



**ASSESSMENT REPORT
Department of Sociology**

ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024

I. LOGISTICS

- 1. [Please indicate the name and email of the program contact person to whom feedback should be sent (usually Chair, Program Director, or Faculty Assessment Coordinator).]**

Dr. Kimberly Richman, Chair

kdrichman@usfca.edu

- 2. Please indicate if you are submitting report for (a) a Major, (b) a Minor, (c) an aggregate report for a Major and Minor (in which case, each should be explained in a separate paragraph as in this template), (d) a Graduate or (e) a Certificate Program. Please also indicate which report format are you submitting –Standard Report or Reflections Document**

Sociology is submitting an aggregate document for our Major and Minor.

- 3. Have there been any revisions to the Curricular Map in 2022-2023 academic year? If there has been a change, please submit the new/revised Curricular Map document.**

There have been NO changes to Sociology's 2022-2023 Curricular Map.

II. MISSION STATEMENT & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle in October 2022? Kindly state “Yes” or “No.” Please provide the current mission statement below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current mission statements of both the major and the minor program

Mission Statement (Major/Minor):

No changes were made to Sociology’s Mission statement. Our current mission statement (for both our major and minor) is:

The mission of the Department of Sociology is to provide students with a high quality educational experience where they learn to critically apply sociological theories, frameworks and concepts to the understanding of everyday lives, pressing social problems and structural inequalities at the local and global levels. Our overarching goal is for students to develop what C. Wright Mills called a “sociological imagination.” The program gives students the tools and skills to challenge interlocking systems of oppression and privilege and build just societies as scholars, advocates, policymakers, and activists. It is also part of the Department’s mission to provide a collegial and enriching working environment for the professional growth of its members and associates.

2. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle in October 2022? No.

PLOs (Major/Graduate/Certificate):

1. Sociology majors should be able to analyze critically social practices, structures, and inequalities, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Define, give examples of, and use meaningfully at least six of the following: culture; status; role; norms; deviance; social structure; social class; social mobility; social change; socialization; stratification; institutions; race; ethnic group; gender.
 - b. Identify both macro-sociological and micro-sociological aspects of social life and discuss examples of these from at least one substantive area of sociology.

- c. Describe at least two intersections between structural inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and/or nation-state.
 - d. Describe inequalities at the regional, international, and/or global levels of analysis.
- 2. Sociology majors should be able to discuss, differentiate, and apply major sociological theories, frameworks and traditions, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Describe, compare, and contrast basic theoretical orientations, such as functionalism, conflict theories, and interactionism.
 - b. Describe and apply some basic theories or theoretical orientations in at least one area of social reality.
- 3. Sociology majors should be able to formulate, conduct, and communicate independent social research, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Describe, compare, and contrast basic methodological approaches for gathering sociological data, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.
 - b. Design and implement a research study in an area of choice and explain why various decisions were made, including sampling, variables, measures, methods of data collection, and data analysis.
 - c. Use computerized and online databases to find published sociological research.
 - d. Critically assess a published research report in an area of choice.
 - e. Clearly convey data findings in writing.
- 4. Sociology majors should be able to connect sociological analysis to practical social action, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. Explain the implications for practical action of sociological theory and research in an area of choice.
 - b. Develop a sociologically informed action plan in an area of choice.
 - c. Conduct at least twenty-five hours of service or activist work in an area of choice and explain what they have experienced from a sociological framework.

III. LOG OF ASSESSMENT OF SOCIOLOGY'S PLOS (by AY)

	1a	1b	1c	1d	2a	2b	3a	3b	3c	3d	3e	4a	4b	4c
08-09	x	x	x		x									
09-10	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
10-11														
11-12	“The Department of Sociology did not assess learning outcomes through the courses that were taught in AY 2011-2012. In fact, last academic year was a period dedicated to revising the learning assurance plan implemented in the previous assessment cycle (2008-2011).”													
12-13	x	x	x	x	x	x								
13-14							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
14-15							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
15-16	x	x	x	x	x	x								
16-17							x	x	x	x	x			
17-18							x	x	x	x	x			
18-19												x		
19-20	Reflections on adapting to a remote/distance learning environment.													
20-21	The department was granted permission to indirectly assess all PLOs through the creation/ administration of an exit survey of Dec 2021 graduating seniors													

