

University of Northern Iowa
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

Master of Arts: Sociology
Student Outcome Assessment Plan

Prepared by the Sociology Faculty
Revised: March 2009

During Fall Semester 2007, the sociology faculty began meeting to develop the following plan for assessment of the sociology graduate program.

Assessment Philosophy and Overview

Each year the sociology faculty will organize and administer an assessment of the graduate program. This includes both gathering pertinent data from students and analyzing the data mindful of our outcomes. The goal of the sociology master's program is to educate and prepare students for successful entry into a diverse array of career fields that utilize sociological skills such as data collection and analysis, research methodology and design, program evaluation, teaching at the community college level, non-profit sector positions, and/or continued doctoral work. Our stated student learning outcomes and competencies are designed to help students achieve skills necessary for success in these endeavors. A combination of direct and indirect measures will be used to assess outcomes (see Assessment Methods). On a biennial basis, the faculty will prepare a full report summarizing this data, delineating key findings, and discussing their implications for the sociology M.A. program and curriculum. Faculty will then implement changes and improvements to the program based on this report, guided by the goal of continuing to improve the quality of the sociology master's program in a manner consistent with our mission and goals, as well as those of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (CSBS), the Graduate College, and UNI.

Outcomes and Competencies

The following student learning outcomes and competencies for the graduate program are assessed and revised periodically by the sociology faculty and are designed to reflect our mission statement and goals for sociology graduate students. These goals include providing students with educational experiences and intellectual skills that will enable them to understand how their everyday lives and actions are influenced by broader social structures, contexts, and processes. In pursuing these goals, we encourage students to develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature and applications of sociological theory and methods. We also promote a learning environment where students are taught to value cultural diversity and pluralism and to engage in critical analysis of structures of power and inequality (see <http://www.uni.edu/sac/sociology/index.htm>). The sociology graduate program student learning outcomes blend ideally with CSBS's mission to foster "understanding of individuals, families, groups, and societies in their social, historical, and political relationships," and with UNI's central mission "to contribute to the development of students by providing a diverse, dynamic learning environment characterized by excellence in teaching" and to support "exemplary undergraduate programs founded on a strong liberal arts curriculum." We are also committed to the specific mission of the Graduate College to provide "selected programs of advanced study, research and creative

activity grounded in a personalized and diverse graduate community that prepares successful practitioners, scholars, and professional leaders.”

Student outcomes are included in all course syllabi, posted on our department website, and available to faculty and staff on UNI’s Academic Assessment site. Upon graduation from our Master’s program, a student should attain the following outcomes and demonstrate the corollary competencies:

Outcome 1: Apply a sociological perspective.

Competency 1.1 Apply sociological concepts and principles to analyze a social situation.

Outcome 2: Evaluate and apply sociological theory.

Competency 2.1 Identify sociological theories and compare and contrast their key concepts and assumptions.

Competency 2.2 Apply sociological theories to explain social phenomena or data.

Outcome 3: Design and implement sociological methods.

Competency 3.1 Develop a sociological research project.

Competency 3.2 Describe and apply the principles of ethical practice as a sociologist.

Outcome 4: Engage in critical analysis.

Competency 4.1 Create a critical argument.

Competency 4.2 Identify and evaluate an argument based on its thesis, assumptions and supporting evidence.

Competency 4.3 Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to test hypotheses or address research questions.

Outcome 5: Develop and implement professional skills.

Competency 5.1 Develop teaching skills.

Competency 5.2 Give an oral presentation in a professional venue.

Competency 5.3 Write results of a research project in publication-ready format.

Frequency of Assessment

Sociology faculty developed a two-year cycle of assessment that reflects typical student progression through the master’s program. Actual collection of this data will vary by the semester that various courses are offered and by the timing of completion of requirements for student theses. Course

embedded papers and exam questions, Teaching Proseminar pre and post-tests, Teaching Practicum evaluations, and focus group results will be collected periodically on an ongoing basis during fall and spring semesters. Teaching internship evaluations, thesis evaluations, and student survey data will be collected as students approach completion of the program. Alumni survey timing is yet to be determined.

Assessment Methods

Course Embedded Papers and Exam Questions:

Outcomes 1 through 4 will be assessed using term papers and exam questions from required and elective courses including, Contemporary Sociological Theories (980:200); Advanced Research Methodology (980:201); Professional Proseminar (980:211a); Quantitative Analysis (980:260); Qualitative Research (980:278); Sociology Seminar (980:280); and various g-level elective courses. Actual courses used for assessment will vary depending on the timing of courses offered during each biennial data collection year. Faculty develops a grid that matches outcomes to specific course papers and exam questions for each data collection cycle (available upon request).

