

**ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN**

**AND**

**2015/2016 UNDERGRADUATE SOCI PROGRAM REPORT**

**Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice**

**Contributors:**

**Mindy Bradley, Bill Schwab, and Anna Zajicek**

**May 27, 2016**

**ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN**  
**DEGREE PROGRAM: SOCIOLOGY, BA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE**  
**(May 27, 2016)**

**Statement of Mission: Undergraduate Program in Sociology**

The mission of the undergraduate 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 sociology undergraduate program 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, students with the B.A. Degree 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.

In addition, students in sociology should have acquired the more specific set of skills:

1. an understanding of the theoretical foundations of the discipline of sociology.
2. an understanding of the methodological foundations of the discipline of sociology
3. an understanding of the sociological perspective (society's structures and processes) emphasizing the relationship between the individual and society.

## **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 CMJS, the undergraduate SOCI committee has the responsibility for reviewing and evaluating our assessment procedures, and for offering suggestions to the faculty. The undergraduate committee is also responsible for developing, 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.)*

- Data collection takes place on an annual basis during spring and fall semesters.
- In 2015, data collection will take place between March 15 and May 1 and November 15 and December 15.
- The analysis of assessment data will take place between May 1 and June 15.

### **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.)*

We use three methods of assessment: 1) a required research paper, 2) a required capstone course, and 3) and exit surveys and exit interviews with graduating seniors. In addition, we do follow-up assessment through an alumni survey.

- The research paper is the same as the one required by the College of Arts and Sciences and follows the guidelines currently in practice for the department. This paper requires that the student demonstrate skills in the areas described above.
- The capstone course is required of all majors in their final semester before graduation. The course requires the student to synthesize material from the major and demonstrate each of the skills listed above. Thus, the grade in this course also reflects the adequacy of the student's preparation. The sociology faculty teaches the capstone course on a rotating basis.
- The exit survey gives us an objective measure and the exit interview a subjective measure of the department's effectiveness at meeting the students' goals.
- Finally, the follow-up alumni survey helps us determine if our program has been successful in preparing students for careers and/or further professional study.

### **3. Reporting of results**

*(Must at least report annually to the Dean of college/school.)*

- Result will be reported annually by June 1

## **2015/2016 Academic Assessment Report**

### **DEGREE PROGRAM: SOCIOLOGY, BA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE (May 27, 2016)**

The Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice employed several measures to assess the academic achievement of its criminal justice and sociology majors:

- A. A research paper
- B. A capstone course
- C. An exit survey

The results of these various methods indicated that the department was performing well and accomplishing its goals.

#### **The Research Paper**

All students who graduated during AY 2015-2016 submitted adequate analytic/research papers in accordance with our and the College of Arts and Science's writing requirement.

#### **The Capstone Course and Exit Interviews**

SOCI 4043, Senior Seminar, is the capstone course for the undergraduate degrees in sociology and criminal justice. There were 33 undergraduates enrolled in SOCI 4043: Senior Seminar during Fall 2015. Among them, 30 students (91%) passed; one student withdrew, and two students received an "I." There were 24 undergraduates enrolled in SOCI 4043 during Spring 2016. Of these, 92% (N=22) passed and two students received an "I." The capstone course is used to conduct exit interviews for sociology major and sociology and criminal justice double majors.

A 30-minute exit interview for the majors is an integral part of the course, and the instructor interviews all graduating seniors through this course. The instructor conducted exit interviews in two sections of the course, Fall 2015, and one section during the Spring 2016 semester. The interviews were informal but used the same series of open-ended questions.

#### **The Interview Protocol**

The instructor explained the purpose of the course to each student, described the types of information collected, and how this information would be used to improve the quality of our undergraduate programs. The instructor also informed them that the interviews were confidential, the information would be reported in a way that they could not be identified, and that they could opt out of the interview or stop the interview at any time. All students participated. The interview questions include:

1. Why did you choose the major?
2. If you had to do it all over again, would you choose the same major?
3. Would you describe your favorite courses?

4. Would you describe the courses you liked least?
5. Is there a professor that you would like to talk about?
6. Did you have trouble getting core courses in a timely manner?
7. Can you suggest changes in the curriculum?
8. What are your plans after graduation?
9. How well did we do in preparing you for the job market or graduate/law school?