21-22	Our department elected to administer a modified version of the American Sociological Association's Survey of Seniors Majoring in Sociology. We made some updates and revisions to the survey and put the survey into Qualtrics for administration (and for future use). Both the survey itself, and the report of findings, are attached (Appendices B and C). After the survey was administered, we created a shared Google document where we could record our responses to the results. We then held a sustained discussion of our experiences at a Department of Sociology meeting held in late January 2022.
22-23	Our department again elected to do an alternative assessment focused on career planning and graduate school advising for our students, based on feedback from the prior year's assessment. This included a focus group, meetings with Career Services, and planned events such as a graduate school speaker panel.
23-24	Our department again elected to do an alternative assessment focused on students' retention and academic support for our students, based on feedback from the administration about our retention data. This included a retention data analysis and focus group with two largest racial and ethnic groups (White identified and Latinx identified students) in our program.

IV ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Introduction and Rationale

During the last academic year (2022-2023), the Office of the Provost and the College of Arts and Sciences called for renewed efforts to improve our retention rate. Our department reviewed the retention data for the academic year 2021-2022 with two administrators (Shirley McGuire and Sabrina Kwist) and learned that our retention rate for 2021-2022 was lower than the college average. To address our concerns about retention, we decided to pursue another alternative assessment project this academic year—to learn more about our students’ struggles and challenges at USF so that we could better help them to meet their academic and learning goals. In this alternative assessment, we used a mixed method approach with special focus on their challenges and concerns. First, we have quantitatively analyzed retention data from CIPE to look for any systematic patterns. Second, based on findings from our quantitative analysis, we designed qualitative research (i.e. focus groups) to obtain more in-depth data to understand what challenges the students in our program face. This mixed methods approach yielded more comprehensive knowledge about our students’ experiences and challenges. We hope to use the findings as we consider revising our curriculum and program to better suit their needs.

Quantitative Analysis of Retention Data for Sociology Majors

The Sociology Department currently has 141 majors and 22 minors. Our analysis of the quantitative retention data for sociology majors between 2016 and 2022 revealed that the Sociology Department’s historical retention rate trend does not follow the College’s. **As shown in Charts 1 and 2, our retention rate had already started declining significantly in Fall 2016 and remained lower than the College’s rate except for 2018. Put differently, our low retention issue predates the pandemic.** While it has recovered in Fall 2022, we cannot tell if this is an outlier like Fall 2018 or not. Thus, we decided to supplement our analysis with qualitative methods to further investigate and find clues regarding what students perceive as their challenges.

According to **Sociology Retention Rate in Comparison to the Past Cohorts by Ethnicity** (IPEDS¹), there was a sharp decline in the retention rate for minority students among the 2020 cohort in the fourth Fall (See Chart 3a~c). We believe that this is due to **the pandemic cohort effect and the fact that students’ response to the pandemic (including online education) varied by ethnicity.** In order to

¹ [Integrated postsecondary education data system](#)

mitigate the cohort effect (i.e. varied response to the pandemic), we also aggregated the retention rate to see if this pattern holds. The **Aggregated Retention Rate by Ethnicity (Chart 4-a)** shows that all the groups experienced a lower retention rate in their third and fourth year as compared to their second year, except for White students (See Charts 4a & b). White students' retention rate remains roughly the same in their second and third years and it declines slightly in the fourth year.

CHART 1: Historical Trend of Retention for Sociology

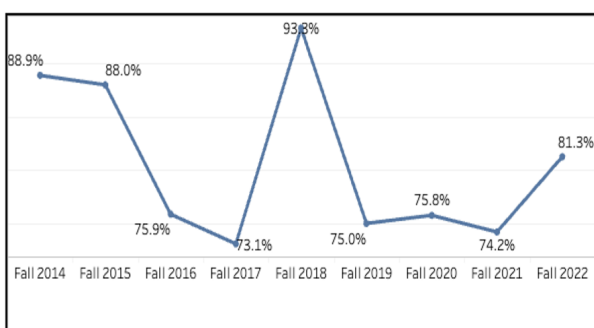
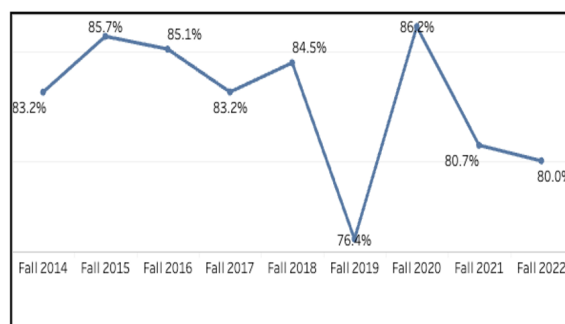