Teaching Proseminar, Practicum and Internship:

Outcome 5.1 is assessed in several ways, including a self-evaluation pre and post-test administered at the beginning and end of the Teaching Proseminar course (980:211b). These are designed to assess student confidence, skills, and knowledge related to teaching introductory sociology courses before and after the course (see Appendix A). The seminar is taken during the spring semester of the student's first year. Students who participate in the concurrent Teaching Practicum (980:287) will be evaluated by the supervising course instructor. In addition, students who receive a guided teaching internship at Hawkeye Community College will be evaluated by their UNI and Hawkeye faculty mentors.

Focus Groups:

During the fall semester of each two-year cycle, graduate students participate in a focus group discussion moderated by two or more faculty members designed to elicit student opinions and determine levels of student satisfaction with various program elements (see Appendix B).

Graduate Student Survey (under construction):

The sociology faculty also plans to construct a graduate student survey that would include both direct and indirect measures of our outcomes and competencies. This survey will be administered to students by their advisors near the completion of the degree requirements (i.e., after finishing coursework but before the thesis has been defended). The Graduate Coordinator will work closely with faculty thesis advisors to implement the administration of the student survey.

Major Project: Thesis

Faculty will assess student attainment of Outcomes 5.2 and 5.3 through evaluating each student's written completion of a thesis prospectus and a thesis, as well as through evaluating the student's oral defenses and discussions of the prospectus and thesis. Faculty will also assess the student's oral skills

(competency 5.2) when observing his or her research presentations at local, regional, or national sociology or social science conferences.

Tracking Alumni Success (in progress):

Sociology faculty have begun to compile information on job placement for the graduates of our master's program. Some of our recent alumni have pursued further graduate work in Ph.D. programs and law schools. Others have found entry-level professional positions in the social services, government, and business sectors, and a number have become instructors in university and community college settings. We are exploring the possibility of implementing an alumni survey as part of the coursework in a required methods course. This survey would offer a cost effective way of building our alumni database while also providing our currently enrolled students with hands-on research experience and direct contact with alumni in the workforce.

Methods of Evaluating and Interpreting Results

After data have been collected, the sociology faculty will work together to analyze and present the findings from the assessment. For embedded class measures, such as written assignments and responses to exam questions, at least two graders will evaluate all of the material. Graders will use a 4-point rating scale of 1= "outstanding" (advanced performance), 2= "good" (understands basic concepts and/or demonstrates basic skills), 3= "adequate" (sufficient but somewhat superficial), and 4= "inadequate" (lacks sufficient knowledge and/or skills). In regard to measures related to student theses, committee members will be responsible for evaluating student performance using the above rubric. Teaching Proseminar pre and post-test results will be compiled and entered into an SPSS database and quantitatively analyzed. Teaching mentors and supervisors here and at Hawkeye will evaluate student teacher performance via written reports which will be analyzed qualitatively. Focus group feedback will be similarly analyzed. Once surveys have been designed and administered to graduate students and alumni, responses will be scored and entered into a SPSS data file and then analyzed by the sociology faculty. All collected raw and analyzed data, reports, and other assessment documents will be electronically stored on our sociology assessment archive site on Blackboard and available only to sociology unit faculty and the UNI's assessment coordinator.

Implementing Assessment Results

The results achieved by the aforementioned assessment methods will be shared with all faculty in the sociology unit. The information is discussed and any weaknesses in student competencies or satisfaction set in motion actions to improve future student outcomes. If weaknesses can be traced to particular courses, faculty teaching those courses are asked to examine their course content and recommend changes for improvement. If the weaknesses appear to be program wide or structural, all faculty are asked to devise ways to improve on those weaknesses. While faculty are responsible for suggesting changes, it is the responsibility of the department head to see the changes are fully implemented and incorporated into specific courses or the entire program, where necessary. After discussion with the faculty as a whole, the department will make necessary modifications where appropriate to course curriculum. A report will then be made to the relevant university officials (e.g. the University Student Outcomes Assessment Committee and the CSBS Dean and Provost every subsequent mandated reporting period).

