

**ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN
DEGREE PROGRAM: SOCIOLOGY, MA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINOLOGY**

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

(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

(Student Learning Outcomes are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will know and be able to do upon program completion. 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; and
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 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, as well as 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 and summarizing the results of the graduating student survey (i.e., alumni survey).

1. Timeline for assessment and analysis

(Must include specific timeline for collection and analysis of assessment data.). Data collection occurs annually during the spring and fall semesters. For this cycle, data were collected between May and June, and the analysis of assessment results was completed in June.

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.)

The graduate director contacts faculty members who are supervising master's theses or comprehensive exams in December and May to determine how well our students are doing. In addition, the graduate director conducts annual graduate student evaluations in May and June (for continuing students). 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.

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 annual evaluations with the graduate committee, and asks the graduate committee for guidance in difficult cases. Subsequently, the graduate director uses the annual evaluations to submit the formal annual evaluation of a student's performance to the graduate school as required by university policy.

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 three tenure-track or tenured faculty members representing our two areas of concentration: general sociology and criminology. 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.

3. Reporting of results

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

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Results will be reported annually by July 15th

2024/2025 Academic Assessment Report Master of Arts Degree in Sociology

Evaluation of Student Performance and Learning Outcomes

During the 2024/2025 academic year, the graduate program and the evaluation of student performance were conducted by the graduate program director. Between May and June 2024, the graduate director reviewed program completion data (MA Thesis defenses and practicums) and post-graduation (PhD program admission and employment) data for the graduating cohort, as well as course grades and cumulative GPA for each graduate student. The director also contacted, where possible, 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. In addition, the graduate director initiated exit interviews with students in May. Participation was voluntary and no identifying information was gathered.

Student Performance Outcomes: New 2023/2024 Cohort

The 2024/2025 cohort consisted of 10 graduate students, all of whom were funded through research and teaching assistantships. Each first-year student received positive evaluations for their assistantship performance as well as satisfactory progress reviews toward the degree. In addition, the department supported several graduate students who presented research papers at the American Society of Criminology annual meeting in Philadelphia, PA.

Student Performance Outcomes: 2025 Graduating Cohort

A. Satisfaction with MA in Sociology Program

As part of this year's review, the graduate director conducted interviews with the graduating cohort rather than administering a survey. These conversations provided valuable insight into the students' experiences in the program. The graduating students consistently reported positive feedback, noting that they developed a wide range of academic and professional skills through their coursework, research, and assistantship responsibilities. They also described how the program strengthened their ability to conduct independent research, present their work at professional conferences, and collaborate effectively with peers. In addition, students highlighted the strong mentoring relationships they built with faculty, emphasizing that this guidance was instrumental in shaping their academic development, supporting their progress toward the degree, and preparing them for future career opportunities.

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

The MA Program in Sociology currently offers three graduation options, including the thesis option, the non-thesis practicum option, and the non-thesis option/comprehensive examination. While our program continues to train MA students for entry into Ph.D. programs and academic careers, we have expanded opportunities for more applied sociology and criminology placement options. As such, and in conjunction with the consistent feedback for more elective course offerings, we are working to introduce additional elective courses, particularly as they relate to technical skill acquisition, writing and communication, and emerging substantive areas in the social sciences. In the 2024/2025 graduating cohort, all ten students pursued the thesis or practicum option. By July 2025, all had successfully defended their thesis or completed their practicums and four matriculated into PhD programs.

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 interviews, the department is generally meeting its educational program goals and student learning outcomes. Specifically, our graduate students indicate that they learned (1) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical perspectives; (2) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods; (3) to gather information and interpret the meaning of this information; (4) to identify ethical issues in sociological research; (5) important differences in the life experiences of people; (6) to view society from an alternative or critical perspective; and (7) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods.

Specific Student Learning Outcomes

According to interview data with the graduating cohort, students indicated a strong degree of consistency between the program's stated learning objectives and the knowledge, skills, and abilities they developed and were able to apply upon completion of the program. In particular, graduating students emphasized that their coursework and assistantship experiences supported the development of critical thinking skills, effective communication skills, problem solving, reasoning, evidence-based argumentation, and analytic and computer skills (Student Learning Outcomes #2 and #3).

In addition, the interviews revealed that students believed the program helped them build broader intellectual abilities aligned with the program's goals. Graduates consistently noted that their courses deepened their understanding of the sociological and criminological perspective; the theoretical foundations of the discipline; the methodological foundations of the discipline; and quantitative data analysis (Program Goal #4 and Learning Outcome #5). Overall, feedback from the graduating cohort reinforced that the program's core objectives were achieved and that students left well prepared for their future career and academic pursuits.

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

Without exception, all first-year graduate students in the new cohort who continued in the program through the spring 2025 semester are making satisfactory progress. To date, most respondents have had positive experiences with the professors, were largely 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, an issue that was also noted by our graduating MA students. We have struggled with this issue for several years due to the introduction of two concentrations (general sociology and criminology in 2012) and the increasing competition for SSCHs that has led to an inward-orientation of academic units. Our graduate cohorts are sometimes too small to fill our elective classes associated with our concentrations, particularly when our cohorts are unbalanced (e.g., larger first year cohort, but smaller second year cohort). To address this issue, we began to cross-list our graduate and senior-level undergraduate classes. However, the graduate faculty have diverging perspectives on this strategy and the department has prioritized a curriculum review to strategically resolve this issue. In other cases, the department has sought to offer fewer electives in any one semester but better identify the cornerstone courses that can be taken by both criminology- and sociology-track students alike. To address this ongoing challenge, the Acting Chair has asked the incoming Graduate Director and Graduate Committee to undertake a full curriculum revision and present their recommendations to the department during Fall 2025 semester.

Summary of what the department has done to address to areas for improvement listed

The Department Chair and Graduate committee prioritized a strategic review of both graduate and undergraduate curriculum across our department-serving majors. Attention was paid to the allocation of tenure- and tenure-track faculty to assess the extent to which the department might better utilize the expertise in the department. This included identifying additional cross-listed courses at the graduate level that could serve both tracks, while highlighting areas of redundancy in our instruction that could free up graduate teaching to serve more elective courses.