CHART 2: Historical Trend of Retention for College



Sociology Retention Rate in Comparison to the Past Cohorts by Ethnicity²

CHART 3-a: 2nd Fall (SOCIOLOGY) Cohort 2022

Ethnicity (IPEDS)							
African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino	International	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Unknown	White
100.0%	75.0%	88.9%	83.3%	100.0%	100.0%	HC: of Past Avg: 100.0%	62.5%
HC: 2 of 2 Past Avg: 87.5%	HC: 3 of 4 Past Avg: 87.2%	HC: 8 of 9 Past Avg: 80.0%	HC: 5 of 6 Past Avg: 81.8%	HC: 1 of 1 Past Avg: 33.3%	HC: 2 of 2 Past Avg: 80.0%		HC: 5 of 8 Past Avg: 76.5%

CHART 3-b: 3rd Fall (SOCIOLOGY) Cohort 2021

Ethnicity (IPEDS)							
African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino	International	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Unknown	White
100.0%	100.0%	54.5%		100.0%	100.0%	HC: of Past Avg: 100.0%	36.4%
HC: 2 of 2 Past Avg: 64.3%	HC: 3 of 3 Past Avg: 75.0%	HC: 6 of 11 Past Avg: 79.6%	HC: of Past Avg: 45.5%	HC: 1 of 1 Past Avg: 0.0%	HC: 3 of 3 Past Avg: 68.2%		HC: 4 of 11 Past Avg: 75.4%

CHART 3-c: 4th Fall (SOCIOLOGY) Cohort 2020

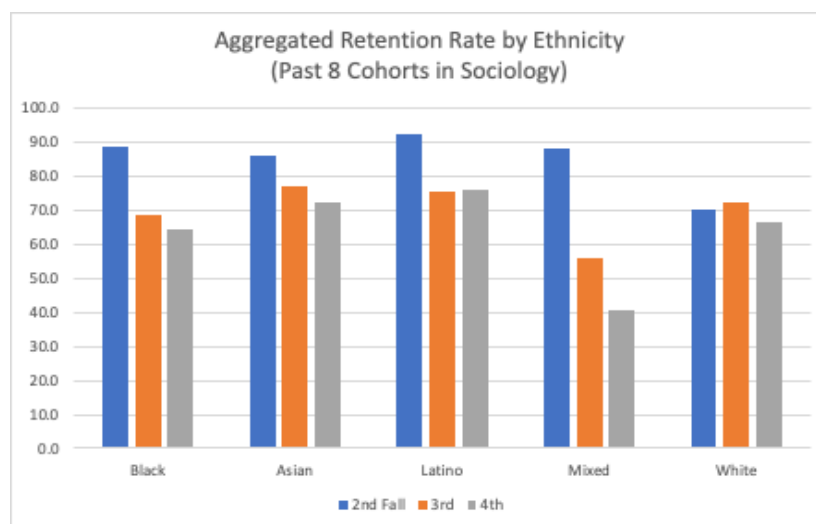
Ethnicity (IPEDS)							
African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino	International	Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	Unknown	White
50.0%	62.5%	37.5%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	HC: of Past Avg: 100.0%	66.7%
HC: 2 of 4 Past Avg: 70.0%	HC: 5 of 8 Past Avg: 75.0%	HC: 3 of 8 Past Avg: 82.6%	HC: 1 of 3 Past Avg: 62.5%	HC: 0 of 1 Past Avg: 0.0%	HC: 2 of 3 Past Avg: 36.8%		HC: 4 of 6 Past Avg: 62.7%

² The darker the shade of Blue means a higher retention rate than the past cohorts. The darker the shade of Orange means a lower retention rate than the past cohorts

**CHART 4-a: AGGREGATED RETENTION RATE IN PERCENTAGE BY ETHNICITY
(PAST 8 COHORTS) ³**

	Black	Asian	Latinx	Mixed	White
2nd Fall	89	86	92	88	70
3rd Fall	69	77	75	56	73
4th Fall	64	72	76	41	67