#### Findings: Strengths

- The vast majority of Criminal Justice majors chose the major as freshmen; Sociology majors often took a more circuitous route declaring the major later in their career.
- All the students said they would choose the major over again. Many interviewees were enthusiastic about the degree program.
- Students tended to focus on favorite professors rather than specific courses—they mentioned Chris Shields most often.
- *Social Data and Analysis, Research Methods, and Theory* were the students' least favorite courses. These three are perennial choices.
- Many majors mentioned caring and helpful professors whose mentorship, in some cases, changed the direction of their careers and lives. Not surprisingly, based on the nature of the position, they mentioned the Internship Coordinator most frequently. Unlike the past, students did not make negative comments about a professor
- This cohort is the first not to mention the backlog in core courses. It appears that the department has successfully addressed this issue.
- Approximately 20% of students are planning to attend graduate or law school, and a few will join the military or law enforcement after graduation. The rest are looking for jobs

#### Findings: Areas for Improvement

- Students would like to see more electives. They feel that the department does not offer enough courses covering important and timely topics in the fields of criminal justice and sociology.
- Students indicated that most of the career placement advising they received was informal and concentrated among individual faculty members. Facing an increasingly competitive job market, they would prefer that more formal assistance with job-seeking be integrated in the program. The department will work with the Career Development Center to address these concerns. Importantly, receiving summer support for the Undergraduate Director would greatly help the department to address these concerns.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Many of our students will not be declared majors as freshmen. Career development needs to begin earlier to build student confidence and address these concerns. We will work with Career Services to develop and offer a 1-hour course for majors prior to their senior year. Career development needs to begin in our major's freshmen year with a practical, grounded 1-hour course coordinated with Career Services. Having the Undergraduate Director available through the summer to meet with our majors and counsel them regarding the skills they need and choices they have is a critical component of this effort.

## Online Survey

An online, electronically administered twenty-three-item questionnaire collected evaluations from students regarding the adequacy of their education and the skills they obtained. Of the 68 total subjects that replied to the survey request, approximately 33% (N=22) of respondents were male, 72% of respondents (N=48) were white, 10% (N=7) were Black; 16% of respondents (N=11) reported Hispanic origin. Many participants (43%) indicated they were combined SOCI-CMJS majors; 22% of the participants were dual majors with the second major other than sociology or criminal justice. The majority of the participants were juniors or seniors (68%). The findings presented are based on a total of 68 completed surveys.

Analyses show that students generally were satisfied with the content of course work in the major, the relevancy and difficulty of the curriculum, the depth and breadth of course offerings, and the adequacy of instruction and advising. Overall, responses indicated that all students were pleased with their experience within the department. A significant number of them planned to further their education, many would select their major again, and nearly everyone would recommend their major to others. We discuss specific findings in detail below.

### Findings:

1. Quality of the curriculum. Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the content, difficulty, and variety of the curriculum. On a scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree, students rate their agreement with the statements “I am satisfied with the variety of courses offered by my degree program” (Figure 1) and “I am satisfied with the content of the major” (Figure 2). Overall agreement with the first statement was average, with 52% of students rating their agreement as 4 and higher; agreement with the second statement was also average with 55% of respondents reporting their agreement as 4 and higher. Only a handful of students (14% and 8%, respectively) reported a rating of 2 and lower, indicating that a very few students expressed disagreement with these statements. These findings confirm the information received in the exit interviews regarding the need for a greater selection of undergraduate electives and possibly including more timely topics in our courses.

Fig. 1

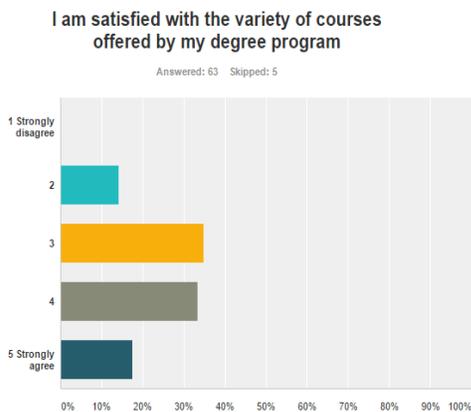
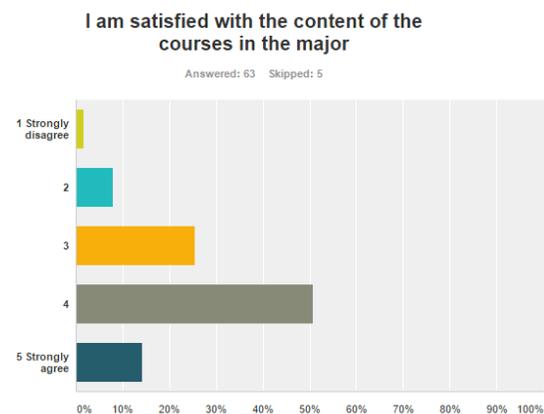
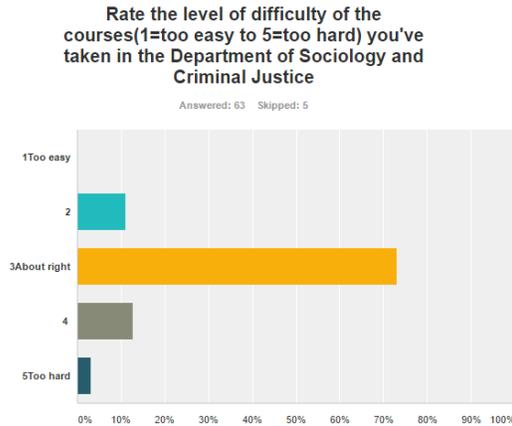


Fig. 2



2. Difficulty of the curriculum. Students rated their agreement with a statement of satisfaction regarding the difficulty of the curriculum. Figure 3 shows students indicating that the level of difficulty is “about right” (73%); only a handful of students (11%) indicated the courses are too easy.

