

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN

AND

2015/2016 GRADUATE STUDENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice

Prepared by

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Chair and Interim Graduate Program Director

May 27, 2016

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN
DEGREE PROGRAM: SOCIOLOGY, MA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE
(May 27, 2016)

Statement of Mission: Graduate Program in Sociology

The mission of the graduate program in sociology is to provide the learning environment to meet the program goals and develop the skills listed below. Faculty members have been encouraged to tie the syllabi for every course into the program goals.

Program Goals (3-4)

(Program goals are broad general statements of what the program intends to accomplish and describes what a student will be able to do after completing the program. The program goals are linked to the mission of the university and college.)

The discipline of sociology is characterized by its breadth and the diversity of its subfields and specializations. Hence, of particular importance to the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice are the following general goals included in our mission statement:

1. to provide knowledge and understanding of the historical, social, intellectual bases of human culture and environment;
2. to provide habits of thought and investigation useful in later life;
3. to encourage exploration and development of ethical values; and
4. to offer the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools.

Student Learning Outcomes (6-8)

(Student Learning Outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will know and be able to do as a result of completing a program. These student learning outcomes are directly linked to the accomplishment of the program goals.)

By graduation, MA students in sociology should be able to:

1. effectively use communication skills in writing, editing, speaking and listening
2. effectively use analytical and computer skills to include the tools to analyze qualitative and quantitative data
3. effectively conceptualize and solve problems, and engage in critical thinking, effective reasoning, and decision-making
4. effectively use social skills to include cooperative learning and group problem-solving
5. be able to translate the sociological perspective into everyday life and problems.

The acquisition of skills listed above is the goal of the BA in sociology. The masters' program in sociology seeks to develop the same skills, except at a more sophisticated level than that expected for the undergraduate student. Graduate work is expected to be more independent and self-directed than undergraduate work, and to be more analytical and theoretical.

Process for Assessing each Student Learning Outcome

(A process must be defined and documented to regularly assess student learning and achievement of student learning outcomes. The results of the assessment must be utilized as input for the improvement of the program.)

In the Department of Sociology and CMJS, the graduate director and the graduate committee have the responsibility for reviewing and evaluating our assessment procedures, and for offering suggestions to the faculty. The graduate director is also responsible for administering and reviewing the alumni survey, and for informing the faculty of the results of that survey.

1. Timeline for assessment and analysis

(Must include specific timeline for collection and analysis of assessment data.)

- Data collection takes place on an annual basis during spring and fall semesters.
- In 2015, data collection will take place between March 15 and May 1 and November 15 and December 15.
- The analysis of assessment data will take place between May 1 and May 20.

2. Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement

(Must include at least one direct and one indirect method of assessment for each learning outcome.)

- The graduate director contacts faculty members who are supervising master's theses in December and May to determine how well our students are doing. In addition, the graduate director conducts annual graduate student evaluations in December and May. This is a formal process, using evaluation forms developed by the graduate committee. These forms are designed to determine if the student is making satisfactory progress.
- The same forms are also used to evaluate assistantship performance of the students who have been awarded graduate assistantships. The graduate director shares the results of the semi-annual evaluations with the graduate committee, and asks the graduate committee for guidance in difficult cases. Subsequently, the graduate director uses the semi-annual evaluations to submit the formal annual evaluation of a student's performance to the graduate school.
- In 2012, graduate faculty approved the addition of a new committee responsible for developing, administering, and evaluating the quality of comprehensive examinations. The comprehensive examination committee consists of four tenure-track or tenured faculty members representing our two areas of concentration: general sociology (two faculty) and criminology (two faculty). After the student has completed the process, the examination committee reports to the graduate director regarding whether the student passed the exam. The graduate director shares the results with the student and departmental faculty.
- a thesis (with an oral comprehensive examination component) or a comprehensive written examination to be taken in the student's last semester of the M.A.;
- a paper reporting original empirical research (this requirement may be met by the thesis);

3. Reporting of results

(Must at least report annually to the Dean of college/school.)

- Results will be reported annually by June 1

**2015/2016 Academic Assessment Report
(Master of Arts Degree in Sociology)
(05/23/2016)**

Evaluation of Student Performance and Learning Outcomes

During the 2015/2016 academic year, the graduate program and the evaluation of student performance was conducted by current department chair/interim graduate director. In May 2016, the chair/interim graduate director reviewed program completion data (MA Thesis defenses and comprehensive exams) and post-graduation (PhD program admission and employment) data for graduating cohort as well as course grades and cumulative GPA for each MA student in our graduate program. This information was subsequently shared with the Graduate Committee, which determined which students were and which were not making satisfactory progress toward degree. The chair/interim graduate director also contacted faculty members supervising the graduate assistants and/or serving as faculty advisors/thesis committee chairs. The faculty were asked to evaluate graduate assistant performance and graduate student progress toward completing the degree. This is a formal process using evaluation forms developed by the graduate committee. Subsequently, the chair/interim graduate director meets with graduate students to discuss the review. The chair/interim graduate director uses the evaluations to submit the formal annual evaluation of a student's performance to the graduate school (due June 30). In addition, the chair/interim graduate director initiated exit surveys via online survey software (SurveyMonkey). All graduating MA students were sent links to the survey via email. Participation in the survey was voluntary; no identifying information was gathered.