CHART 4-b



Highlights from Our Quantitative Data Analysis

Our retention rate for 2nd Fall has been fairly robust across the groups based on aggregated retention data. However, the same data show that it declines in the third and fourth year, especially among minority students as shown in Chart 4b. This suggests that minority students may face some unique challenges in continuing with their education in their third and fourth years. Thus, while we do not know what exactly causes our students to leave in their third and fourth year, we could potentially improve the later-year retention rate of minority students if we provide support for minority students before entering their third and fourth years. Such a targeted approach may be the most efficient way to help our students successfully continue their education as sociology majors at USF. Based on the most recent 4-year graduation rate data by ethnicity in the College of Arts & Sciences, the Latinx student graduation rate is 52.5% which is about 15% lower than Asian/Asian American students. White students’

³ We calculated the aggregated average for the past eight cohorts because the N for each cohort was far too small to make meaningful generalizations from them separately. This table does not include categories such as “Pacific Islanders,” “Unknown,” and “International (students)” because of extremely small N issues (1 or 2 students in these groups) and/or missing values.

4-year graduation rate is also fairly low (52.5%)⁴. Therefore, improving latter year retention could also improve graduation rates for these groups.

Qualitative Analysis of Students' Struggles and Challenges:

Having carefully reviewed the quantitative retention data, we conducted additional qualitative research: two separate focus groups, one with Latinx-identified students, and one with White-identified students. Our rationale for selecting these two groups included: 1) both groups seem to have lower retention and graduation rates, but follow different patterns, 2) each group's size in the major is substantial enough to conduct separate focus groups, and 3) the existing literature suggests that these two groups have very different learning experiences and challenges in higher education. For example, [Pew Research](#) reveals that while Latinx students are the fastest growing population in college enrollment in the U.S., they are more likely than their peers not to finish college due to financial reasons and family responsibilities. This is not necessarily true for their White counterparts. Thus, focusing on these two groups could yield useful qualitative insights about their different experiences as our majors. Such insights allow us to diversify our approach to support our students' academic success, which we believe is better than a one-size-fits-all approach. Learning more about Mixed Race, International, Black, Pacific Islanders, and Asian students' experiences is equally important. Unfortunately, their population sizes in our program was too small to draw reliable generalizations.

Both of the student focus groups were carried out in early November.⁵ The original plan was for Sociology Department Program Assistant Jamie Andan to facilitate both focus groups, because she has a strong rapport and trust relationship with our students, and to reduce the power differential dynamic. However, because Jamie was sick on the date of the first focus group, Prof. Hwaji Shin (full time faculty and a member of 2023-2024 Assessment Committee in the Sociology Department) facilitated the first focus group with White students on November 9th, 2023. Jamie Andan facilitated the second focus group with Latinx students on Nov 16th, 2023.⁶

For the Nov 9th focus group, four White-identified students attended. One of them identified as male (junior transfer), and the other three identified as female (all of them sophomores). For the Nov 16th focus group, four Latinx identified students attended. One of them identified as male and a junior, while the other three identified as female (including one freshman, one sophomore, and one junior). All students were notified that their input would remain anonymous, but understood that the focus group was recorded

⁴ Unfortunately, we could not see the graduation rate specifically for sociology majors by ethnicity on Tableau.

⁵ We originally hoped to schedule these focus groups in mid-October, but we faced a challenge in recruiting enough participants. Thus, we had to push it back to early November.

⁶

using ZOOM and voice memo, for accuracy. The audio transcript was then transcribed using Temi software.

After the transcripts were completed and de-identified, each member of the Assessment Committee read the transcripts closely to discern patterns and common concerns and issues raised by the students, as well as similarities and differences between the two groups. We did not use formal coding procedures, since the transcripts were too few for any coding scheme to be useful or valid. After we had each read through the transcripts carefully, we shared and compared our findings to look for commonalities.

Highlights from Qualitative Data Analysis

The findings from the White-identified student focus group (WF) and the Latinx-identified student focus group (LF) revealed some important overlaps as well as a few notable contrasts between these two groups in terms of what they identified as challenges to meet their academic goals as sociology majors at USF. While we are cautious not to make overgeneralized conclusions based on small sample sizes, we nevertheless found the information gathered from these two focus groups insightful and helpful. The following sections discuss the notable experiences, challenges, and suggestions that participants shared with us.

Experiences as Sociology Majors

Participants in both focus group expressed their general content with our program when they were asked about their experience as sociology majors at USF. One White female participant compared her experience as a sociology major to her former STEM major by saying that sociology majors are allowed greater flexibility in terms of course selections and schedules. Participants from both focus groups similarly cited the small class sizes and close interaction between faculty and students as two of their main reasons for choosing to stay at USF and continuing as sociology majors. Both focus groups' participants expressed similar appreciation for how the sociology program goes out of its way to help and support them in general.

