



Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major

by the

ASA Task Force on Assessing the Undergraduate Sociology Major

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PREFACE

You hold in your hands a manual on assessment specifically prepared for departments and programs that offer an undergraduate major in sociology. It represents a collaborative effort of members of the Task Force on Assessing the Undergraduate Major of the American Sociological Association. It is based on the excellent foundation of Gregory L. Weiss' assessment manual for Roanoke College; on the work of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Sociology Curriculum and the Task Force on Guidelines for the Certification of Programs in Applied Sociology; and on existing assessment work already on the worldwide web by several institutions including Central Michigan University, California State University - Bakersfield, and California State University - Chico. It was guided by best practices of assessment for higher education with a specific application to the sociology major - understood both as students and programs in the undergraduate curriculum. At the end of this volume, be sure to review the *Assessment Template for Student Learning Goals* - a procedural handbook for working through learning goals for students. We also recommend that you consult another monograph in the ASA Teaching Resources Center: Holm, Charles S. and William S. Johnson. 2001. *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology*. (2nd Edition). Washington, DC: American Sociological Association. Finally, in the near future the ASA website will be another location for resources on assessment.

The manual and web site also benefited from a survey of ASA department affiliates in the spring of 2004 regarding the assessment needs of existing programs (N=96, 30 percent response). Responding institutions reflect considerable diversity: 60 percent are public institutions (40 percent private); 73 percent are universities (27 percent four-year colleges); most (61 percent) are organized as a single discipline department; and almost half (45 percent) offer a bachelor's as the highest degree. The size of departments varied from no full-time sociology faculty to more than 40 sociology faculty with an average of about 12 (and mode of 4). The vast majority of respondents favored both a "Best Practices" report and a "Self-Study Manual." Fewer than half desired independent consultants, but those who did favored consultants obtained through the ASA. Smaller programs preferred external reviewers. More felt a campus visit (37) rather than regional (27) or national (19) meetings would provide the best delivery of workshops.

Over a third of departments ranked these forms of program assistance at high priority: using assessment results to improve our

undergraduate program, analyzing and interpreting assessment data, developing recommendations from results, developing and maintaining an assessment plan, developing a program of on-going assessment results, developing learning objectives, and implementing assessment recommendations. Many of the respondents had begun to collect assessment data, but they still needed help to use it or to "close the loop." Over a third of responding departments requested help with the following techniques: surveys of alumni, surveys of exiting seniors, work in capstone courses, standardized assessments with similar departments/programs, surveys of current students, and student portfolios. It is vital that the full department is involved in reviewing and implementing the results of assessment processes.

On behalf of the entire Task Force, I applaud your engagement in the assessment process and hope that you find sociology is helping to set the example of meaningful assessment at your institution and across the country.

*Janet Huber Lowry, Chair
Task Force on Assessing the Undergraduate
Sociology Major*

The ASA's Academic and Professional Affairs Program thanks William S. Johnson and Stephen Sharkey for serving as reviewers of this volume.

AN INTRODUCTION TO ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

The Meaning of Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning is a systematic collection, analysis, and use of information to improve student learning. It requires that faculty answer three questions: (1) What knowledge do we want students to acquire and what competencies do we want them to gain while they are in our program? (2) What information can we collect to determine the extent to which this knowledge and these competencies are being acquired? and (3) How can we use that information to stimulate collegial discussion about program improvements that are designed to enhance student learning? (San Diego State University Committee on Assessment, 2002).

In one sense assessment is simply an effort to do at a departmental level what every conscientious instructor does at the individual level. Instructors design courses and course components that are intended to help students to learn. Students provide feedback about the effectiveness of these efforts through the quality and appropriateness of their comments and questions; their performance on examinations, papers, and projects; and in many other ways. If instructors discern that the teaching techniques are working well, they may continue them unchanged or still be open to making changes to try to do better. If the techniques are not working effectively in helping students to learn, most instructors will make modifications. In this case, the instructor has in mind some explicit or implicit objective for organizing the course or teaching a component in a particular way, gathers feedback on its level of effectiveness, and may make changes hoping to make it more effective and to enhance student learning.

Assessment does the same thing but at a broader level. The purpose of assessment is program review. It is *not* to evaluate individual faculty or individual students. It *is* a process for determining what learning goals and objectives for students are considered to be most important by department faculty, for determining how well students who major in sociology achieve these learning goals and objectives, and for determining ways that the program (the curriculum, course content, and pedagogy) might be modified in order to enhance student learning. The focus is on what students know and on what they are able to do after completing a sociology major. While the individual professor may be considering student learning from a "micro" perspective, the department is doing so from a "macro" perspective. Of course the decisions and information happening at the department level must be

linked to the institution as a whole, its mission and goals, to make it clear how sociology contributes to the full institution.

Forces Stimulating Assessment

Assessment has become institutionalized in higher education as it has in other sectors of society including business, government, and non-profit organizations. Within higher education, four primary agents have stimulated the assessment movement:

1. *The regional accreditation agencies.* The regional accrediting bodies now instruct colleges and universities to develop "institutional effectiveness" programs. This concept requires that each institution is engaged in an ongoing quest to enhance quality and to achieve its stated mission. The expectation is that each institution develops a broad-based system to determine institutional effectiveness appropriate to its own context and purpose, to use the purpose statement as the foundation for planning and evaluation, to employ a variety of assessment methods, and to demonstrate use of the results of the planning and evaluation process for the improvement of its educational programs.
2. *State governments.* Many state legislatures are now placing similar demands on public institutions to engage in systematic assessment of their programs and to document the value of the education provided.
3. *Various academic groups, academic foundations, and disciplinary associations.* Several higher education associations, such as the American Association for Higher Education (now closed) and the professional associations in most academic disciplines, including ASA, are independently urging program assessment in the interest of program improvement.
4. *Individual colleges and universities.* As more and more institutions of higher education have committed to the concept and practice of assessment and have seen the benefits of doing so, they have become advocates for the process and models of developing good programs.

Primary Justifications for Assessment

The one singularly important reason to do assessment is that it is an effective means for enhancing student learning. Institutions and academic departments might *have to* do assessment due to various mandates. But, we *should want* to do assessment because we care about student learning and because the assessment process enables us

to systematically study student learning in such a way that it can be enhanced.

Conducting assessment of academic programs requires faculty and administrators to conceptually distinguish between "teaching" and "learning." Traditionally, higher education has focused more on the process of providing education than on what happens in students who receive an education. This is understandable because faculty have more control over what they do and how they do it than they do on students' ability and enthusiasm to learn. For example, instructors can be judged to be "good" teachers if they know their subject, have carefully prepared syllabi, incorporate new technologies into the classroom, and stimulate meaningful discussion. Yet, if challenged on the point, faculty--perhaps especially sociologists--would probably acknowledge that none of these "inputs" are necessarily the same as or possibly even good indicators of the amount of "learning" that has occurred in students. Today, it is widely recognized that teaching and learning are two sides of the same process but that they are not the same thing. The "means" of higher education (i.e., instruction) are not the same thing as the "ends" or "outcomes" of higher education (i.e., changes in student knowledge or capabilities or attitudes). Academic program assessment enables us to make this conceptual distinction and to focus on both the teaching process and the learning outcomes.

Properly done assessment of academic majors and programs contributes to improved teaching and learning in a variety of ways:

1. Academic departments are led to engage in serious discussion about what they really want to achieve or to have happen with their students.
2. The design and administration of good assessment mechanisms offers a meaningful way to rigorously evaluate the extent to which an academic major or program is reaching its specified objectives.
3. Reflection on and discussion of assessment results offers faculty a forum for genuine consideration of possible changes that will enable learning objectives to be more fully realized.

The Key Components of Assessment

The key components of assessment can be divided into two categories: creation of an assessment plan and conduct of an annual assessment process.

The Assessment Plan:

1. Development of a meaningful statement of the department's "purpose" (the term used in some institutions) or "mission" (the

term used in most institutions); this statement should be linked to *institutional* mission.

2. Development of broad goals and specific objectives for student learning.
3. Identification of a variety of effective mechanisms for determining the extent to which the objectives are being achieved.

The Assessment Process:

1. Ideally, an annual (or at least a regular) selection of two to four objectives on which the assessment process will focus during that year.
2. Collection of appropriate assessment data during the year.
3. Determination of the extent to which the designated objectives are being met and consideration of modifications in curriculum, course content and pedagogy that could enhance student learning.
4. Implementation of changes.

The Paramount Role of Faculty in Assessment

Responsibility for assessing student learning rests with faculty members. Most institutions have developed an assessment framework, and academic departments are expected to develop their own plans consistent with these guidelines. However, the content and conduct of assessment is in the hands of faculty. The assessment of student learning in sociology at an institution should rest with the sociology faculty and sociology department.

1. *Sociology faculty* develop the department's mission statement or statement of purpose.
2. *Sociology faculty* write the broad goals they have for student learning in sociology.
3. *Sociology faculty* write the specific objectives they have for student learning in sociology.
4. *Sociology faculty*, as a collaborative effort, design courses and learning opportunities that, in their best judgment, will help students achieve those learning goals.
5. *Sociology faculty* select and design the specific mechanisms that will be used to assess the extent to which the learning goals and objectives are being met.
6. *Sociology faculty* carry out the assessment data collection process each year.
7. *Sociology faculty* compile, analyze, and interpret assessment results.
8. *Sociology faculty* discuss assessment results and determine ways that the sociology curriculum, course content, and pedagogy might

be modified to help students better meet the learning goals and objectives.

9. *Sociology faculty* implement changes that are designed to enhance student learning.

While these nine statements are intentionally phrased to place faculty at the center, remember to consult college/university resource people for help, e.g., institutional research offices, assessment personnel, colleagues in other aligned departments, sociology colleagues at other schools, and state, regional, and national sociology associations.

Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

Several of the country's most prominent authorities on assessment, working under the auspices of the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum (Astin et al., 2003:all) have identified nine key principles for assessing student learning. These principles offer helpful guidance in thinking about and enacting assessment.

1. *The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.* Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only what we choose to assess but also how we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with

educational purposes and expectations--those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

4. *Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.* Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way--about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. *Assessment works best when it is ongoing and not episodic.* Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement. Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.
6. *Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.* Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment should involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.

7. *Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.*
Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
8. *Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.* Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making.
9. *Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.* There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation--to ourselves, our students, and society--is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

CREATING AN EFFECTIVE SOCIOLOGY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Step #1: The Mission Statement

Creation of a sociology assessment plan should begin with the writing of a department mission statement. A carefully written mission statement serves as the foundation for all subsequent assessment activity. Nevertheless, it can be modified at any time as decisions are made to sharpen or extend the mission and/or as program objectives and assessment mechanisms are modified.

Mission statements for any organization should be clear, uplifting, and achievable. The mission statement for a sociology program should follow these guidelines:

1. The mission statement should specify the purpose of the sociology major/program within the overall college or university context; it should make clear sociology's distinctive contribution to the institution and to the mission and goals of the institution. This is an opportunity for sociologists to identify the important role that sociology plays in helping the institution meet its mission, goals, and objectives.
2. The mission statement should include the basic philosophy of the department, important values that guide the department, and broadly stated goals for students who major in sociology. This is an opportunity to identify the important content and methods of the discipline and the philosophy and values of the department with respect to teaching students, scholarship, and service.
3. The mission statement is the starting point for all subsequent work in assessment. It should be the foundation on which learning goals and learning objectives are developed.
4. The mission statement should be succinct but should include the essential mission of the sociology *major/program* rather than the mission of any individual faculty member. Most statements are one to three paragraphs, but length varies considerably. Some institutions specify a very short mission statement, while other institutions prefer more elaboration.

Appendices one through four in this document provide examples of mission statements of sociology departments (some of which are shared with another discipline) in four institutions. Each mission statement is formatted and focused somewhat differently, but each represents the department's effort to articulate its mission.

While the mission statement is the logical first step in assessment, some faculty balk at this beginning, seeing mission statements as empty public

relations clichés. Sometimes it is more fruitful and practical to start with step #2 and talk about what goals the department has for its students and then return to make the linkage with institutional mission.

Helpful Resources

Diamond, Robert M. 1997. *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A Practical Guide*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Weiss, Gregory L., Janet R. Cosbey, Shelly K. Habel, Chad M. Hanson, and Carolee Larsen. 2002. "Improving the Assessment of Student Learning: Advancing a Research Agenda in Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 30:63-79.

Step #2: Learning Goals and Learning Objectives

Assessment of student learning is an effort and a plan for sociology faculty to consider what they want students to learn, to determine how well students are learning, and to develop ways to enhance learning. To conduct meaningful programmatic assessment, colleagues must move beyond a statement of program mission to the articulation of specific program goals and objectives. This distinction between goals and objectives can sometimes be a bit fuzzy, but the distinction is important.

Learning goals are broad, abstract statements of the desired long-term outcomes of the curriculum and the program. They are derived from the mission statement and are logical outgrowths of it. Learning goals describe in general terms the achievable knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and relationships with society and with constituencies in society that a department wants and expects students to develop as a result of being a sociology major.

To illustrate, the following is a learning goal that a sociology department might have:

Sociology majors should understand the role of theory in sociology.

Learning objectives are specific statements of learning outcomes that stem from the learning goals. They are realistic, measurable, and straightforward. They tell us how to determine if the learning goals have been achieved. For the learning goal stated above, a department might ask, "How do we know if our students understand the role of theory in sociology?" "What would students have to be able to do to demonstrate to us that they genuinely have this understanding?" The answer to these questions is the content of learning objectives. They specify what students should be able to do if the learning goal is being met.

To illustrate, the aforementioned learning goal is now followed by sample learning objectives that correspond to it.

Sociology majors should understand the role of theory in sociology, such that the student will be able to:

- a. define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge,
- b. compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations,
- c. show how theories reflect the historical context of times and cultures in which they were developed,
- d. describe and apply some basic theories or theoretical orientations in at least one area of social reality.

Well-written learning objectives do the following:

- 1. They include a statement of ability using an action verb. Good objectives use action verbs like "paraphrase," "compute," "describe," and "compare and contrast." Broader verbs such as "understand" and "appreciate" should be used in learning goals rather than learning objectives. Appendix five provides a table of appropriate action verbs categorized by level of Bloom's taxonomy.
- 2. They can be operationalized and are empirically verifiable/directly observable.
- 3. They are attainable or feasible given the resources of the major/program.
- 4. They clarify or establish a link between what students accomplish in the program and what they can do after they graduate.
- 5. They make it possible to envision a variety of different ways to gauge the degree to which the objective is being met.

The learning objectives should be outcome- or result-oriented rather than statements of process. (Appendix six provides a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and relationships with society and constituencies in society that might be the focus of learning objectives.) Well-written learning objectives do not focus on "what the faculty will do"; they specify "what will occur" within students as a result of their program of study. Thus, "offering sound courses in core areas of the discipline" is too process-focused. Instead, faculty should focus on the results that taking the program of study provided in the major will have on students. The companion piece to this manual - the *Assessment Template for Student Learning Goals* - should be very helpful in constructing proper learning objectives.

Helpful Resources

McKinney, Kathleen, Carla B. Howery, Kerry J. Strand, Edward L. Kain, and Catherine White Berheide. 2004. *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated: Meeting the Challenges of Teaching Sociology in the Twenty-First Century*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Robert Mager, 1997. *Preparing Instructional Objectives: A Critical Tool in the Development of Effective Instruction* (3rd Edition), Atlanta: CEP Press.

Step #3: Assessment Mechanisms

Sociology departments can employ a wide variety of assessment mechanisms for determining the extent to which objectives for student learning are being met. Some mechanisms are more appropriate for certain kinds of learning objectives than for others.

All of the mechanisms offer some advantages and have some limitations. Faculty members in each department will have greater or lesser comfort with individual mechanisms and will judge that some are more useful or more appropriate than others within the context of their department and their institution.

There are certain guidelines that should be considered in the selection of assessment mechanisms.

1. Assessment mechanisms should provide answers to important questions of faculty members. One of the oldest assessment adages is that if faculty do not care about the results on a particular mechanism, then the mechanism should not have been used.
2. To the degree practical, care should be taken so that faculty are generally comfortable that the assessment mechanisms used actually measure what faculty intend for them to measure.
3. Both direct (examining actual performance) and indirect (asking for perception of performance) assessment measures can be used, but direct measures (such as evaluating an actual oral presentation) are generally preferable to indirect measures (like asking students if they have developed good oral presentation skills).
4. Both quantitative and qualitative measures can be used, and many assessment programs intentionally use both.
5. There is no magic number of assessment mechanisms that departments should use. Faculty should identify a sufficient number of mechanisms to ably evaluate the variety of objectives that have been formulated. The number should not be so great as to be burdensome, but having only a couple of mechanisms is clearly not enough.
6. Assessment programs just getting started may and generally should incorporate mechanisms that have been used informally in the past.
7. Final grades for courses should almost never be used to assess outcomes on specific objectives, because they typically measure performance on a variety of activities and do not have a one-to-one correspondence with any specific learning objective. Grades on particular assignments or essay questions can be used as assessment measures but only in cases where they directly measure a single learning objective.

8. Departments should make the assessment program their own. It should be designed to fit the college and the department. Sociologists ought to be especially adept at assessment. Our training in conceptualization and operationalization; systematically studying human attitudes, behaviors, and values; collecting and interpreting data; and using data to identify program improvements provides experience in the core elements of sound assessment.

The following section reviews some of the most commonly used direct and indirect mechanisms for assessing the extent to which learning objectives have been met. A brief description of each measure is followed with an example illustrating how the mechanism could be used to assess learning relevant to a particular learning objective and recommended helpful resources.

Direct Measures of Learning

1. Capstone Courses

Capstone courses in sociology require students to integrate knowledge and skills that have been acquired throughout their undergraduate curriculum. This method of assessment differs from others because the course itself may be the mechanism to assess the extent to which students are able to meet a designated learning objective.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students will be able to design and carry out a research project.

Assessment could be: A capstone course could be centered on having each student design and carry out a research project. The project may require the integration of knowledge and skills learned in social theory, research methods, and data analysis. Grades on this project can be used to assess the extent to which students have achieved the objective.

Helpful Resources

Catherine White Berheide. 2001. "Using the Capstone Course for Assessment of Learning in the Sociology Major" pp. 164-176 in *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology* (2nd Edition), ed. by Charles F. Hohm and William S. Johnson. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Julian D. Faye. 1996. "The Capstone Course as an Outcomes Test for Majors" pp. 79-81 in *Assessment in Practice*, ed. by Trudy W. Banta, Jon P. Lund, Karen E. Black, and Frances W. Ostrander. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

2. Course-Embedded Assessment

Often, particular courses or combinations of courses are designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills to meet certain learning objectives. Assessment measures may be embedded into specific exam questions, papers, or projects that are already being used in these courses or in new assignments that can be directly tied to assessment. As mentioned, final course grades are rarely valid assessment mechanisms because they are based on a variety of performances within the course and do not correspond one-on-one with any particular objective. However, a particular exam question or assignment or part of an assignment may correspond directly to an objective and can be used. These measures have the advantage of being attached to assignments that are already part of the course and which students take very seriously.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students will be able to present sociological research findings in a clear manner.

Assessment could be: The junior and senior level courses require students to present sociological research findings to the class, using a template to record whether the student covered certain basic points, such as explaining the research question and clarity of presentation. Each student could be given a grade on this assignment and the aggregate grades on the assignment for all of the classes taught in a semester or in an academic year could be used to assess the extent to which this learning objective is met. This could also work even if the presentation is only one part of the grade as long as the presentation part of the project receives its own evaluation.

Helpful Resources

Catherine Palomba. 1999. *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, Improving*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
Barbara E. Walvoord, Virginia Johnson Anderson, and Thomas A. Angelo. 1998. *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

3. Departmentally-Developed or Nationally-Normed Tests

Many departments require senior-level students to pass a departmentally-developed comprehensive examination prior to graduation. This examination may be part of a capstone course or some other required senior-level course but often is administered outside any particular course. The examination may be an effort to evaluate the cumulative learning of students, but particular questions on the exam can be asked in such a way that they directly correspond with a learning

objective. These departmentally-developed tests offer several advantages: they are written by faculty who have created the learning objectives, designed the curriculum, and taught the courses; they are inexpensive; and there is quick turn-around time.

Commercially generated standardized tests, such as the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and the Major Field Achievement Tests, are nationally-normed and enable faculty to compare performance of their students with others around the country. Evaluation is done off-campus and does not require faculty time. However, these tests have questions on topics not covered or emphasized within a particular institution, they are expensive, and they do not offer immediate turn-around. Furthermore, the GRE was not designed for this purpose, but rather for predicting graduate school success. There is no longer a GRE subject test in sociology, so only the general GRE is available, making it even less relevant to outcome assessment for the sociology major. For these reasons, the trend has been toward greater use of departmentally-developed tests.

A testing option that is available within institutions is use of a pretest-posttest comparison. For example, a department might have a learning objective that "students are able to apply the sociological imagination to their own lives." Students in an introductory sociology course or an initial sociology course beyond the introductory course might be asked to write an essay that requires this application of the sociological imagination. Then, in a senior-level sociology course or at some point near the end of the senior year, sociology majors would be given the same essay assignment. Faculty could then compare the initial essay with the later essay to assess growth in understanding of the sociological imagination.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students will be able to compare and contrast theoretical orientations in sociology.

Assessment could be: A departmentally-developed comprehensive examination could be given near the end of the senior year. Sociology majors are asked to compare and contrast theoretical orientations in sociology or to discuss an assigned topic from the point of view of two or three assigned theoretical perspectives.

Helpful Resources

Anthony T. Booker. 1996. "Assessing Writing Through Common Examinations and Student Portfolios," pp. 213-215 in *Assessment in Practice*, ed. by Trudy W. Banta, Jon P. Lund, Karen E. Black, and Frances W. Ostrander. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Robert F. Szafran. 1996. "The Reliability and Validity of the Major Field Test in Measuring the Learning of Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 24:92-96.
- Theodore C. Wagenaar. 2004. "Conversation: Assessing Sociological Knowledge: A First Try." *Teaching Sociology*, 32:232-238.

4. Student Portfolios

Some departments use portfolios (i.e., collections) of student work that can convey the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as growth in student performance. Portfolios include items such as research papers, class projects and assignments, examinations, self-evaluations, and personal essays. Information may be gathered from in-class or out-of-class assignments and may include material drawn from co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Department faculty determine the kinds of material that should be included and how these materials will be used to assess student growth on the learning objectives. An advantage of portfolios is that they enable assessment of the entire range of student work.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students should be able to apply sociological concepts and principles to individual experiences and the social world.

Assessment could be: Faculty examine student portfolios to assess the extent to which students repeatedly and in a variety of contexts convey the ability to apply sociological concepts and principles to individual experiences and the social world.

Helpful Resources

- Dean S. Dorn. 2001. "An Electronic Assessment Portfolio at California State University-Sacramento." pp. 94-121 in *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology* (2nd Edition), ed. by Charles F. Hohm and William S. Johnson. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- Albert M. Katz and Bradley A. Gangnon. 2000. "Portfolio Assessment: Integrating Goals and Objectives with Learner Outcomes." *Assessment Update* 12:6-7,13.
- Barbara Trepagnier. 2004. "Teaching Sociology Through Student Portfolios." *Teaching Sociology* 32:197-205.

5. Research Papers/Major Projects

Many departments require, and others offer an option for, a senior thesis, an independent study, or some other type of major project. These papers and projects typically are structured to give students an

opportunity to demonstrate a mastery of knowledge of a particular substantive area and social research skills. The final product often includes a major paper but may also include an oral presentation to a class, at an on-campus symposium, or at a professional meeting. Performance on this mechanism is based on the paper and possibly of an audiotape or videotape of the oral presentation and can be used to assess achievement of a variety of learning objectives.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students should be able to formulate empirical research questions.

Assessment could be: Faculty examine all of the senior theses, independent studies, and major projects submitted by students during an academic year to assess the ability of students to properly formulate empirical research questions.

Helpful Resources

David J. Hartmann. 2001. "Program Assessment in Sociology: The Case for the Bachelor's Paper" pp. 204-208 in *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology* (2nd Edition), ed. by Charles F. Hohm and William S. Johnson. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Edward L. Kain. 1999. "Building the Sociological Imagination Through a Cumulative Curriculum: Professional Socialization in Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 27:1-16.

Indirect Measures of Learning

1. Surveys/Focus Groups of Current Students and Graduating Seniors

Student learning may be assessed indirectly through self-reflection and self-analysis of students themselves. Students may be asked to assess their own knowledge and skills in particular areas and their level of personal growth in these areas and to compare their learning experiences with their expectations or with students in other major fields or in whatever way would be useful information to the faculty. Faculty may solicit student opinion about which of the learning objectives are being especially well met and which could most benefit from further work. Many institutions now routinely conduct exit interviews with graduating seniors. These interviews can be especially helpful because they come at or near the end of the undergraduate major, and they occur at an appropriate time for students to reflect on the totality of their experience with sociology. Helpful information can be collected about the effectiveness of the curriculum, the integration of sociology courses, and instructional strategies that have been particularly useful or ineffective.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students are able to explain the major 19th century foundations of modern sociological theory (such as the work of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx) and show how each tradition influences current sociological theories.

Assessment could be: In an exit interview, students are asked to rate their own sense of comfort and competency with each of the learning objectives or could be asked to distinguish between themes that were frequently emphasized versus seldom emphasized by faculty.

Helpful Resources

- Jeana Abromeit and Stephen R. Sharkey. 2001. "Bringing Student Self Assessment into the Sociology Curriculum" pp. 138-147 in *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology* (2nd Edition), ed. by Charles F. Hohm and William S. Johnson. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- J. Daniel McMillin and Richard C. Noel. 2001. "A Focus Group Method for Use in Program Assessment" pp. 122-137 in *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology* (2nd Edition), ed. by Charles F. Hohm and William S. Johnson. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- Paul W. O'Brien, Agnes C. Reidmann, Walter E. Doraz, and James T. Payne. 2001. "Assessing Student Perceptions: Neglected Voices in Departmental Assessment" pp. 59-71 in *Assessing Student Learning in Sociology* (2nd Edition), ed. by Charles F. Hohm and William S. Johnson. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

2. Surveys/Focus Groups of Alumni

Surveying alumni at some point following graduation (often, alumni surveys are administered at one, two, three, or five years post-graduation) can be very helpful in obtaining program evaluations that are informed by real-world experience. Alumni offer a unique perspective on the effectiveness of the overall curriculum, the integration of courses, curricular and co-curricular experiences that were especially helpful, and suggestions for program improvements. Alumni surveys are typically an inexpensive way to collect data, and they have the additional benefit of maintaining connection with individuals who are an important part of the department's history.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students will be able to apply sociological concepts and principles to individual experiences and the social world.

Assessment could be: Among other questions, an alumni survey asks respondents which from a list of sociological concepts, insights, or skills they most value or use most often.

Helpful Resources

Donna Shoemaker (ed.). 1999. *Research in Alumni Relations: Surveying Alumni to Improve Your Programs*. Washington, DC: Council for Advancement and Support in Education.