Fig. 3



3. Program Goals 3 and 4. We measured our program goals 3 and 4 by asking students questions related to understanding of the historical, social, intellectual bases of human culture and environment, providing habits of thought and skills useful in later life. among others. Figure 4 indicates that students reported high satisfaction with the level of understanding they gained; Figure 5 indicates that 66% of our students strongly agree that they know several theories in their area.

Fig. 4

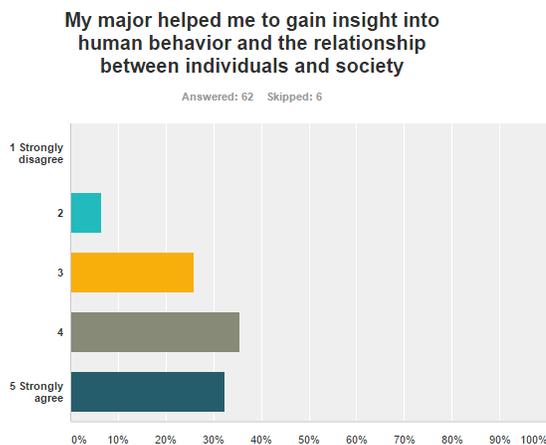
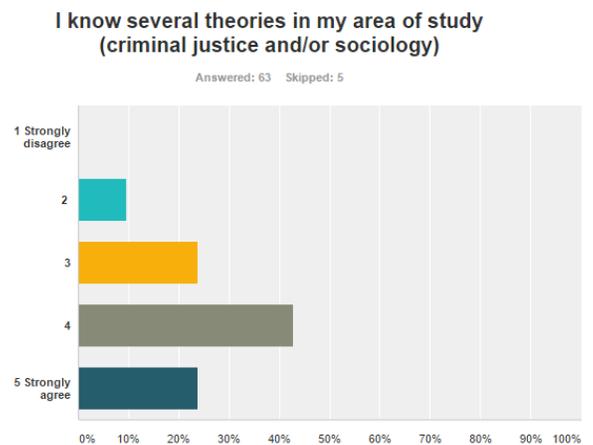


Fig. 5



As Figure 6 demonstrates, 51% of the respondents strongly agree they have learned how to conduct research in their major area (Fig. 6). With regard to habits useful in later life, 41% of our students agree that they have acquired leadership skills (Fig. 7). While many students agreed that they were satisfied or very satisfied with this aspect of their education, some disagreed (27%).

Fig. 6

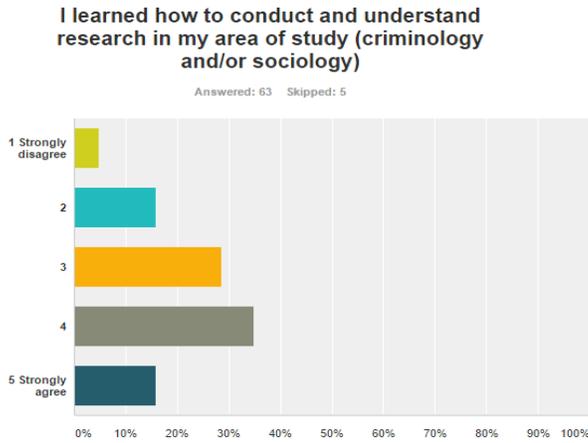
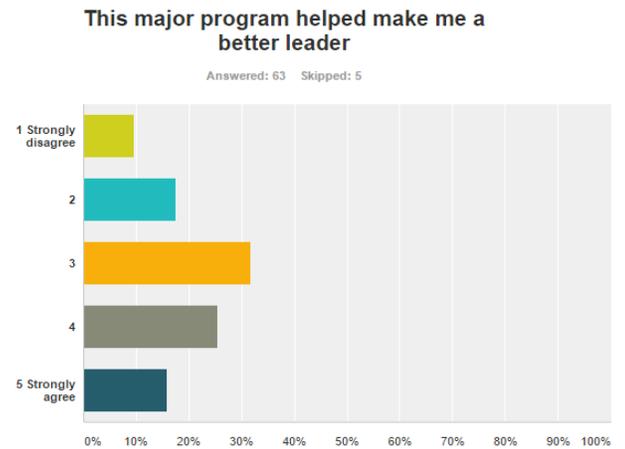


Fig. 7



4. Student Learning Outcomes (6-8). Finally, we asked a set of questions asking students to reflect on the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they have acquired and be able to do as a result of our program. Overall, students feel very positively about our performance. Responses suggest that the department is meeting the programmatic goals consistent with our mission. Specifically, Figures 8 and 9 indicate that students highly agreed that the major improved their writing and critical thinking abilities.

