

**UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**  
**July 2007**

**Introduction**

This report uses the same format as last year's report –this will facilitate comparison as we attempt to learn from this exercise. Goals, learning objectives, and methodology remain the same. The only difference is that this year the department launched its full offerings for the new criminology major, and is submitting a parallel assessment plan for this new major. We will await this plan's review, given its substantial similarity to the undergraduate sociology major assessment plan, in consideration of a proposal that beginning next year the two majors could perhaps be assessed in a single integrated report.

**Goal 1. Students will learn the conceptual framework of sociology.**

**Method:** The plan calls for collecting papers and exams from the required theory course and scoring them on a three point scale—exemplary, acceptable, unacceptable—with respect to specific knowledge and concepts drawn from three classical sociological theorists and three sociological perspectives.

Professor Chriss and Manning reviewed materials from their respective Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 offerings of the required Sociological Theory course. Both sections covered the six topics to be assessed (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, functionalism, symbolic interactionism and feminism). One section emphasized these six topics, the other included other topics. One section emphasized primary texts, the other commentaries.

A. The evaluation of the fall offering revealed the following: There were 16 total papers assessed for learning outcomes. These were randomly selected and copies were made of them at the end of the above mentioned semester, and set aside for later evaluation. 15 of the 16 papers dealt with assessable topics, and this will be explained further below. (One of the papers, on Simmel, was discarded.)

These papers were shorter writing assignments that asked students to briefly discuss a theorist (e.g., major concepts, pertinent biographical details, general impact on the field), locate him or her within a theoretical tradition, and provide an annotated bibliography containing major primary works by the theorist as well as notable secondary works about the theorist by other authors. These papers ranged from 6 to 10 pages. The rubric was applied to the papers (categories of exemplary, acceptable, and unacceptable. Below is how the six substantive topics fared against the rubric. (Numbers represent total number of papers in each category.)

|                                       | EXEMPLARY | ACCEPTABLE |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| UNACCEPTABLE                          |           |            |
| Functionalism (Parsons, Merton, etc.) | 1         | 2          |
| Weber                                 |           | 1          |
| Marx                                  |           | 2          |
| Durkheim                              | 2         | 2          |
| Symbolic Interactionism               |           | 1          |
| Feminist Theory                       | 1         | 1          |

Overall, 4 of the papers were judged exemplary, 9 were judged acceptable, and 2 were judged unacceptable.

Comments:

1. Both of the unacceptable papers were on Parsons (functionalism), which indicates that Parsons is somewhat hard to comprehend.
2. Students in general did not do a very good job of locating and summarizing primary works of these authors, although secondary works were discussed more cogently.
3. Students seem to do an average to acceptable job when it comes to summarizing and discussing the major works of the theorists included among the assessable topics. Although there are few outstanding papers, there are also few very poor ones.

B. Evaluation of the spring 2007 offering generated the following results, based on 16 randomly selected test papers:

|                                       | EXEMPLARY | ACCEPTABLE |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Functionalism (Parsons, Merton, etc.) | 4         | 11         |
| Weber                                 | 1         | 7          |
| Marx                                  | 6         | 8          |
| Durkheim                              |           | 7          |
| Symbolic Interactionism               |           | 9          |
| Feminist Theory                       | 1         | 11         |

Comments:

1. These papers show that many students had trouble explaining central ideas under exam conditions. Students performed a little better on Marx and functionalism but had a harder time with Weber and Durkheim. There were many acceptable scores on the feminism section – but this was the last section covered before the exam – and the reading requirements were less.
2. Comparisons across sections presume unrealizable “all other things equal” circumstances. The lower scores in the spring may be a byproduct of the respective students in these two classes, exacerbated by anxiety in the latter (graded by exam instead of take-home paper).

