

The 2012-2013 Annual Assessment Report for the Sociology Graduate Program

Prepared by the Sociology Graduate Assessment Committee

Amy Liu, Ph.D., Chair
Jacqueline Carrigan, Ph.D.
Aya Ida, Ph.D.
Todd Migliaccio, Ph.D.

June 14, 2013

1. As a result of last year's assessment effort, have you implemented **any changes for your assessment including learning outcomes, assessment plan, assessment tools (methods, rubrics, curriculum map or key assignment etc.) and/or the university baccalaureate learning goals?**

- a. If so, what are those changes? How did you implement those changes?
- b. How do you know if these changes have achieved the desired results?
- c. If no, why not?

We have developed a new assessment plan, adopted and/or modified several VALUE rubrics to assess our students' written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, intercultural knowledge and competency and inquiry and analysis skills, We also have begun requiring the use of references (as data) in all our research papers, introduced our program learning outcomes (PLOs) and rubrics in the Soc. 200a (Introduction to the Sociology Graduate Program) course and further developed them in other graduate classes this year.

We do not know whether these changes have achieved the desired results because this is the first time we have assessed critical thinking skills in our graduate program. We plan to assess this learning outcome again next year to see whether any changes we have made improve student learning.

2. As a result of last year's assessment effort, have you implemented **any other changes at the department, the college or the university, including advising, co-curriculum, budgeting and planning?**

- a. If so, what are those changes? How did you implement those changes?
- b. How do you know if these changes have achieved the desired results?
- c. If no, why not?

We have not implemented any other changes at the department, the college or the university level as a result of last year's assessment effort as this is the first time we have assessed critical thinking skills in our graduate program.

3. What **PROGRAM** (not course) learning outcome(s) have you assessed this academic year?

This year, we have assessed program learning outcome 6 (**PLO 6**): critical thinking skill. Sociology graduate students will demonstrate a habit of systematically exploring issues, ideas, artifacts and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion: they will (**PLO 6: Critical thinking** adopted from the VALUE rubric in Appendix II):

- 6.1: Clearly state the issue/problem which needs to be considered critically, comprehensively describe the issue/problem and deliver all relevant information (issues, texts and/or numerical data) necessary for a full understanding of the issue/problem (**6.1: Explanation of issues**).
- 6.2: Thoroughly interpret and evaluate the information taken from source(s) to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis (**6.2: Evidence**).
- 6.3: Thoroughly analyze their own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluate the relevance of contexts when presenting a position (**6.3: Influence of context and assumptions**).
- 6.4: Students' specific position (perspective, thesis, or hypothesis) takes into account the complexities (all sides) of an issue. Limits of position and others' points of view are acknowledged and synthesized within position (**6.4: Student's position**);
- 6.5: Conclusions, consequences and implications are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order (**6.5: Conclusions and related outcomes**).

See Appendix I for all learning outcomes the sociology graduate program plans to assess in the upcoming program review cycle.

4. What method(s)/measure(s) have you used to collect the data?

The VALUE critical thinking rubric has been used to collect data in order to directly assess 10 student papers selected from two required core courses offered in spring 2013: Statistics (Soc. 215) and Theory (Soc. 240). The graduate assessment committee is made up of four faculty members, each of whom read two papers. To determine the final scores, the group came together to discuss the similarities and differences of our scores until a consensus was reached. The group met again a week later, after reading 8 more papers. All papers were agreed upon with one exception. This one paper was re-read and the average score was used as our final data.

This is the first time that our graduate program has used a rubric (The VALUE rubric) to EXPLICITLY AND DIRECTLY assess our students' critical thinking skills. We have discovered excellent insight into students' critical thinking skills even though our sample size is small. We plan to include more papers in our program's future assessment studies.

5. What are the criteria and/or standards of performance for the program learning outcome?

At the end of the first year of graduate study, 70% of our graduate students will score 3 or better in each of the 5 areas of critical thinking. See Appendix II and III for more details.

6. What data have you collected? What are the results and findings, including the percentage of students who meet each standard?
- In what areas are students doing well and achieving the expectations?
 - In what areas do students need improvement?

Data for the critical thinking ability of our graduate students are presented in Table 1.