Student Performance Outcomes: New 2015/2016 Cohort

The new 2015/2016 cohort consisted of ten graduate students. Two students had to withdraw from the program (one in fall 2015 and another in spring 2016) due to medical and personal reasons. The chair/interim graduate director conducted annual evaluations of the remaining eight graduate students. All eight graduate students received positive marks on their assistantship performance; seven graduate students received positive evaluations of their progress toward the degree; one graduate student received negative evaluation of his progress (GPA significantly below the 3.0 GPA). Based on the graduate regulations the student has been dismissed from the program. On a brighter side, this year, in spite of the cuts in the travel funds available for MA students, the department was able to send three first year graduate students to present their papers at the national Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) conference in Denver, CO.

Student Performance Outcomes: 2016 Graduating Cohort

A. Satisfaction with MA in Sociology Program

The 2016 graduating cohort included eight graduate students. Six graduate students (75%) completed the latest MA program assessment survey conducted April and May 2016. Students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the degree program (The average response score ranged from 3.33 to 5.00, on a scale from 1 through 5). The survey also indicated that students are satisfied with (1) their ability to find faculty members with whom they could talk about professional matters (5.00); (2) the quality of graduate teaching (4.5); (3) quality of graduate advising (4.67), and (4) quality of assistantship experiences (4.67). All respondents also indicated that would recommend our graduate program to others (100%). Again, the major issue raised by the students is variety of elective courses offered (3.33).

Overall, on all items, the results of the survey show a substantive improvement over the 2015 results, when the range of satisfaction as measured by the average response scores was from 2.77 to 4.68.

B. Evidence that Intended General Educational Goals and Learning Outcomes Are Being Achieved Program Completion and Post-Graduation Outcomes

The MA Program in Sociology offers two graduation options, including the non-thesis option. In the 2016 graduating cohort, seven students pursued the thesis option; one student pursued the non-thesis option. Among the seven thesis students, five had successfully defended their thesis by the end of the spring semester; the remaining two students are on track to defend their thesis at the end of the summer 2016. All seven thesis students presented their papers at national and regional professional conferences, including the national Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) conference in Denver, CO. and the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society in Chicago, IL.

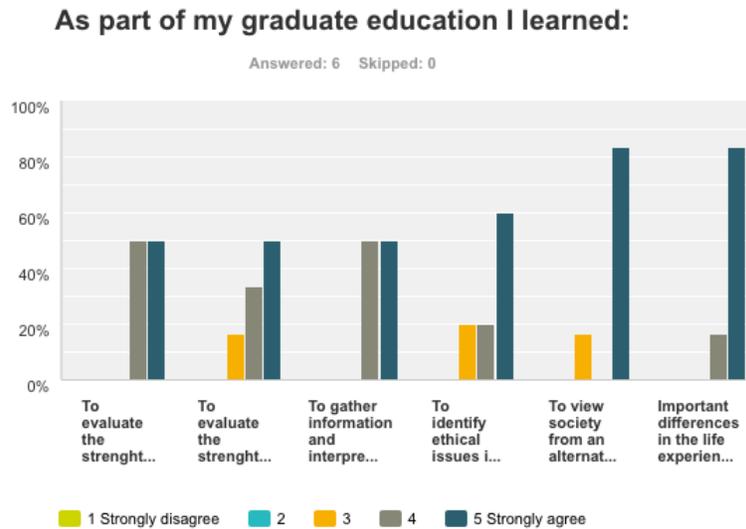
With regard to post-graduation paths, three graduates are in the process of seeking employment in closely related fields. Many of our students pursue doctoral work elsewhere, and their success in these programs is a good indicator of the quality of our program. Two graduate students applied and were admitted with funding to the Ph.D. programs: Jonathan Redman - Ph.D. Program in Sociology at UC Irvine; Caity Curry – Ph.D. Program in Sociology at the University of Minnesota; third student applied to the MBA program at the University of Arkansas. These placements attest to the quality of our program and raise the issue of opportunities lost because our best students cannot continue their doctoral education in our department.

In sum, these outcomes provide evidence that our MA program offers the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools (**Program Goal # 4**).

