Program: Undergraduate Major

Department: Sociology

Number of students: spring 2011: 2867 students, 581 FTES; fall 2011: 2800 students, 578 FTES

Period of reference: 2006-2007 to present

Faculty member completing template: Todd Migliaccio Date: February 3, 2012

1. Following our last program review in 2007 and based on suggestions from the review, we overhauled our assessment procedure. It was in compliance with assessment suggestions by the American Sociological Association. We implemented an exit exam to more directly evaluate our learning objectives. We also focused our assessment on 2-3 learning objectives each year, instead of trying to evaluate all of them every year. This allowed us to focus on each learning goal and thus make the assessment process more “efficient and effective”. We also conducted a 3 year evaluation of student writing, from which we identified strengths and weaknesses. From this, we are identifying possible departmental responses, such as the development of a department writing rubric. Changes became most noticeable for students in our program this year, as we began the implementation based on findings from the writing assessment. Currently we are in the process of a program review, and the main focus of the review will be to analyze our learning outcomes and align them with Sacramento State Baccalaureate Learning Goals. Then we will design a new, more integrated assessment protocol for evaluating them.

2. A) The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on the discipline of sociology and its breadth of knowledge in the field in contributing to our understanding of social reality: We highlight this as the most important, as we are a content-based major that focuses on learning ideas and concepts relative to the larger society. Knowledge of these concepts is the basis for developing the other skills and outcomes we want our students to achieve.

B) The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to think critically: Developing critical thinking skills is part of the development of a sociological perspective or what we call a “sociological imagination.” The ability to critically evaluate the society around them is an important aspect of being a sociologist, but even more important it will help students after graduation, professionally, and throughout life.

C) The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to develop intercultural knowledge and competence about cultures locally, the United States, and globally: Our department places an emphasis on the study of diversity and inequality, as can be noted by the required core course, Social Inequality, as well as the multiple courses offered that address issues of inequality. We focus on expanding student awareness of
global experiences and diversity by creating courses that address it explicitly and we have added global discussions to already existing courses.

D) 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: Communication is a primary aspect of not just sociology but of the skills that are needed for a student to develop as they enter into the working world. We feel this skill will benefit all students beyond college. To insure this is accomplished, we conducted an extensive assessment of writing.

E) The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to analyze a social experience or solve a social problem through sociological lens: A major component of our core program is developing student ability to apply their sociological imagination by conducting research, which often entails studying a social problem. Students are required to take a theory, a statistics, and a methods course. During the methods course they will complete a research project.

3. Our learning outcomes are aligned with the university learning goals, as we focused on this as we began our self study. They are listed below. The department learning outcomes are linked to the University Baccalaureate Learning Goals. To note: we connect both Baccalaureate Learning Goals I and II with our first learning objective because competency in the discipline of sociology directly contributes to the overall learning goal of knowledge of human cultures.

I. Competency in the Discipline and II. Knowledge of Human Cultures:
1. The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on the discipline of sociology and its breadth of knowledge in the field in contributing to our understanding of social reality.

III. Intellectual and Practical Skills:
2. The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to think critically.
3. 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.

IV. Personal and Social Responsibility
4. The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to develop intercultural knowledge and competence about cultures locally, the United States, and globally.

V. Integrative Learning:
5. The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to analyze a social experience or solve a social problem through sociological lens.
4. a. We are evaluating our assessment protocols with the intention of making significant changes to the process. We have focused our learning goals into the five identified in question 3. These were established from what our previous learning goals had been with the intention simplifying and reducing the number. While the assessment process will change in the future, we present data gathered previously, emphasizing the materials and findings that are connected to our modified learning goals. Below, we will describe our past assessments and identify general findings to reflect what we have done. We will also describe our initial writing assessment and the plan that is being developed for assessment of writing (learning objective 3) in the future. This may give a general idea of how we will approach future assessment attempts for all learning objectives.