Challenges and Retention Issues—Money, Schedule, and Mental Health

When we asked our participants if they have ever considered leaving USF or transferring to another school, most of them in both focus groups said the thought of leaving did cross their minds but they did not consider it seriously for various reasons. One of the White female participants shared her observation about the relatively low retention rate at USF; she has seen a significant number of her friends living in the same dorm leaving USF shortly after their first semester or year. She and other participants in the

focus group of White-identified students (hereafter, “WF”) attributed this low retention to a poor fit to USF and San Francisco, with the high cost of living and tuition among the reasons for these students to consider a transfer. Another White female participant mentioned that she took a leave of absence from USF, citing her mental health struggle. She switched her major to sociology from STEM when she returned to USF. **Most of the participants in the WF, however, noted that transferring could also cost them after spending more than a year,** because of the moving cost, fees, and possibly taking longer time to graduate, as there is no guarantee all of their USF credits would be transferred to another institution. **This rational calculation of the transferring cost motivated them to stay and finish their education at USF. This gives us an important insight to explain why the quantitative data revealed a lower retention rate among White students in their 2nd and 3rd year.** Most of the Latinx students in our focus group said they did not seriously consider leaving USF, but they all made a point about how eager they are to “try to make it a shorter stay” at USF, citing the financial reasons. **Although it is not conclusive, the different responses to this question between these two groups seem to correspond to the difference in retention patterns between them in our quantitative data; our White students are more likely to consider leaving USF earlier than Latinx students (in their second Fall) and thereafter their retention rates are stable, while our Latinx students experience a drop in retention later than this.**

Students in both groups expressed difficulty around course schedule restraints, and their desire to have more feasible schedules, especially for required and CORE sociology courses. They also expressed their frustration with early morning and/or late evening courses, long one time a week classes, as well as so many Mon-Wed-Fri courses. Students in both groups also noted the difficulty in balancing their personal and academic lives due to such course schedule constraints, and this shared frustration was articulated by one of the White female participants in the following manner: *“it’s like 6:30 to 10:30 or it’s like, you know, an 8:00am like it makes it really hard to have a steady work schedule at the same time.”* Similarly, a female Latinx participant also passionately expressed her frustration about one of the core courses’ schedules which meets once a week from 6:30 to 10:20: *“that was like kind of crazy... it’s so late at night and I don’t live in campus.... I am going to have to do it... I am thinking about graduating in the Fall... because in the following semester I had to take a capstone class... but I wish there would have been another additional class...but better time.”* Students also expressed a desire for scheduling flexibility in the former of multiple sections offered at different times for required courses. One Latinx student commented, “I can’t take this class now. And there are no other periods offered for it. So I just wish that for like the major required courses, there were like multiple time slot options.”

Latinx students in the focus group unequivocally expressed their frustration with the parking situation on our campus as many of them commute by car. They explained to us how this challenge

combined with the course schedule constraints make their lives stressful. Since not every student can afford to live in proximity to the campus or in San Francisco, they must commute from their own family's homes via car. A long commute to school, while juggling academic responsibilities and their personal responsibilities with their fiancé and family, was already challenging to them. In this context, the constant struggle to find parking while dealing with an unfavorable course schedule (late night or early morning) adds more undue physical and mental stress to their already frustrating situation.

It is important to note that participants in both focus groups seemed to mistakenly assume that the schedule constraints they experience are merely a reflection of faculty's individual availability and/or preferences. They are unaware of the fact that this was largely a result of the schedule policy imposed on the departments by the University. These participants' feedback made it abundantly clear that the existing scheduling rules and their unintended consequences have a crippling impact not only on faculty but also on students' ability to strike a feasible balance between their financial and personal obligations and their academic commitments. Many surveys have repeatedly shown that having flexibility and control over their schedules improve employees' productivity and satisfaction, and helps reduce stress ([Mauer 2019](#)). **These students' voices support this and highlight the impact of scheduling on academic success.**

Hit or Miss? —CASA, CAPS, Financial Aid, and Faculty Advising

While participants in both focus groups are generally content with their academic experiences as sociology majors, they did refer to a few areas where they wish to have more support from the department as well as the University. Almost all the participants in both focus groups mentioned inconsistent experiences with faculty advisors, CASA coaches, and other offices on campus. Participants in both groups addressed that they had some very positive experiences with some of the faculty members and with CASA coaches, while they had less than satisfactory experiences with others. One female White-identified student said of her CASA coach, *"I've had really great advisors but also I've had to change and advocate for them, 'cause some of them don't know what they're talking about."* They characterized their inconsistent experiences as "hit and miss." One Latinx student mentioned that she at first had a very unsupportive CASA coach, but when she switched to another CASA coach, she felt very supported. She described how close she is to her advisor by saying "(my CASA coach) and I are like this (very close)."