Janice Van Dyke and George W. Williams. 1996. "Involving Graduates and Employers in Assessment of a Technology Program" pp. 99-101 in *Assessment in Practice*, ed. by Trudy W. Banta, Jon P. Lund, Karen E. Black, and Frances W. Ostrander. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

3. Surveys of Graduate Schools and/or Employers

Surveys of graduate schools in which the department's majors have matriculated and/or employers for whom the department's majors work can provide valuable information about the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduate program. These surveys offer the opportunity to ascertain information about the quality of preparation of graduates of the department with students and employees who have graduated from sociology programs at other institutions and can suggest helpful modifications to learning objectives, curriculum, and course content.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students will be able to use standard software packages, such as SPSS and Microcase, to analyze data, Excel to create spreadsheets, and Word to write papers.

Assessment could be: Employers and graduate advisors are asked to evaluate the relevant computer skills of the student or students and to compare them with students from other undergraduate institutions.

Helpful Resources

J. Joseph Hoey and Denise Gardner. 1998. "The Impact of Survey Research-Based Assessment at North Carolina State University." www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/projects/impact/asmt_imp.htm.

Janice Van Dyke and George W. Williams. 1996. "Involving Graduates and Employers in Assessment of a Technology Program" pp. 99-101 in *Assessment in Practice*, ed. by Trudy W. Banta, Jon P. Lund, Karen E. Black, and Frances W. Ostrander. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

4. Monitoring of Students' Academic Honors, Awards, Grants, Publications, Presentations, and Other Indicators of Achievement

The success of sociology majors in winning various academic and co-curricular (e.g., community service) honors and prizes and their ability to write papers that are published or presented at professional meetings can be important indirect indicators of student learning. The constant

monitoring of student performance in these areas and in other areas deemed by a department to be important can be a useful assessment mechanism.

Example:

If a learning objective is: Students will be able to write a clear and concise report of the findings from empirical sociological analysis.

Assessment could be: Departments monitor the number of students who complete high quality independent studies, have papers accepted for presentation at a conference, or have papers accepted for publication in a journal.

5. External Reviews

External reviewers are generally an invaluable part of the program improvement process. Typically, reviewers examine numerous department documents prior to a campus visit in which they meet with department faculty and students and with others on campus who have knowledge about the sociology program. External reviewers can be very helpful in commenting on the appropriateness of the department's mission statement, learning goals and objectives, roster of assessment mechanisms, and the extent to which the sociology program is structured to accomplish the objectives that have been identified as being most important. They can offer their own analysis of available measures of student achievement, identify program strengths and weaknesses, and offer valuable suggestions for improvement. An external review can provide information that is used by faculty in the conduct of their own program assessment. But it is not a substitute for program assessment conducted by the faculty.

Helpful Resources

ASA's Department Resources Group, a network of consultants trained to undertake program reviews. Reviewers are matched to send colleagues from similar institutional contexts. Consultant expenses and a reasonable honorarium are expected. Contact ASA at apap@asanet.org to make arrangements.

CONDUCTING MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT

Establishing a mission for the department, making a commitment to learning goals and learning objectives for students, assessing the extent to which the objectives are being met, and making genuine improvements in order to enhance student learning is the core of undergraduate education. It is the foundation on which sound and coherent curricula, informative and integrated courses, and effective instructional strategies are built. Conducting meaningful assessment requires a commitment from faculty in order to ensure that efforts are genuinely directed at enhancing student learning.

This section of the manual presents the Nichols Model - the most commonly used model for thinking about and reporting annual assessment activity. An alternative model -the VCU WEAVE Model - is presented in Appendix 12. While some departments may prefer one of these models over the other, perhaps the most important feature to note is the extent to which they are similar. Assessment has reached a stage at which there is considerable agreement about the ways to do it meaningfully. At many institutions, the administration, assessment office, and faculty have agreed upon the protocol and procedures for conducting annual assessment. All departments are expected to conduct assessment in the same general manner, and a template is provided for reporting assessment results. Sociology departments in institutions that have yet to commit to a standard procedure or in institutions that allow for departmental flexibility may be especially interested in these models. However, sociology departments in all institutions may benefit from understanding the logic that underlies both of these models.

The Nichols Model

The most commonly used model for conducting and reporting assessment results was developed by James Nichols of the University of Mississippi (Nichols, 1995). Nichols conceptualized the assessment process as involving five distinguishable stages, each of which was assigned a column in a reporting chart.

It is important to realize that departments typically assess about three learning objectives each year. Continuous data gathering means some data are being collected and interpreted every year with the anticipated (and hoped for) consequence that ongoing assessment becomes part of the department culture. Continuous data collection does *not* mean that every objective is measured constantly. Our data gathering needs to be paced and measured so that we can sustain commitment to assessment and so that we remember to focus attention on improving parts of the program sequentially. Data collection and

focused discussion sequentially covering all the articulated program objectives is meant to stimulate the evolution of program improvement. Departments often have 12 to 15 objectives, collect data on about three each year, and sequentially move through assessment of all objectives in four or five years. This enables most departments to digest the results of an entire assessment cycle between external reviews.

Stage 1: Identification of a learning goal from the department's Assessment Plan.

The focus of data collection is on an individual objective. But, each objective is important because it has been determined to relate to a broader learning goal. The learning goal to which the studied objective is attached is placed in the first column. For the purpose of illustration, we are using "the ability to communicate effectively" as the learning goal.

A Single Hypothetical Example:

Learning Goal	Learning Objective	Assessment Mechanisms	Assessment Results	Program Improvement
Students should develop the ability to communicate effectively				

Stage 2: Identification of one or more learning objectives associated with the learning goal in the department's Assessment Plan.

The selected objective(s) is placed in the second column.

Continuation of the Same Example for One Objective:

Learning Goal	Learning Objective	Assessment Mechanisms	Assessment Results	Program Improvement
Students should develop the ability to communicate effectively	An ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation			

Stage #3: Identification of at least two assessment mechanisms (from the department's Assessment Plan) that will be used to examine the selected objective(s).

Ideally, there should be at least two different ways to assess each of the objectives. The mechanisms are drawn from those listed in the third part of the Assessment Plan. If at all possible, at least one of the mechanisms should be a direct measure of learning. Each mechanism should contain a criterion or threshold of success; this is the level at which faculty would conclude that the objective has been reasonably met. The criterion should be set at whatever level is appropriate and meaningful. If an institution is doing assessment properly, departments are evaluated on their conscientious effort to write a good Assessment Plan, to conduct annual assessment activity conscientiously, and to make program improvements designed to enhance student learning.

Continuation of the Same Example for One Objective:

Learning Goal	Learning Objective	Assessment Mechanisms	Assessment Results	Program Improvement
Students should develop the ability to communicate effectively	An ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	<p>At least 80% of final presentations in the capstone course are rated as good or better</p> <p>At least 80% of respondents on an alumni survey indicate that they are confident of their ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation</p>		

Stage #4: Identification of the results of the application of the assessment mechanisms.

This column describes the results of assessment activity. It must contain information that allows determination about whether or not the criterion level has been reached. This column is completed at whatever time during the year that results from the assessment mechanism are available or at the end of the year.

Continuation of the Same Example (With Hypothetical Data in Column 4):

Learning Goal	Learning Objective	Assessment Mechanisms	Assessment Results	Program Improvement
Students should develop the ability to communicate effectively	An ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	At least 80% of final presentations in the capstone course are rated as good or better At least 80% of respondents on an alumni survey indicate that they are confident of their ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	70% of final presentations in the capstone course were rated as good or better 65% of respondents in an exit interview said that they are confident of their ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	

Stage #5: Identification of efforts that will be made to enhance student learning on this objective ("Closing the Loop").

If assessment shows that an objective is being met, and no one has ideas for doing better, the fifth column simply reports that. When assessment shows that an objective is not being met, faculty consider ideas for doing better, and the fifth column reports the changes that will be made to enhance student learning on this objective.

Continuation of Same Example (With Hypothetical Data in Column 4):

Learning Goal	Learning Objective	Assessment Mechanisms	Assessment Results	Program Improvement
Students should develop the ability to communicate effectively	An ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	At least 80% of final presentations in the capstone course are rated as good or better At least 80% of respondents on an alumni survey indicate that they are confident of their ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	70% of final presentations in the capstone course were rated as good or better 65% of respondents in an exit interview said that they are confident of their ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation	Faculty members will develop a system of rubrics that will be used for evaluating all oral presentations Faculty members in all upper-level courses will attempt to include a graded oral presentation Faculty advisors will consult with advisees and, where appropriate, encourage enrollment in a public speaking course

Essentially, the entire purpose of assessment is captured in the final column. After faculty consciously reflect on what they want students to learn and systematically study how well students are learning it, they make efforts to find ways to enhance student learning. Everything else aside, assessment is a logical and orderly way for faculty to continually ask themselves what they can do to improve student learning.