**Actions:**

The main thing to be learned by this 2007 assessment of theory learning is that a) primary sources must be emphasized somewhat more heavily, and that b) functionalism—especially Parsons' version—needs to be made clearer to the students. Last year's four action points, copied below, are still on the table and will be addressed along with this year's faculty review:

1. The theory committee should determine the amount of the course that should be allocated to the six topics of the rubric.
2. The theory committee should determine what role primary texts play in the course and how students' knowledge of primary texts should be evaluated.
3. The theory committee needs to discuss ways to ensure that the rubric is being covered systematically and that the examinations and papers embody a significant emphasis on the topics included in the rubric.
4. So that change can be assessed from one year to the next, the theory committee will agree by next fall on a way to assess outcomes systematically so that the materials collected can be assessed on the scale specified in the assessment plan. From 2007 it is apparent that applying the same scale to different products (tests versus papers) may still make comparisons across sections (whether fall to spring, or from year to year) problematic. Indeed, the resolution may be a realization that what is sought is a comparison of how specific learning issues were addressed from year to year, with the outcome measures a signal about relative success, but certainly not measurable parameters amenable to precise longitudinal comparison.

**Goal 2: Students will learn the sociologist's ways of knowing.**

**Method:** the assessment of outcomes for the four learning objectives associated with this goal calls for using a rubric to score papers and/or exams collected from the required research methods (SOC 353) and statistics (SOC 354) courses.

## A. Soc 353, Methods of Social Research

This year's assessment of Soc 353 outcomes focused on objectives 2 and 3:

- 2) Students will be introduced to the fundamentals of sampling, probability, and inferential statistics.
- 3) Students will learn to differentiate between independent and dependent variables and to develop testable hypotheses.

(Objective one was assessed for Soc 354; objective four was not assessed and may need further scrutiny and/or specification by the department -- 1) Students will learn how to use and apply the basic tools of descriptive statistics (frequency distributions in tabular

and graphical form, central tendency and dispersion measures); 4) Students will develop an understanding of the different quantitative and qualitative approaches to sociological research.)

1. Using relevant exam questions, instructors compiled the percentage of correct answers in the key areas of research design, data collection, and data analysis.

|   | % correct | # of questions |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| 1. Independent vs. dependent variable (causation) | 74        | 8              |
| 2. Hypothesis                                     | 68        | 5              |
| 3. Unit of analysis                               | 65        | 4              |
| 4. Sampling                                       | 72        | 13             |
| 5. Conceptualization                              | 70        | 6              |
| 6. Operationalization                             | 64        | 3              |
| 7. Survey instrument                              | 78        | 12             |
| 8. Observation and interviewing                   | 74        | 6              |
| 9. Inductive/deductive reasoning                  | 74        | 5              |
| 10. Univariate analysis                           | 72        | 9              |
| 11. Bivariate analysis                            | 67        | 12             |

2. Five final papers to which to apply the rubric were randomly chosen from each of the two classes. Five were quantitative; five were qualitative. Two instructors reviewed and evaluated these papers.

|               | Exemplary | Acceptable | Unacceptable |
|---------------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| Question      | 1         | 7          | 2            |
| Hypothesis*   | 2         | 2          | 1            |
| Adequate Data | 1         | 8          | 1            |
| Data Analysis | 1         | 7          | 2            |
| Conclusion    | 1         | 7          | 2            |

\* not applicable to qualitative papers.

### Comments:

The assessors concluded that examinations and research papers show most students gaining an adequate understanding of how to interpret and conduct research in terms of research design, data collection, and data analysis.

**Actions:**

The methods instructors/ assessors wish to improve the validity and utility of their outcome measurements, and have three considerations in mind:

1. How to use the data on examination questions to measure student progress. Our main concern is that the percentage of students correctly answering questions on a particular topic measures both student understanding and the difficulty of the questions. We also discussed administering some kind of pretest to determine how much progress students make during the semester. We will convene a meeting of Methods instructors in the fall to pursue these issues.
2. How to develop and use common definitions of data analysis and conclusions that apply equally well to qualitative and quantitative projects. We plan to exchange assignments before they are finalized, as well as to continue reviewing completed projects. We will include this issue in our fall meeting.
3. At least one of the Methods instructors will meet with former students who are now employed as researchers at local agencies, to ask them how well the course has prepared them for their jobs, and to seek ideas for the course.