None of the Latinx students in our focus group specifically referred to their experiences with CAPS, but three White female participants pointedly criticized the general lack of accessibility and availability of service at CAPS. One of the White female participants said that *"I've heard a lot of like hit and miss things with CAPS and I think hit and miss is really what you don't want in a mental health program..."* This concern was noteworthy, given that many surveys ([Son 2020](#)) have already

revealed the depth of college student's mental health struggles, as well as gaps in faculty management of and preparedness for students' psychological crises ([Lipson 2022](#)). It also indicates that White students are more likely to reach out to CAPS for mental distress than our Latinx students.

Another notable contrast between these two focus groups is their experience with the financial aid office. None of the White students in the focus group identified experiences with the financial aid office as one of their negative experiences or challenges as students at USF. But most of the Latinx students in our focus group explicitly addressed their strong discontent and difficulties with the financial aid office. One female Latinx student referred to what she perceived as a very callous attitude of the financial aid office's staff. She summarized her negative interaction with them in this way: *"Just basically like, get the money or else you can't register. And I was like, okay."* Other Latinx participants in our focus group shared their frustration with the general lack of assistance from the financial aid office. One of the students in the Latinx focus group who happened to work at the financial aid office on campus clarified that people in the office are not able to assist in all the financial needs of students. While these participants understand that they do have financial obligations as student, they nevertheless agreed that more sincere support from this office would have been helpful to them. Given that many Latinx students in our program are first-generation college students, it was no surprise that they raised concerns about their experiences at the financial aid office and the challenges to meet financial obligations. This suggests **the need to be cognizant of and sensitive to their struggles and anxiety associated with the financial burden they carry to complete their education at USF. To that end, we could also argue for greater flexibility on the part of the university in allowing students to register for courses despite financial challenges.**

More Career Development and Mentorship

When we asked what kind of support they wished to have from the department, both White and Latinx focus group participants unequivocally asked for more career development support and mentorship, echoing our findings from last year's assessment. Participants from both focus groups told us that while they like the versatility of sociology, the very same characteristic of our discipline makes it challenging for them to imagine their concrete future career opportunities. One White female participant said, *"it can be overwhelming because it is such a broad discipline figuring out exactly where you're gonna go."* And another White female participant mentioned the stigma associated with a sociology major. She explained that even if she understands sociology is "science", her degree is still a BA thus not treated in the same way as a hard science or STEM degree. Thus, she struggles to imagine a clear career pathway with her BA in sociology. Similarly, Latinx students in the focus group characterized sociology as a very broad discipline that can be applied to various fields, but they noted that most people do not understand what

sociology is or what sociologists do; thus, they are afraid that prospective employers may not understand what sociology degree holders can do with their academic training. Apart from professions in social work or legal careers, participants from both focus groups wondered what exactly they could do with a degree in Sociology.

This focus on career planning has been a recurring theme from our past two assessment projects and it was re-confirmed here. This year's focus group, however, allowed us to gain more insight into what type of support students wish to have, in addition to more information about graduate school. Students in both focus groups expressed a desire for more applied experiences (i.e. fieldwork, internships, etc.) in the curriculum. One White female student mentioned that she wished to have more field trips as part of course activities. Only one participant from both focus groups wished to have more information about graduate school, while most of the students in both focus groups express their strong desire for more career development and training resources. When they were asked to elaborate on what concrete services and/or opportunities they wish to have, most participants in both focus groups mentioned the importance of peer mentorship opportunities. One first-generation Latinx student noted, "I feel like you go into college and you don't have, you know, somebody who's experienced that family and going into it can be daunting. Yeah. Um, and I think having a support system to let them know that, you know, you're not here while you're away from home or even if you're, you live in San Francisco, come here and still a daunting experience. You might feel like you don't belong. Or like you said, even like just feel small within this school, you know?" Latinx students seemed to know more about the career-oriented events than White students, interestingly. But in general, participants in both groups seem largely unaware of some already existing resources, such as our annual Sociology career panel discussion, Sociology Alumni Spotlight posts on Instagram and in a weekly newsletter, and a guide on "how-to" connect with USF Sociology Alumni on LinkedIn. **This signals that we need more intentional and aggressive outreach efforts to publicize these resources, and provide others.**

