

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Assessment Report 2008-2009
MA Program

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology encompasses two academic disciplines that contribute fundamental components to liberal arts education. According to the American Sociological Association, approximately one quarter of Sociology departments are conjoined with Anthropology in a variety of institutional arrangements reflecting their shared intellectual background and particular institutional histories and needs. Both disciplines focus on similarities that constitute us as humanity as well as differences that separate us as groups according to such factors as ethnicity, environment, gender, age, class, and religion. Thus, Sociology and Anthropology bridge the humanities and social sciences in addressing fundamental questions having to do not only with how the human world works but also with what it *means* to be human. The disciplines derive from joined theoretical traditions and topical interests with a focus on how people negotiate their social and cultural realities. For instance, while both frequently study social phenomena such as “the family,” they do so at different levels, through different methodological approaches, or through different theoretical lenses. While anthropologists may study the family from a kinship structure approach, sociologists may approach the same topic from structural-functional or symbolic interactionist perspectives. The different disciplinary “takes” on shared topics provide specific, yet complementary, strategies for studying a range of social and cultural phenomena. The work of sociologists and anthropologists like Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, C. Wright Mills, George Herbert Mead, Norbert Elias, Zygmunt Bauman, Manuel Castells, Immanuel Wallerstein, Erving Goffman, Margaret Mead, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Franz Boas continue to inform contemporary society and they enrich the way we all understand ourselves as human, whether or not we recognize the intellectual background to our ideas. Any institution that aspires to maintain an advanced research and teaching agenda must incorporate these disciplines and their illuminating perspectives on human social life and its kaleidoscope of diverse forms.

As outlined in the university’s Mission Statement, the program supports our students as they are encouraged to recognize themselves as humans in a globalized world where knowledge about cultural and social differences is becoming increasingly important. Likewise, critical thinking abilities in these areas help to educate students to become socially responsible citizens in a diverse democracy and to become active contributors to the economic and educational development of their communities and West Virginia. The department answers these calls to provide students with greater cross-cultural awareness and analytical skills. In the MA program in Sociology, students develop their thinking and understanding of the great diversity of human communities, at home and abroad. Such perspectives are essential for those pursuing any kind of career in the 21st century and advanced training in such perspectives prepares students to pursue both an academic career and to strive for professional excellence.

II Current Assessment Goals and Activities

As it was recognized in the department’s latest five year review report (finalized in October 2008), the department has had virtually no formalized assessment goals or activities in the past years. As a consequence of the comments to the five year review report from the dean, the review committee, etc., the department has this fall devoted significant effort to the development of a solid foundation for a functional and forward looking assessment plan; our progress was described in the requested

Progress Report (finalized in October 2009). I attached the plan as it currently looks with its focus on our undergraduate program.

We naturally recognize that more work is needed before an assessment plan can be fully implemented. To develop an assessment plan for the graduate level, the different character of the MA program must be considered (for instance its lower enrollment, its shorter duration of study, and the lower number of core courses). We will continue to work with this over the coming months and it is our expectation that we will have the first assessment activities in agreement with our plan executed in spring 2010.

The resulting assessment instruments will revolve around four goals for the students in our graduate program:

- A. To acquire increased breadth and depth of substantive and theoretical sociological knowledge and to critically reflect on the obtained knowledge.
- B. To acquire quantitative and qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation, and application, and to be able to demonstrate skills in at least one of these research paradigms in the form of a public presentation.
- C. To equip students with the ability to convey sociological concepts and knowledge and to be able to demonstrate this ability by teaching an undergraduate sample class.
- D. To acquire an awareness of career and educational opportunities available with a Master's degree in sociology.

While developing the assessment instrument, we will largely focus on the core classes, which all students must pass on their way towards the MA degree. The described goal A will be linked with the theory courses and electives, goal B with the research methods courses, and goals C and D with the new course on professional development. Additionally, all goals are also reinforced in electives. In the revised curriculum, students must develop a portfolio. All the portfolios will be reviewed and evaluated by the departmental faculty to determine whether or not the department is meeting its objectives. In addition, we will continue to employ instruments that have been used in the past such as the graduate survey focusing on the perceived quality of our department and qualitative interviews and feedback during the spring assessment day.

