ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN

AND

2018/2019 GRADUATE STUDENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Department of Sociology and Criminology

Prepared by

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Statement of Mission: Graduate Program in Sociology

The mission of the graduate program in sociology is to provide the learning environment to meet the program goals and develop the skills listed below. Faculty members have been encouraged to tie the syllabi for every course into the program goals.

Program Goals (3-4)
(Program goals are broad general statements of what the program intends to accomplish and describes what a student will be able to do after completing the program. The program goals are linked to the mission of the university and college.)

The discipline of sociology is characterized by its breadth and the diversity of its subfields and specializations. Hence, of particular importance to the Department of Sociology and Criminology are the following general goals included in our mission statement:
1. to provide knowledge and understanding of the historical, social, intellectual bases of human culture and environment;
2. to provide habits of thought and investigation useful in later life;
3. to encourage exploration and development of ethical values; and
4. to offer the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools.

Student Learning Outcomes (6-8)
(Student Learning Outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will know and be able to do as a result of completing a program. These student learning outcomes are directly linked to the accomplishment of the program goals.)

By graduation, MA students in sociology should be able to:
1. effectively use communication skills in writing, editing, speaking and listening
2. effectively use analytical and computer skills to include the tools to analyze qualitative and quantitative data
3. effectively conceptualize and solve problems, and engage in critical thinking, effective reasoning, and decision-making
4. effectively use social skills to include cooperative learning and group problem-solving
5. be able to translate the sociological perspective into everyday life and problems.

The acquisition of skills listed above is the goal of the BA in sociology. The masters' program in sociology seeks to develop the same skills, except at a more sophisticated level than that expected for the undergraduate student. Graduate work is expected to be more independent and self-directed than undergraduate work, and to be more analytical and theoretical.

Process for Assessing each Student Learning Outcome
(A process must be defined and documented to regularly assess student learning and achievement of student learning outcomes. The results of the assessment must be utilized as input for the improvement of the program.)

In the Department of Sociology and Criminology, the graduate director and the graduate committee have the responsibility for reviewing and evaluating our assessment procedures, and for offering suggestions to the faculty. The graduate director is also responsible for administering and reviewing the alumni survey, and for informing the faculty of the results of that survey.

1. Timeline for assessment and analysis
   (Must include specific timeline for collection and analysis of assessment data.)
   o Data collection takes place on an annual basis during spring and fall semesters.
   o In 2018/2019, data collection took place between April 23 and May 27.
   o The analysis of assessment data took place between May 30 and June 30

2. Means of assessment and desired level of student achievement

   (Must include at least one direct and one indirect method of assessment for each learning outcome.)
   o The graduate director contacts faculty members who are supervising master's theses in December and May to determine how well our students are doing. In addition, the graduate director conducts annual graduate student evaluations in December and May. This is a formal process, using evaluation forms developed by the graduate committee. These forms are designed to determine if the student is making satisfactory progress.
   o The same forms are also used to evaluate assistantship performance of the students who have been awarded graduate assistantships. The graduate director shares the results of the semi-annual evaluations with the graduate committee, and asks the graduate committee for guidance in difficult cases. Subsequently, the graduate director uses the semi-annual evaluations to submit the formal annual evaluation of a student's performance to the graduate school.
   o In 2012, graduate faculty approved the addition of a new committee responsible for developing, administering, and evaluating the quality of comprehensive examinations. The comprehensive examination committee consists of four tenure-track or tenured faculty members representing our two areas of concentration: general sociology (two faculty) and criminology (two faculty). After the student has completed the process, the examination committee reports to the graduate director regarding whether the student passed the exam. The graduate director shares the results with the student and departmental faculty.
   o a thesis (with an oral comprehensive examination component) or a comprehensive written examination to be taken in the student's last semester of the M.A.;
   o a paper reporting original empirical research (this requirement may be met by the thesis);

3. Reporting of results
   (Must at least report annually to the Dean of college/school.)
   • Results will be reported annually by July 8th

2018/2019 Academic Assessment Report
(Master of Arts Degree in Sociology)
(07/08/2019)