We have historically relied on a graduating senior survey as an indirect measure of our learning outcomes. We also used a graduating senior exam for direct measures of learning outcomes. To further triangulate, we implemented an analysis of qualitative faculty course evaluations. This occurred at the end of the year, with a sample of faculty reviewing each of their classes based on the learning objectives that were being analyzed that year. This year, however, we are reevaluating our entire assessment program to better integrate it into our curriculum. This may include designing rubrics like the one designed for our writing assessment. The intention is to improve our assessment design to better understand student learning in the hopes of helping students to be successful in our program.

For the writing assessment (learning objective 3), we conducted a three year comprehensive assessment of student writing. All faculty evaluated randomly chosen papers from core classes, which were gathered at the end of each semester. Faculty evaluated papers through descriptive means, but covered five distinct areas of writing, and two areas of sociological competence. The evaluations (120 total assessments) were then analyzed to determine strengths and weaknesses in each area. From this, we also designed a sociology writing rubric, which we are intending to use for future assessments of student writing. Our present intent is to use the rubric to set a baseline for comparisons as we make changes to the program.

b. In the past, we have gathered data from graduating seniors at the end of each semester. All seniors were contacted through email and/or classes and informed of the online links through which they could complete both the survey and the exam. It ends up being on a volunteer basis. Our entrance survey is administered to all students who attend orientation and then it is input into an online spread sheet.
For the previous writing assessment, we took 10 random papers from a core class each semester, and evaluated each paper twice. For the future writing assessment, we are using 15 standard thesis papers from core classes, as well as a sample of journal papers (or other style of paper) from an elective class. We are using only papers from sociology majors. This will allow us to not only set a baseline but also to evaluate the rubric in relation to other types of papers.

c. See attached graduating survey, graduating exam and sociology writing rubric.

d. We have historically run basic statistical analysis on the exit exam and survey to determine %’s of responses, change in responses each year and overall scores. Each learning objective was measured by a combination of questions form the survey (indirect) and questions from the exam (direct). For indirect methods, we looked at response percentages. For example, survey question 2, page 5 asks students whether their skills were increased in a variety of areas: writing, critical thinking and research methods. We felt that if 70% of students agreed, that was a positive result. For direct methods, we used two approaches: first, we created an index of the questions connected to the learning objective. Exit exam questions 2, 3 and 4 (as well as others) are related to learning objective 1 (knowledge about the discipline). Second, we looked at individual questions to be able to note in which areas students were struggling. We assessed learning objectives 2-sociological imagination and 4-writing directly through our writing assessment.

Based on previous assessments, our students have generally performed well in terms of the learning objectives, usually indicating above 70% for each of the learning goals. Focusing on each of the learning objectives identified above, in learning objective 1, which was reviewed back in 2007 through indirect means, 83% of students identified they felt they had an excellent understanding of the field of sociology and common sociological concepts. This has been confirmed through the direct measures gathered over the past five years, with students scoring fairly well on concept questions, while struggling with more abstract or theoretical questions. Furthermore, in the writing assessment, faculty found most students to be competent in their use and application of sociological concepts, as well as presenting a sociological perspective in their writing, showing an awareness of the field and its focus.

For writing assessments (learning objective 4), 92% of students reported that the sociology department helped them develop their writing skills. More direct analysis of writing assessment is identified below.
Concerning a sociological imagination (learning objective 2), 100% of students reported that the department of sociology helped them to develop their critical thinking skills. More direct analysis was conducted during the writing assessment, but overall, faculty felt that the majority of students were able to critically analyze the social world, using their sociological imagination, displaying a much greater ability to do so when connecting it to personal experiences.

Awareness of global diversity and inequality (learning objective 3) is a fairly new learning objective. We have not gathered data explicitly on this and are presently developing the assessment plan, which may include the use of the Intercultural Knowledge and Competency VALUE rubric, but this has not yet been determined. Past data collected for assessment was focused more on conceptual knowledge. Our student’s awareness of global perspectives and their role in the society has grown over the years. In 2003, students expressed a low awareness of the global world (48% believed they had excellent awareness), but four years after that review, we found that student awareness of the global world had grown to 70%, reflecting a positive impact once we altered our curriculum to better focus on this learning objective.

