Sociology Department Annual Assessment Report, 2011-2012
Department of Sociology
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Annual Assessment Report, 2011-2012

Option 1: Narrative Submission: please address the following questions.

1. What goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed in the AY ending June 30, 2011?

   6: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on how social structures operate.

   The student should be able to demonstrate

   a. how institutions interact in their effects on other and on individuals;
   b. how factors such as population or urbanization affect social structures and individuals; and
   c. how culture and social structure vary across time and place.

   7: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on reciprocal relationships between individuals and society.

   The student should be able to explain

   • how the self develops sociologically;
   • how societal and structural factors influence individual behavior and the self's development;
   • how social interaction and the self influences society and social structure; and
   • how to distinguish sociological approaches to analyzing the self from psychological, economic, and other approaches.

2. How did you assess these learning outcomes?

   a. Describe the measures you used and the information gathered? (Description, date administered, results)

      Three different formats of assessment: Direct quantitative, Indirect quantitative, Interpretive qualitative.

      a. Describe the measures you used and the information gathered? (Description, date administered, results)

      Direct quantitative: Online 33 question exam that focus on topics/concepts in the field of Sociology, administered to graduating seniors at the end of every semester.

      Date Administered: Letters emailed to graduating seniors throughout the year to inform students that the survey is available for them to complete.

      Information Learned:

      Learning Objective 6:

      This learning objective focuses on broader, but important concepts in the field of sociology, such as institutions, urbanization and culture. I will review each sub-learning objective and discuss what our students are aware of.
a. Institutions: Overall, our students showed a general grasp of how institutions impact others, as well as the structure of institutions. Overall, considering all of the questions on the exam that pertained to institutions, students answered the questions correctly 64% of the time. While not as high as we would like, there were actually two questions that students seemed to struggle with, with the remainder of the responses being above 72% answered correctly. The first question, after reviewing it, was worded poorly, resulting in a confusing possible question. This question needs to be revised for future surveys to insure greater validity in assessing student knowledge. Removing that response, the average increased to 68% of correct responses. The other question involved student ability to extrapolate from discussions about specific institutions to the larger notion of institutions. Faculty who teach such classes identified that they cover this idea, but it is specific to their institution.

b. Population and Urbanization: 80% of students were able to respond to questions pertaining to these concepts correctly. We feel students are able to understand the impact of populations and subsequent social changes quite well.

c. Culture and Structure: 80% of students accurately answered questions pertaining to these topics, solidifying our belief that students generally are able to grasp ideas of culture and social structure and their impact in society, and how that changes over time and place.

Learning Objective 7:
Overall, students were able to correctly respond to questions pertaining to this learning objective 74% of the time. Reviewing the responses, students struggled with a difficult theoretical concept that was set forth by one of the primary theorists in the field. The lead faculty believe that as with theory in general, students are struggling less with the specific idea and more with the notion of theory because of a theory phobia. Still, students showed complete comprehension of the questions pertaining to other theoretical ideas in the field.

Indirect quantitative: Online 19 question survey about experiences in and attitudes about the Sociology program that are administered to graduating seniors at the end of every semester.
Date Administered: Letters emailed to graduating seniors throughout the year to inform students that the survey is available for them to complete.
Information Learned:

Learning Objective 6:
a. Institutions: 75% of students felt they attained a high level of understanding about institutions, how they impact us and their relationship to other institutions. Even more impressive, 99% of students said they felt
at least a moderate degree of knowledge concerning the topic, with no students expressing they felt no gain in knowledge.

b. Population and Urbanization: Similarly, 72% of students felt they attained a high level of understanding about the topic, with 100% feeling at least a moderate level of knowledge about the topic.

c. Culture and Structure: While not quite as high, 66% of students felt a high level of knowledge attained, and 96% feeling at least a moderate level of knowledge gained. As with the other two areas, no one felt they received no additional knowledge about the topic.

Learning Objective 7:
Concerning student understanding of social psychology, our graduating students, 78% conveyed they felt they had obtained a high level of understanding in the field, with over 98% identifying at least a moderate level of understanding. As with the previous learning objectives, no students felt they received no knowledge of the topic.

Interpretive qualitative: Analysis of student ability concerning the learning outcomes being assessed by faculty who teach core classes in the areas related to the learning outcomes (institutions and social psychology). We looked at paper and idea development via exams, papers and class discussions over the course of one year. We assessed two separate courses for each of the learning objectives (two institutions classes and two social psychology courses).

Date Administered: Ongoing throughout the year, but assessment submitted at the end of the year by identified faculty.

Information Gained:
Learning Objective 6:
a. Institution: Students quite quickly understood how within each institution, individuals, relationships and small groups were impacted. For example, students in one of the family courses (Soc 169, a service learning class) consistently were able to discuss how the families of individuals with whom they interacted at a community partnership impacted their experiences at that institution, such as how at-risk kids’ education were impacted by their family experiences. Similarly, in the Sociology of Education course (Soc 140), a common discussion was how the educational system impacts people, and specifically how it interacts with other institutions, such as the intersection between education, family and government when discussing alternative forms of schooling (i.e. Charter Schooling). Even more compelling about the ability of our students, in one of our core course (most if not all Sociology majors), Social Inequalities (Soc 125), much of the discussion surrounds how inequalities are impacted through, and to some degree by larger social institutions, helping students to understand larger social dynamics beyond individual discrimination. The knowledge gained by students in this class is reflected in most
other classes in that the majority of students displayed an acceptable level of understanding of this idea, to a good level of understanding, as shared by faculty who teach these courses. And while only about 10% of students expressed a higher level of understanding about institutions, this fits within the normative expectations of student learning. Regardless, we will continue to emphasize institutions and their impact throughout our classes with the intent of helping all students to understand them at a higher level.

b. Population: Throughout many of the institutions classes, faculty discussed how large social factors, in particular population and urbanization impact individuals and social structures. For example, in our Introduction to Sociology course (Soc 1), all faculty educate students on the impact of urbanization on not just the development of Sociology as a field of study but also how it impacted the economic institutions, the development of the educational institutions, interactions with others, etc. In our core Theory course (Soc 192), discussions of specific theorists, such as Durkheim, students reflect on theoretical discussions about larger changes in society and how they impact social interactions and norms. Furthermore, faculty identify that students are expressing the larger ideas of urbanization and population in their research methods papers (Soc 102a and 102b), courses that are usually taken by students at the end of their academic careers. Furthermore, population changes are discussed in a number of classes, including how institutions change as demographics change. For example, two separate faculty who taught the Family course this past year (Soc 166) shared that their students were consistently able to show an excellent understanding of the changing structures of family as the demography changes, or even larger social changes, such as world wars. Students consistently displayed comprehension of the relationship between larger social changes and the impact they can have on institutions, structures and individuals. Students discuss in their papers and presentations how the diversity of family forms exist as a result of the changing economy. Even more telling, in our Urban Life and Problems course (Soc 110), most students develop a comprehension of how urbanization impacts individuals, groups, interactions and social structures. While a majority of students displayed an acceptable level of understanding, only about 10% displayed a higher level of understanding, engaging the ideas beyond class discussions. Overall, faculty feel, based on the assessment, that students have a good groundwork for understanding the ideas of population and urbanization as they persist in their studies.

c. Culture and Structure: As discussed several years ago in our assessment, our department focused on student comprehension of global dynamics and diversity in cultural experiences. As a result of
this increased emphasis, students have expressed a greater understanding of how cultural experiences differ across location and time. Students displayed throughout the program a greater understanding of this diversity of cultural dynamics. For example, in the Sociology of Gender course (Soc 126), students display comprehension in the exams and papers how expectations about gender change over time, as well as across subcultures, as a diversity of gender experiences are discussed throughout the class. Beyond class discussions, students in the gender course present on cross-cultural gender experiences, comparing those experiences to the dominant cultural expectations, educating the class on the ideas, which the class is then tested about. These presentations show student ability to identify connections between gender experiences and cultural experiences, as well as compare and contrast those experiences across other cultures. One faculty identified in the Urban Life course (Soc 110) that they devote a significant amount of class time and discussion to the role of culture in urban life, placing much more emphasis on how culture is experienced in different urban areas, as well as in comparison to rural culture. Another example of student engagement on the issue of culture and social structure, is in the Inequalities course (Soc 125) faculty have students engage inequalities over time, and how culture and structure have changed, thus impacting inequalities. Relying heavily on historical theories, such as Marx and Weber, relating them to more contemporary theories, such as Collins and Blum, a majority of students express, through written assignments and exams in the Inequalities classes, an understanding of the variation of culture and structure over time, and the subsequent relationship with inequalities in a society. One faculty did identify that a greater number of students struggle with one theorist used in class, Rick Fantasia’s “cultures of solidarity” but feels that this is less indicative of student comprehension of the variation of culture and structure and more likely representative of both the fatigue of students, as the theorist is discussed at the end of the course, along with the difficulty of the theoretical ideas being introduced by Fantasia. The faculty member identified that this is an important piece of work and intends to evaluate all possibilities to keep the book while helping students to better comprehend the ideas, including consideration of removing the book and introducing a secondary source, if one can be located. Overall, this faculty member, along with other faculty, believe that student comprehension of how culture and structure vary over time and place, and the subsequent impact they have on groups and individuals is consistently within the acceptable to good range, with a smaller percentage showing heightened understanding.
Learning Objective 7:

a. Self: Faculty who teach courses that directly address ideas in social psychology, and self specifically expressed that the majority of students are able to gain an understanding of the social development of self. For example, in Soc 150 (Social Psychology, a core class in our curriculum), faculty revealed that during initial discussions in the course, students expressed a basic understanding of the concept of self, but struggled with in depth articulation of self as a social concept. By the end of the class, though, the majority of students (75-80%) expressed both through papers and in exam questions an understanding of self as a social concept, in particular applying it well to their lives. Even more telling of the level of compression our students gain about the concept of self, in the Soc 168 course (Self and Society) upwards of 90% students were able to engage and articulate in their papers about how self develops for any one of the main characters that students read about in the class. In fact, as one faculty member expressed, by the end of the class, students expressed a difficulty with answering the question, “How does the self develop sociologically?” But the struggle expressed by students with identifying one “clear” answer actually showed to the faculty member they were better at grasping the variety of experiences as a result of the social context that people experience. Simply, most of our students gain a good understanding of the notion of self as a social concept, which is even more telling since, as faculty expressed in the Social Psychology core class, students started with very little understanding of this notion. What is even more interesting is that in previous assessments, when analyzing our students ability to utilize their sociological imagination in their critical analysis of society, were able to do so quite well when applying it to their own lives, but struggled in critical reflect on the ideas when discussing general social concepts. But, as expressed by faculty, the application to both their lives and general society ideas by students was good, showing a potential expanded use of the sociological imagination in reference to the concept of the self.

b. Social Development of Self/Behavior: Throughout the sociology program, students have to learn how to understand how larger social forces impact their own behaviors and sense of self as they engage the structure vs. agency debate within the field. While initially it is difficult for students to understand how social forces influence them and their life choices, it is easier for them early in their studies to understand behaviors than it is self. And even more specifically, as expressed by faculty, students struggle less with how family, friends and education impact us and more with larger social structures of the economy, racism, sexism, etc. Still, as students struggled with learning the impact of larger social forces, as expressed through assignments, such as in Soc 168, through writing assignments, 80-90% of students
displayed an understanding of how a self cannot be separate from family, neighborhood and class in which the self develops. Furthermore, as emphasized by faculty who teach Soc 150, the majority of students as they went through the class, developed a greater understanding of how larger social forces, as well as forces that are in closer proximity to us, which shows that not only do students have a greater understanding of social context and the influences but potentially overcoming fears of its impact on their own lives, as expressed in the discussion of self.

c. Agency: The other half of the structure vs. agency argument, which students consistently readily engage in discussions throughout our program. When the topic of “Doing Gender” arises in the Soc 150 course, students are able to express both ideas about how individuals, through interactions can both maintain the status quo of a dichotomous gendered society as well as challenge the larger social structure. Similarly, students are able to engage the idea of people who present themselves as challenging the gender norm in society, struggling against the larger social structures that work to force conformity. Ultimately, this area seems to be the most consistently understood by students as well as the one that the majority of students are able to engage at a much deeper level beyond comprehension, and faculty, noting this, offered more in depth ideas to further challenge students with these discussions.

d. Sociology vs. Psychology: This is a constant topic of discussion in many of our classes, as it is important to help students understand the sociological perspective. To do so, we often engage students in a discussion of how psychology and sociology differ in perspectives. For example, because of the micro emphasis in psychology, both Soc 150 and 168 address this issue deeply. Often at the outset of the course, including a discussion of the history of the topics and their divergent perspectives. Comprehension of the sociological perspective in comparison to the psychological perspective lays the foundation for the course, so faculty often have students engage the discussion through specific assignments. For example, in Soc 150, one faculty member uses an in-class group exercise that has students use each perspective to answer a question about a specific topic. The majority of students are able to display a comprehension at a good to high level of the differences between the perspectives, which is further supported through exam questions that ask students to identify differences.

b. As a result of these assessments what did you learn about the program’s success in helping its students achieve these learning outcomes?
Overall, as we look at our assessments, we feel that we are helping a large percentage of our students to achieve the departmental goals set forth. More so,
we feel our students are confident in their own ability and understanding of larger social ideas after completing our programs. This does not mean we do not have areas in which our students struggle of which they are unaware, which we intend to continually address. Instead, we feel that our students feel well informed and educated in the field of sociology, having developed a sociological imagination that is important in the field, which is reflected in their ability to engage larger social ideas, both at the micro and macro levels.

c. In what areas are students doing well and achieving expectations?
Students are able to grasp issues of culture, structure and the impact of population, as well as how they relate to larger social issues. In discussions of institutions, students generally grasp the impact specific institutions have on people and their roles in a society. Through all of our forms of assessment, there is consistency of comprehension on all of the concepts assessed, with the majority of students displayed acceptable to good levels of understanding.

Overall, students express an excellent understanding, on average of the field of social psychology, showing an ability to connect the individual to the larger society consistently and accurately. Beyond this, students show a heightened understanding about agency, identifying the quality education in our program concerning this difficult area of discussion.

d. What areas are seen as needing improvement within your program?
There is a need to help connect specific ideas and examples, such as institutions, to larger discussions about institutions to help students see the connection between ideas. While we are unable to add to our curriculum an “institutions” course, faculty feel we can attempt to educate students about institutions within these classes. For example, in the “Family” course (Soc 166) faculty are planning on discussing the general social concept of institutions to set up the class, and then connect it to discussions about family. Such emphasis will be suggested to any who teach courses about an institution.

In terms of the limitation concerning social psychology, faculty who teach the courses expressed that the theoretical idea that was reviewed in the assessment is an extremely difficult concept for students to fully grasp, and that even graduate students struggle with the idea. Faculty are going to assess the question and determine if a more appropriate question that will better reflect student understanding of theoretical ideas that can be expected of students completing this class be created. We will also consider continuing to utilize the question as a test to determine those students who grasp theoretical ideas at a higher level, giving us a determinant of ranking for students. Regardless, looking at all of the findings, in particular, the qualitative assessment that faculty conducted over the course of the past year, we feel students in our major are achieving the identified learning objective related to social psychology at a good level.
3. As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated?

   At this stage, the department has decided not to implement any program changes based on the results, but do plan to request greater emphasis on institutions as larger social structures, especially within those classes that engage those ideas specifically.

   a. If so, what are those changes?

      Simply, an informal change throughout the department will hopefully address the needed results in helping students to connect ideas.

      Assessment questions will be reviewed and considered to be adjusted to better reflect measurements of the department learning objectives.

   b. How will you know if these changes achieved the desired results?

      In terms of learning, students will be able to connect ideas discussed in institutions classes to larger ideas of institutions. Further, students will be able to better apply ideas discussed in one institutions class to a completely different institutions course as they will begin to understand the connection to larger social ideas. Furthermore, we will continue to collect assessment data and check that data to determine if students are able to better grasp the institutions as larger social structures, and also the theoretical ideas from social psychology.

4. Did your department engage in any other assessment activities such as the development of rubrics, course alignment?

   First, we moved our online assessments from online flashlight to surveymonkey, as well as are using a new process online for contacting students, which has increased our response rate dramatically. In the process of doing this, we shortened our survey down to 19 questions from 33 questions in the prior survey.

   Our department last year, completed our three year writing assessment, analyzed the data and presented the findings to the department. A writing working group was established to identify key issues to address based on the findings and to offer suggestions to the department concerning these suggestions.

   One of the developments from this writing assessment was a designed writing rubric that is specific to the Department of Sociology, identifying what faculty deem as important when assessing student writing.

   The writing working group submitted to the department several requested requirements for all classes in the department. Each class will require students to review links and attachments that address how to write an argumentative thesis, plagiarism, citations in papers and how to cite using ASA citation. We feel that inundating students with the basic components of writing will give a foundation from which faculty will be able to build off when assigning writing assignments.
in their courses. These requirements are an attempt to address primary issues that lay the foundation for other limitations identified through the writing assessment.

This working group is also planning to continue to meet to determine a course of action for several other writing struggles that our students seem to have.

5. What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?

This upcoming year, we are going to look into reviewing and designing our learning objectives and goals for our graduate program. We have already begun the discussion over the past couple of years, but look to focus on it in detail this upcoming year. This is one of the primary points of discussion in our upcoming retreat.

We also plan to implement our suggested changes concerning writing department-wide, as well as work to determine the rest of our course of action that will greatly assist our students with their writing, while still taking into account limitations of funding and time. The group is interested, specifically, in looking at potentially use the recently designed writing rubric beyond just assessing our student writing, but even in the classes. A larger issue is trying to determine the best way to approach student editing of papers and the development of their papers over time.