This year we are changing our assessment plan, as we are focusing each year on a specific set of learning goals and not all of the goals each year (this is explained in detail below). This semester, we are addressing the following learning goals: 1, 5 and 11. (These are identified later, as well as can be located at the following link: http://www.csus.edu/psa/soc_v1/1Acad_LrngGoals.htm). In this summary, I will predominantly focus on learning objectives 1 and 5 in the discussion, as 11 is still in process (the writing assessment), which is also described below in the changes to our assessment procedures (all of the changes have been added to our online assessment plan, located at the following link: http://www.csus.edu/psa/soc_v1/1Acad_Assessment.htm). I will briefly discuss an indirect assessment of writing by our students.

Learning goals to be addressed for 2008:

1: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality. The student should be able to describe how sociology differs from and is similar to other social sciences and give examples of these differences; and apply sociological imagination, principles, and concepts to her/his own life.

5: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on basic concepts in sociology and their fundamental theoretical interrelations.

11: The sociology major at CSUS will be expected to have the writing skills necessary to communicate effectively with persons whom they encounter in their work, civil obligation and personal life.

Looking first at the most recent indirect measures (graduating senior survey) of the three learning objectives being addressed this year (1, 5 and 11), which are administered at the close of each semester. For learning objective 1, all of the students who completed the surveys (100%) identified that they feel they have gained a significant understanding of how sociology differs from other social sciences. Similarly, all of the students who completed the survey expressed a deeper understanding of the basic concepts within the field of sociology (learning objective 5), including concepts related to inequality, socialization and institutions. These numbers actually show a slight improvement from previous years, which identified a few students who did not feel they fully grasped the ideas of both the field of sociology and the concepts that are used within the field. Still, the changes are minimal, as our students have, over time, generally expressed a general belief in their understanding of these areas.
In terms of writing, almost 92% of the students expressed that they felt the sociology department assisted them with their writing from some extent to a great extent. In fact, 67% of students believed that their writing was assisted by the department to a great extent. While this is beneficial to know that students feel their writing has grown, we are still interested in determining at what level our students are actually writing, and potentially any limitations they may have in their writing. In an attempt to assess this, we have implemented a more in depth procedure for analyzing their writing, which we are implementing this semester, and will extend for three years. The full discussion of this new assessment of writing procedure is described below.

In terms of how well our students actually performed (a direct measurement of learning objectives) we recently began to implement an exit exam. We are currently assessing its validity and reliability in measuring the department learning objectives, so each semester adjustments are made, either by modifying wording of questions or replacing them altogether (or potentially adding new ones). The exam will measure more directly the knowledge gained by our students, reflecting nine of our eleven learning objectives (the only two it does not assess are the use of critical thinking skills, which we are developing a procedure to assist us with assessing that learning objective; and the writing learning objective, which is described in detail below). While the exit exam is still undergoing constant reevaluation and adjustments to best fit the needs of the department, I will give a preliminary commentary here about its outcomes concerning learning objectives one and five.

For learning objective one, an average of 88% of our students expressed an excellent understanding of the field of sociology, and how it differs from other disciplines. Simply, both the direct and indirect measures shows a majority of our students are gaining the knowledge about the field of sociology that we desire.

For learning objective five, we can identify that while there is a range of responses for the variety of questions that were used to assess this learning objective, the average percentage of correct responses (78%) displays that our students have an excellent grasp of the basic concepts within the field of sociology. There were a few questions/concepts that displayed lower scores, so we have begun to evaluate both the focus of the department in educating students about these specific concepts/ideas, as well as to address the structure of the question to determine the reliability of the questions. Regardless, the higher percentage on the direct assessment supports our student’s beliefs in their own knowledge of the concepts within the field.

CHANGES TO ASSESSMENT PLAN:

We are establishing a much more structured formative assessment of our department learning goals, to better achieve the goals we identified and to better assist our students. This also addresses several of the recommendations made in the recent program review, such as “continuing to explore ways of measuring effectiveness” (Part II, # 6). As a result, our department has decided to make changes to the department assessment
program, as well as a more structured process for assessing student writing. The emphasis on student writing is not only because it is a part of our learning goals but also due to the fact that student writing is a common concern in both our department and the university in general. The changes to the assessment have been updated on the department website as well.

