

Program Assessment: Annual Report

Program(s): Sociology

Department: Sociology & Anthropology

College/School: Arts and Sciences

Date: June 13, 2019

Primary Assessment Contact: Joel Jennings, Undergraduate Director

1. Which program student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

This year we assessed our fourth goal: Sociology majors will have the skills necessary to communicate effectively in written and oral forms. We used the following Student Learning Outcomes:

- a) write a clear and convincing sociological analysis of an event, issue, or problem
- b) make an oral presentation that is succinct, clear, convincing, and professional
- c) use computerized and online resources to find information (e.g., databases, reputable internet websites, government statistics, etc.)
- d) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assess which references are appropriate for academic research

This is the fourth year the sociology program has implemented an assessment under its revised plan. We used committee review of the capstone projects of graduating seniors as a direct measure of learning outcomes and complemented that with exit interviews and surveys of graduating seniors as indirect measures of our goal. The capstone papers and exit interviews were reviewed by a faculty committee and a summary report was prepared as scheduled during June. This summary report will be presented to all departmental faculty members for review and discussion at the annual faculty retreat at the end of August, 2019. Madrid is not involved in this assessment.

Capstone papers were used for this evaluation. As Capstone papers are researched for a written and oral presentation formats, they fit the assessment learning outcome goals quite well.

2. What data/artifacts of student learning were collected for each assessed outcome? Were Madrid student artifacts included?

We analyzed a randomly selected sample of three Capstone papers. We also recorded the presentations associated with these papers using Tegrity. These Capstone papers either empirical works or literature reviews that were guided by individual faculty members and overseen by an instructor of record in the Sociology division.

Madrid artifacts were not included (we will share our findings with them and invite dialogue, however).

We also undertook qualitative interviews that asked students about their understanding and comfort with social science methodology. We explored which classes helped them understand the various methods used in social science, as well as what instructional techniques were helpful.

3. How did you analyze the assessment data? What was the process? Who was involved?

NOTE: If you used rubrics as part of your analysis, please include them in an appendix.

Direct Methods:

1) During June 2019, a committee (Dr. Chris Prener and Dr. Joel Jennings) evaluated a sample of Capstone papers (3 of 16) using a rubric that focused on the four learning objectives.

Indirect Methods:

A second committee (Dr. Richard Colignon and Dr. Joel Jennings) also conducted focus groups with graduating seniors to identify specific issues with the program's delivery of methods courses and techniques.

4. What did you learn from the data? Summarize the major findings of your analysis for each assessed outcome.

NOTE: If necessary, include any tables, charts, or graphs in an appendix.

Average scores for learning outcomes (N/A = not applicable to paper topic)

- a) $(5+5+5+5+2+2) = 24/6 = 4.0$
- b) $(5+4+4+4+4+3) = 24/6 = 4.0$
- c) $(5+5+5+5+3+5) = 28/6 = 4.6$
- d) $(5+4+5+4+2+2) = 22/6 = 3.6$

Our findings indicate that we have students with a range of capacities in terms of their ability to write and present independent research. Students mostly established a clear and convincing sociological analysis of their topic, though there was variation.

Students generally did quite well on their oral presentations. This was a strength even as we again saw variation between presentations. Overall, students did a good job of presenting their analysis using PowerPoints that were organized and well-designed.

The third assessed outcome was a bit difficult to evaluate, as students were generally not specific about how they gathered their data. This point was mostly assessed indirectly based on the sources the students used and any explicit references they provided. This is an area that we may want to directly address when we assess this set of learning objectives in the future.

Students generally used appropriate sources in their research, although a weakness in writing was associated with insufficiently rigorous sources in one case. This was an area that could be strengthened in future semesters.

During focus groups, sociology students recommended that advisers encourage students to take sociological theory earlier in their coursework, as this would be helpful for preparing for the Capstone. Students also reported wide variation in terms of opportunities to make oral presentations in their undergraduate courses. They further suggested that juniors be encouraged to attend Capstone presentations so as to better understand the expectations.

Finally, some students suggested there might be value in having a one-unit course in the term before the final capstone. This could be used to develop a topic and preliminary research before entering the final term.

5. How did your analysis inform meaningful change? How did you *use the analyzed data to make or implement recommendations for change* in pedagogy, curriculum design, or your assessment plan?

We will use the findings from this assessment to inform an ongoing discussion in the division about how to better prepare undergraduate students for Capstone research. We are currently discussing ways to create intellectual and skills-based scaffolding within the lower division sociology courses that will ensure that students are comfortable and prepared to write and present original research by the time they begin their Capstones.

6. Did you follow up (“close the loop”) on past assessment work? If so, what did you learn? (*For example, has that curriculum change you made two years ago manifested in improved student learning today, as evidenced in your recent assessment data and analysis?*)

The Sociology program assessment protocol is a four-step process. We are currently in Year #4. As such, we have not yet completed a cycle of assessment and have not yet had the opportunity to compare data between years. We have, however, been using feedback from focus groups with graduating seniors to make adjustments to the program as necessary. Feedback from this year’s focus groups, for example, will inform discussions around the kinds of writing and presentation requirements found in courses at the 1000, 2000, 3000, and 4,000 levels in division meetings during the fall semester.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any revised/updated assessment plans to the University Assessment Coordinator along with this report.

Rubric for Exit Interviews

Structured Exit Interview with Graduating Seniors

Focus group questions.

1. What was the most interesting question on the questionnaire?
2. What was/were you favorite courses in the major?
3. What elective courses would you suggest we create?
4. Weakness in the curriculum—What required courses would you suggest we create?
5. Do you have a sense of the breadth of knowledge of this discipline?
6. Were courses with hands-on-experience helpful?
7. Do you think you received helpful guidance from you mentor?

Sociology majors will have the skills necessary to communicate effectively in written and oral forms.

Learning Outcomes:

8. write a clear and convincing sociological analysis of an event, issue, or problem
9. make an oral presentation that is succinct, clear, convincing, and professional
10. use computerized and online resources to find information (e.g., databases, reputable internet websites, government statistics, etc.)

11. evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assess which references are appropriate for academic research

12. Other Issues:

- a. Facilities?
- b. Research Experience?
- c. Security issues?

13. What additional questions should we be asking?

Notes on responses: