

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN

AND

2017/2018 GRADUATE STUDENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Department of Sociology and Criminology

Prepared by

Anna Zajicek (Department Chair)

Shauna Morimoto (Vice-Chair and Graduate Program Director)

June 24, 2018

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT PLAN
DEGREE PROGRAM: SOCIOLOGY, MA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CRIMINOLOGY
(June 30, 2018)

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 Criminal Justice 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 CMJS, 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.)

- 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 May 20.

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 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.;
- 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 14

(Master of Arts Degree in Sociology)
(07/08/2017)

Evaluation of Student Performance and Learning Outcomes

During the 2017/2018 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 2018, 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 2017/2018 Cohort

The new 2017/2018 cohort consisted of eight graduate students, seven were funded through research and teaching assistantships; one student was self-supported. In addition, the department supported an MA student pursuing a degree in Journalism. In December 2017, one of our first-year graduate students had to leave the program and the country due to her family situation. This former student has subsequently been offered employment with the Australian Federal Police. 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 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 will be presenting papers this summer, one at the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and the other at Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS). Further, two graduate students traveled on research assignment with one of our faculty. Finally, Whitney Frierson, our MA graduate student and Arkansas native, has been selected as a participant in the 2018 University of Michigan Humanities Emerging Research Scholars Program.

Student Performance Outcomes: 2018 Graduating Cohort

A. Satisfaction with MA in Sociology Program

The 2018 graduating cohort included 12 graduate students. Six graduate students (50%) completed the latest MA program assessment survey conducted May – June 2018. The majority of respondents noted that they would recommend our program to others (Q16 - 67%). The average response score ranged from 2.0 to 5.0, on a scale from 1 through 5. Overall, on all items, the results of the survey show a slight decline from the 2015/2016 (average 3.8 to 5.0) but remain in line with the 2016/2017 results when the range of satisfaction as measured by the average response scores was 2.8 – 4.6. 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 somewhat satisfied with

- (1) content of required courses (Q2 – 3.67)
- (2) number of courses offered (Q3 – 3.17)
- (3) their ability to find faculty members with whom they could talk about professional matters (Q12 – 4.67) and,
- (4) quality of assistantship experiences (Q15 - 4.0)

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 – 4.17)
- (3) quality of graduate teaching (Q13 – 4.17)
- (4) quality of graduate advising (Q 14 – 3.5)

Again, the major issue raised by the students is variety of elective courses offered (Q6 - 2.0).

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; seven students pursued the non-thesis option. Among the thesis students, four had successfully defended their thesis by the end of the spring semester.

With regard to post-graduation paths, several students have accepted job offers or are in the process of seeking employment in closely related fields. One graduate (Madeline Brice) has accepted a position of criminal intelligence analyst at the fusion center located in the OSBI headquarter in Oklahoma City. Connor Thompson accepted job offer from NavAir where he will be working on the civilian side. Liz Ward accepted a year-long position with Americorps in partnership with South Dakota State University. Sam Thomas will be continuing his education in the MS in Analytics Program at the North Carolina State University.

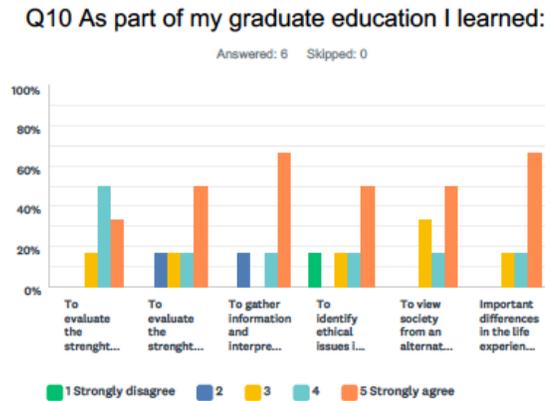
In sum, these outcomes provide evidence that our MA program offers the necessary foundation for professional competence or further training in professional or graduate schools (**Program Goal # 4**).

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” (83%); (2) “to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods” (67%); (3) “to gather information and interpret the meaning of this information” (83%); and (4) “to identify ethical issues in sociological research” (67%). Moreover, the majority of students *agreed or strongly agreed* with the statements that they learned (1) “important

differences in the life experiences of people” (80%); and (2) “to view society from an alternative or critical perspective (80%). The area in which student satisfaction scores had the lowest mean was again learning how “identify ethical issues in sociological research” (3.8).

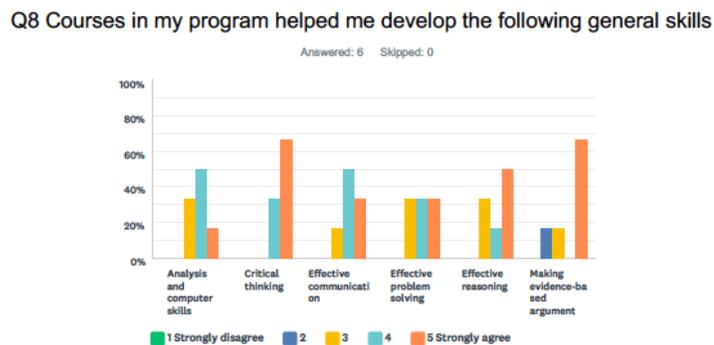
Figure 1: Question 10



Specific Student Learning Outcomes

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 (83%); effective problem solving (67%); effective reasoning (67%) and making evidence-based arguments (67%), and analysis and computer skills (67%). In terms of average scores, analysis and computer skills received the lowest average score (3.8).

Figure 2: Question 8



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” (4.33); “the overall theoretical foundation of the discipline” (4.2); “the overall methodological foundations of the discipline (4.0).” The application of sociological/criminological concepts to the analysis of society (3.67) and understanding of qualitative research design and analyses (3.8) were only areas that received lower average scores. Based on additional comments, the consistency with which understanding of qualitative research area receive lower scores is very likely a reflection of the more quantitative orientation in the content of our graduate courses than the quality of teaching our qualitative methods course (see below).

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

	1 STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 STRONGLY AGREE (5)	NOT APPLICABLE (6)	TOTAL
The sociological/criminological perspective	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	6
The application of sociological/criminological concepts to the analysis of society	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6
The overall theoretical foundation of the discipline	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6
The classical theoretical perspectives	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	0.00% 0	6
The contemporary sociological perspectives	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	16.67% 1	6
Criminological Theories	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	6
The overall methodological foundations of the discipline	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	6
Qualitative research design	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	6
Quantitative research design	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6
Qualitative data analysis	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50.00% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	6
Quantitative data analysis	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	6

Qualitative Responses:

Q22 Please provide any additional comments or suggestions regarding the program curriculum

Answered: 5 Skipped: 1

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I think the program curriculum is fantastic, although offering more electives would be beneficial for future students.	5/9/2018 1:51 PM
2	The alternating of electives for crim in the fall made it hard to find classes that were actually applicable.	5/8/2018 3:08 PM
3	The variety of courses offered is lacking. I left some courses not feeling confident about the subject that I was supposed to have learned.	5/7/2018 7:26 AM
4	Proseminar could use some revamping. Some of the talks/presentations that were given were helpful, others not as much. "How to present at a conference" is helpful, but only to a small handful of students, and then only later in their schooling. Topics like that could be covered later in the year, or on an individual basis with students who are actually about to go to a conference. More information on thesis vs. comps, what a thesis actually is and what it involves, etc. would be very helpful (Dr. Bradley took time out of another class to explain this in-depth, she presents it in a way that would be helpful to first-year students). Overall, each topic of proseminar should be looked at, and ones that only pertain to select students at some point in their career could probably be sacrificed or rearranged to make room for more basic information and more immediately pertinent information. If it's somehow possible to move Qualitative Methods to the first year it would be a great idea. Currently, we were only exposed to quantitative research and analysis methods in the first year. Knowing more about qual. methods would allow some people to make a more informed decision regarding thesis vs. comps, and research topics for a thesis. A qualitative-based thesis is probably not as practical in a 2-year Masters degree, but learning about it sooner in order to have it as an option would still be nice. More elective options would be beneficial for grad students. I know the department is already well aware of this, and that numerous factors go into elective availability, but it would always be a welcome addition.	5/5/2018 8:49 PM
5	I would have like more choice in sociology electives.	5/5/2018 7:31 PM