Fig. 8

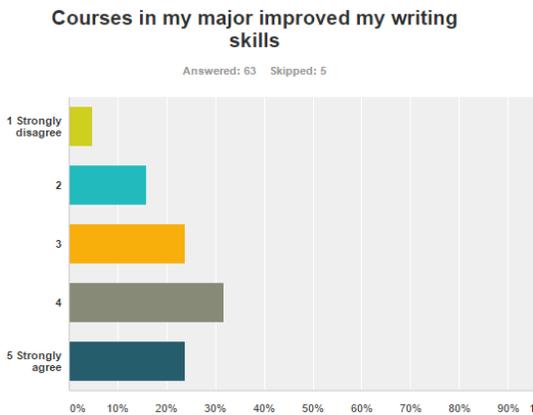
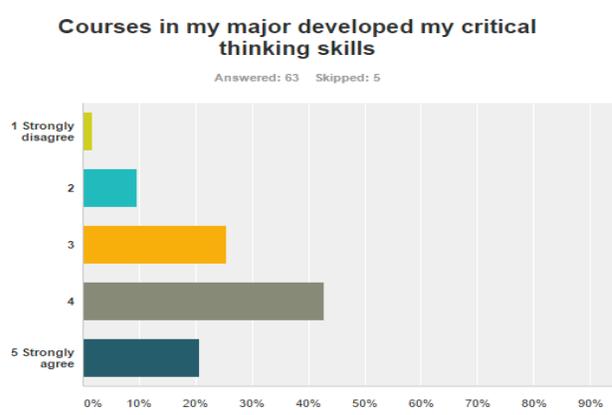


Fig. 9



Additional findings indicated that the majority of the respondents feel the degree is valuable (Fig. 10) and 75% of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they were glad they chose their major (Fig. 11). Similarly, nearly 89% (24 out of 27) reported that they would recommend their major to others.

Fig. 10

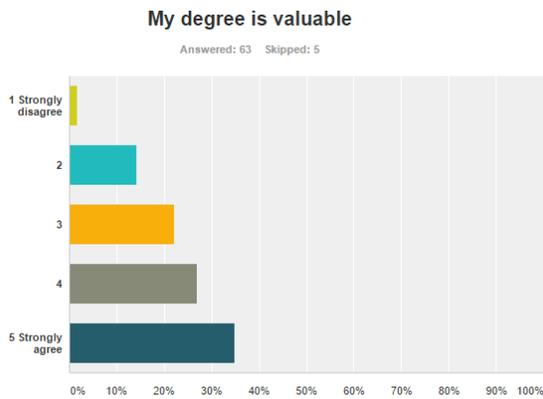
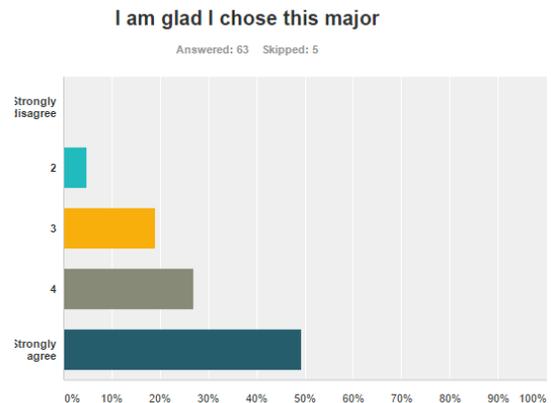


Fig. 11



### Summary

In general, our findings indicate that our department is performing well. Our students are satisfied with their experiences in the department, have positive experiences with the professors, and benefit from their courses. While we are meeting or exceeding all of our student learning objectives, we should strive for improvement in meeting students' interests regarding the breadth of program offerings and our programmatic goal of development of leadership skills. Moreover, need to work with Career Services to develop and offer a 1-hour course for majors prior to their senior year. Resource-wise, the Department is one of the largest majors in the Fulbright College, with over 450 majors in Sociology and Criminal Justice, but the Undergraduate Director position is budgeted at nine months only. Having the Undergraduate Director available through the summer to meet with our majors and counsel them regarding the skills they need and choices they have is a critical component of this effort.