Given our students' strong desire for clear career pathways and vocational training, it is no surprise that students enrolled in the Dual Degree program (formerly Dual Degree in Teacher Preparedness, now Undergraduate Teacher Education Center) in both focus groups expressed their high satisfaction and positive experiences. Each focus group had one female sociology major enrolled in the dual degree program. Interestingly, they both expressed their great satisfaction about their experiences, career pathway, and the attentive support that they receive from their UTEC program staff, especially Amy Joseph. Since Amy used to be Sociology's Program Assistant, her knowledge of our major has especially helped sociology majors who are also enrolled in the UTEC program. Furthermore, it is very important to note that both focus groups' participants also expressed their deep appreciation for our program coordinator, Jamie Andan, for her attentive support including but not limited to her weekly

newsletter, 4-year graduation planning, and for facilitating the Sociology Ambassador program. Their genuine appreciation for both Amy and Jamie strongly signals the **great impact that Program Assistants and coordinators can have on students' retention and academic success.**

Conclusions and Action Plan:

Both the quantitative and qualitative research reveal heterogeneous challenges that students face and a common desire for more support in the areas of career development, course scheduling, and peer mentoring. Some of the challenges that students face are clearly beyond the realm of our control at the department level, such as parking availability, schedule limitations, mental health, and financial support--although we can continue to advocate for them, as their learning conditions are our working conditions. We also continue our effort to diversify our support for our students in terms of career development and fostering more mentorship with faculty and student peers. To this end, our department has already started the following noteworthy initiatives.

First, we are offering a new quantitative methods course as well as a career exploration and planning course as sociology electives in the spring of 2024, responding to students' demands. However, ironically, we are facing low enrollment issues with these two classes. We need to figure out why these courses are not filling up despite repeatedly expressed interest in these areas, and we should find new ways to encourage students to take advantage of existing opportunities and resources more effectively. We will also aim to work on integrating and highlighting career-ready skills throughout our curriculum.

Second, the department will host another career conversation event between current Sociology students and Sociology alumni from different fields. Last year, this event was very successful with a large turnout of participants. We administered a feedback survey where students reported a desire to also meet with alumni who are in different fields than academia and law, thus we are planning to invite someone who works in other fields such as education, social work, or business.

Third, we reinvigorated the existing Sociology Ambassador program where sociology majors who are interested in getting more involved within the department can sign up to be a peer mentor and connect with fellow Sociology majors. Jamie Andan was incredibly helpful in facilitating this initiative. We plan to look into ways to better match specific Ambassadors with specific new students.

Fourth, our department is currently undertaking a micro credential pilot program which offers a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion certificate for interested majors and minors. A recent report from the American Association of Colleges and Universities finds a majority of employers in their survey (89% of 1,010 executives and hiring managers across the nation) see value in candidates with a college degree, a wide range of viewpoints, and micro credentials ([Palmer 2023](#)). Reflecting this fact, this program has been successful in attracting a robust number of participants. In Spring of 2024, we plan to host our

inaugural DEI training workshop, led by USF Sociology alumna Dr. Sarah Toutant (Director of DEI at the Childcare Resource Center, one of the largest non-profit organizations in the state of California). At this workshop, students will learn not only DEI practices in organizational settings, but also how to foster their career in the field of DEI.

In addition to these initiatives already underway, our department is exploring efforts to effectively support underrepresented Latinx students in our program. First, we applied to the Provost's Innovation Fund last year to sponsor a mentorship program and alumni networking event for Latinx students. While we did not receive this funding as our overall retention improved somewhat with the last year's cohort, we nevertheless have decided to reapply for the fund. To this end, we are pursuing a collaborative effort with Critical Diversity Studies to support first-generation minority students. Sociology Chair Kim Richman has also reached out to the Latinx Excellence and Belonging Initiative Working Group (LEBI) and studied their report about experiences and concerns of Latinx faculty, staff, and students on campus, as well as initial recommendations. From this report, we learned that *“(m)any Latinx students do not feel affirmed in their identity at USF and identify key challenges such as a lack of Latinx faculty, a lack of events representing diverse Latinx cultures, the high cost associated with attending school, and the lack of institutional spaces like Latinx-focused LLCs or support programs.”* Our department similarly recognized this as a major issue. Thus, we have been requesting a new tenure-track faculty line in Latinx Sociology for the last two years, and are committed to continuing to pursue this hire.