Where do the ideas for improvement come from? They come from creative, thoughtful teachers who are in tune with students and take time to consider possible changes. They come from trial-and-error. They come from *Teaching Sociology*. They come from the *ASA Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology* and its sponsored sessions and workshops. They come from teaching-related and curriculum-related sessions and workshops at the ASA meeting, regional and state sociology

meetings, and meetings of allied professional associations. They come from teaching materials published by the *ASA Teaching Resources Center* and other organizations. They come from suggestions of external reviewers sponsored by the *ASA Department Resources Group* and from other qualified peer reviewers. They come from students; they come from colleagues in other disciplines; and they can come from any conversation with anyone about teaching and learning. They come from assessment.

The Relationship of Assessment to Department Goals

The final step in meaningful assessment is the identification and implementation of steps that the department can take to enhance student learning. These steps can become part of the department's goals for the following academic year. For example, if a department chooses to develop a common evaluation sheet for oral presentations so that students continually have the traits of good oral presentation reinforced, the development and implementation of that form becomes part of the goals of the department for the next year. It may be that some of the steps a department would like to take have resource implications. An important part of the justification for the necessary resources becomes the enhancement of student learning. If the institution's administration is making an effort to develop a meaningful assessment program, that ought to be, at the least, one of the most compelling justifications for increased funding.

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APPENDICES: SAMPLE GOALS, MISSION STATEMENTS, PROCESSES FROM SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS

APPENDIX 1

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Bucknell University

Mission Statement

The following statements describe the values and expectations that guide the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Bucknell. They are a foundation for the Department's goals and objectives.

1. We are committed to diversity and intellectual pluralism in our ways of teaching and our modes of scholarship.
2. Our central intellectual objective is to teach and communicate the sociological and anthropological ways of viewing the world. Our distinctive perspectives represent ways of viewing the world and living. We are not just communicating disciplinary orientations or traditions. Our teaching mission is closely tied to the idea of teaching the liberal arts. As a consequence, we have a responsibility to teach all Bucknell students and not just our majors.
3. Our curriculum reflects the long-standing interest of our disciplines in examining the human condition and applying anthropology and sociology to its improvement.
4. We are committed to teaching our disciplines in depth, treating them as professional communities of inquiry.
 - a. We teach a disciplinary core of concepts, methods, and traditions that is cumulative and that students carry from one course to another.
 - b. Our disciplines are broad and diverse by nature and we present many different perspectives to our students.
 - c. We emphasize a process of learning and doing research in which analytic problem solving is central.
5. We support an open access pattern in our curriculum and make many of our courses, including upper-level specialized courses, available to inquiring students without formal prerequisites.
6. We prepare students for successful lives after Bucknell: for graduate education, for applied professional fields, and for the worlds of work.

7. We are teacher/scholars.
 - a. Our members have lively, ongoing research programs that involve them in scholarly and applied knowledge communities within and outside of Bucknell.
 - b. We share our knowledge with professional colleagues through publication in scholarly journals and through other means of communication.

Our research enriches our teaching:

- * By bringing our research work directly into the classroom as the subject matter we teach;
 - * By including students in our personal research projects;
 - * And by encouraging students to do their own original research, providing them the material, intellectual, and personal support to do research, and helping them to report their research results in appropriate professional settings.
8. Members of our department are involved in activities on campus and in community and professional activities off-campus that express and advance our departmental mission. These activities are local, regional, national, and international.
 9. Our department emphasizes collegiality. We want to maintain a welcoming environment for all faculty members, staff, students, alumni, and friends.

(www.bucknell.edu/Academics/Colleges_Departments/Academic_Departments/Sociology)

APPENDIX 2
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
SUNY - Cortland

Mission Statement (for Sociology and Criminology)

Our vision for the Sociology and Criminology programs at the State University of New York at Cortland is, first and foremost, one in which students are significantly changed by the teaching and mentoring they experience, the literature they read, the writing and thinking they do, and the diverse social worlds they encounter in research activities, internships, and civic service.

At SUNY Cortland a course of study leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology is intended to help students develop the insights of a sociological perspective, to provide a familiarity with continuing research and theoretical analysis of the social world, to ensure that students develop skills leading to successful careers, and to promote active citizenship.

The insights of a sociological perspective include the ability to perceive the structures and patterns upon which everyday life rests, to understand the interplay between individual choice and social influence, to interpret events from multiple perspectives, and to examine existing social arrangements critically--in other words to develop and apply a "sociological imagination."

Continuing research and theoretical analysis of the social world involves developing the analytical tools to understand an ever-expanding body of knowledge about the dynamics of social relationships, the nature of power and influence in complex societies, and the role of age, class, ethnicity, gender, and other social characteristics in affecting people's life chances and perspectives.

Through the study of sociology, students gain access to concrete skills that are relevant to a broad range of rewarding careers. These skills enhance the student's ability to assess new and unfamiliar situations, to select and apply qualitative and/or quantitative techniques in solving practical problems in creative ways, and to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing. As multiple careers become the norm in American life, such skills become ever more essential.

Active citizenship and social responsibility means that sociology majors will be prepared to "make a difference" in the quality of others' lives as well as the quality of their own. Persons educated in sociology are equipped and motivated to contribute to the improvement of their communities, their nation, and their world.

(www.cortland.edu/sociology/missions.html)

APPENDIX 3
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Denison University

Mission Statement

The Department of Sociology/Anthropology is firmly committed to the principles of a liberal education. We have therefore sought to create a learning environment within which students may liberate themselves from ideological and social conditions that produce ignorance, apathy, irresponsibility, and cynicism. We believe that the development of a perspective that examines the human condition in empirical, analytical, comparative, historical, holistic, and critical terms makes a significant contribution to intellectual liberation. In pursuing such a goal, our task is to provide students with the most rigorous and comprehensive approaches to knowledge and analysis appropriate within an undergraduate program in Sociology and Anthropology. Our commitment to teaching also defines for us the importance of active scholarship through which we may practice our disciplines and encourage similar pursuits among our students.

Since our graduates enter into a wide range of professional, administrative, policy-oriented, and other occupations, our goal is to transmit, foster, and produce knowledge and practice that involve students in their own learning experience. In this respect we want to encourage students to take their education into their own hands by helping them to engage personally in research, analysis, and writing about diverse human societies. We believe that just as students must emancipate themselves from ignorance, they must also emancipate themselves from us. Thus, we wish to assist students to develop skills in the processing, integration, and utilization of knowledge, rather than its simple transfer. To this end our mission is not only to produce knowledgeable social actors but social agents who have a self-reflective sense of their empowerment and potential contributions to the enhancement of the human condition.

(www.denison.edu/socanthro/mission.html)

APPENDIX 4
Department of Sociology
University of Minnesota

Mission Statement

Change is the ubiquitous feature of the human condition. In this, the first decade of the 21st century, change also may be more rapid, more massive, and more complex than at any moment in the past. Not coincidentally, the problems society faces today are numerous, monumental in scope, and, at times, seemingly intractable.

Sociology examines stability and change in social life. It addresses the underlying patterns of social relations which maintain stability in formal organizations, in the family, in the economy, in legal institutions, and in the political area. It also assesses the dynamics of change in these institutions over time and space. It looks at both changing persons and social structures with a view toward enriching our understanding of how change occurs and with what effects.

The substantive focus of sociology at the University of Minnesota is to clarify the implications of both stability and change within a framework of social action. The intent is to join the rich social scientific understandings of social and individual dynamics with wider issues of public concern. The overall purpose is to fashion a sociology simultaneously committed to creating general knowledge of social life, but at the same time mindful of the discipline's responsibility to its public role in clarifying critical social issues.

The framework of action and change underscores our focus on agency and choice as central to sociological analysis. Micro-oriented sociologists examine agency in terms of individuals--their strengths, resiliencies and pathologies--as they exercise choice across developmental progressions, family life cycles, and work careers. Macro-oriented sociologists assess agency in terms of planned change and spontaneous movements as they affect economic and social development. Current work at the forefront of the discipline weaves these multiple levels together by examining how social change affects the biographies of individuals and how, in turn, individual change culminates in larger social transformations.

The vision informing our mission is of a proactive civic sociology drawing attention to significant social issues, and responsive to the interests of the wider society. The vision is illustrated and implemented in current departmental projects concerned with the quality of social life: youth employment, gender relations, crime and criminal justice, philanthropy, and political extremism. For the department, the vision of a civic sociology is central

both to the future of the discipline and to our educational mission. Accordingly, the department is committed to moving its concern with action and change across its multiple activities:

1. In education, promoting commitment to our collective quest for a systematic understanding of society,
2. In research, in broadly interpreting the causes and consequences of social stability and change, and
3. In service, in enriching public discourse and influencing public policy to guide planning and development.

(www.soc.umn.edu/aboutus/missionstatement.htm)

APPENDIX 5

Useful Verbs in Writing Learning Objectives (Categorized by Bloom's Taxonomy)

Knowledge	Compre- hension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
Define Identify Indicate Know Label List Name Select Underline	Classify Describe Discuss Explain Identify Locate Review Summarize Translate	Apply Compute Construct Demonstrate Illustrate Interpret Investigate Predict Use	Analyze Calculate Categorize Compare Contrast Determine Differentiate Distinguish Relate	Arrange Construct Create Design Formulate Organize Plan Prepare Produce	Assess Estimate Evaluate Discriminate Judge Interpret Rate Revise Support

(Source: Norman E. Gronlund, *How to Write and Use Instructional Objectives* (6th edition), Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999.)

