

Sociology Program Assessment 2016-2017

Learning Objective 1: Be able to identify and explain the basic concepts, terminology, and theories of the social science of Sociology.

Assessment Measure: Total score on the Sociology Major Field Test

Proficiency Criteria: Since our sociology program does not offer a number of the "core" courses offered by larger sociology programs, our criteria for program success is for all of our students taking the Sociology MFAT exam to score in the percentile rank of 40 or greater.

Evidence: Of the 15 students taking the MFT, only 5 (33%) students scored within the 40th percentile or higher.

Criteria Met: No

Learning Objective 2: Use the sociological perspective in analyzing contemporary social issues.

Assessment Measure: Students' percentile rankings on the Core Sociology component (Subscore 1) of the Sociology Major Field Test.

Proficiency Criteria: Since our sociology program does not offer a number of the "core" courses offered by larger sociology programs, our criteria for program success is for all of our students to score in at least the 40th percentile of the Core Sociology (Subscore 1) section of the MFAT.

Evidence: Of the 15 students taking the MFT, only 5 (33%) students scored within the 40th percentile or higher on the Core Sociology section.

Criteria Met: No

Learning Objective 3: Use the sociological perspective in analyzing different cultural systems.

Assessment Measure: The Global component (Assessment Indicator 9) of the MFAT.

Proficiency Criteria: Since our sociology program does not offer a number of the "core" courses offered by larger sociology programs, our criteria for program success is for all of our students to score in at least the 40th percentile of the Global component (Assessment Indicator 9) of the MFAT.

Evidence: The program mean percent correct for our 15 students was 38, putting us in the 17th percentile overall. We do not have an individual student score summary at this time.

Criteria Met: No

Learning Objective 4: Be able to collect and analyze data, especially data concerning social phenomena.

Assessment Measure: The Methodology and Statistics component (Assessment Indicator 2) of the MFAT.

Proficiency Criteria: Since our sociology program does not offer a number of the "core" courses offered by larger sociology programs, our criteria for program success is for all of our students to score in at least the 40th percentile of the Methodology and Statistics component (Assessment Indicator 2) of the MFAT.

Evidence: The program mean percent correct for our 15 students was 40, putting us in the 29th percentile overall. We do not have an individual student score summary at this time.

Criteria Met: No

Learning Objective 5: Students are able to apply the basic concepts of their areas of specialization

Assessment Measure:

Criminal Justice (CJ): Local specialization exit exam; Human Services (HS): Local specialization exit exam

Proficiency Criteria:

CJ: Students will answer at least 70% of the questions on the local exam(s) pertaining to their areas of specialization.

HS: Students will answer at least 70% of the questions on the local exam(s) pertaining to their areas of specialization

Evidence:

CJ: Of the 13 students that took the CJ exit exam, 9 (69%) answered at least 70 percent of the questions correctly while 4 (31%) failed to reach the 70 percent benchmark.

HS: Of the 6 students that took the HS exit exam, 3 (50%) answered at least 70 percent of the questions correctly while 3 (50%) failed to reach the 70 percent benchmark.

Criteria Met: Partially

Program Summary:

Our results for AY 2016-2017 mirror past results in that we are largely not meeting our goals for the overall major. Given the consistent nature of the results, this is likely an indicator that our main assessment measure -- the Sociology Major Field Test (MFT) -- is not actually measuring what our students are learning. According to the American Sociological Association, only 25.2 percent of 645 responding Sociology departments were using an external standardized exam to assess summative learning in AY2011-2012. In contrast, 63.9 percent of departments used a senior thesis or project for their summative measures (2012). The benefit of using a standardized exam is the comparability to other Sociology departments; given the relatively small number of departments using this measure this reduces the usefulness of the MFT as our primary summative assessment.

Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) offer a strong critique of the usefulness of the MFT questions. They point out some questions are generally factual which does not accurately measure learning and knowledge of *sociological* concepts. This critique is, in many ways, reflective of both our proficiency criteria and past assessment report observations. Our criteria for “meeting” our outcome is our students achieving the 40th percentile. This is a fairly low bar and indicates that the MFT requires a broader knowledge base within the discipline than a small department such as ours can actually give our students. For example, the MFT offers questions regarding organizational; this is a subject area that our department does not and cannot, due to issues such as the lack of faculty expertise or the potential lack of student interest, offer as courses.

Finally, the MFT is a completely objective measure that requires no writing. As our students are ending up in very communications-heavy jobs post-graduation, we should be measuring their communications skills. Since the MFT does not allow us to do so this further contributes to the lack of usefulness of the tool.

To create better alignment between our assessment measures and what we are actually teaching, I have revamped the assessment plan overall. This includes a new internally generated written exit exam to measure summative learning; this is a tool that was adapted from one provided by Wagenaar (2004) in *Teaching Sociology* as a more robust written measure compared to

standardized exams. This exit exam will be offered for the first time in Fall 2017. We will also begin asking students to complete a portfolio that will provide a more holistic summative measure in our new Capstone course (first being offered in Spring 2019). Other formative measures will be implemented within various points along the required degree pathways to help us detect issues and problems with the program rather than relying solely on a summative assessment.

In terms of our specializations, our CJ students largely continue to meet our general proficiency criteria. Despite this, our proficiency percentage (69%) is somewhat lower than AY2014-2015 (88%) but slightly higher than AY2015-2016 (63%). This could potentially be due to the drop in student numbers taking the exam between AY2014-2015 (n=17), AY2015-2016 (n=8), and this year (n=13). When investigating the specific questions students did poorly on -- defined as less than 50 percent selecting the correct answer -- these questions largely fall under the domain of “legal definitions relevant to criminal justice.” For example, on the following question the average percentage is 14.29:

The charging document filed by a prosecutor is known as an:

- ☐ a) Arraignment
- ☐ b) Arrest
- ☐ c) Indictment
- ☒ d) Information

Given the similarities in question type, this indicates we may want to strengthen our emphasis on legal knowledge and terminology within our criminal justice specialization.

Our HS specialization exam was rewritten for AY 2016-2017 using test bank questions and given the increase in student scores – with 50 percent reaching proficiency – this indicates our previous problem was with the exam. As the new version has only been offered twice and our limited data pool (n=6), I hesitate to make conclusions regarding the validity of the new exam or how our scores reflect student learning as I do not believe we have enough data to judge the reliability or validity of the new exam yet. Regardless, that we did reach 50 percent of students achieving proficiency after years of students being unable to reach our benchmark indicates the measure is, at least, a better one than the previous HS exam. We also may be able to use this preliminary data to have a better idea about the consistency of our HS specialization given that those classes are taught primarily by adjuncts. When we have more multi-year data with the new HS exam for comparison, I believe we will be able to have a better idea of the consistency of information provided in the classroom.

American Sociological Society. 2012, "Comparison of Assessment Tools Used for Sociology Undergraduates". Retrieved 07/15/2017, 2017 (<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/trends/comparison-assessment-tools-used-sociology-undergraduates>).

Ferguson, Susan and William Carbonaro. 2016. "Measuring College Learning in Sociology." Pp. 135-87 in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century*, edited by R. Arum, J. Roska and A. Cook. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wagenaar, Theodore C. 2004. "Assessing Sociological Knowledge: A First Try." *Teaching Sociology* 32(2):232-38.