The first change we made is that we edited both the entrance and exit surveys to be more streamlined to increase the response rates of students, which is important in determining the achievement of the departmental learning goals. The edits also allow for greater connection between the entrance and exit surveys, which will potentially allow for more accurate and longitudinal assessment of our majors, both in terms of the learning goals of the department and beyond.

The second change involved a continued assessment and adjustment of our exit exam, which we have only recently created and begun to offer to our graduating seniors as a way to directly assess our student learning goals (the exit surveys offer an indirect measure). We identified, after conferring with a number of students who completed the exit exam that several of the questions were either too easy, i.e. information they had prior to joining the department (which would not allow for us to assess what information they gained in the major) or are not a part of the program at all, i.e. they never received the knowledge pertaining to the specific questions. Adjustments and corrections have been made, as well as additions to attempt to more thoroughly assess the different learning goals, and we will again have our graduating seniors complete the survey, as well as offer feedback concerning their utility (we will also continue to have our faculty assess the questions to give a more thorough engagement of the questions).

The third change in our assessment plan is to restructure our assessment procedure to allow us to focus more on specific learning goals and address them, as opposed to offering limited analysis of each goal each year. The new structure is based on a suggestion by both our recent program review and the ASA assessment guide. The procedure will be the following:

Each year the assessment committee will assess a set number of our learning goals, which will allow us to focus more explicitly on each learning goal and thus make the assessment process more “efficient and effective” as recommended in the program review (Part 1, #10). The goals will paired up with associated goals, such as assessing statistics and methods-based goals together.

Upon completion of the review at the end of the school year, the department assessment committee will determine if any changes need to occur and what changes would best benefit our department and students. Each set of goals would be assessed then 5 years later to determine how well we addressed any noted issues in the previous assessment (if any needed to be addressed), as well as how the new changes helped, if any were implemented.
We will gather the same data each year that has been gathered in previous years (i.e. data that measures all of our learning goals) even though we will only be using data that pertains to the specific goals of that given year. This will allow us to focus, as identified above, while still collecting longitudinal data. Additional measurements will often be included in the assessment process depending on the learning goals being assessed in a given year (for example, in 2010, when methods and computer/spss skills are assessed, those who teach research methods will offer a short summary of the students' abilities in such areas, as it offers a much more qualitative component to our assessment, as well as allows those teaching the class to engage with one another to determine the abilities of our students in this area. Other alternative data will be determined by the goals being assessed). The creation of new strategies based on the present issues (and learning objectives), as well as any changes or additions to the department address a third recommendation from the program review in that "assessment strategies continue to be refined, and that the momentum demonstrated over the past few years continue" (Part II, #10).

The following assessment schedule will be used:

Year Learning Goals
2008 1, 5, & 11
2009 2 & 10
2010 3 & 4
2011 6 & 7
2012 8 & 9

The cycle will again repeat itself, meaning we will assess each area every 5 years.

The first area we are addressing is student writing (as well as goals #1 & 5, which have been discussed above). We will initially assess writing for 3 years (2008-2010) in order to get the most complete understanding of the issues with our students' writing. After the initial assessment, it, like all of the other goals, will be assessed once every five years. The following is the assessment process for our writing:

**The process of writing assessment for 2008:**

Each semester we will randomly sample 15-20 papers from one of our core classes. The first year, it will be Sociology 194, the next year 150, the third year 125, and then repeat that process (students will be informed that their paper may be used, but no names will be used). Papers will be randomly chosen to better assess the general quality of student writing in our program, and what areas need to be addressed. This also accounts for why we will conduct this initially over a 3 three year span.

A committee of five will read the papers (each paper will be read by two faculty) each semester to assess the writing ability of our students, as well as the use of sociological terms and their understanding of the field of sociology. The areas we will assess in the writing includes: structure, grammar, argument (supporting evidence), thesis application
and development, use of sociological terms, and the understanding of the sociological perspective (after working with the university writing across the curriculum coordinator, a rubric has been established). Upon completion of the reviews during each semester, the committee will write a short summary of their findings and the concerns they have about the patterns they see in terms of our student writing. At the end of the year, both semester conclusions will be discussed by the present committee to determine if any concerns exist at that time (only one semester will be used for this year, as the program has only been implemented).

