

**Assessment Trends Report
Student Learning Outcomes in the Sociology Major**

September 2009

The goal of this report is to evaluate the assessment of student learning outcomes in Sociology Major. The report addresses four key questions to evaluate the quality of our assessment processes.

(1) How have we sustained the assessment effort over a multi-year period of time?

How many years have you completed an annual assessment report?

2006 2007 2008 2009

Until Dr. Crisler retired, both he and Dr. Troy worked on the development of the student learning outcome goals, on collecting and analyzing data, crafting assessment methods, and drawing conclusions from the data. Direct data was collected every year, in the form of papers and research projects, except in 2008, Dr. Crisler retired without submitting his report. Otherwise, both sociologists met to discuss the data and assessment methods and shared the annual reports over email.

(2) How do we systematically and comprehensively collect and analyze data about student learning?

Dr. Crisler and Dr. Troy collect data and analyze data. Assessment of student learning focuses on performance in classroom and experiential situations. Each assessment report focuses on a variety of evaluation artifacts, some changing each year. Data includes student questionnaires, evaluations of senior capstone projects, employment data from the Success Report, and graduate school acceptance data collected by the department.

Sociology faculty collects the following assessments of the sociology major:

1. Learning Goal 1 is assessed in Sociological Analysis SO450, the capstone course, through an analysis of the final exam, which asks students to write specifically to this learning goal. Given the presently small number of graduating majors, all sociology majors' assignments are evaluated.
2. Learning Goal 2 is assessed in SO224, Poverty and Welfare, which substitutes for one of the Sociology Fundamentals courses (SO 320 Social Stratification) by evaluating the term paper submitted in this class. Because of the small number of majors, all papers from Sociology majors are evaluated. Although this learning goal addresses inequalities of race and gender, as well as class, only papers concerning class inequality are assessed because other classes are taught by adjuncts.
3. Learning Goal 3 is assessed by evaluating the proposal for a research project that students turn in while they are students in SO221, Methods of Sociological Research.
4. Advising Survey – Each semester when course schedule advising is performed, the department will administer the Behavioral Sciences Advising Survey. This anonymous questionnaire data will be collected, analyzed, and reported to faculty and students, and used as an indicator and source of guidance for how faculty are serving student needs.

	Student Learning Outcome 1	Student Learning Outcome 2	Student Learning Outcome 3
AY 2006-07	GREEN	GREEN	RED
AY 2007-08	NOT ASSESSED	GREEN	NOT ASSESSED—INADEQUATE NUMBER OF STUDENTS
AY 2008-09	GREEN	GREEN	YELLOW

(3) How do we use the analysis to improve curriculum and pedagogy and to inform decisions about budgets and strategic priorities?

Analysis of assessment data demonstrates that students in the Sociology major are meeting some learning outcome goals better than others. While students are meeting Goals 1 and 2, Goal 3 remains a problem for the sociology curriculum. Dr. Crisler's students had problems with this goal, and, in his first year teaching the class, Dr. Troy's students did not do as well as we had hoped. Student feedback indicates problems in both Course Organization and Communication. The instructor believes that students enter the class with expectations that are too low, and

therefore they struggle when they are pushed to attain standards appropriate to the field. When the course is taught again in Spring 2010, several changes will be made. First, the course will be reorganized to focus on the ultimate outcome, the research proposal. Therefore, instead of an academic, somewhat theoretical, review of research methodology, the course will be more applied in focus. Second, models of acceptable research proposals will be distributed and reviewed in detail. Students will then be instructed more specifically on how to write each section of the proposal. As a result of these changes, students should be more aware of the task before them, and should be more likely to understand it and take it seriously.

To help their students meet this goal, the faculty members revised the course content of SO 221, Methods of Social Research, to focus directly on writing a research project, from the proposal to the polished essay. Two pedagogical reforms were also implemented:

- Reassignment of a faculty member to other courses, and
- Deliberate and intentional integration of the teaching of writing.

(4) How do we evaluate, modify, and continue to improve the student learning assessment process in this program?

Discussions about student learning in Sociology were regular and ongoing, due to the sociologists' concern for their students, as well as the proximity of their offices. The sociologists used their assessment data to draw conclusions about the appropriateness of their learning goals and the students' ability to meet those goals. While they were able to determine that their students are learning what they want them to learn, students were meeting some goals more consistently than others. The faculty members also used their assessment data to revise their assessment methods, becoming more specific about what types of artifacts to collect. Assessment analysis also showed the faculty where they could revise their curriculum to help their students meet the learning outcome goals, especially in the area of writing a research proposal.

As a result of assessment, Sociology faculty have confirmed that their student learning outcome goals are the right ones for their students. Because they developed strong assessment methods from the outset, the faculty have not needed to alter their practices.

Evaluation from Focus Visit Leadership Team (includes Academic Deans, Program Leaders, and Focus Visit Report Writers)

FVLT Rating: Green

Academic program	Goal 1 (multi-year)	Goal 2 (data collection)	Goal 3 (Use assessment to improve)	Goal 4 (improve assessment)	Total
Sociology	3	2	3	2	10

Based on the four questions/criteria, the Focus Visit Leadership Team rates the Sociology major as green and concludes that the major has a strong multi-year reporting process. The program should continue efforts to implement a sustainable system of systematic and comprehensive data collection and analysis. Making and implementing changes based on assessment is difficult with lack of sustainable and comprehensive data. The program can improve initiatives to find better assessment processes for measuring student performance.