

SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT

August 4, 2015

Introduction

Following our last departmental assessment (submitted September 29, 2014), departmental faculty and our Academic Council student representatives deliberated on what our next steps would be. We reviewed previous assessment efforts as well as the feedback we received and then decided to tackle assessment in a more systematic way by going back to the first step (goal setting), then the second step (figuring out what courses work on which goals), and then the third step (identifying how we were going to assess the goals). Next, we designed an approach to assessment that started with two components of our program that had not been previously assessed – our Gateway courses and our one-credit add-ons. That led to planning this year's and next year's assessment activities. And finally, we wanted to emphasize closing the loop as the final, critical step in assessment.

This translated into several concrete actions listed here and explained below: (A) Finalize new departmental learning goals. (B) Create a matrix representing how these goals are fulfilled within the major. (C) Carry out a direct assessment of Goal 1b ("Understand core sociological concepts") at the Gateway level. (D) Be more ambitious about closing the loop of transforming lessons from assessment into action. (E) Revise our assessment timeline to incorporate an assessment of one-credit add-ons in Fall 2016.

New Departmental Goals

We did in fact finalize our new departmental goals, which are listed below. This involved streamlining and clarifying the previous goals.

I. Knowledge

- Acquire knowledge about human society through the study of sociology and related disciplines
- Understand core sociological concepts such as social structure, social inequality, socialization, social norms, social roles, social identities, social institutions, social theory, social research
- Recognize variation in human behavior and social systems over time and place

II. Intellectual Skills and Practice

- Use sociological imagination; understand the intersection of biography and history
- Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of social scientific evidence
- Engage diversity to practice sociology, collaboratively and across social identities

III. Values and Transformation

- Interrogate one's own values in relation to sociological learning

- Apply sociological knowledge and learning to matters of personal and social concern
- Carry sociology into life at and beyond college

Matrix of Goals in the Major

We have developed a matrix (see Table 1) to identify the specific courses (or places in the sociology curriculum) in which the different learning goals are pursued. A checked box indicates that all instructors who teach that course agree that the content and skills relevant to meeting that goal are being taught in that course.

Table 1. Matrix of Learning Goals Throughout the Major

<i>Goals</i>	<i>Gateway Courses</i>	<i>Social Research Methods</i>	<i>Statistics for the Social Sciences</i>	<i>Classical Sociological Theory</i>	<i>Contemporary Social Theory</i>	<i>Senior Seminar Sociology</i>
<i>Knowledge</i>						
Ia. Acquire knowledge about human society through the study of sociology and related disciplines	X			X	X	X
Ib. Understand core sociological concepts such as social structure, social inequality, socialization, social norms, social roles, social identities, social institutions, social theory, social research	X			X	X	
Ic. Recognize variation in human behavior and social systems over time and place				X	X	
<i>Intellectual Skills and Practice</i>						
IIa. Use sociological imagination; understand the intersection of biography and history	X			X	X	X
IIb. Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of social scientific evidence		X	X			X
IIc. Engage diversity to practice sociology, collaboratively and across social identities					X	X
<i>Values and Transformation</i>						
IIIa. Interrogate one's own values in relation to sociological learning	X			X	X	
IIIb. Apply sociological knowledge and learning to matters of personal and social concern		X		X	X	X
IIIc. Carry sociology into life at and beyond college			X		X	X

We have now posted the new goals on our departmental website and are developing the habit of listing them on syllabi when relevant. That means all of them are listed on the Gateway syllabi and some of them are listed on the syllabi of other courses.

We also began to operationalize the teaching of these learning goals. Ultimately, this will involve all of the goals. During this year's assessment, we focused studying how well students in Gateway courses have learned the basic sociological concepts in 1b. The first step was to develop definitions of the concepts presented in that goal. The result of that work is listed here:

Social structure: The organized pattern of social relationships and social institutions that together constrain and facilitate social interactions.

Social inequality: The relatively fixed, hierarchical arrangements in society by which groups have different access to resources, opportunities, power, and perceived social worth.

Socialization: The lifelong process by which individuals internalize the values, beliefs, and norms of a given society.

Social norms: Written and unwritten rules that specify behaviors appropriate and inappropriate to a particular social situation.

Social role: The expected behavior of a person occupying a particular social position.

Social institutions: Relatively stable and predictable social arrangements created and sustained by people that have emerged over time with the purpose of coordinating human activities.

Social theory: A systematic explanation for observed patterns in the social world.

Social research: The empirical process that social scientists use to formulate and answer questions about the social world.

Direct Assessment of Learning Goal 1b

We developed a multiple choice instrument for assessing Gateway students' knowledge of definitions of the core concepts for students in Gateway courses. Learning outcomes for these terms related to Goal 1b as well as other goals pursued in other courses will be developed in the future.

This spring the test was distributed in three sections of SO101: Sociological Perspectives and one section of SO201: Social Issues and generated an N of 76. The distribution of scores is shown below.

Figure 1. Distribution of Assessment Scores

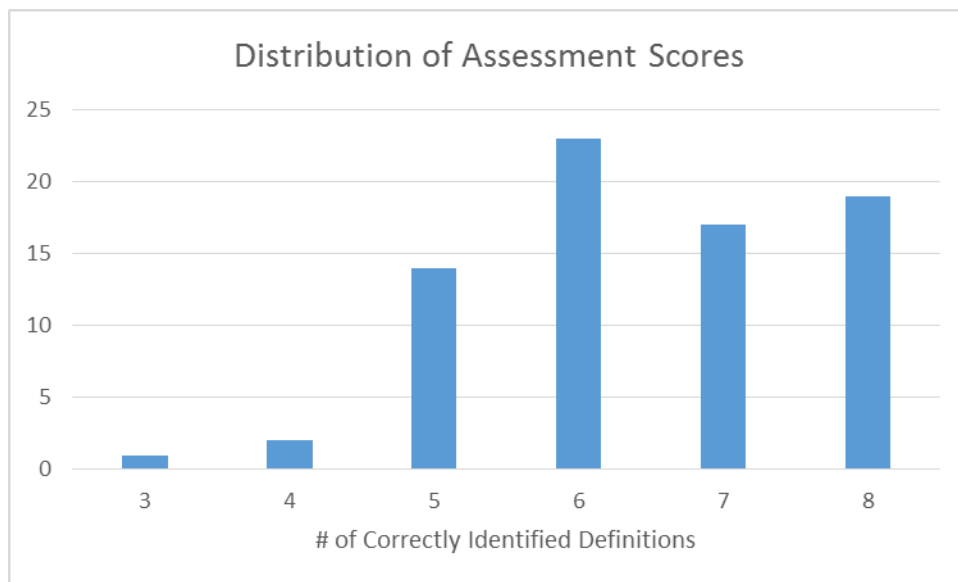


Table 1. Proportions of Correctly Identified Definitions

Definition	Proportion Correct
Social Theory	.947
Social Institutions	.881
Socialization	.763
Social Norms	.671
Social Structure	.750
Social Inequality	.815
Social Role	.907
Social Research	.711

As Figure 1 indicates, 77 percent of the respondents had an overall score of 6 or better. Ninety percent correctly identified a definition of social theory and social role, as evident in Table 1. The lowest proportions of correct identifications were for social norms (67 percent) and social research (71 percent). Answers for all other terms were correct in at least two thirds of the cases.

Closing the Loop

The first part of closing the loop last year was to finalize the new learning goals and communicate them to all instructors teaching Gateway courses. This step is particularly important whenever we hire a new colleague, especially a contingent faculty member. We also developed specific outcomes associated with those goals at the Gateway level. The results of this assessment indicates that we are already doing a pretty good job of providing students with the foundational concepts necessary for further study in sociology. However, we need to do a better job on several of the concepts. Going forward, we aspire to be more explicit in communicating the goals and effective in realizing the learning outcomes. That will require more systematic and intensive engagement with the learning goals 1b in Gateway courses.

Future Plans

This coming year we plan to continue the assessment of Goal 1b in the Gateways. We will gather more evidence of how successful our learning outcomes relative to that goal in additional Gateway courses. We also will begin to think about more advanced learning outcomes for that goal in intermediate and upper-level courses. Ultimately, we hope such goals will be built into our curriculum by way of scaffolded learning experiences. We will also take advantage of the particular constellation of courses being offered to assess how the one-credit “R” (research) component is working. Those faculty members leading assessment work will meet with instructors teaching courses designated with an “R” to plan assessment for that particular add-on.

Note

Andrew Lindner has been the main coordinator of this year’s assessment. Jenni Mueller and Susan Walzer finalized the new department goals. Jenni, Susan, Amon Emeka, and John Brueggemann assisted in developing definitions of core concepts in Goal 1b, learning outcomes for those concepts in Gateways, and the instrument for assessing Gateway students’ knowledge. Andrew compiled all the quantitative analyses presented here. John and Andrew drafted this report. We consulted the department at regular intervals throughout the process. Kate Berheide provided guidance and editing along the way.

August 26, 2015

Dear John,

Thank you for this terrific assessment report for Sociology. It truly is exemplary.

As before, we are responding to the department and program reports with particular attention to the ways faculty are framing goals for our students; analyzing student work directly (and also considering indirect information such as surveys and interviews) to see how well they are meeting our goals; discussing the results together; and making use of the results to change courses, requirements, and/or pedagogies. To meet the standards for accreditation, we are asked to analyze our students' work directly on a regular basis. You have done all of these things, and more, setting up the assessment processes thoughtfully and clearly in such a way that you can pick it right up this year and carry it forward.

The key, as always, is to study our students' learning in ways that you find meaningful. Everything lines up behind that. Your report's emphasis on closing the loop reflects that vision as well.

Student Learning Goals: You led your department in revising and adopting revised goals for your students' learning, and you mapped the goals to the curriculum together. You rightly viewed this as an essential step now that you have many new faculty and had not reviewed your goals in some years.

Assessments—Direct: You created and implemented a direct assessment of how well your students are meeting Goal 1b in your gateway courses, and you analyzed the data and present the results here.

Assessments—Indirect: None this year.

Results: The results of your direct assessment are encouraging: most of your students are mostly meeting your goal. Your report notes where you found a little weakness, and you plan to close the loop.

Discussion, implementation: Given that your report came in fairly late in the summer, we assume that you haven't had the chance to discuss it at length in the department. We encourage you to do that, and to include the question of how well you all think this process worked. You do express the laudable intention of sharing these results with the faculty and considering how you might take them into account as you teach the gateway courses this year.

Looking ahead: You have set up your assessment report in such a way that it contains a plan for next year and beyond. It includes further discussion of your results.

Overall: One of the impressive things about your report is that you engaged so many of your faculty and used the process to help build consensus about what students should be learning in the classes you studied. We look forward to learning more about your other goals and the courses in which they are being met!

We trust that you won't mind if we use your report as an example of excellent inquiry into our students' learning. Thank you for this fine work.

Sincerely,

Sarah Goodwin

Lisa Christenson