Table I: The Results for Critical Thinking Skill

Different Levels Five Criteria (Areas)	Capstone (4)	Milestone (3)	(2.5)	Milestone (2)	(1.5)	Benchmark (1)	Total (N=10)
6.1: Explanation of issues		40%	40%	20%			2.6 (100%, N=10)
6.2: Evidence		20%	50%	30%			2.45 (100%, N=10)
6.3: Influence of context and assumptions		20%	50%	30%			2.45 (100%, N=10)
6.4: Student's position		30%	30%	40%			2.45 (100%, N=10)
6.5: Conclusions and related outcomes		10%	40%	50%			2.30 (100%, N=10)

Based on the standards and criteria from 6.1 to 6.5 in the critical thinking rubric in Appendix II, the majority of the students were not thinking critically. Issues/problems to be considered critically were often not stated clearly or described **comprehensively**, thus readers sometimes did not have all the relevant information necessary for a **full** understanding (6.1). Only 40% of our students scored 3 (our goal being 70%). That was to say only 40% were able to state, describe and clarify the issues/problems so understanding of the issues was not seriously affected by the omissions of the information. Thus, only 40% met the standard performance in explanation of the issues (6.1). The majority of our students (60% of 2 and 2.5) stated the issues/problems, but did not adequately describe or clarify things including undefined terms, unknown backgrounds, undetermined boundaries and/or unexplored ambiguities. That was why the average score in this area (6.1: Explanation of issues) was only 2.6, which is below our goal.

For 6.4, only 30% of our students were able to take into account the complexities of an issue and acknowledge others' points of view or the limits of their position when they developed or presented their position (perspective, thesis, or hypothesis). Thus, only 30% met the standard performance in 6.4. The average score was only 2.45, which is much less than 3. The majority (70%) only acknowledged (not analyzed) they were different sides of an issue. Sometimes when their position was stated, it was simplistic or obvious. Some just wanted to prove their perspectives, positions, hypotheses or research questions were important and/or correct. Many students failed to acknowledge limits of position and synthesized others' points of view within the position.

Our graduate students have not met the standards of performance with their presentation of evidence (6.2) or the consideration of influence of contexts, limits or assumptions (6.3). The average score for these two areas was 2.45. Only 20% were able to identify

their own assumptions, others' assumptions or relevant contexts when presenting a position (for 6.3). An equal percentage of students (20%) have provided enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis based on the sources (for 6.2). Thus, only 20% met the standard performance in these two areas (6.2 and 6.3). The majority (80%) were not fully aware of their own assumptions, others' assumptions, or only question some of these assumptions (6.3). Moreover, there was not enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Sometimes students even took viewpoints or information from experts as facts without any questioning (6.2).

Thus, the conclusions and related outcomes students came up with were not very good, with an average of only 2.3. Ten percent of our students' conclusions were logically tied to a diverse range of information, including opposing viewpoints, and all the related outcomes (consequences and implications) were identified clearly. Thus, only 10% met the standard of performance in this area (6.5). The majority of the information, on the other hand, was chosen to fit the desired conclusion without consideration of different assumptions, opposing views or the limits of the position, so the overwhelming majority of our students' conclusions (90%) were logically tied to this information. In fact, most students just wanted to claim their hypotheses/research questions were correct. Sometimes, it was not surprising that some of these conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) were overly simplified.

7. As a result of this year's assessment effort, do you anticipate or propose any changes for your program (e.g. structures, content, or learning outcomes)?

a. If so, what changes do you anticipate? How do you plan to implement those changes?

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

This is the first time that our graduate program has used the VALUE rubric to EXPLICITLY AND DIRECTLY assess our student critical thinking skills. We believe that by doing so we have gained excellent insight into student learning.

Like many other graduate students, our students have been struggling with their thesis. If we want our students to meet the critical thinking standards soon and to write theses or similar research papers (with 5 chapters) without too much struggles, we need to design MORE lectures and exercises (in and outside our graduate classes) to teach our students EXPLICITLY how to think critically. We can start with EACH of the 5 areas (6.1 to 6.2) and EACH of the five chapters of a thesis or a research paper. We need to give students many opportunities (assignments or excises) in our graduate program to practice thinking critically. For example, students need to be clear on the major purposes of each of the 5 chapters or the whole research paper. Moreover, all the research questions in chapters 1, 2, and 3 should be the same as those in chapters 4 and 5: they should all fit logically together. Students need to clearly understand the

complexities of many social issues and consider all perspectives, including the opposing points of view, their own assumptions, others' assumptions, and the limitations of their studies and others' studies and the limits of their positions.