Evaluation of Student Performance and Learning Outcomes

During the 2018/2019 academic year, the graduate program and the evaluation of student performance was conducted by current department chair and graduate program director. Between May and July 2019, the graduate director reviewed program completion data (MA Thesis defenses and comprehensive exams) and post-graduation (PhD program admission and employment) data for graduating cohort as well as course grades and cumulative GPA for each MA student in our graduate program. This information was discussed with the Graduate Committee, particularly with respect to students who were not making satisfactory progress toward degree. The graduate director also contacted faculty members supervising the graduate assistants and/or serving as faculty advisors/thesis committee chairs. The faculty were asked to evaluate graduate assistant performance and graduate student progress toward completing the degree. This is a formal process using evaluation forms developed by the graduate committee. Subsequently, the graduate director meets with graduate students to discuss the review. The graduate director uses the evaluations to submit the formal annual evaluation of a student's performance to the graduate school (due June 30). In addition, the department chair initiated exit surveys via online survey software (SurveyMonkey). All graduating MA students were sent links to the survey via email. Participation in the survey was voluntary; no identifying information was gathered.

Student Performance Outcomes: New 2018/2019 Cohort

The new 2018/2019 cohort consisted of eleven graduate students. All students were funded through research and teaching assistantships. In addition, the department supported an MA student pursuing a degree in Journalism. The graduate director conducted annual evaluations of all graduate students. All first-year cohort graduate students received positive marks on their assistantship performance, and all first-year graduate students, except one, received positive evaluations of their progress toward the degree. The department was able to support several first and second year graduate students to present their papers at the national Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and the American Criminological Society meetings. In addition, two students presented papers this summer, one at the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and the other at Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS).

Student Performance Outcomes: 2019 Graduating Cohort

A. Satisfaction with MA in Sociology Program
The 2019 graduating cohort included six graduate students. Five graduate students (83%) completed the latest MA program assessment survey conducted May – June 2019. The majority of respondents noted that they would recommend our program to others (Q16 - 80%). The average response score ranged from 2.25 to 4.75 on a scale from 1 through 5. Overall, on all items, the results of the survey show a slight decline from the 2017/2018 (average 2.00 to 5.00). With some exceptions, students expressed satisfaction with the quality of the degree program. We discuss the specific results below.

The survey indicated that students are satisfied (and actually more satisfied than in 2017/2018) with

      (1) content of required courses (Q2 – 4.0)
      (2) number of courses offered (Q3 – 3.0)
      (3) their ability to find faculty members with whom they could talk about professional matters (Q 12 – 4.75) and,

(4) quality of assistantship experiences (Q15 - 4.75)

The level of satisfaction with other aspects of the program was also positive:

(1) content of elective courses (Q5 - 3.5)
(2) level of difficulty of elective courses (Q7 – 4.25)
(3) quality of graduate teaching (Q13 – 4.00)
(4) quality of graduate advising (Q 14 – 3.5)

Again, the major issue raised by the students is variety of elective courses offered (Q6 - 2.25).

B. Evidence that Intended General Educational Goals and Learning Outcomes Are Being Achieved
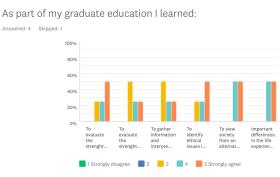#### Program Completion and Post-Graduation Outcomes

The MA Program in Sociology offers two graduation options, including the non-thesis option. In the 2018 graduating cohort, five students pursued the thesis option; one student pursued the non-thesis option. Among the thesis students, two had successfully defended their thesis by the time of this report.

In sum, these outcomes provide evidence that our MA program offers the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools **(Program Goal # 4).**

General Learning Outcomes

According to the survey results, the department is meeting its general educational program goals (Program Goals 1, 2, 3 and 4) and student learning outcomes (Learning Outcomes 2 and 3). Specifically, as Figure 1 (Q-10) demonstrates, our graduates indicated high level of agreement with the statements included under the prompt "As part of my graduate education I learned…" The majority of students *agreed or strongly agreed* with the statement that they learned (1) "to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical perspectives" (75%); (2) "to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods" (50%); (3) "to gather information and interpret the meaning of this information" (50%); and (4) "to identify ethical issues in sociological research" (100%). Moreover, the majority of students *agreed or strongly agreed* with the statements that they learned (1) "important differences in the life experiences of people" (100%); and (2) "to view society from an alternative or critical perspective (100%). The area in which student satisfaction scores had the lowest means were "(2) "to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods" (3) "to gather information and interpret the meaning of this information" (3.5).
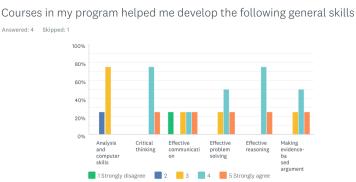
Figure 1: Question 10