APPENDIX 6

A Classification of Learning Outcomes Dimensions

In constructing learning objectives for students, it is helpful to think of the variety of dimensions in which growth or change in students might be desired. The following classification system is helpful in thinking through these various dimensions. It should be considered as a menu; departments may choose to formulate objectives relative to as many or few of these dimensions as they think important.

I. Knowledge Outcomes--the purely cognitive aspect of educational outcomes

- A. General knowledge (breadth of knowledge)--familiarity with and analysis and comprehension of facts and principles inherent in broad areas of study. It may include:
 - 1. recall and comprehension of facts in a broad area of study
 - 2. recall and comprehension of theories and terminology in a broad area of study
 - 3. recall and comprehension of investigative principles and methods in a broad area of study
 - 4. recall and comprehension of the history and development of a broad area of study
 - 5. ability to relate/integrate approaches and concepts drawn from more than one broad area of study
- B. Knowledge of specific fields (depth of knowledge)--requires mastery of the accepted body of facts, theories, language, and techniques of a particular field of study. It may include:
 - 1. recall and comprehension of facts in a particular discipline or specialized field
 - 2. recall and comprehension of theories and terminology in a particular discipline or specialized field
 - 3. recall and comprehension of investigative principles and methods in a particular discipline or specialized field
 - 4. recall and comprehension of the history and development of a particular discipline or specialized field
 - 5. ability to effectively manipulate appropriate concepts, theories, and investigative methods to create new knowledge in a particular discipline or specialized field

II. Skills Outcomes--the relative abilities of students to perform explicit tasks

- A. General competence (social functioning) skills--encompass the abilities to use knowledge, organize information, define problems, and discover and implement solutions to problems. It may include:
 - 1. verbal skills, including reading, reading comprehension, writing, and oral communication
 - 2. quantitative skills, including mathematics, statistics, and computing
 - 3. leadership/organizational/human-relations skills
 - 4. analytical skills, including skills of problem definition, problem solving, and critical thinking
 - 5. invention/innovation/creative-thinking skills
 - 6. aesthetic-appreciation/creative-expression skills
 - 7. physical/motor skills
- B. Professional/occupational skills--consist of the particular, specialized skills needed for effective performance in an identified profession or occupation

III. Attitude/Value Outcomes--the affective impacts of higher education

- A. Personal goals and aspirations--are defined in terms of levels, patterns, and directions of personal interests, desires, drives, and ambitions. It may include:
 - 1. general goals and aspirations (lifestyle, social mobility, family goals, personal goals)
 - 2. occupational and career goals
 - 3. educational goals
 - 4. motivation and drive levels for each of the above
- B. General attitudes, values, and satisfactions--in terms of their content, extent, and internal consistency. It may include:
 - 1. beliefs (including religious beliefs), belief systems, value commitments, and philosophies of life
 - 2. mores, customs, and standards of conduct
 - 3. patterns of feelings and emotions, including particular satisfactions and dissatisfactions with individuals, groups, institutions, and social situations
- C. Attitudes toward self--development of identity. It may include:
 - 1. perception of self, general self-concept, self-discovery
 - 2. self-reliance, self-confidence, including adventurousness and initiative, autonomy, and independence

3. satisfaction with self, psychological well-being
 4. personality/personal coping characteristics, including flexibility and adaptability, dogmatism/authoritarianism, tolerance and persistence, and so forth
- D. Attitudes toward others--related to and part of individual identity. It may include:
1. specific perceptions of other individuals/groups in a society
 2. tolerance for cultural and intellectual diversity, including a willingness to accept different points of view
 3. general human understanding, including empathy, sensitivity, and cooperation

IV. Relationships with Society and with Particular Constituencies--an often longer-term measure of the effects of higher education on students

- A. Relationships with educational institutions
1. individual educational development goals
 2. patterns of enrollment, placement, and participation
 3. patterns of retention, attrition, and program completion
 4. patterns of program/institutional change or transfer
 5. levels of achievement in subsequent educational experiences
 6. quality of student effort
 7. assessed relevance and contribution of past education to subsequent educational experiences
- B. Relationships with employers
1. individual employment/career choice goals, including change, stability, and intensity of goals
 2. first job obtained after education, including the relevance of this job to the education received
 3. long-term employment history
 4. income/earnings history
 5. promotion and job performance
 6. job satisfaction
- C. Relationships with professions/professional associations
1. individual professional development goals, including change, stability, and intensity of goals
 2. patterns of professional certification/recognition/award
 3. patterns of subsequent professional development activities
 4. assessed contributions of past education to professional success
 5. professional satisfaction
- D. Relationships with family/community/society
1. family roles, relationships, and child-rearing practices

2. patterns of social affiliation, group membership, and participation
3. patterns of voluntary contribution, including contributions of time, money, or other support
4. patterns of citizenship activities/political participation

(Source: Peter Ewell, *The Self-Regarding Institution: Information for Excellence*, Boulder, Colorado: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 1984.)

APPENDIX 7

Learning Goals and Outcomes *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated (2004)*

The sociology major should study, review, and demonstrate understanding of:

1. the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. describe how sociology differs from and is similar to other social sciences, and give examples of these differences;
 - b. describe how sociology contributes to a liberal arts understanding of social reality;
 - c. apply the sociological imagination, sociological principles and concepts to her/his own life.
2. the role of theory in sociology, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge;
 - b. compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations;
 - c. show how theories reflect the historical context of times and cultures in which they were developed; and
 - d. describe and apply some basic theories or theoretical orientations in at least one area of social reality.
3. the role of evidence and qualitative and quantitative methods in sociology, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. identify basic methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods in building sociological knowledge;
 - b. compare and contrast the basic methodological approaches for gathering data;
 - c. design a research study in an area of choice and explain why various decisions were made; and
 - d. critically assess a published research report and explain how the study could have been improved.
4. the technical skills involved in retrieving information and data from the internet, using computers appropriately for data analysis, and (social) scientific technical writing that accurately conveys data findings, as well as an understanding and application of principles of ethical practice as a sociologist.

Item #4 could be reformatted in the following way:

1. *the role of data analysis in sociology, such that the student will be able to:*
 - a. *use the necessary technical skills in retrieving information and data from the internet;*
 - b. *use computers appropriately for data analysis;*
 - c. *accurately convey data findings in writing; and*
 - d. *describe and apply the principles of ethical practice as a sociologist.*

5. basic concepts in sociology and their fundamental theoretical interrelations, such that the student will be able to
 - a. define, give examples, and demonstrate the relevance of the following: culture, social change, socialization, stratification, social structure, institutions, and differentiations by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and class.
6. how culture and social structure operate, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. show how institutions interlink in their effects on each other and on individuals;
 - b. demonstrate how social change factors such as population or urbanization affect social structures and individuals;
 - c. demonstrate how culture and social structure vary across time and place and the effect of such variations;
 - d. identify examples of specific policy implications using reasoning about social structural effects.
7. reciprocal relationships between individuals and society, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. explain how the self develops sociologically;
 - b. demonstrate how societal and structural factors influence individual behavior and the self's development;
 - c. demonstrate how social interaction and the self influences society and social structure; and
 - d. distinguish sociological approaches to analyzing the self from psychological, economic, and other approaches.
8. the macro/micro distinction, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. compare and contrast theories at one level with those at another;
 - b. summarize some research documenting connections between the two; and
 - c. develop a list of research or analytical issues that should be pursued to more fully understand the connections between the two.

9. in depth at least two specialty areas within sociology, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. summarize basic questions and issues in the areas;
 - b. compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations and middle range theories in the areas;
 - c. show how sociology helps understand the area;
 - d. summarize current research in the areas; and
 - e. e. develop specific policy implications of research and theories in the area.
10. the internal diversity of American society and its place in the international context, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. describe the significance of variations by race, class, gender, and age;
 - b. know (identify?) how to appropriately generalize or resist generalizations across groups.

Two more generic goals that should be pursued in sociology are:

11. To think critically, such that the student will be able to:
 - a. move easily (demonstrate?) from recall analysis and application to synthesis and evaluation;
 - b. identify underlying assumptions in particular theoretical orientations or arguments;
 - c. identify underlying assumptions in particular methodological approaches to an issue;
 - d. show how (explain?) patterns of thought and knowledge are directly influenced by political-economic social structures;
 - e. present opposing viewpoints and alternative hypotheses on various issues; and
 - f. engage in teamwork where many or different viewpoints are presented.
12. To develop values, such that the student will:
 - a. see (articulate?) the utility of the sociological perspective as one of several perspectives on social reality; and
 - b. see (value?) the importance of reducing the negative effects of social inequality.