To improve students' critical thinking, this summer before the August 2013 retreat, the graduate director will ask faculty members who will teach graduate classes in fall 2013 and spring 2014 for possible changes they plan to make. The assessment committee will suggest the following changes. All these suggestions will be discussed at the department retreat in August 2013 or the department meetings next fall.

- Describe at least 2 ways to show how students in their class can demonstrate each of the 5 areas of the critical thinking skills. This would include clearly defining purposes, clarifying issues/problems, selecting types of evidence (texts, issues, literature, or numerical data) and using the evidence to investigate different points of view and assumptions in EACH of the 5 chapters.
- Design or modify at least two lectures to EXPLICITLY discuss what is critical thinking and describe two ways students and faculty can introduce and develop the critical thinking skills before we ask our students to write a research paper or thesis to EXPLICITLY DEMONSTRATE students can think critically (short term and long-term).
- Design or modify at least two assignments to give students opportunities to EXPLICITLY demonstrate the critical thinking skills before we ask our students to write the thesis or the research paper to EXPLICITLY DEMONSTRATE students can think critically (short term and long-term).
- Modify the critical thinking rubric.
- Reassess critical thinking based on different classes.

8. Which program learning outcome(s) do you plan to assess next year? How?

We plan to assess critical thinking again next year. This way we can assess the impact our changes this year may have on the students' critical thinking skills for next year. We also plan to assess written communication. This will allow us to assess any impact of our changes on our students' written communication skills (both short term and long term goals).

Appendix I: Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for the Sociology Graduate Program

Here is the list of the detailed program learning outcomes (PLOs) for the sociology graduate program:

1. Sociology graduate students are expected to demonstrate advanced sociological knowledge including theories, methods, perspectives and other content: they will (**PLO 1: Advanced sociological knowledge** adopted from the *Degree Qualification Profile*).
 - 1.1: Elucidate major research methods, sociological theories and approaches to inquiry and/or school of practices;
 - 1.2: Articulate their sources; and
 - 1.3: Illustrate both their applications and their relationship to allied fields.

- 2: They will demonstrate a deep understanding of sociological contributions: they will (**PLO 2: Sociological contributions and applications** adopted from the *Degree Qualification Profile*):
 - 2.1: Assess the contribution of major sociologists;
 - 2.2: Describe major methodologies and/or practices in sociology; and
 - 2.3: Implement at least two of them through projects, papers or performances

- 3: Our graduate students are able to demonstrate a deep understanding of challenges in sociology: they will (**PLO 3: Challenges in sociology** adopted from the *Degree Qualification Profile*):
 - 3.1: Articulate a full range of challenges involved in practicing sociology;
 - 3.2: Elucidate the learning edges of the field; and
 - 3.3: Delineate the current limits of sociological theory, knowledge and/or practice by independently initiating, assembling, arranging and reformulating ideas, concepts, design and/or techniques in carrying out a project directed at a sociological challenge which lies outside conventional boundaries.

4. Our graduate students are able to communicate effectively in writing about any topics from a sociological perspective; they will (**PLO 4: Written communication** adopted from the VALUE rubric in Appendix 2):
 - 4.1: Identify the purpose of their writing and use the purpose to develop a composition.
 - 4.2: Organize materials and arguments to explain or persuade effectively.
 - 4.3: Use credible, relevant and updated evidence and sources
 - 4.4: Integrate research findings into their work, including proper citation and formatting.
 - 4.5: Display technical proficiency in writing (grammar, spelling, etc.).
 - 4.6: Write clearly and revise when needed

5. Sociology graduate students are able to demonstrate effective oral communication skills: they will (**PLO 5: Oral communication** adopted from the VALUE rubric in Appendix 3):

5.1: Use a clear and consistent organizational pattern to present content cohesively (**Organization**);

5.2: Choose memorable and appropriate language to enhance the effectiveness of the presentation (**Language**);

5.3: Select different types of delivery techniques to make the presentation compelling and the speaker appear polished and confident (**Delivery**);

5.4: Use different types of materials to significantly support the presentation and establish the presenter's credibility/authority on the topic (**Supporting materials**);

5.5: Deliver a compelling central message (**Central message**);

6: Sociology graduate students will demonstrate a habit of systematically exploring issues, ideas, artifacts and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion”: they will (**PLO 6: Critical thinking** adopted from the VALUE rubric in Appendix 4):

6.1: Clearly state the issue/problem which needs to be considered critically, comprehensively describe the issue/problem, and deliver all relevant information so it is necessary for a full understanding of the issue/problem (**Explanation of issues**).