B. No action was taken during the past year to change the content or delivery of the course, even though in last year's assessment it was felt this might be desirable, given three recurrent problems:

1. Students continue to have difficulties performing data analysis.
2. Concern that students in one section of the course focused on qualitative methods at the expense of learning enough about quantitative methods.
3. Concern that questions used to measure outcomes are not comparable across the sections of the course.

The instructors had discussed the possibility of focusing almost exclusively on quantitative research rather than trying to give equal weight to quantitative and qualitative research; using the same textbook in the future for all sections of the course; and developing homework assignments that could be graded by a TA who could also serve as a tutor. Although a TA was assigned to the course this past year, the student served as a tutor only and was not involved in grading assignments. The possibility for fuller utilization of the TA needs further exploration, in addition to continuing to work toward standardizing the learning experience across sections.

B. SOC 354, Quantitative Social Research.

**Method.** As in previous assessments, the instructors assessed the correctness of students' problem solutions on tests and exams, selecting problems that address s the basic learning objectives identified for 40 students:

- I. Students will learn how to use and apply the basic tools of descriptive statistics (frequency distributions in tabular and graphical form, central tendency and dispersion measures)
 

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| A. Frequency distributions (tables) | 85% |
| B. Frequency distributions (graphs) | 85% |
| C. Central tendency*                | 70% |
| D. Dispersion*                      | 75% |
  
- II. Students will be introduced to the fundamentals of sampling, probability, and inferential statistics
 

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| A. Sampling               | 70% |
| B. Probability            | 75% |
| C. Inferential statistics | 90% |
  
- III. Students will learn to differentiate between independent and dependent variables and to develop testable hypotheses.
 

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| A. Independent vs. dependent variables | 75% |
| B. Hypothesis formation                | 85% |

**Comments:** on criteria where learning rates were lower, assessment usually occurred earlier in the course. For example, on the first test, 30 percent of the students still had significant difficulty in accurately computing, interpreting, and differentiating proper uses for the mean, median, and mode measures of central tendency. By the end of the course, given that the material is cumulative and earlier, simple concepts must be utilized in later, more complex tasks (for example, computing and interpreting regression parameters, performing and interpreting a t test and a chi-square test). Although the course does not aspire to mastery learning, in effect the basic concepts must be mastered if the students are to pass the final sections of the course.

**Actions:** Instructors need to continue to discuss new ways of delivering the material. One instructor will be developing an online version of the course during the spring semester.

**Goal 3: Students will learn a working understanding of a focused sample of the accumulated research knowledge base in sociology.**

**Method:** The assessment plan calls for selecting two 300-level substantive classes for assessment, which will rotate from year to year. Instructors are asked to develop a set of

objectives for that class and to identify items on exams and/or essays that could be used to assess student achievement of those outcomes. The two courses assessed this year both are from the social inequality concentration, Sociology of Gender (SOC 317) and Race and Ethnic Inequality (SOC 380).

Instructors are asked to develop a set of objectives for that class and to identify items on exams and/or essays that could be used to assess student achievement of those outcomes.

### **Findings:**

#### A. Soc 317 (Sociology of Gender)

Course objectives were stated on syllabus & outcomes were assessed by means of percent correct answers on monitoring questions. Note: some objectives were also assessed using essay exam questions (details in section II).

#### Section 1: Analysis of Multiple Choice Question Answers

Objective 1: Students will become aware of various forms of gender inequality that exist in contemporary U.S. society.

