

MA Sociology

Assessment report

2010

Background and brief results:

The MA program in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology program earlier has had no assessment plan. In 2008-2009, after the hiring of a new department chair and the reorganization of the leadership of the graduate program, discussions were conducted in the department on how to improve many aspects of the program; a new set of requirements were presented and approved in 2009-2010. In conjunction with the reorganization of the program, we also discussed how to develop and implement more systematic assessment activities. As illustrated in this report, 2010 therefore was the first year in which assessment activities have been carried out with the program and the 2010 “test run” has caused us to make some adjustments to our assessment tools; additionally, 2011 will be the first year in which we will be able also to review portfolios, which in a program with a relatively low number of students is an important tool for our assessment plan. In 2010, we had a problem with few respondents and we are discussing how to improve the number for 2011. However, overall we imagine now to have a functioning assessment plan that both fulfills its obligations towards the institution and in the future will provide the department actionable information from which we can make adjustments to our program.

I. Program's Mission: State the mission of your program and specify how your program's mission supports the university's mission

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology functions in a manner consistent with Marshall University's stated mission and strategic visions. The existing curriculum imposes rigorous standards and high expectations for student learning and performance, both in regards to academic understanding of materials taught and ability to communicate knowledge orally and in writing. Our ongoing effort to update course offerings to reflect changes in faculty and current disciplinary trends demonstrates commitment to an essential element of the university's mission to regularly review program curricula and requirements to better meet the changing needs of the people of West Virginia and the region. In agreement with Marshall University's President's Strategic Vision for a dynamic approach to education in the 21st century, the mission of the Sociology MA program is to prepare our students for further academic training, college teaching careers, or professional careers that allow them to apply their advanced training.

Students in the program intend to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange by exploring reasons behind observed behavior and shared meanings. They, thus, take advantage of our shared curiosity in what it means to be human. In their work, students explore stereotypes about cultural "others" who appear strange to them. By studying the way these others experience and perceive life from their own perspectives, ethnocentric ideas are actively challenged. By comparing and understanding various ways of knowing and being as meaningful but diverse responses to common human problems that deserve respectful consideration, cultural insensitivity is eroded. Our academic disciplines study the social life of people in varied forms such as networks, families, organizations, and nations. In this course of study, students become increasingly aware of the complexity and creativity of human life and the difficulty and risk of drawing clear lines between 'us' and 'them'.

The faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology has a renewed commitment to continually improve not only our course offerings but also our instruction through innovative, participatory methods that encourage critical thinking and provide opportunities for applying learned ideas to real world problems. In this way, we help the university to graduate students who are capable of effectively navigating a rapidly changing society and increasingly international culture.

II. Program's Student Learning Outcomes

The Graduate Program has four objectives with associated main outcomes. These outcomes cover several more specific items, are taught throughout the two year study time and are part of many core classes and electives. The four main outcomes are:

Students will ...

- a. demonstrate an increased breadth and depth of substantive and theoretical sociological knowledge and be able to critically reflect on the obtained knowledge.
- b. demonstrate quantitative and qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation, and application, and apply these skills in a public presentation and/or a publication.
- c. be able to convey sociological concepts and knowledge, and demonstrate this ability by teaching a sample class.
- d. have an awareness of career and educational opportunities available with a Master's degree in sociology and demonstrate this ability by applying to PhD programs and/or job offerings.

Table 1. Where main outcomes are taught.

	SOC 600 Classical Sociological Theory	SOC 601 Contemporary	SOC 605 Qualitative	SOC 606 Quantitative Research Methods	SOC 609 Professional	Electives	Thesis
a. breadth and depth of substantive and theoretical sociological knowledge	X	X				X	X
b. quantitative and qualitative research skills and presentation			X	X		X	X
c. convey sociological concepts and knowledge, and teaching a sample class					X		X
d. awareness of career and continued educational opportunities					X		

III. Assessment Activities:

The assessment of our outcomes rests upon a diverse set of direct and indirect measures and applies qualitative and quantitative methods (see Table 2).

