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 craftsperson 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. 200	Soc. Research Soc. 344	Soc. Statistics. Soc. 345	Soc. Persps. Soc. 360	Senior Seminar Soc. 475	Electives								
1. Critical Thinking and Analysis 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									

identify limitations of particular research methodologies		X	X		X									
recognize alternative viewpoints on social scientific issues				X	X									
generalize appropriately or resist inappropriate generalizations across groups and through historical time	X													

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: _Sociology_____

Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major													
	Intro. To Soc. Soc. 200	Soc. Research Soc. 344	Soc. Statistics Soc. 345	Soc. Persps. Soc. 360	Senior Seminar Soc. 475	Electives								
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										

apply the sociological imagination to an understanding of the intersection of biography and history within social structures	X	X			X									
apply sociological concepts and principles to individual experiences and the social world		X			X									
explain how personal and cultural values result from and affect social processes	X													
explain the degree to which values are historically and culturally situated	X													
explain the relationship between beliefs and behavior	X													

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: ____Sociology_____

Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major													
	Intro. To Soc. Soc. 200	Soc. Research Soc. 344	Soc. Statistics Soc. 345	Soc. Persps. Soc. 360	Senior Seminar Soc. 375	Electives								
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										

they developed														
describe major theories in selected substantive areas of sociology				X	X									
explain basic concepts such as culture, roles, norms, social structure, social institution, socialization, and stratification	X			X										
explain how the self develops sociologically	X													
explain how societal and structural factors influence individual behavior and the self's development	X													
explain how social interaction and the self influence society and social structure	X													

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: _____Sociology_____
Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes	Courses Offered in the Major													
	Intro. To Soc. Soc. 200	Soc. Research Soc. 344	Soc. Statistics Soc. 345	Soc. Persps. Soc. 360	Senior Seminar Soc. 475	Electives								
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														

in constructing sociological knowledge		X												
explain and apply basic statistical principles and techniques			X		X									
design and carry out a research project					X									
evaluate statistical information and analysis			X		X									
critically assess empirical research of others		X	X		X									

Course/Outcomes Matrix

Department/Program: _____Sociology_____
Template

Program's Student Learning Outcomes 5. Providing students with the opportunity to plan and implement original research demonstrating the integration of sociological thinking, theory and research methods. The Soc. Major should be able to:	Courses Offered in the Major													
	Intro. To Soc. Soc. 200	Soc. Research Soc. 344	Soc. Statistics Soc. 345	Soc. Persps. Soc. 360	Senior Seminar Soc. 475	Electives								
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													

describe how culture and structure vary across time and place and describe the effect of such variation	X													
explain how demographic and other social change affect structures and the individual	X													
explain how social institutions affect each other explain the effects of social institutions and their interactions on individuals	X 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.