#### E1 Q1            98% (58 Students)

Of 193 countries in the world, only 6 are lead by women. This fact best illustrates:

- |                      |                           |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| *a. Male dominance   | c. Male identification    |
| b. Male centeredness | d. Obsession with control |

#### E2 Q1            85% (59 Students)

Research shows that teachers typically pay more attention to boys in the classroom. This form of gender discrimination most closely relates to which element of patriarchy:

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| a. male dominance | c. male control       |
| b. male lineage   | *d. male centeredness |

#### E2 Q2            64% (59 Students)

According to Sadker and Sadker's research on gender in elementary schools:

- a. male teachers are more likely to discriminate against girls compared to female teachers.

- \*b. women's accomplishments often are ignored in the curriculum.
- c. teachers often pay more attention to boys because they believe boys will go on to higher education and girls will probably not.
- d. all of the above.

E2 Q10      88% (59 Students)

According to Jean Kilbourne in "Killing Us Softly 3" (video) and "Beauty and the Beast of Advertising," advertisers:

- a. present women in powerful positions due to a growing market of women professionals.
- \*b. often trivialize women's power in advertisements.
- c. do not include women in advertisements when selling products to women.
- d. sexualize men as much as women in today's society.

Objective 2: Students will understand how gender is created and maintained by societies.

E1 Q6      84% (58 Students)

According to Lorber, societies create and maintain gender distinctions in order to organize social life, and gender has an impact on human behavior. Thus, gender is a \_\_\_\_\_.

- |                          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| *a. Structure            | c. Process |
| b. Stratification System | d. System  |

Objective 3: Students will learn macro and micro approaches to sociologically defining gender.

E1 Q14      78% (58 Students)

Johnson's analogy of patriarchy as a tree is similar to Risman's "Gender as Structure" model because:

- \*a. Each approach emphasizes both individuals and large scale patterns in society.
- b. Each approach focuses mainly on individuals and interactions.
- c. Each approach suggests that people in occupations behave according to job expectations and not gender expectations.
- d. None of the above.

E1 Q16            91% (58 Students)

According to Risman’s “Gender as Structure” approach, gender has direct influence on which levels of social life?

- \*a. individual, interactional, and institutional
- b. individual and institutional only
- c. institutional only
- d. individual only

Objective 4: Students will become familiar with various perspectives for challenging gender inequality.

E3 Q20            78%  
 E3 Q21            81%  
 E3 Q22            76%  
 E3 Q23            56%  
E3 Q24            78% (54 Students)

Matching:

- |                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Radical Feminism | c. Marxian Feminism     |
| b. Liberal Feminism | d. Socialist Feminism   |
|                     | e. Multiracial Feminism |
20. Focuses on equality of opportunity for women in areas such as education, employment, and politics. (b)
21. Developed as a response to the white middle-class women’s rights movement in the 1970s. (e)
22. Argues that men control the most important resources in society, and women’s labor is exploited for the benefit of the ruling class (men). (c)
23. Focuses on the interplay between gender and class in shaping women’s and men’s statuses in society. (d)
24. Focuses on elements of patriarchy that contribute to widespread dehumanizing of women and violence against women. (a)

Section 2. Analysis of Essay Question Answers.

Drawing on the Sociological Theory assessment plan, Dr. Rodriguez randomly selected 5 essay exams and scored them on a three point scale—exemplary, acceptable, unacceptable, with respect to Sociology of Gender course objectives.

Objective 2: Students will understand how gender is created and maintained by societies.

Short Answer Exam 1, Question 3:

Describe the relationship between patriarchy and the individual, according to Johnson. Be sure to address socialization and paths of least resistance in your answer.

Exemplary  
 Acceptable  
 Acceptable  
 Acceptable  
 Unacceptable

The exemplary answer clearly illustrated that individuals are influenced by the social structure, and also how they can either challenge or perpetuate the gender order through interaction. Two of the acceptable answers focused more on how social systems influence individuals without noting the ability of individuals to alter systems. A third acceptable answer explained why individuals tend to follow the norms dictated by social structure, but did not clearly explain how the system is maintained. The unacceptable answer was unclear and showed signs of mimicry rather than understanding.