After the initial three year assessment of student writing, if there are any weak areas that have continuously been identified, the committee will determine the best way to address the concerns, which will be presented to the department at the beginning of the next school year, and then implemented that same year.

Assessment Committee:

It will be developed on a rotating basis, every year a group of five faculty will be on the committee. Committee members will be in line with the learning goals being assessed. They will conduct the assessment and determine any concerns that exist, as well as offer suggestions on potential changes that could be implemented to be brought to the department.

The chair of the assessment program in the department will always be present in the end of the year discussion about the learning goals.
GE Assessment Summary:

Area A Assessment:

The sociology department has one class in GE Area A, which is Sociology 8. While the entire class is based on students developing critical thinking skills as they gain an understanding of how sociology can be used to examine everyday life, and thus every assignment in the class is used to assess the student’s ability in at least one of the learning objectives, one of the primary assignments that is used to directly evaluate all of these learning objectives is the “interactive reading forms” in which students read and analyze several readings throughout the semester. Based on students’ grades, the professor is able to determine not only the pass level of the students for each learning objective but also if the students have shown progress in their understanding and ability in the learning objectives.

Since the implementation of this assessment plan, for each of the learning objectives, an average of over 90% of the students showed an ability over the years that put them at passing for each of the learning objectives, with the majority of them (a range of 55-95%) displaying a greater ability in the learning objectives. As well, only an average of about 5% of students were identified as failing to grasp each learning objective. Students were
strongest in their abilities in learning objectives 1 and 4, with 2 being the most difficult for students. Still, even learning objective 2, when a student was to detect errors of reasoning and then explain how the reasoning was in error, the average passing for that learning objective was 83%. Subsequent semesters, however, showed that student average in that learning objective was up to nearly 90%, necessitating no response by the department. We, however, will continue to monitor the course, as well as reevaluate the process by which we assess the outcomes to determine if adjusts can be made to further assist students.

Area C Assessment:

We had three classes within the Area C GE. The first was in Area C4, Sociology 135. The predominant manner through which this course was evaluated was journals that had students discuss and critically engage issues of popular culture throughout the course. The students in the class were able to consistently engage and understand the issues that surrounded the topics in the class. For the first learning goal, 84% were able to do critically analyze the issues at a pass or high pass level, with only about 5% failing over the years. Similarly, an average of 85% displayed skills that were pass or higher, and only an average of 3% failed to comprehend the values and development of the topics. The professor also identified that during semesters that students appeared to struggle with ideas initially, i.e. in the first journals, he would adjust the course so that students will gain a better understanding of the issues.

The second class, Sociology 160, which is a part of GE Area C1, has not been taught since the implementation of the assessment plan (which means since I have been on campus) due to the limited availability of the faculty who teaches the course (she has been required to teach core classes in the major instead). We recently hired someone who will be able to teach the course, which means the class is expected to be taught in the near future.

The third class, Sociology 162, which is a part of GE Area C4, the students have been displaying a high ability for both learning goals, including an average 87% in learning goal 1 and 88% in learning goal 2. An average of 4% of students failed to display these abilities (both learning objectives) over the course of the semester. This was based on the short in-class writing assignments given each week to determine student knowledge and ability, which, as the professor identified, was used to direct class the following week to potentially address missing information or limited ability by the majority of the class.