APPENDIX 8
Learning Goals and Objectives
California State University - Fresno

A. Goals Related to Skills

1. Be able to think critically
 - 1.1 Be able to identify the structure of an argument presented in written form (conclusion, premises, and supporting evidence).
 - 1.2 Be able to identify the weaknesses (if any) in the structure of the argument, its background assumptions, and its evidence.
 - 1.3 Be able to identify the basic fallacies in reasoning such as appeal to ignorance, the gambler's fallacy, hasty generalization, false dilemma, slippery slope, ad hominem arguments, and the straw man fallacy.
2. Be able to demonstrate basic computer skills necessary to find, create, apply, and communicate sociological information.
 - 2.1 Be able to use on-line data bases to find published research.
 - 2.2 Be able to use the internet, e-mail, and Web pages to communicate with others and to find information.
 - 2.3 Be able to use standard software packages, such as SPSS and Microcase to analyze data, Excel to create spreadsheets, and Word to write papers.
3. Be able to read, write and speak effectively.
 - 3.1 Be able to read professional-level sociological reports with understanding.
 - 3.2 Be able to write a clear, grammatical, well-organized report of the findings from sociological data analysis.
 - 3.3 Be able to make oral presentations focused on course content in group settings.

B. Goals Related to Understanding Core Sociological Concepts and Theories

1. To be able to define the basic concepts of sociology.
 - 1.1 Be able to define and use meaningfully basic concepts such as: culture, status, role, norm, stratification, social class, structural mobility, exchange mobility, race, ethnic group, prejudice, discrimination.
2. To understand the structure of societies.
 - 2.1 To be able to explain and critically evaluate major theoretical positions which are currently advanced to explain social stratification.

- 2.2 To be able to explain and critically evaluate major theoretical positions which are currently advanced to explain ethnic group relations.
- 2.3 To be able to explain and critically evaluate major theoretical positions which are currently advanced to explain gender relations.
- 2.4 To be able to demonstrate familiarity with key social institutions such as: the family, health care, and formal organizations.
- 3. To understand the reciprocal relations between individuals and the small groups in which they are embedded.
 - 3.1 To be able to explain and critically evaluate major theoretical positions in modern social psychology.
 - 3.2 To be able to explain and critically evaluate examples of research in distinguish the observational and experimental traditions in social psychology.
- 4. To understand the role of theory in sociology.
 - 4.1 Be able to explain the major 19th century foundations of modern sociological theory (such as the work of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx) and show how each tradition influences current sociological theories.
 - 4.2 Be able to explain and critically evaluate major modern theoretical orientations such as: structural-functionalism, conflict, symbolic interactionist, rational choice, etc.

C. Goals Related to Research Methods in Sociology

- 1. To understand the design of research including sampling, measurement, and data collection.
 - 1.1 To be able to construct a sampling design illustrating the principles of random selection and stratification.
 - 1.2 To be able to identify possible measures of concepts.
 - 1.3 To be able to distinguish between reliability and validity.
 - 1.4 To be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative methods of data collection.
- 2. To understand both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data.
 - 2.1 To be able to construct and interpret two-variable and three-variable tables.
 - 2.2 To be able to use qualitative data in generating and testing theory.
 - 2.3 To be able to write a research report using both quantitative and qualitative data.

3. To understand the applications of research methods to program evaluation and needs assessment.
 - 3.1 To be able to distinguish between program monitoring and impact assessment.
 - 3.2 To be able to distinguish between experimental and quasi-experimental designs for impact assessment.
 - 3.3 To be able to demonstrate the importance of comparison groups in evaluative research.
4. To understand ethical issues that arise in the course of research.
 - 4.1 To be able to identify the critical ethical issues in research such as confidentiality, informed consent, and minimization of risk to subjects.
 - 4.2 To be aware of various professional codes of ethics such as the code of ethics from the American Sociological Association.
 - 4.3 To be able to identify studies that illustrate the critical ethical issues in research.

(www.academicaffairs.csufresno.edu/assocprovost/SOAP/Program_Review/Sociology)

APPENDIX 9
Learning Goals and Objectives
Central Michigan University

Learning Goals Learning Objectives

Think critically

- ▶ Distinguish between arguments based on empirical evidence and arguments based simply on opinion.
- ▶ Identify basic premises in particular arguments.
- ▶ Examine one's own cultural practices, beliefs, and values.
- ▶ Analyze who has vested interests in a particular social order.

Write clearly in order to communicate sociological content

- ▶ Write in a clear and concise sociological analysis account of a social event, topic, issue, or problem.
- ▶ Write a clear and concise report of the findings from empirical sociological analysis.

Understand the role of evidence and quantitative and qualitative research methods in sociology and to be aware of ethical issues in research.

- ▶ To know the difference between a dependent and independent variable.
- ▶ Identify basic methodological approaches for gathering data.
- ▶ Understand and apply basic statistical tests sociologists often use.
- ▶ Calculate and interpret the percentages and bivariate statistics in a simple bivariate cross tabulation.
- ▶ Discuss ethical issues in sociological research.

Have basic computer skills necessary to find, communicate, create, and apply sociological knowledge and information

- ▶ Use computerized and on-line databases to find published sociological research.
- ▶ Use the internet, email, and web pages to communicate to others and to find sociological information.
- ▶ Use a standard software package, such as SPSS, to analyze data.

B. Goals Related to Understanding Sociological Core Concepts and Theories

Know basic concepts in sociology and sociological perspective

- ▶ Define, give examples, and demonstrate the relevance of key concepts such as self, culture, socialization, stratification, social

structure, institutions, social harm, crime, delinquency, and deviance and key differentiations such as race/ethnicity, gender, age and social class.

- ▶ Distinguish between individualistic and systematic arguments and accounts.

Recognize the internal diversity and inequality of American society

- ▶ Recognize and discuss the impact of inequality and race and/or gender on social structures and on differences of individuals.
- ▶ Discuss the social factors (including institutional factors) that create and perpetuate inequality.
- ▶ Describe the processes through which prejudice and discrimination are created and perpetuated.

Have an appreciation for the relationships between individuals and the social context

- ▶ Explain how structural and group factors influence interactions and the development of the self.
- ▶ Explain how social interaction and the self influences society and social structure.
- ▶ Explain the linkages between "personal troubles" and "public issues."

Understand (a) the role of theory in sociology and (b) how to apply key concepts of sociology inquiry in social analysis

- ▶ Define theory and describe its role in sociology
- ▶ Compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations (conflict; Structural-functionalist; interactionist).
- ▶ Show how theories reflect the context in which they are developed.
- ▶ Describe and apply basic theories or theoretical orientations to some given sociological phenomena.

C. Related to Attributes/Attitudes

Have an appreciation for social justice

- ▶ Be aware of the ways in which individual action can either promote or reduce social justice.
- ▶ Apply the sociological perspective in action to reduce social problems.

(www.provost.cmich.edu/outcomes/outcomes/chsbs.htm)

APPENDIX 10
Learning Goals and Objectives
Roanoke College

The Department of Sociology is committed to the following learning goals and outcomes objectives for students graduating with a sociology major.

Goal #1: Students graduating with a sociology major are able to articulate perspectives on human behavior that are sociological.

Objectives:

1. An ability to express the contribution of sociology to understanding social reality
2. An ability to describe how sociology is similar to and different from other social sciences

Goal #2: Students graduating with a sociology major are able to articulate the role of theory in sociology.

Objectives:

1. An ability to describe the role of theory in building sociological knowledge
2. An ability to compare and contrast theoretical orientations
3. An ability to apply sociological theories to areas of social reality

Goal #3: Students graduating with a sociology major are able to articulate the role of social research methods in sociology.

Objectives:

1. An ability to describe the role of research methods in building sociological knowledge
2. An ability to compare and contrast methods of social research
3. An ability to design and carry out a social research project

Goal #4: Students graduating with a sociology major are able to articulate the role of data analysis in sociology.

Objectives:

1. An ability to describe the role of data analysis in building sociological knowledge
2. An ability to compare and contrast techniques for analyzing data
3. An ability to use data analysis techniques to answer social questions
4. An ability to use the computer in the acquisition and analysis of information and data

Goal #5: Students graduating with a major in sociology are able to define and illustrate key sociological concepts.

Objectives:

1. An ability to define and illustrate the following sociological concepts: culture, social structure, social inequality, and cultural diversity
2. An ability to describe cultural diversity in the United States and in the world and an appreciation for it
- 3.

Goal #6: Students graduating with a major in sociology are able to summarize basic knowledge, questions, and issues in substantive areas of sociology.

Objectives:

1. An ability to summarize existing knowledge, current questions, and important issues in at least three substantive areas of sociology
2. An ability to describe and explain continuing sources of social inequality

Goal #7: Students graduating with a major in sociology are able to communicate effectively about sociology.

Objectives:

1. An ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in writing
2. An ability to express ideas in a clear and coherent manner in oral presentation
3. An ability to demonstrate effective critical thinking skills

Goal #8: Students graduating with a major in sociology are well prepared for subsequent education and employment.

Objectives:

1. Admission to an appropriate graduate or professional school for those interested in continuing their education
2. Successful completion of graduate or professional education for matriculants in those programs
3. Judgment by graduates in the labor force that the sociology program prepared them well for their life and work responsibilities

Goal #9: Students who fulfill the Social Scientific Reasoning distribution requirement with Introduction to Sociology should acquire an understanding of how the science of sociology produces knowledge about society, social interaction, and human behavior.

Objectives:

1. An ability to describe and to apply the sociological perspective to understanding society, social interaction, and human behavior.
2. An ability to describe the processes by which sociologists study society, social interaction, and human behavior.