The LEBI report recommends hiring Latinx graduate students to mentor Latinx undergraduate students, and our focus group participants also expressed a desire to have more mentorship and interaction between students from different academic class levels. Given that we also have many first-generation college students (especially among Latinx students) in our program, we recognize the importance of developing a curated comprehensive first year experiences. One idea is to develop affinity groups based on students' culture and identity, which help facilitate these types of connections. After emerging from social isolation during the pandemic, we believe this is a very crucial endeavor to consider.

Furthermore, as we learned from this assessment (i.e. quantitative data analysis) that our retention rate for junior and senior students is lower than that for first year and sophomore students, it is strategic for us to invest in support not only for the first- and second-year students, but also for the continuing third- and fourth-year students in order to stabilize and improve our retention rate. One of the initiatives under consideration is to facilitate networking opportunities such as an “Alum Mixer” event where current students could talk and network with our alumni. Other USF majors such as Politics and Communication Studies already host such an event. We will study these initiatives and discuss how we could also implement this type of opportunities for our continuing students. We also need to consider an analogous third-year experience, since this is where our data indicate a drop-off in retention rate,

especially for Latinx students, and we know that many students transfer into the sociology major in their sophomore and junior years.

We will also discuss and look for ways to foster advisor-advisee relationships beyond our bi-annual 15-minute pre-registration advising sessions. It is challenging to keep students with the same advisor due to sabbaticals, leaves, retirements, chair rotations, and so forth. However, we should make our best effort to keep students with the same advisor during most (if not all) of their time in the major. We will continue to explore different models of advising systems in order to nurture more stabilized and meaningful connections between faculty and students.

Finally, we recognize the caveats of this assessment study, notably the small N in each focus group and the last-minute use of a faculty member to facilitate one of the focus groups. We will plan to recruit students more widely in future studies of retention and assessment, and also to try to replicate the qualitative findings with a non-faculty member facilitating, as well as with a Latinx-identified facilitator in the Latinx focus group.

Appendix A

Fall 2023 Sociology Student Focus Group

Focus Group #1: November 9th, 11:45am-12:45pm in KA 265

Focus Group #2: November 16th, 11:45am-12:45pm in KA 265

Note to Participants about Recording/Anonymity: *"Everything you say during this focus group discussion will be anonymous. We are choosing to record the discussion only for the sake of differentiating participants' opinions/questions. When reviewing the discussion recording, we will not make note of participants' identities. Participants will be labeled as "Person 1," "Person 2," etc. Does everyone consent to being recorded during today's discussion? If not, please let us know."*

Note: After recording begins, ask participants to confirm their consent to being recorded again: *"We have started recording. Does everyone consent to being recorded during today's discussion?"*

Goal of Discussion: Learn about students' learning experiences at USF as Sociology majors; Assess student concerns and needs

Focus Group Questions

- 1) Questions on their learning experience as Sociology Major: Please talk about your learning experience as a Sociology major at USF.
- 2) Questions on their challenges (both academic and personal) that hinder their learning goals
 - a) What are your biggest concerns and challenges that may impact (or have impacted) your ability to achieve your academic goals? These can include both academic and personal.
 - b) What do you think would be the best way to address or resolve these challenges, or to prevent them from coming up in the first case?
- 3) Have you ever considered changing majors?
 - a) When and why?
 - b) What other majors did you consider, and why?
 - c) What prevented you from changing your major?
- 4) Have you ever considered leaving USF or taking a leave from USF?
 - a) When and why?
 - b) What made you consider leaving USF or taking a leave from USF?
 - c) What made you stay?
- 5) Questions on their needs (what kind of support they might think would be helpful)
 - a) What kind(s) of support from the sociology department do you find most helpful in achieving your academic goal(s)? What kind(s) of support have you not had, but wish to have in the sociology department?
 - b) What kind of support from the University do you find most helpful in achieving your academic goal(s)? What kind(s) of support have you not had, but wish to have at USF?