

Department of Sociology

ASSESSMENT PLAN – from 2011-12 Program Self Study document

1. Evaluate assessment program; develop department assessment plan for the next 5 years

Based on discussions, we have established a plan for assessment in the coming years. Before being implemented, however, we intend to use the assessment this year as a pilot study to determine the utility and appropriateness of the plan, since the direct assessment that is being conducted this year may be used for two other learning goals in future years.

The plan is to assess one learning goal each year:

2011-2012: Learning Goal 3: Writing

2012-2013: Learning Goal 1: Competency in the Discipline

2013-2014: Learning Goal 2: Critical Thinking

2014-2015: Learning Goal 4: Intercultural Knowledge and Competence

2015-2016: Learning Goal 5: Integrative Learning

For direct assessment of student work, we decided to do the following:

This year we are completing the writing assessment (described below), establishing a baseline for our writing. We want our students to average a score of 2.5 or higher as a benchmark on the writing rubric. In fact, we felt that the 2.5 or higher, which is a commonly used benchmark, would be applicable for our evaluation of students on the other learning goals.

For both learning goal 2: *Critical thinking* and learning goal 4: *Develop intercultural knowledge and competence about cultures*, we decided to use the same plan, possibly article, and likely a version of the prompt that is being used for writing. We chose to do this in lieu of using already established assignments as we wanted to insure that the assessment tool would directly evaluate the goal and indicators we desired to assess. Assignments can often measure several ideas or goals, which can take away from being able to assess student learning in a specific goal. Regardless, prior to implementing this assessment in future years, we will evaluate the assessment this year to determine usefulness and efficiency of this assessment procedure. To assess the level of students, we will use the VALUE rubrics for critical thinking and intercultural knowledge and competency (2.5 benchmark as identified above). Prior to using them, however, we will evaluate each rubric with the intent of modifying them to better meet the assessment goals of our program.

For learning goal 1: *Competency in the Discipline*, we are going to utilize ETS Major Fields Tests that our graduating seniors complete. The questions will be reviewed by all faculty in the department as they identify important information and ideas students who graduate from our program should know. We established a benchmark of 70% passing for our students (both overall and within each area). We will continue to develop a more concrete plan to increase response rates by our students.

For learning goal 5: *Integrative learning* we will draw a random sample of 30 papers from all of the sections of our research methods course (Soc 102) over the course of the year (half from fall, half from Spring), which requires students to conduct a research project on their own, drawing on theory, methods of inquiry, data gathering, analysis, etc. to complete the project. We will, as with the others, evaluate and potentially modify both the Integrative Learning and Inquiry and Analysis VALUE rubrics, with a benchmark of 2.5.

For indirect assessment, we intend to continue to utilize the graduating senior survey that is administered each semester to all graduating seniors. It will continue to be administered online. We have adjusted the survey to better measure the newly designed department learning goals.

We recently established a department undergraduate Sacct 9.1 course that allows us, among other activities, to contact and submit surveys to graduating seniors directly. We will also remind students in classes to complete the survey, including giving time in Soc 102 to complete the surveys. We feel this will increase response rate. We will evaluate the new process each year.

We will continue to use the entrance survey for all new majors to note changes in experiences for students, as well as to understand why our students become Sociology majors, since the majority change from other majors. We recently asked for students to create an ID that only they will know but will allow us to match entrance and exit surveys to note changes while in our program. We also altered the entrance survey to match both the newly designed Department Learning Goals and the Exit Survey.

Finally, we are considering using focus groups of randomly selected graduating seniors to get a better sense of key issues that are of concern to the department. Likely two members of the assessment committee will meet with 8-10 students to discuss their experiences as Sociology majors. There is presently a plan to conduct two focus groups, but this can be altered, depending upon the issues faculty are interested in discussing with students. We will conduct this at the end of this year to assess the appropriateness of it as an assessment tool.

All of the findings and review of the assessment tools will be introduced at the faculty retreat to be discussed for further implementation or possible changes. Findings will be reviewed to determine response by the department.