ASSESSMENT PLAN
FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIOLOGY
PROGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND
ANTHROPOLOGY

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

I. Department Mission Statement

According to Marshall University's Mission Statement (<http://www.marshall.edu/president/strategic/mission.asp>), the faculty charge is to support and actively contribute to the "preservation, discovery, synthesis, and dissemination of knowledge." The section of the statement most relevant to faculty involvement with students assigns to the professoriate the following responsibilities:

- a) to sustain an active student involvement in the learning process
- b) to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to an engaged citizenry
- c) through interaction and mentoring, to prepare students to better understand the world they occupy

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology wholeheartedly endorses the university's prescriptive and pledges to assure an instructional protocol designed to accomplish all these purposes. The undergraduate sociology curriculum is intended to provide an understanding of the interactions and workings of societies, their institutions, organizations and groups. Through an introduction to the basic concepts, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches of the discipline, we seek to familiarize students with the sociological imagination, encouraging a deeper understanding of the relationships between personal experience (one's own and others) and the social world. Our courses are explicitly designed to acquaint students with diverse cultures and social structures and to emphasize the dynamics of power and inequality on local, national and global levels, as they operate through race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. The wider goal, of course, is to provide opportunities for students to develop agency and a sense of social responsibility by critically engaging the social world outside the classroom.

The department emphasizes the active engagement of our students in sociological inquiry. Toward that end, many courses are designed to teach students the basis of theory construction and methodological processes. Our courses encourage students to make their own discoveries about human social experiences, and all seniors are required to synthesize and apply what they have learned in the completion of a faculty-mentored Senior Capstone course.

While the department's curriculum provides a strong foundation for graduate work in the discipline, our strength is in the development of strong critical and analytical skills which are essential for success in any chosen life course. In the tradition of a liberal arts education, the sociology curriculum hopes to promote in our students a sense of curiosity about the diverse ways humans create, transform and adapt to their surroundings and a self reflection and appreciation of perspectives and experiences outside their own. If successful, we will have done our part to create a public intellectualism, a citizenry that

maintains an attentive, constructive and articulate engagement with community issues and the social affairs of the day.

II. Assessment Plan: Program Goals/Outcomes

The architecture of a viable assessment plan rests on a general statement of program goals accompanied by specific outcomes that should clearly define what students are expected to accomplish as they proceed through the program. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology's assessment plan for its undergraduate sociology program (see addendum) consists of five program goals broadly outlined that are characteristic of sociology's historic traditions and are consistent with the university's mission.

A) Cultivating critical thinking and analysis

Evaluating the ability of our students to master such critical thinking will involve a determination of whether they have the capacity to identify the assumptions and limitations that underlie the various theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches typically employed in sociological research. Such mastery should also entail the ability to recognize the basis upon which sociological viewpoints are constructed and an appreciation for rival hypotheses. Moreover, when interpreting social science data and literature students should be able to indicate when generalizations are germane and when they are inappropriate.

B) Developing the capacity to think sociologically (cultivating the "sociological imagination")

The "sociological imagination" defines the discipline's unique approach to knowledge of the social world and thus constitutes its very foundation. It is vital, therefore, that students be able to distinguish between sociology and the other social sciences as well as describe sociology's distinct contributions. Furthermore, students must come to apply the sociological imagination routinely; to "see" the intersection of history and biography and appreciate how "private troubles" are often precipitated by "public issues." Finally, our majors should be able to explain how culture shapes our thoughts, feelings, and actions and that "who we are" is profoundly influenced by social processes and traditions we are sometimes only vaguely aware of.

C) Equipping students with the ability to apply sociological concepts/theory to an analysis of human agency and social structure

All social science disciplines have a theoretical core and sociology is no exception. To navigate the sociological literature, students must be able to distinguish between various theoretical orientations, appreciate how theory informs empirical research, and explain the historical and cultural contexts of theories' origins and evolution. In the process, certain basic concepts must be assimilated so that sociologists can communicate using a common vocabulary. Moreover, students should never lose sight of theoretical explanations for the role of the individual and how social interaction is crucial for the development of culture and structure but the formation of the self as well.

D) Equipping students with the methodological tools needed to gather and use data to study social life

No enterprise can be constructed without the use of the proper tools. If theory constitutes the foundation stones, the building blocks of the edifice are represented by empirical research and therefore, to carry the analogy one step further, the sociological craftsman must master edgers and trowels. The student must thus be able to formulate a research question, identify data specific to that question, and choose a method best suited to the investigation. The ability to apply various statistical principles and techniques should also be a part of the students' toolbox. A mastery of these tools will enable a skillful execution of one's own research and the ability to critically evaluate the research efforts of others.

E) Providing students with the opportunity to plan and implement original research demonstrating an integration of sociological thinking, theory and research methods

A novice working independently, deftly and with confidence, should be the culminating signature of any apprenticeship program. In most sociology courses, especially upper division and independent study courses, selecting a research topic, collecting data and reviewing the literature, and composing a manuscript that details findings and conclusions is a characteristic feature of the syllabus. It is during the Senior Capstone experience, however, that all the research skills that students have assimilated are brought to bear in an original project that includes the collection and analysis of primary or secondary data grounded in relevant theoretical and empirical literatures.