Over the past academic year, the sociology faculty has:

1. Revised core outcomes and competencies and assessment plan for the sociology graduate program.
2. Included statements of outcomes and competencies in course syllabi and posted on unit website.
3. Designed and begun to implement a teaching proseminar course, teaching practicum, and guided internship to improve and assess teaching skills.
4. Conducted a focus group to elicit program assessments from graduate students.
5. Set up a centralized unit-specific academic assessment archive on Blackboard, where all sociology assessment documents are/will be securely stored and available to sociology unit faculty.
6. Conducted an Academic Program Self-Assessment (APA) and submitted comprehensive report to the Task Force II of UNI's Office of the Provost. This report included discussions and decisions about the current and future state of the program.

Our goals and activities for graduate SOA during the next academic year include:

1. Considering development of a graduate student survey containing direct and indirect measures of all outcomes and competencies.
2. Considering the development of an alumni survey.
3. Continuing to refine learning outcomes and assessment methods.
4. Evaluating SOA findings and using related feedback to improve the quality of our courses and pedagogy (ongoing).

APPENDIX A
PRE AND POSTTEST (created 1/2009)
Self-Assessment of Instructional Skills
Teaching Proseminar

Name: _____

Date: _____

Please circle the number that reflects your level of confidence in each of the following instructional skills. Assume these questions refer to teaching an introductory class in Sociology or Criminology (whichever applies to you). Use the following scale: 1= Not confident; 6 = Extremely Confident

How confident are you:

1= Not confident; 6 = Extremely Confident

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|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Creating a syllabus. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. Choosing readings/text(s) for a course. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. Identifying central topics around which to organize an introductory course. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. Identifying central questions around which to organize a class period. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. Developing an outline and organized notes from which to present course materials. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. Using multimedia technology in and out of the classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. Using techniques for "breaking the ice" during the first day(s) of class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. Using knowledge of sociology (criminology) to supplement information in readings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. Using a variety of effective communication strategies when lecturing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. Using various approaches for beginning class periods. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. Providing opportunities for integrating students' questions and answers into lectures. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. Responding to student questions and comments. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 13. Summarizing and emphasizing main points when delivering lectures. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 14. Assessing and reflecting on the effectiveness of your teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. Maintaining professional demeanor and conduct inside and outside the classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 16. Identifying issues on which to base class discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 17. Using different methods of conducting class discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 18. Controlling the flow of class discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 19. Using different types of examples and illustrations in lectures and class discussions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 20. Evaluating student work objectively and fairly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

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| 21. Integrating students' assigned readings into teaching. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 22. Creating exercises that enhance student learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 23. Teaching to a diverse group of students within a classroom setting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 24. Teaching about controversial issues such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 25. Explaining the goals of liberal arts education to your students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 26. Teaching and evaluating writing skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 27. Teaching and evaluating research skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 28. Managing student behavior in the classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 29. Mentoring students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 30. Maintaining ethical boundaries with students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 31. Dealing with “problem” students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 32. Dealing with ideological resistance of students to controversial material. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 33. Preparing a teaching portfolio for future job searches. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

APPENDIX B
Focus Group Questions, Fall 2008 Sociology Grad Program
Updated Dec. 8, 2008

BECOMING A GRAD STUDENT

1. How did you become a graduate student in our program? What attracted you to our program?
2. Do you have any suggestions for how we might improve our recruitment or outreach efforts?

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAM

1. Has the program enabled you to improve your writing skills? If so, how?

Probe: Have you received sufficient feedback on your papers and writing assignments?
Probe: Could you have received any other types of helpful or constructive feedback?
2. Has the program enabled you to improve your understanding of sociological methods and research? If so, how?

Probe: Could the program do anything more to help you become more knowledgeable about sociological methods?
3. Has the program enhanced your abilities to understand and apply sociological theories? If so, how?

COURSE OFFERINGS

1. Are there enough graduate (esp. 200-level) courses being offered each semester?
2. Are classes scheduled so that they do not conflict too much?
3. Is there a sufficient range of graduate level courses?
4. Are there particular courses that you'd like to see offered that aren't currently offered?

ADVISING and PROSEMINAR

1. What do you think of the advising that you have received from the Graduate Coordinator?

Probes: What do you see as the benefits or strengths of the current advising process?
In your view, are there any changes or improvements that should be made in the advising provided by the Graduate Coordinator?

2. Have you found the graduate proseminar to be a useful experience?

Probes: What do you see as the benefits or contributions of the proseminar?
Are there any changes or improvements that should be made in the proseminar?

OVERALL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

1. What do you see as the major strengths of the sociology program?

2. How do you think the program could be improved?