Assessment Area D

There are eleven courses within Area D in the Sociology Department. The majority rely on quantitative data to assess the learning objectives. I organize this discussion around the three GE Areas in D in which sociology classes exist. Area D2 has 8 courses, so while I will identify each course, but will focus the discussion on limitations and areas of excellence and not offer extensive discussions about each. If there are further questions about these, feel free to contact me at anytime.
In Area D1a, Sociology 1 is our class with the highest number of sections. For Sociology 1, while we have multiple sections taught by multiple faculty, overall, there is consistency of the scores by students for learning objectives 1, 3 and 4 across the sections over the years, with the average displaying scores 73% (or higher) of the students showing an ability at passing for all three learning objectives. There were a few sections and even in one situation, a faculty member whose sections scored lower than the averages, in particular in learning objective 3. The faculty member was contacted to discuss the lower scores, who identified that he did not normally spend as much time on that topic area (diversity and inequality specifically) and would adjust in the future. The faculty member stated he would begin to focus more on that topic area, but never taught the class again before full retirement. Learning objective 2, however, has displayed a consistently lower average score across the sections (below 68%, but prior to the last year, as low as 60%). An email was sent to all faculty who teach these sections to inform them of the concern as well as to gather any comments about this issue. Most faculty understood and said they would emphasize the research methods discussion as they felt students did not fully understand the relationship between methods and the field of sociology. A suggestion was made to all faculty who teach this class to not simply identify the methods and the concepts related to them, but to discuss the relationship between methods and the rest of sociology, both theory and general findings. I should note that we have recently hired new part-time faculty who are teaching this course, and having been informed of this concern prior to teaching, their students are doing much better in their understanding of research methods, with averages of student comprehension at the passing level in the mid 80% range. We will continue to monitor this issue.

Our Sociology 106 course has only been taught one time since the implementation of the assessment plan, and that was during the same semester that the assessment plan was being accepted by the GE committee. The professor, however, identified that the majority of students (about 75%) were able to both understand and engage the field of demography and comprehend how social events alter the demographics of a society, and even how it impacts groups differently. Simply, the learning objectives for the course were being achieved for a majority of the students.

In Area D1b, Sociology 163 has not been taught since the implementation of the assessment plan, but the professor who normally teaches it identified he is planning on teaching it in the near future.

Area D2 has 8 separate courses within the area, so I will identify any areas in each class that students excel or are limited, as well as responses to the identified limitation. For Sociology 3, there were no glaring concerns about the learning objectives based on our assessment outcomes. Students tended to struggle the most with the second learning objective that focused on diversity but even that was within the 70% range, on average. This lack of concern was supported by the qualitative assessment that was used by one faculty member who identified that students understood and responded positively to the discussions that addressed diversity within the society, and the subsequent inequality that
exists as a result of it. Sociology 10 also showed little concern, students performing well on all three learning objectives, with at least an average of 75% students passing each objective. In fact, for learning objective one, over 90% of students showed a passing competency in understanding the issues and arguments surrounding much of the criminal justice issues in society. Sociology 118, while not being taught as often due to need of other courses being taught, students show a high competency level in all three learning objectives in the class, with none below an average of 90% passing of competency in any of the learning objectives. This is likely due to the consistency as well as passion of the faculty in teaching this course.

For Sociology 120, we have multiple sections being taught by multiple faculty, and this course also fulfills the race and ethnicity general education requirement. Our findings indicate that objectives one and three were successfully achieved with an average percentage score of 85% and 75% respectively, while the second objective had a low score on average of 62%. This scoring, however, was not consistent across sections, as some sections produced lower outcomes than others. This is likely because of emphasis throughout the sections. As well, in reviewing the issues within sections, one of the prominent components that students struggled with was not the notion of diversity but rather the implementation of different theories within the discussion of racial diversity. As a result, faculty, whose sections performed well discussed how they covered and connected the theoretical material. It was noted that the use of videos and specific readings that address theories and connect them more directly to race and ethnicity issues may have been, in part, one of the primary issues. Faculty then shared, not only the materials but how they present them to the class, identifying a more consistent discussion of the material throughout the sections. One key point that was made by faculty was to make sure theory is discussed throughout and not just in one section of the class. We will monitor the changes and determine if more invasive changes need to be implemented in the future.

Sociology 155, as with 120, objectives one and three were displayed acceptable pass rates (81% and 74% respectively). Learning objective two was lower than the other two (67%), and concerns over the understanding of diversity that exists was raised by the professor. As a result, the professor has begun to emphasize issues of diversity more explicitly (they were always a part of the class, but he chose to emphasize them more explicitly, both in the syllabus and in the lectures). The belief is that students will be more focused on this experience of diversity within the criminal justice system as the professor emphasizes them more explicitly. This will also be more closely monitored.