Essay Exam 2, Question 1:

The US has the highest rate in industrial world for rape, domestic violence, spousal murder. What might be some sociological reasons for this pattern, according to the course materials? You must cite **at least** 3 course materials from this section of the course in your response, and at least two of the citations **must** be readings.

Exemplary  
 Acceptable  
 Acceptable  
 Acceptable  
 Unacceptable

The exemplary answer illustrates that the structure of society has an influence on the patterns of violence that occur in society by citing and synthesizing a variety of course materials. This particular answer focused mainly on the social construction of masculinity as it relates to patterns of male violence in society. One of the acceptable answers also focused mainly on hegemonic masculinity as a reason for violence. Two acceptable answers highlighted the mass media

as an institution that promotes violence and the objectification of women. The unacceptable answer failed to clearly explain how masculinity or media may contribute to violence. Instead, the student described a video on masculinity and media and briefly mentioned males' lack of intimacy without properly citing materials.

Objective 4: Students will become familiar with various perspectives and methods for challenging gender inequality.

Essay Exam 3, Question 2:

In the last third of the course, we discussed academic and social movements aimed at eliminating gender inequality, as well as how individuals can challenge gender inequality. Using at *least two readings* from this section of the course, describe two approaches to challenging gender inequality, and explain which method you believe to be most useful and why.

Exemplary  
 Exemplary  
 Acceptable  
 Acceptable  
 Acceptable

The two exemplary answers both discussed men's involvement in feminism and compared different approaches men have used to address gender inequality.

The acceptable answers described multiracial feminism and strategies for change from Allan Johnson's *The Gender Knot* which was required reading for the course. Two of the acceptable answers were stronger than the third because they developed the ideas better and gave stronger reasoning for why they support a particular approach.

B. SOC 380 (Race and Ethnic Inequality)

Objective 1: To provide insight into the historical significance of race and its development as a social construction.

Question: The "one-drop" or "hypo-descent" principle states that:

- a. Anyone with white ancestry is considered white
- b. Anyone with black ancestry is considered black
- c. Anyone with mixed ancestry is considered white
- d. Anyone with white ancestry is granted freedom from slavery

Correct answer: B. 72% of students answered correctly.

Question: The fact that racial categories have changed significantly across Census years most strongly suggests that:

- a. Institutional discrimination is still rampant
- b. Race is based on stereotypes
- c. Race is a social construction
- d. Discrimination is difficult to measure

Correct answer: C. 86% of students answered correctly.

Objective 2: To demonstrate important racial patterns, disparities, and inequalities in employment, education, housing, crime, family structure, health, and media representation.

Question: Which of the following statements best fits anticipated U.S. population trends?

- a. Significant decline of Asian and white populations
- b. Significant growth of white and Hispanic populations
- c. Significant decline of the black population and growth of white population
- d. Significant growth of Hispanic population and moderate growth of Asian population

Correct answer: D. 74% of students answered correctly.

Question: Hispanic segregation is:

- a. Rising and higher than Asians'
- b. Rising and higher than blacks'
- c. Declining and lower than blacks'
- d. Declining and higher than blacks'

Correct answer: A. 69% of students answered correctly.

Objective 3: To explain the key causes of racial disparities, and to highlight the role of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping in the development and maintenance of racial inequality.

Question: The fact that minorities get fewer "returns" from their education means that

- a. They are less likely to return to school for higher education
- b. They get fewer economic rewards for their education and degrees
- c. They are less likely to marry someone with similar degrees or credentials
- d. Their children are less likely to attend the same caliber of colleges that they did

Correct answer: B. 68% of students answered correctly.

Question: Which theory of prejudice does Beverly Tatum most endorse in “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”

- a. Social learning theory
- b. Realistic conflict theory
- c. Contact theory
- d. Group position theory

Correct answer: A. 91% of students answered correctly.

