

Assessment Report, Department of Sociology, 2003-2004

A. BA PROGRAM in SOCIOLOGY

The specific goals were developed in 1994.

1. To impart to students the conceptual framework of sociology
2. To impart to students the sociologist's ways of knowing.
3. To impart to students a working understanding of a focused sample of the accumulated research knowledge base in sociology.

The department makes use of two data sources in conducting its assessment:

a. **COURSE PORTFOLIOS:** each semester, the department collects a sample of "A" and "C" papers from the required "core" courses taken by all students (SOC 352: Sociological Theory, SOC 353: Methods of Social Research, and SOC 354: Quantitative Sociological Analysis). These portfolios are read each year by the department's undergraduate committee. For each course, a variety of outcomes related to the goals stated above have been identified. For example, for Research Methods, the committee examines the portfolio to determine to what extent students "understand the basic logic and procedures of quantitative and qualitative research," are able to "name and understand the logic of major research methods," "understand and evaluate a research article from a peer reviewed Sociology journal," and "are able to conduct a simple research project." Portfolios are examined both with a view to determining whether the courses actually attempt to teach students the skills needed to achieve these outcomes and to what degree both strong and average students succeed in doing so.

b. **EXIT INTERVIEWS:** each Spring, a sample of Sociology majors (chosen deliberately to represent the racial and gender diversity of the department as well as the range of ability levels of students in Sociology) are interviewed by two members of the department (the interviewers rotate from year to year). The focus of the interviews is on determining what students did and did not like about the curriculum, what additions/changes they would like to see made, whether they encountered problems as Sociology majors, and what changes to the department's practices they can suggest.

Review

Exit interviews were conducted in spring semester in conjunction with program review. Students who had been assembled to meet with the external reviewer spent an hour talking with the department chair because the external reviewer was delayed. On the whole students were pleased with the courses and the instructors. Students voiced two primary concerns: They wanted more guidance in the internship course that the department offers and they wanted more information about what jobs are available for sociology majors. In response to their concerns, the department is considering ways to be more proactive with the internship course and organizing ongoing workshops to which alumni will be invited to talk about their jobs and how they got them.

Although we did not formally review core courses during 2003-2004, the faculty participated in a program with the American Sociological Association/National Science Foundation intended to increase student competence in research methods and statistics. Over half the faculty is involved in introducing "modules" into their courses so that students get hands-on experience with manipulating and interpreting numbers. In conjunction with that, a pre-test was administered to students in the research methods courses. We will collect data on an ongoing basis to determine whether the introduction of the modules into substantive sociology courses will increase students' preparedness for the research methods course as time passes.

During 2004-2005 we plan to develop specific objectives for our goals and review the core courses to determine whether and where material is being included as well as criteria to use to assess whether objectives have been met.

B. MA PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

Specific Goals were developed in 1994:

1. To impart to students the conceptual frameworks of sociology and develop a critical understanding of the ongoing debates over these frameworks.
2. To impart to students the fundamental procedures for conducting basic and applied sociological research.
3. To impart to students the fundamental knowledge and the contemporary research issues in one major substantive area of sociology.
4. To develop in students the capacity to conduct and report professional-quality sociological research.

The department makes use of two major data sources in conducting its assessment activities:

a. **COURSE PORTFOLIOS** for all 600-level courses. Students are required to take SOC 640 (Theory), SOC 650 and 651 (Research Methods and Statistics), two 600-level seminars, each in a substantive area of Sociology, and two electives. In addition, all students must complete an MA paper. All papers and exams (except for electives) from these courses (as well as all MA papers) are collected by the department and reviewed semi-annually by the department. In 2002-2003, the department reviewed materials for 640, 650 and 651. Materials from the seminars and the MA papers will be reviewed this year. The department decided to order its review in this way because changes were made in the 600-level seminars in response to the previous year's assessment activities; it was felt that more time was needed to allow those changes to have a significant effect on the courses and to allow a larger sample of the seminars to be offered (and reviewed).

b. **EXIT INTERVIEWS:** The department added exit interviews with graduate students to its assessment activities in Spring 2002. Two faculty members met with a group of graduate students who were at the stage of completing their MA paper and discussed with them their experiences in the program. As with the undergraduate exit interviews, the

emphasis is on learning what students like and dislike about the curriculum, changes they would like to see, and whether students encountered problems as they moved through the program.

Review

Review of portfolios for the MA paper was conducted in Summer 2004. The focus was on the quality of the MA theses and whether required courses prepared students well for this final project. Members of the graduate committee concluded that the program appears to need some revision because some students are ill-prepared to tackle the MA paper. With rare exceptions, students take longer than a semester to complete the paper, receive incompletes, and often must petition to extend incompletes. Discussion focused on whether the MA paper should be offered as a regular course rather than as an independent study. Given the size of the faculty, this would put additional strain on our resources. It was concluded that revisions should not be undertaken without a clearer understanding of program objectives and how best to achieve them. Therefore, before recommending any changes in the program, the decision was made to clarify program objectives and then to determine where in current courses material is being included to meet them. If objectives are met in current courses, students might be better prepared to complete the MA paper in a semester. The project for 2004-2005 will be to specify objectives for each of our goals and to determine whether if/where each is being met in current courses. Whether the program requires major or minor reorganization will then be discussed.

Exit interviews were not conducted in Spring 2004 because too few students completed the program spring semester. Exit interviews will be conducted in Spring 2005.

During 2004-2005 we plan to develop specific objectives for our goals and review the core courses to determine whether and where material is being included as well as criteria to use to assess whether objectives have been met.