III. Assessment Plan: Course/Outcomes Matrix

The assessment of programmatic objectives commences with a linkage between the specified goals and the courses where the measurement of those goals will take place (see addendum). It should be noted that all sociology courses, to one extent or another, tend to pursue the stated departmental aims so that the matrix is essentially arbitrary. However, since those concentrating in sociology will all pass through certain courses, the template primarily features the department's course requirements; all other course offerings are collapsed under an "electives" category. The matrix, therefore, characterizes only the principal or major linkages between courses and goals. It is within the required courses that students' abilities can be most accurately captured.

For most of the objectives, student outcomes will be measured in more than one course permitting a conventional pre- and post-test model over some duration of time. Where that is not feasible and only a single course is linked to a specific outcome, several complementary measures administered at different points in time should assure a valid measure of student competency. Instead of attempting to measure all outcomes annually over a 4-year cycle, the department is inclined to stagger the measurement of different outcomes in a sequential fashion. Ultimately, in the near term, the departmental faculty will collaboratively design the various measurement instruments and establish benchmarks compatible with the department's objectives.

IV. Assessment Plan: Portfolio Requirement

An assessment of student capabilities typically involves measurement instruments that yield quantifiable sums (e.g., percentages, ratios, means, medians, etc.). Although useful as an aggregate gauge of capacity, such measurements usually ignore a visceral sense of how students actually conceive of the quality of their own educational experience. In order to measure the quality of the educational experience, the department will require each student, as part of the Senior Capstone, to submit a portfolio (see addendum) that will include:

- a)** at least one (1) paper taken from Soc. 360 (Sociological Perspectives) turned in upon completion of the course
- b)** the paper written for the Senior Capstone course submitted to the department prior to graduation
- c)** any sociology paper/assignment that the student considers the strongest work completed during his/her tenure

Each submission will be accompanied by a short essay that details its strengths and weaknesses in accordance with the departmental goals. Moreover, the essay should also include a brief statement describing how the paper might differ if it were to be revised in retrospect. Finally, for the paper that the student volunteered as his/her “best,” the essay should explain how and why the spirit of the “sociological imagination” became manifest.

All the portfolios will be reviewed and evaluated by the departmental faculty to determine whether or not the department is meeting its objectives.

Marshall University
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Program Goals (Sociology)

The Sociology program at Marshall University seeks to develop each student's knowledge of and abilities in the following areas:

I. Cultivating critical thinking and analysis

The Sociology major should be able to:

- a) identify assumptions underlying theoretical arguments
- b) identify limitations of theoretical arguments
- c) identify assumptions underlying particular research methodologies
- d) identify limitations of particular research methodologies
- e) recognize alternative viewpoints on social scientific issues
- f) generalize appropriately or resist inappropriate generalizations across cultural groups and through historical time

II. Developing the capacity to think sociologically (cultivating the “sociological imagination”)

The Sociology major should be able to:

- a) describe the similarities and differences between sociology and the other social sciences
- b) describe how sociology contributes to understanding human experiences
- c) apply the sociological imagination - - the understanding of the intersection of biography and history within social structure
- d) apply sociological concepts and principles to individual experiences and the social world
- e) explain how personal and cultural values result from and affect social processes
- f) explain the degree to which values are historically and culturally situated
- g) explain the relationships between beliefs and behavior

III. Equipping students with the ability to apply sociological concepts/theory to an analysis of human agency and social structure

The Sociology major should be able to:

- a) describe how theory contributes to sociological knowledge
- b) compare and contrast major theoretical orientations
- c) explain how theories reflect and affect the historical and cultural contexts in which they developed
- d) identify major theories in selected substantive areas of sociology

- e) explain basic concepts such as culture, roles, norms, social structure, social institution, socialization, and stratification
- f) explain how the self develops sociologically
- g) explain how societal and structural factors influence individual behavior and the self's development
- h) explain how social interaction and the self influence society and social structure

IV. Equipping students with the methodological tools needed to gather and use data to study social life

The Sociology major should be able to:

- a) explain how empirical evidence contributes to sociological knowledge
- b) formulate empirical research questions
- c) identify materials, research, and data relevant to research questions
- d) identify major methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods in constructing sociological knowledge
- e) explain and apply basic statistical principles and techniques
- f) evaluate statistical information and analyses
- g) design and execute a research project
- h) critically assess the empirical research of others

V. Providing students with the opportunity to plan and implement original research demonstrating an integration of sociological thinking, theory and research methods

The Sociology major should be able to:

- a) summarize basic issues in an area
- b) compare and contrast theoretical orientations and middle-range theories in an area
- c) explain how sociology contributes to an understanding of the area
- d) summarize the current research in an area
- e) suggest specific policy implications of research and theories in an area
- f) describe the relationship between culture and structure
- g) describe how structure and culture vary across time and place and describe the effects of such variations
- h) explain how demographic and other social changes affect structures and individuals
- i) explain how social institutions affect each other
- j) explain the effects of social institutions and their interactions on individuals

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: Sociology_ (The table links courses to specific goals. These linkages are to a considerable extent arbitrary since pursuance of most goals runs through all sociology courses. This table identifies major or primary linkages.)

Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes The Marshall University Sociology program seeks to develop each students knowledge of and abilities in the following areas	Courses Offered in the Major							
	Intro. To Soc.	Soc. Research	Soc. Statistics.	Soc. Persps.	Senior Seminar	Electives		
1. Critical Thinking and Analysis	Soc. 200	Soc. 344	Soc. 345	Soc. 360	Soc. 475			
The Soc. Major should be able to:								
identify assumptions underlying theoretical arguments				X	X			
identify limitations of theoretical arguments				X	X			
identify assumptions underlying particular research methodologies		X	X		X			

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: Sociology Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major						
	Intro. To Soc.	Soc. Research	Soc. Statistics	Soc. Persps.	Senior Seminar	Electives	
	Soc. 200	Soc. 344	Soc. 345	Soc. 360	Soc. 475		
2. Develops the capacity to think sociologically (cultivating the "sociological imagination")							
The Soc. Major should be able to:							
describe similarities and differences between sociology and other social sciences		X		X			
describe how sociology contributes to understanding human experiences				X			

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: Sociology Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major						
	Intro. To Soc.	Soc. Research	Soc. Statistics	Soc. Persps.	Senior Seminar	Electives	
	Soc. 200	Soc. 344	Soc. 345	Soc. 360	Soc. 375		
3. Equipping students with the ability to apply sociological concepts and theory to an analysis of human agency and social structure							
The Soc. Major should be able to:							
describe how theory contributes to sociological knowledge				X			
compare and contrast major theoretical orientations				X			
explain how theories reflect and affect the historical and cultural context in which				X			

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: Sociology Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major						
	Intro. To Soc.	Soc. Research	Soc. Statistics	Soc. Persps.	Senior Seminar	Electives	
	Soc. 200	Soc. 344	Soc. 345	Soc. 360	Soc. 475		
4. Equipping students with methodological tools needed to gather and use data to study social life. The Soc. Major should be able to:							
explain how empirical evidence contributes to sociological knowledge		X	X		X		
formulate empirical research questions		X	X		X		
identify materials, research and data relevant to research questions		X			X		
identify major methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods							

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: Sociology Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major							
	Intro. To Soc.	Soc. Research	Soc. Statistics	Soc. Persps.	Senior Seminar	Electives		
5. Providing students with the opportunity to plan and implement original research demonstrating the integration of sociological thinking, theory and research methods.	Soc. 200	Soc. 344	Soc. 345	Soc. 360	Soc. 475			
The Soc. Major should be able to:								
summarize basic issues in an area					X	X		
compare and contrast theoretical orientations and middle-range theories in an area					X	X		
explain how sociology contributes to an understanding of an area					X	X		
summarize current research in an area					X	X		
Suggest specific policy implications of research and theories in an area					X	X		
describe the relationship between culture and structure	X							

Marshall University

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Assessment: Portfolio Requirement

In addition to a standardized instrument administered intermittently and/or embedded within our curriculum which is designed to assess in quantitative terms how effectively the department cultivates a comprehensive knowledge of all things sociological we may want to augment such measures with a more qualitative methodology. Such an evaluation would take place as part of a Senior Capstone portfolio, asking students to assess how effective the department had been in accomplishing its goals. The evaluation portfolio would constitute 5-10% of the final grade and would be organized as follows:

Departmental Goals Summarized

- 1) development of the capacity to think sociologically (cultivating the “sociological imagination”)
- 2) equipping students with the ability to apply sociological concepts and theory to an understanding and analysis of human agency and social structure
- 3) equipping students with the tools needed to think methodologically about how to gather and use data to study social life
- 4) the cultivation and strengthening of critical thinking and analytical writing
- 5) providing students with the opportunity to plan and implement original research demonstrating an integration of sociological thinking, theory and research methodologies

As part of the Senior Capstone experience each student would be required to submit a portfolio that would include (the original assignment should accompany each submission):

- a) at least one (1) paper taken from Soc 360 (Sociological Perspectives) turned in upon completion of the course
- b) the paper written for the Senior Capstone course submitted to the department prior to graduation
- c) any sociology paper/assignment that demonstrates what the student considers the strongest sociological work completed during his/her major career

For each submission, the student would compose a short essay (500-1000 words) that attempts to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the submission in relation to the departmental goals. The essay would also include how the work might be different if permitted to go back and do it all over again. For submission c (the “best”), the essay should also include a comment on how/why the sociological imagination “came alive” through the experience of doing the work.

The portfolios will be read and evaluated by sociology faculty to determine if we are meeting our curricular goals.