Table 2. Overview of Assessment Activities

Assessment activity	Time frame for assessment activity	Assessed information
Review of graduating students' portfolio	To be done for the first time in 2011	CV, application materials, teaching material, writing sample, thesis or problem report, and the teaching of a sample class
Online survey of all graduate students	Conducted in 2010 Revisions to be made for 2011	Survey questions related to all four outcomes, including questions about different activities and a knowledge quiz
Qualitative interviews at Assessment Day and open ended questions in our online survey	Conducted in 2010	Questions about the quality of our program, satisfaction with facilities and faculty

We will review portfolios from graduating students for the first time in 2011. Our Sociology MA has been reorganized over the past two years, new requirements established, and learning outcomes developed. 2011 is the first time, we expect MA students to graduate who have experienced our revised program and who have taken "Professional development" (SOC 609) – the new course that focuses on the portfolio development. The portfolios under review must include: a CV, an application to a PhD program and/or an application to a specific job, a sample syllabus (normally for SOC 200, our undergraduate introductory course), a selected writing sample, the student's teaching of a sample class (videotaped), and the thesis or problem report.

In 2010, we conducted for the first time an online survey asking our students about different achievements and activities during their graduate studies at Marshall and also probing their sociological knowledge. All items in the survey are related to our four main learning outcomes and will be discussed in the next sections. In addition, qualitative feedback was gathered during Assessment Day and also through open-ended questions in the online survey. Through this tool, we collected information about shortcomings in teaching, facilities, and faculty, the students' satisfaction with our program and so on.

This information is immediately relayed to faculty (if necessary) and has been/will continue to be employed for other program adjustments. We will discuss the findings in more detail below.

From the very nature of our graduate MA program – small cohorts in a two year program – we have decided that we must employ all our assessment tools every year to extract sufficient data to guide us in programmatic changes. The tools themselves are in development and changes are made based on the experience of 2010 (and are likely to continue to be made as needed). In the following overviews, items marked as “(new)” were not included in the tool employed in 2010 but will be used in the 2011 tool. The same is true for our benchmarks.

- A. **Assessment Measures (Tools)** – Indicate the assessment measures used for each outcome evaluated during the reporting period. Although the majority of your measures should directly assess student learning, they may be supplemented with indirect measures. Assessment rubrics should be included as appropriate.
- B. **Benchmarks** – indicate benchmarks your program has set for each outcome assessed during the reporting period.

Outcome (a) “Student will demonstrate an increased breadth and depth of substantive and theoretical sociological knowledge and be able to critically reflect on the obtained knowledge.”

OUTCOME	MEASURE	PTS 2010	PTS 2011
Demonstrate theoretical knowledge	Quiz of 7 questions related to theory (see next page)	7	7
Students criticize the work of other scholars	Review and criticize written scholarly work in journals (NEW)		1
	Review and criticize written work of other students (NEW)		1
Students’ revise their work based on peer reviews	Has a paper of yours being reviewed (NEW)		1
	Revise written work based on comments (NEW)		1
		7 max	11 max

To be supplemented by direct measure of portfolio review in 2011

BENCHMARK (2010) and results

Knowledge Quiz: 50% know at least 4 of the knowledge questions, 20% of students know 6 of the 7 knowledge questions

O1_knowledge

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	1	16.7	16.7
	3.00	1	16.7	33.3
	4.00	2	33.3	66.7
	5.00	1	16.7	83.3
	6.00	1	16.7	100.0
Total		6	100.0	

Results: 1 didn’t answer. 4 out of 5 have more than 4 points. 1 out of 5 has 6 points.

Theory Knowledge Questions:

1. Sociologists view theory and research as

interdependent independent separate but equal unrelated.

2. A _____ is a set of core assumptions and concepts broadly describing how societies operate and how people in them relate to one another.

fact sociological theory concept method of research

18. Functionalists are most inspired by which one of the following thinkers?

Karl Marx Emile Durkheim Max Weber Erving Goffman

3. Which one of the questions listed below is a conflict theorist most likely to ask?

How is social order possible? How do meanings change over time? How does a part contribute to societal stability? Who benefits from a particular pattern or social arrangement, and at whose expense

4. The Capitalist, if he cannot agree with the Labourer, can afford to wait and live upon his capital.” This line, written in 1881, applies to the situation of the

proletariat bourgeoisie means of production subordinate group

5. Which one of the theorists is most likely to ask “How do involved parties experience, interpret, influence, and respond to what they and others are doing while interacting?” functionalists conflict theorists symbolic interactionists classic theorists

6. A major criticism of the conflict theory is that it

overemphasizes the stability and order that exist in a society offers a simplistic view of the employer-employee relationship focuses too strongly on consumer groups, citizen groups, and the worker’s ability to promote change understates the tensions and divisions that exist in society

7. One weakness of the _____ perspective is that specific observations are difficult to generalize.

functionalist conflict symbolic interaction sociological

Outcome (b) “Students will demonstrate quantitative and qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation, and application, and apply these skills in a public presentation and/or a publication.”