6.2: Thoroughly interpret and evaluate the information taken from source(s) to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis (**Evidence**)

6.3: Thoroughly analyze their own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluate the relevance of contexts when presenting a position (**Influence of context and assumptions**).

6.4: Students' specific position (perspective, thesis, or hypothesis) takes into account the complexities (all sides) of an issue. Limits of position and others' points of view are acknowledged and synthesized within position (**Student's position**);

6.5: Conclusions, consequences and implications are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order (**Conclusions and related outcomes**).

7. Sociology graduate students will demonstrate "a set of cognitive, affective and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts”: they will (**PLO 7: Intercultural Knowledge and Competency** from the VALUE rubric in Appendix 5):

7.1: Articulate insights into their own cultural rules and biases; demonstrate awareness how their experiences have shaped these rules and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self- description.

7.2: Demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, beliefs or practices.

7.3: Interpret intercultural experience from their own perspectives and more than one worldview while demonstrating an ability to act in a supportive manner which recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

- 7.4: Articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and be able to skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.
- 7.5: Ask complex questions about other cultures; seek out and articulate answers to these questions which reflect multiple cultural perspectives.
- 7.6: Initiate and develop interactions with different cultures and suspends judgment in valuing her/his interactions with culturally different others.

8. Sociology graduate students are expected to apply sociological knowledge and skills to systematically explore issues or works in many fields through the collection and analysis of evidence which results in informed conclusions, judgments, or recommendations: they will (**PLO 8: Inquiry and analysis** from the VALUE rubric in Appendix 6):

- 8.1: Identify a creative, focused, and manageable topic which addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects of an issue.
- 8.2: Synthesize in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.
- 8.3: Skillfully develop all elements of a methodology or theoretical framework and synthesize appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks from across disciplines or from relevant sub-disciplines.
- 8.4: Organize and synthesize evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences or similarities.
- 8.5: State a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.
- 8.6: Insightfully discuss limitations and implications of the study.

Appendix II: Critical Thinking Value Rubric for PLO 6: Critical Thinking Skill

Criterion	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
6.1: Explanation of issues	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.
6.2: Evidence <i>Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion</i>	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis.	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.	Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis.	Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.
6.3: Influence of context and assumptions	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions).
6.4: Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.
6.5: Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)	Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order.	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.

Standards and Achievement Targets: 70% of our undergraduate students should score **2.5 or above**; 70 % of our first year graduate students should score **3 or above**, and get **3.5 or above** by the time of their graduation.

Appendix III: Critical Thinking Data Collection and Evaluation Sheet

Criterion	Capstone = 4	Milestone= 3	Milestone =2	Benchmark = 1
6.1: Explanation of issues	4	3	2	1
6.2: Evidence <i>Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion</i>	4	3	2	1
6.3: Influence of context and assumptions	4	3	2	1
6.4: Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)	4	3	2	1
6.5: Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)	4	3	2	1

Basic information of the paper

Paper ID: _____; Course ID: _____; Number of pages _____
 Number of references _____
 Types of journal articles _____

Basic demographic information of the student

Student ID _____
 Age _____
 Gender _____
 Race _____
 English as a second language learning/international student _____
 Number of units completed in the graduate program: _____
 Overall graduate GPA _____
 Overall undergraduate GPA _____
 Our undergraduate student _____
 The classes that have been taken in our graduate program _____

Table I: The Results for Critical Thinking Skill

Different Levels Five Criteria (Areas)	Capstone (4)	Milestone (3)	(2.5)	Milestone (2)	(1.5)	Benchmark (1)	Total (N=10)
6.1: Explanation of issues		40%	40%	20%			2.6 (100%, N=10)
6.2: Evidence		20%	50%	30%			2.45 (100%, N=10)
6.3: Influence of context and assumptions		20%	50%	30%			2.45 (100%, N=10)
6.4: Student's position		30%	30%	40%			2.45 (100%, N=10)
6.5: Conclusions and related outcomes		10%	40%	50%			2.30 (100%, N=10)