Objective 4: To foster an understanding of how race and ethnicity research is conducted.

Question: Which option was offered for the first time in the 2000 Census?

- a. Measurement of expressed identity instead of internal identity
- b. Option of “quadroon” category
- c. Ability to select multiple race categories
- d. Measurement of external identity instead of internal identity

Correct answer: C. 79% of students answered correctly.

Short Answer Question: What is the basic logic of an audit study that sociologists use to assess racial discrimination? What some benefits of this technique are as compared to self-reports of discriminatory behavior?

40% of students provided “excellent” responses.

45% provided “good/satisfactory” responses.

15% provided “poor” responses.

**Action:** These findings will be discussed at a faculty meeting in the fall. Three courses now have been assessed and it will be possible to discuss findings from three courses to determine whether the percentages of students who learn is adequate and, if not, how to increase them. In general it appears that the overall level of learning is acceptable and relatively uniform across these three specializations that have been assessed to date (including last year’s upper-level course assessment, SOC 341, Juvenile Delinquency).

### **Indirect Assessment Mechanisms**

**Method:** Last year a dozen students were invited to an exit interview over lunch during finals week, but only one sociology major came. This year with a more concerted effort (i.e. more choice of pizza) a total of five students majoring in sociology participated in a

lively focus group discussion led by the chair of the undergraduate committee, Dr. Hubbard.

Findings:

1. Looking back to when you first started thinking seriously about going to college, for example during high school, did you have an intended major or area of study? Probe if yes: what was it?

**All of the sociology majors began their college career with interests/majors different than sociology (e.g. pre-med, pre-law, engineering, music, education)**

2. Why did you decide to become a Sociology (Sociology/Criminology) major?

**All of the students indicated that they decided to become a sociology major due to the fact that they found a sociology class interesting.**

3. What were the most surprising things you learned as a Sociology (Sociology/Criminology) major?

**Students were interested and surprised by crime statistics. Many were surprised by how the “media” fails to adequately represent research and statistics. Others claimed that they were surprised by how useful sociology is in everyday practice.**

4. What did you find most helpful about the program?

**The secretaries, both Phyllis and Gloria!**

5. What did you find least helpful about the program?

**Most students said that they wished the program contained more information about jobs they could get with the major. Some students suggested that some professors are great at advising while others were not. They suggested having one advisor for the department.**

6. What did you like best about the Sociology (Sociology/Criminology) major?

**The students all agreed that the best thing about the major was that the classes were interesting.**

7. What did you like least about the Sociology (Sociology/Criminology) major?

**The students did not like the methods and the stats courses.**

8. What changes would you suggest for the program? Are there things missing that could be added?

**In addition to the suggestions discussed above in other questions, several students suggested that there be more focused classes such as women and crime 2, interpersonal violence 2, media and pop culture, sociology of adolescence, and a sexuality class.**

9. What do you think are the benefits of having majored in Sociology (Sociology/Criminology)?

**Several students suggested that they felt that it made them more critical of media and less likely to use stereotypes but that they still did not know what to do with the major.**

10. What do you plan to do with your Sociology degree?

**All said they wanted to find a job but didn't know where or what kind of job.**

#### **Actions:**

This feedback is honest and significant, and will be discussed next fall by the undergraduate committee and the faculty as a whole. In some cases issues can be addressed directly, in others indirectly through a better understanding of some of the possible underlying issues about which these responses are merely symptoms.

One major initiative in the department that speaks to the call for making the major more "job relevant" (but keeping in mind this is not a universal concern) and also making the statistics/methods courses more palatable (a near universal concern) is the department's ongoing IDA project directed by Professor Meiksins. In brief, the NSF-sponsored initiative for which our faculty have been trained at the University of Michigan requires dispersing data analysis exercises through out our curriculum, but especially in the entry-level courses such as SOC 201.