	MEASURE	PTS 2010	PTS 2011
Students will be able to present their work	A research paper is presented in an attended class	1	1
	A research paper is presented in a class not attended (NEW)		2
	A research paper is presented at a conference	1	3
Students are able to produce work that is recognized by peers	A research paper is submitted for publication (NEW)		1
	A research paper is revised and resubmitted (NEW)		2
	A research paper is published (NEW)		3
	A research paper is accepted for a conference (NEW)		3
Students are able to produce work that is publicly recognized	Student’s research cited/quoted in media (NEW)		1
	Poster presented at a conference	1	1
		3 max	17 max
Demonstrate research knowledge	Quiz of 6 questions related to research (see next page)	6 max	6max

To be supplemented by direct measure of portfolio review in 2011

BENCHMARKS (2010) and results

Research Knowledge Quiz: Graduates have at least 4 out of 6 points, 50% have at least 5 out of 6 points

O2_knowledge

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid .00	1	16.7	16.7	16.7
4.00	1	16.7	16.7	33.3
5.00	3	50.0	50.0	83.3
6.00	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	6	100.0	100.0	

Results: 1 didn’t answer. All 5 valid answers received at least 4 points. 80% of valid answers had at least 5 points.

Measures about activities: Students will have at least 1 point, 50% of our students will have at least 2 points

O2_toDOmeasure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	1	16.7	16.7	16.7
	1.00	5	83.3	83.3	100.0
	Total	6	100.0	100.0	

Results: 1 didn't answer. All 5 valid answers received at least 1 point. None had two points.

RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE RELATED QUESTIONS

1. Sociologists view theory and research as

interdependent independent separate but equal unrelated.

2. Which of the following is a false statement about the characteristics of high-quality sociological research?

Once a sociological study is completed, findings and conclusions are considered final. Sociologists collect data that is observable to others. Sociological findings endure as long as they can be duplicated and as long as they can withstand reexamination. Sociologists do not let personal and subjective views about the topic influence the outcome of the research

3. Researchers should maintain objectivity. This means they should

stay away from topics in which they have a personal interest not accept funding. clearly define the objects of their investigation. not let personal and subjective views about the topic influence the observations or outcome.

4. A sampling frame is

a complete list of every case in a population. a portion of cases from a particular population. the plan for gathering data to test hypotheses. a sample with the same distribution of characteristics as the population from which it is drawn

5. In an unstructured interview, the question-answer sequence is

forced-choice. set in advance. rigid and cannot be altered. flexible and open-ended.

6. _____ is especially useful for studying behavior as it occurs

_____ is especially useful for studying behavior as it occurs A self-administered questionnaire Secondary data analysis An interview Observation

Outcome (c) “Students will be able to convey sociological concepts and knowledge, and demonstrate this ability by teaching a sample class.”

OUTCOME	MEASURE	PTS 2010	PTS 2011
Students are familiar with teaching methods	assisted faculty in teaching	1	1
	participated in teaching an online class	1	1
	discussed teaching methods in a class (NEW)		1
	developed a syllabus	1	1
Students are able to convey sociological concepts	advised/helped undergraduate students	1	1
	taught a sample class (less than a unit).	2	1
	taught an entire class (entire class from beginning to end)	3	3
	taught an entire course of her/his own through an entire semester	4	4
Students reflect on their own performance	Reviewed a recording of her/his presentation	1	1
	Received verbal and/or written feedback about her/his presentation	1	1
		15 MAX	15 MAX

To be supplemented by direct measure of portfolio review in 2011

Benchmark (2010) and results:

Measures about activities: Students will have at least 4 points, 30% of our students will have at least 8 points

O3_toDO

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid .00	1	16.7	16.7	16.7
1.00	1	16.7	16.7	33.3
4.00	3	50.0	50.0	83.3
8.00	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	6	100.0	100.0	

Results: 1 didn't answer. 4 out of 5 (80%) have at least four points. 1 out of 5 (20%) has 8 points.

Outcome (d) “Students will have an awareness of career and educational opportunities available with a Master’s degree in sociology and demonstrate this ability by applying to PhD programs and/or job offerings.”