Q23 Please provide any additional comments or suggestions regarding advising and/or mentoring

Answered: 5 Skipped: 1

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I think hosting more events where students are able to engage with faculty would be great. Also faculty being aware that graduate students are trying to get to know them to possibly work with them on a project would be beneficial. Some faculty are great and love to connect, but others are not.	5/9/2018 1:51 PM
2	Finding an advisor was on the student. That was somewhat challenging. Perhaps you could consider providing a mentor at least in the beginning to get each student on a good track. Resolves ambiguities.	5/8/2018 3:08 PM
3	I think the department can greatly improve on advising and mentoring. It seems that students with certain assistantships get more one-on-one care compared to others, regardless of their ability or talent. We need more career-focused mentoring, whether the student plans to get a job after graduation or pursue a PhD.	5/7/2018 7:26 AM
4	As the second year students are all out looking for jobs right now, I have to be honest and say that the department could definitely improve on preparing us for job searches or helping us know what's out there. Even just a proseminar topic (but preferably more than that) on how a Sociology degree can be used in different career fields, how it can be applied outside of academia. Other than going on to get a PhD or becoming a research assistant somewhere, almost no information or advice was given. Individual faculty members have been helpful when I ask them, but the department as a whole hasn't done this. Formalized mentoring for non-thesis GAs would be helpful. Research assistants and thesis students get more of this by nature of their work relationship with faculty members, but it is definitely not a given with regular GAs. The professors I've worked with provided advice and mentoring to different degrees, but usually only intermittently. Having a more intentional, formalized mentoring program/relationship would be helpful in development as a grad student and in preparation for careers or PhD work.	5/5/2018 8:49 PM
5	It's very difficult to build a relationship with a thesis advisor or mentor if you haven't worked with someone before entering the program.	5/5/2018 7:31 PM

Q24 Please provide any additional comments regarding your overall experience in this MA program

Answered: 5 Skipped: 1

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I think specifically with the proseminar class graduate students take their first semester is a vital decision maker for whether a student goes the thesis route or the comps route. I think giving students a realistic example of each would be very beneficial. I have discussed with a professor in the department that collectively as a cohort we felt pressured into comps because we were not going on for a PHD. If I could do this experience over, I would have done a thesis. I wish I did not let one professor's comments sway my decision making because I am not strong with quantitative analysis, however, I am very strong in all other areas. The comps exam are pass/fail and if you are weak in one particular area, it could unfortunately be the determining factor of whether you receive an M.A. or not.	5/9/2018 1:51 PM
3	Overall, I gained a lot of skills and enjoyed the experience, but in my job search at this time, I do not feel like I am reaping any benefits from my degree.	5/7/2018 7:26 AM
4	I am very pleased with the MA program overall and my experience with the Sociology Department and the university. Although the faculty were very busy and sometimes difficult to track down, they were all very approachable and helpful when asked. They were also very professional, with no complaints or negativity towards other faculty or students. It felt like being part of a tight-knit community. My critical thinking skills, knowledge of sociological topics and sociological imagination ;) have all increased immensely. I feel I have gained enough competence to get a job involving research, and am better prepared and more qualified for any job in general.	5/5/2018 8:49 PM
5	It would have been better to know summer funding opportunities and assignments earlier.	5/5/2018 7:31 PM

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

All of our first-year graduate students (fall 2018 cohort) are making satisfactory progress. Our survey responses and post-graduation outcomes of our 2018 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 the coverage of qualitative research design and analysis in our required courses
- expanding the coverage and discussion of ethical issues in sociological research
- increase emphasis on the application of sociological/criminological concepts to the analysis of society

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. In 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)