General Learning Outcomes

According to the survey results, the department is meeting its general educational program goals (Program Goals 1, 2, 3 and 4) and student learning outcomes (Learning Outcomes 2 and 3). Specifically, as Figure 1 demonstrates, our graduates indicated high level of agreement with the statements included under the prompt “As part of my graduate education I learned...” The majority of students *agreed or strongly agreed* with the statement that they learned (1) “to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical perspectives” (100%); (2) “to gather information and interpret the meaning of this information” (100%); (3) “to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods” (83%); and (4) “to identify ethical issues in sociological research” (80%). Moreover, the majority of students *strongly agreed* with the statements that they learned (1) “important differences in the life experiences of people” (83%); and (2) “to view society from an alternative or critical perspective (83%). The areas in which student satisfaction scores had the lowest mean were: learning to “evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods” (4.33) and to “identify ethical issues in sociological research” (4.4). Overall, in 2016 the mean of the mean scores on these questions was slightly higher than in 2015, 4.53 versus 4.48, respectively.

Figure 1: Question 10



Specific Student Learning Outcomes

According to the data, our graduating students indicate a high degree of consistency between our stated learning objectives and student learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students know and be able to use as a result of completing our graduate program (Figure 2). Specifically, students indicated a high degree of agreement with a set of statements under the prompt, “Courses in my program helped me develop the following general skills...” (Student Learning Outcomes 2 and 3). In this regard, the majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that they developed: critical thinking skills (100%); effective communication skills (83%); effective problem solving (100%); effective reasoning (100%) and making evidence-based arguments (100%), and analysis and computer skills (100%).

Figure 2: Question 8

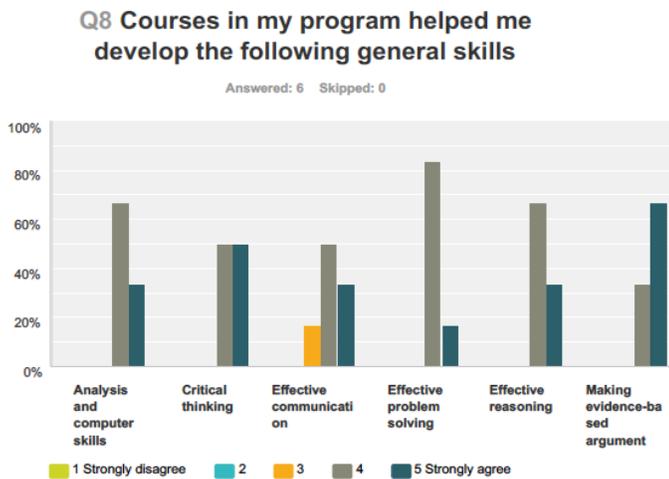


Table 1: Question 9 - Courses in my program helped me to develop an understanding of....

Basic Statistics ?					
	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
The sociological/criminological perspective	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.83	0.37
The application of sociological/criminological concepts to the analysis of society	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.67	0.47
The overall theoretical foundation of the discipline	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.67	0.47
The classical theoretical perspectives	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.67	0.47
The contemporary sociological perspectives	3.00	6.00	5.00	4.67	0.94
Criminological Theories	4.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	0.89
The overall methodological foundations of the discipline	2.00	5.00	4.50	4.17	1.07
Qualitative research design	1.00	6.00	4.00	3.83	1.67
Quantitative research design	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.50
Qualitative data analysis	1.00	6.00	4.50	4.00	1.63
Quantitative data analysis	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.67	0.47

Moreover, responses indicate that courses offered in our program help students develop other skills and intellectual abilities identified as the key components of what the program intends to accomplish. These outcomes were measured by student responses to a set of statements asking them to indicate the level of agreement with a set of statements under the prompt: “Courses in my program helped me to develop an understanding of....” (Program Goal 4 and Learning Outcome 5). In this regard, students expressed high level of agreement with statements related to understanding of “the sociological/criminological perspective” (4.89); “the application of sociological/criminological concepts to the analysis of society” (4.63); “the overall theoretical foundation of the discipline” (4.56); “the overall methodological foundations of the discipline (4.33).” Understanding of qualitative research design was only area that received considerably lower average score (3.44). This low score is very likely a reflection of the more quantitative orientation in the content of our graduate research methods courses.

Summary and changes to degree/certificate planned or made on the basis of the assessment and analysis

The overwhelming majority of our first year graduate students (fall 2016 cohort) are making satisfactory progress. Program completion and post-graduation outcomes as well as survey responses from our 2016 graduating cohort indicate that they will likely utilize the knowledge and skills developed in our program. With regard to satisfaction with the program, the majority of respondents had positive experiences with the professors and graduate assistantships, were satisfied with advising and mentoring, and benefitted from graduate courses. Our primary areas for improvement continue to include:

- expanding the number of elective courses offered in the program
- expanding the coverage of qualitative research designed in our required courses
- expanding the coverage and discussion of ethical issues in sociological research

Summary of planned changes to the assessment method and process

In general, the assessment methods the department uses to evaluate the extent to which the goals of our program and student learning outcomes are satisfactory. Our primary areas for improvement include:

- developing an alumni survey assessing the extent to which our graduates actually utilize the knowledge, skills, and abilities developed in our graduate program
- developing survey questions evaluating program goal # 4 (to offer the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools) and student learning outcome #4 (effectively use social skills to include cooperative learning and group problem-solving)