OUTCOME	MEASURE IN ONLINE SURVEY	PTS 2010	PTS 2011
Students are familiar with the sociological landscape	joined a sociological society (or was already a member)	1	1
	attended at least one academic conference	1	1
	developed a portfolio (CV, resume, application letter, ...)	1	1
Students are actively looking into further education	written a real and/or mock application for a PHD program	1	1
	have sent out application letters (NEW)		2
	have been accepted to a different PhD/MA program (NEW)		3
Students are actively looking into the job market	have researched the job market for sociologists	1	1
	have send out an job application as a MA in sociology (NEW)		2
	have received a job offer as a MA in sociology (NEW)		3
Students pursuit funding possibilities	have researched funding possibilities	1	1
	have applied for funding (research, travel, ...)	2	2
	have received funding (NEW)		3
		8 max	21 max

To be supplemented by direct measure of portfolio review in 2011

Benchmarks (2010) and results:

Measures about activities: Graduate Students should have at least 4 points, 30% of Graduating students should have at least 6 points

O4_toDO

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	3	50.0	50.0	50.0
	4.00	1	16.7	16.7	66.7
	8.00	2	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	6	100.0	100.0	

Results: 3 out of 6 (50%) have 4 points. 2 out of 6 (33%) have at least 6 points.

C. Results/Analysis – indicate detailed results for the reporting period, i.e. what were mean scores on each component of assessment rubrics, mean scores on exam questions related to outcomes, etc.

The 2010 online assessment was completed in May 2010. Most of the respondents were newer students, only 1 of our respondents indicated that she or he is planning to graduate in 2010. In the coming years, we will be able to compare our impact on first year students, second year students, and graduating students. Further, as a few measures will be added to the online survey and a direct assessment of students' portfolio will be conducted in 2011, the 2011 assessment will allow us to depict more accurately if all our program outcomes are met. Thus, we consider our 2010 assessment only as a baseline for future assessment activities and considerations of their results. The detailed results from 2010 were presented in the previous section. A few benchmarks were not met, which is not surprising since the respondents were mostly first year students and have not completed their studies. A severe gap occurred within outcome (d) "Students have an awareness of career and educational opportunities available with a Master's degree in sociology and demonstrate this ability by applications to programs and/or job offerings." This is not surprising as the cohort had yet to enroll in SOC 609 Professional Development – the course that focuses on this outcome. We thus expect that the assessed results will improve in 2011.

D. Analysis/Planned Action – Indicate what your results mean and what your program plans to do to improve student learning based on the outcome of assessment. Be very specific in this section. Remember that, even if you meet your specified benchmarks, there is always room for improvement. We encourage you to carefully analyze your program's relative strengths and weaknesses within each outcome

The assessment activity and the tools employed in spring 2010 was a "first test run". As indicated above, the results have been used to refine our assessment activities and the above described tools will be employed for spring 2011 assessment. A particular concern in 2010 is the low number of respondents. After discussing this matter with Mary Beth Reynolds, Director of Academic Assessment, we are considering different incentives and other measures to boost the number of respondents.

IV Overview of changes implemented in your program this past year based on results and planned action specified in last year’s report

Our report last year described in some detail assessment activities we were considering. As described above, these activities have now been employed and we are looking forward to continue to refine the tools developed. Spring 2011 assessment activities, hopefully with more respondents, will yield more actionable information.

V. Specify any changes/modifications made to your program based specifically on data obtained during Assessment Day Activities.

In addition to the tools discussed in the previous section, the following general questions were asked:

Q3. Please rate each of the areas according to your level of satisfaction.						
Answer Options	Poor	Below average	Average	Very good	Excellent	No Opinion
Classroom and other facilities	0	1	1	2	2	0
Faculty	0	0	2	2	2	0
Core Classes	0	0	1	1	4	0
Electives	0	0	2	2	2	0
Thesis/Problem report	0	0	1	1	1	3

Classroom and other facilities received the worst marks. Qualitative feedback indicated dissatisfaction with classrooms: “*Classrooms are outdated and on par for high school.*” Core classes received the highest ratings, electives and faculty range in the middle. One student raised personal concerns with a particular course. The information was relayed to the faculty and the problems addressed.

Q10. What is the likelihood that you will continue in our program?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Extremely unlikely	0.0%	0
Somewhat unlikely	0.0%	0
Unknown	16.7%	1
Somewhat likely	16.7%	1
Extremely likely	66.7%	4

Most students indicated that it is extreme likely that they continue in our program. “Unknown” was the answer of the student who was about to graduate. Somewhat likely was the answer of a student who had troubles in a course. S/he is still enrolling in our classes.

VI. Assistance Needed with Assessment: What assistance can the Office of Assessment give you to help improve your assessment program?

Markus Hadler, the director of graduate programs in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, meet with Mary Beth Reynolds, Director of Academic Assessment, to discuss different aspects of this report and problems with our tools. The meeting was very productive. We very much appreciate the help and are likely to continue to have such reflexive discussions about our assessment activities in the future.