Integrated learning is a new learning objective (learning objective 5), but it is related to previous learning objectives within our department about the use and application of research methods in studying the social world, along with the comprehension and application of theory to the social context. We have historically gathered data on both of these areas, and students have performed well in both direct (80-88% success rate) and indirect (80% felt confident in their skills in both areas). Furthermore, our faculty have reported that students consistently complete their research projects and show us they are competent in their ability to evaluate a social problem using appropriate methods and theories.

For the initial writing assessment and the faculty course evaluation, we utilized grounded theory approach, identifying common patterns that exist throughout the data and then compiling them into strengths and weaknesses, as well as subsequent possible solutions to the issues. For the writing assessment, we used comments from faculty in their evaluations of student writing to help design the writing rubric.

For future paper assessment, we will use the rubric. This initial assessment we are conducting using the rubric will also allow us to adjust the rubric to make it more useful and applicable to a wider range of papers.

While the results of our previous assessment are available, we are in the process of redesigning our assessment procedures. We are considering all forms of assessment,
including capstone, portfolios, and embedded questions. Our procedures for measuring assessment in the future may be markedly different than those in the past.

5. A) Historically, our program had focused on content, so many of our suggestions were to increase emphasis on key areas that students were struggling with. For theory, we worked to better integrate theory discussions into our classes in order to reduce the students’ struggles with theory. The idea was to discuss theory in all classes more explicitly. We also began encouraging students to take theory earlier in their college careers. (L.O. 1,2,3,5)

B) In methods analysis, students performed well, but struggled with their own confidence in their ability to carry out a research project. Our intention was to increase confidence and competency by establishing a greater level of comfort with it. We believe students have a methods phobia that limits how they feel about doing a research project. The key focus was similar to the response to theory to make it much more integrated into the program so students are more comfortable with it. (L.O. 5)

C) For writing analysis, we presented several changes to the department, including a writing rubric. We are evaluating how this can be used beyond assessment. We also required in core classes that students reviewed specific webpages and information pages that discuss citation in sociology, theory development and plagiarism. Finally, we required students to utilize ASA citation style to develop citation skills. All of these requirements help students learn basic writing skills that we can expand on with each new assignment. This has just been implemented this year, so we have no data on the impact it is having. We are going to further discuss potential responses to the writing analysis during program review. (L.O. 4)

D) For the learning objective focusing on diversity, social inequality, and global cultures (L. O. 3), the department made several changes. We introduced two new courses, Globalization, and Sport in a Global Perspective. We also encouraged more discussion of global issues in other courses such as Criminology, Family, and Education. These changes are reflected in the change from 48% to 70% in four years in students’ scores regarding awareness of the global world (see above: d4, paragraph 5).

6. We have, during three subsequent years (ending in 2006) attempted to contact alumni to gather information about them, while also inviting them to an alumni event. We had limited response and chose to no longer pursue this avenue due to budgetary constraints. We have a website that acknowledges our alumni. On this site exists a survey that allows alumni to contact us, and inform us about their experiences while in the program and after. At this time, we have no explicit process for gathering such information. We will consider this possibility during our program review, likely contacting and working with OIR on their regular alumni surveys. For example, last
year, OIR collected data from sociology graduates and posted the data. During our program review, we are evaluating questions we would like added to future surveys that address specific concerns.

7. The initial development of department learning objectives and the subsequent assessment plan was based on a suggested design by the American Sociological Association. Our learning goals and assessment plan was on par with sociology programs of a similar size and focus. Furthermore, the changes made to the assessment protocol in 2007 were reflective of suggestions, again, made by the American Sociological Association during that same time frame. Essentially, our learning goals and assessment plan have been in accordance with suggested practices of the ASA. Furthermore, our recent determination of requiring ASA citation format in our core classes is in compliance with ASA standards.

8. Our program is in the middle of the program review and we are planning to redesign our assessment protocol. We are presently reviewing all possible methods of assessment in order to design the best method that will produce results that will enable us to best evaluate our program and respond to our students and their needs.