Sociology 156 performed well in both objectives one and two, but objective three, in the two times it was taught, were an average of passing at around 50%. The faculty member who was teaching this material was informed of the concerns, but has since retired with no plans to teach the class again. The faculty who is intending to teach the course in the future has been informed of the issue about understanding contributions by other groups and plans to work on emphasizing it in future classes. Our plan is to further monitor this objective in particular to note if the problem persists, and thus determine a plan to address the issue.
Sociology 157 displayed no concerns at all, with all three learning objectives being achieved at an average passing rate of 80% or better, including above 90% for learning objective 1. Finally, Sociology 164 has not been taught since the implementation of the assessment plans. The professor who normally teaches the course has identified she plans to teach it next year (she was originally scheduled to teach it this year, but received a sabbatical and was unable to teach it. The class was subsequently cancelled).

Assessment Area E

We have 4 classes within GE Area E, but all of the classes are considered electives and are not taught on a regular basis. Sociology 168 was last taught as a summer course during the period of time we were first implementing the assessment plan for the course, so the data is limited. We have recently hired a new faculty member who will be expected to teach this course on a more consistent basis. Still, during that summer session, the professor identified, relying predominantly on qualitative data and interpretive assessment that the majority of students were engaging the ideas at a passing level. As well, and a professor who teaches Sociology 158 offered a similar assertion, that the use of quantitative measures as assessment tools do not offer a completely accurate determination of student ability for the learning objectives in area E. While they both claimed this to be true for all three learning objectives, it was most relevant for the third learning objective, which asked students to examine their own individual behavior. As a result, we adjusted our assessment plan to focus more on interpretive analysis of qualitative data in determining student ability.

For the few times Sociology 158 was taught, based on the qualitative data, the students displayed a passing level above 85% for all three learning objectives. In fact, for the first two, the students displayed passing levels as high as 90%, while the third was an average of 86%. The quantitative data did not reflect as high, presenting average pass scores much lower (65% learning objective 1; 70% learning objective 2; 55% learning objective 3). In discussing these scores with the professor, the learning objective 3 score was determined to be an inappropriate assessment tool. Learning objective 1, however, was determined to be poorly worded questions that did not fully address the point being measured. The professor has adjusted the questions to more accurately measure the students’ understanding of the interrelationship of the physiology, psychology and social experiences in the development of the individual. Learning objective 2, however, the professor felt was a result of the emphasis in class discussions on the external influences and not as much on the internal influences. As a result the professor identified he would be making sure in future classes, both influences will be discussed more thoroughly (he did state he discussed the internal, but that the emphasis was placed so much on external that students were not as focused on them when asked).

As with the other two classes, Sociology 127 was only taught one time after the assessment plan was fully developed and accepted by the university. Still, based on an assessment of the journals that students wrote, as well as class discussions, it was determined that the majority of students (88%) displayed a passing level in all three learning objectives. In fact, for learning objective 2, the professor identified that most
students were not only able to identify influences that were discussed in class but engaged factors that were never discussed in the class. One concern expressed by the professor was in learning objective 3. While the majority of students were able to display an ability in the area that display passing ability, only a limited number of students displayed a high passing ability in the area. They were not able to engage the ideas at a much higher level. The professor felt much of it might have been related to the ability to fully grasp the historical context and how it related to them. As a result, he has stated he will, in future classes, identify this historical context in relation to masculinity within each component of the course, and then have the students, in class, discuss how it can relate to individuals. His intent is to help students to make that connection even stronger.

The final class in the area is Sociology 126. This class was taught on a much more consistent basis (on average of about once a year), but the data is limited in this class, as one of the professors was inconsistent with submitting the material (losing and/or forgetting the findings). The professor has identified a better way to submit them (electronically) in the future to make sure they are saved elsewhere in case there are questions about the findings. The data that did exist presented that students performed very well in the three learning objectives, with the majority displaying passing ability (90%). In fact, as both professors identified, students, upon entering the class had a limited notion of gender as a social concept that impacts a person’s identity, but upon completing the class most of the students were identifying the numerous ways gender exists in the society and the impact it has on a person’s identity, and in particular gender identity, including their own understanding of their gender identities. As one professor shared, it was exciting to read their papers at the end of the semester because the students truly showed a deeper understanding of how gender has in the past and continues to impact them. As stated, the data will be gathered more systematically from all who teach the course to make sure the assessment of the learning objectives is accurate.