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<u>Specific Student Learning Outcomes</u>

According to the data, our graduating students indicate a satisfactory degree of consistency between our stated learning objectives and student learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students know and be able to use as a result of completing our graduate program (Figure 2, Q - 8). Specifically, the majority of students strongly agreed or agreed with a set of statements under the prompt, "Courses in my program helped me develop the following general skills…" (Student Learning Outcomes 2 and 3): critical thinking skills (100%); effective communication skills (50%); effective problem solving (75%); effective reasoning (100%) and making evidence-based arguments (75%), and analysis and computer skills (0%). In terms of average scores, analysis and computer skills received the lowest average score (2.75) and effective communication (3.25).

Figure 2: Question 8

Courses in my program helped me develop the following general skills

Answered: 4   Skipped: 1

■ 1 Strongly disagree   ■ 2   ■ 3   ■ 4   ■ 5 Strongly agree

Finally, responses indicate that courses offered in our program help students develop other skills and intellectual abilities identified as the key components of what the program intends to accomplish. These outcomes were measured by student responses to a set of statements asking them to indicate the level of agreement with a set of statements under the prompt: "Courses in my program helped me to develop an understanding of…." (Program Goal 4 and Learning Outcome 5). In this regard, students expressed high level of agreement with statements related to understanding of "the sociological/ criminological perspective" (4.5); "the overall theoretical foundation of the discipline" (4.5); "the overall methodological foundations of the discipline" (4.0). Understanding of quantitative data analysis (3.5) and understanding of quantitative research design (3.75) were the two areas that received the lowest average scores. Historically, it has been the understanding of qualitative research area that received the lowest scores. Since this is the first time that the quantitative area received low scores, we plan to monitor responses to these questions to establish whether this is a new trend (see below).

Table 1: Question 9 - Courses in my program helped me to develop an understanding of….

BASIC STATISTICS	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	MEDIAN	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION
The sociological/criminological perspective	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.50
The application of sociological/criminological concepts to the analysis of society	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.50
The overall theoretical foundation of the discipline	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.50
The classical theoretical perspectives	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.75	0.43
The contemporary sociological perspectives	4.00	5.00	4.50	4.50	0.50
Criminological Theories	4.00	6.00	5.50	5.25	0.83
The overall methodological foundations of the discipline	3.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	0.71
Qualitative research design	3.00	5.00	4.50	4.25	0.83
Quantitative research design	2.00	5.00	4.00	3.75	1.09
Qualitative data analysis	3.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	1.00
Quantitiave data analysis	2.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	0.87

This year only one respondent provided qualitative feedback.

Summary and changes to degree/certificate planned or made on the basis of the assessment and analysis

With one exception, all of our first-year graduate students (fall 2019 cohort) are making satisfactory progress. One student was dismissed from the program due to unsatisfactory performance (low GPA). Our survey responses and post-graduation outcomes of our 2019 graduating cohort indicate that they will likely utilize the knowledge and skills developed in our program. With regard to satisfaction with the program, the majority of respondents had positive experiences with the professors and graduate assistantships, were satisfied with advising and mentoring, and benefitted from graduate courses. Our primary areas for improvement continue to include:
- expanding the number of elective courses offered in the program
- expanding opportunities to learn and practice effective communication
- increase emphasis on the development of computer skills

One institutional change outside departmental control that might have affected the experiences of this graduating cohort was the transition from graduate student offices located on the first floor of Old Main to Harmon/Fairview apartments. dIn addition to the new graduate offices being located at a remote site, the students now occupy separate offices. All student cubicles in Old Main were located in the same space and all graduate students had access to a common computer lab. Since the 2017 graduating cohort experienced the transition in the middle of their graduate term in the MA Program, they have experienced more of a disruption than what we expect to see in the future.

Summary of planned changes to the assessment method and process

In general, the assessment methods the department uses to evaluate the extent to which the goals of our program and student learning outcomes are satisfactory. Our primary areas for improvement include:
- developing an alumni survey assessing the extent to which our graduates actually utilize the knowledge, skills, and abilities developed in our graduate program
- developing survey questions evaluating program goal # 4 (to offer the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools) and student learning outcome #4 (effectively use social skills to include cooperative learning and group problem-solving)