(Roanoke College, Department of Sociology, *Learning Goals and Objectives*, 2004.)

APPENDIX 11
Learning Goals and Objectives
Skidmore College

The Sociology program at Skidmore College seeks to develop each student's knowledge and abilities in the following areas.

1. Critical Thinking

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. understand alternative viewpoints on social scientific issues.

2. The discipline of sociology and its contributions to understanding social life.

The sociology major should be able to:

- a. describe similarities and differences between sociology and the other social sciences.
- b. describe how sociology contributes to understanding human experiences.
- c. apply your sociological imagination--that is, understanding of the intersection of the biography and history within social structures.
- d. apply sociological concepts and principles to individual experiences and the social world.

3. Sociological theory

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 context in which they developed.
- d. major theories in selected substantive areas of sociology.

4. Methodology

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 building sociological knowledge.
- e. explain and apply basic statistical principles and techniques.
- f. evaluate statistical information and analyses
- g. design and carry out a research project.
- h. critically assess empirical research of others.

5. Basic concepts in sociology and their interrelationships

The sociology major should be able to explain basic concepts such as culture, roles, norms, social structure, social institution, socialization, and stratification.

6. Social structure and social institutions

The sociology major should be able to:

- a. describe relationships between culture and social structure.
- b. demonstrate how culture and social structure vary across time and place and describe the effects of such variations.
- c. describe how demographic and other social changes affect social structures and individuals.
- d. demonstrate how social institutions affect each other.
- e. demonstrate the effects of social institutions and their interactions on individuals.

7. Reciprocal relationships between individuals and society

The sociology major should be able to:

- a. explain how the self develops sociologically.
- b. demonstrate how societal and social structural factors influence individual behavior and the self's development.
- c. demonstrate how social interaction and the self influence society and social structure.

8. Knowledge of a substantive area within sociology

The sociology major should be able to:

- a. summarize basic issues in the area.
- b. compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations and middle-range theories in that area.
- c. explain how sociology contributes to understanding of the area.
- d. summarize current research in the area.
- e. suggest specific policy implications of research and theories in the area.

9. Social and cultural variations

The sociology major should be able to:

- a. describe the significance of variations across social categories.

- b. describe the significance of cross-cultural variations.
- c. describe social and cultural trends.
- d. generalize appropriately or resist inappropriate generalizations across groups and historical time.

10. Sociological analysis of values

The sociology major should be able to:

- a. explain how personal and cultural values result from and affect social processes.
- b. explain the degree to which values are historically and culturally situated.
- c. explain relationships between beliefs and behavior.

(www.skidmore.edu/academics/sociology/policies/goals.html)

APPENDIX 12

The Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) *WEAVE* Model

Virginia Commonwealth University has created a shared model for assessment and quality enhancement (www.vcu.edu/quality/pdfs/WEAVEManual2002.pdf). The purpose of the program is to integrate the processes of planning, program review, and assessment into one seamless framework that has been named *WEAVE*. The acronym stands for:

- * Write expected outcomes
- * Establish criteria for success
- * Assess performance
- * View assessment results
- * Effect improvements

The framework consists of the following seven steps:

Write Expected Outcomes

- Step #1: Articulate the mission or purpose of the academic program.
- Step #2: Define educational and programmatic goals and objectives, including desired student learning outcomes.

Establish Criteria for Success

- Step #3: Identify and describe appropriate assessment instruments or methods.
- Step #4: Establish criteria for learning success.

Assess Performance of Students

- Step #5: Conduct assessment activities.

View Assessment Results

- Step #6: Analyze the findings from the assessment activities.

Effect Program Improvements

- Step #7: Implement changes to enhance quality.

The steps combine creation of an Assessment Plan and the conduct of an annual program of assessment activities and program improvement. The Nichols Model and the *WEAVE* model contain all of the same activities but categorize them somewhat differently. Both are excellent assessment programs, although some departments might prefer one or the other ways of conceptualizing this process.

Alternative ways of conceptualizing the process lead to similar but slightly different means for reporting assessment data. Some may

prefer a standard form, while others may prefer tabular format. Each of these formats is illustrated using the VCU WEAVE forms.

WEAVE Possible Reporting Format #1: Quality Enhancement Program Form

Program Identification:

Program Purpose or Mission:

Objective/Outcome 1:

Assessment Measures for Objective/Outcome 1 - Criteria for Success - Time Frame

Assessment Activity	Criterion/What Constitutes Success	Timetable

Assessment Findings:

Use of Assessment Results:

WEAVE Possible Reporting Format #2: Assessment Matrix

W	E	A	V	E
Write objectives	Establish Criteria	Assess	View Results	Effect Change
Learning Objective	Assessment Criterion Measure of Success	Schedule	Results or Findings	Use of Results/ Future Actions

ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE FOR STUDENT LEARNING GOALS¹

The ASA Task Force on Assessment

Preface

The purpose of this template is to help departments know where to begin in assessment as well as help departments advance in assessment with guidance from the American Sociological Association.² **This document is a companion piece to the ASA Task Force Assessment Manual.** Thus, is it a product of the work accomplished by the ASA Task Force on Assessment and an intentional effort to support the work of the ASA Task Force on the sociology Major, which revised the *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* (McKinney et al. 2004) booklet.

Much is *known* about assessment and we hope this template is useful in providing organization, direction, and suggestions for actual *practice*. There is, however, no template that can simply “be adopted”; departments must make decisions appropriate to their distinctive situations as they consider the 12 outcomes. It is just not possible to send out “The ASA Assessment Instrument”, for unlike engineering or nursing, for example, such complete standardization of knowledge is not appropriate.³ As explained in the Assessment Manual, a department *must* make any program its own or assessment will almost certainly fail. At the same time, there is enough shared understanding of the essential components of our discipline to allow us to both define what matters and respect variations on the themes. Thus, this template suggests an ideal type that can help guide departments as they identify the strengths of their programs, consider gaps, prioritize efforts, and where appropriate, work toward changes.

¹ This template is based on the goals provided in *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated: Meeting the Challenges of Teaching Sociology in the Twenty-First Century* (2004).

² We wish to acknowledge the following organizations and individuals: the ASA for its long standing work on assessment through workshops and annual meeting sessions, in particular the leadership of Carla Howery; the leadership and modeling of campus specific assessment accomplished by Greg Weiss of Roanoke College; the Collaboration for the Advancement of College Teaching and Learning, Saint Paul Minnesota; and, the Department of Sociology at Augsburg College, especially Diane Pike, primary author.

³ This is true for other fields that, like sociology, do not have a GRE subject area test for instance.

Lastly, understand that this is a program level model. The required decision-making and the nature of programmatic success in teaching and learning mean that this guide should be used collaboratively. In each section, examples and suggestions are provided--*not* mandates for a single way of effective practice. What ultimately matters most is how departments make use of what they learn to benefit the students, the faculty and the program.

Learning Goal 1:	<p>Students⁴ can demonstrate understanding of the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how sociology is similar or different from other social sciences and give examples of these differences. • Articulate the contribution of sociology to a liberal arts understanding of social reality. • Apply principles, concepts and the sociological imagination to at least one area of social reality.
Departmental Decisions	<p>Does this goal fit with the current major? Which principles and concepts should students be able to identify? With which social sciences should students be able to compare and contrast? How are the liberal arts defined at your institution? Upon what can the department agree as sociology's contribution? What are the sociological principles and key concepts upon which can you agree? In what ways will you expect students to articulate the sociological imagination?</p>
Location in the Program	<p>Identify courses in which these abilities are taught and practiced: intro, methods, statistics, lower division electives, upper division electives, theory, seminar List particular assignments; be as specific as possible</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Well-crafted, standard examination questions (short answer and/or multiple-choice) can identify students' comprehension of basic concepts. Essay questions for more complex tasks: "Compare and contrast sociology with psychology and economics." Provide a short newspaper clipping of an event and ask students to compare and contrast how different disciplines would make sense of (analyze) the example; might also allow connection of sociology to the liberal</p>

⁴ "Students" refers to baccalaureate level undergraduate sociology majors at the completion of a curricular program--that is, of "the major" in sociology.

	arts. Authentic examples often help students practice application of their sociological understanding; Offer multiple opportunities both within a particular course and across the curriculum. What is already in place? Discuss the shared understandings across multiple sections and courses. Rotate the focus: what is assessed this year and what next year? <i>Sample</i> student work. ⁵
Criteria for Evaluation	What standards of evaluation will be applied? What levels of quality are necessary to distinguish for purposes of departmental programming? Is pass/no pass ever appropriate? Compare findings on student comprehension of intro and address strengthening areas of weaker performance. For intro essays, faculty share examples of two excellent, two good, and two satisfactory essays; discuss patterns of strength and gaps; share ideas for addressing gaps. In other (typically required) courses, identify continued application of concepts.
Closing the Loop	Examine the capacity of students to demonstrate these abilities at various points in the curriculum. Give the intro instrument again in senior year and compare results; compare an essay question or short paper assignment to sample of intro levels essay. Prioritize! What matters most?

Learning Goal 2:	Students can demonstrate the role of theory in sociology. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge. • Compare and contrast basic theoretical knowledge. • Demonstrate the historical/cultural context in which theories were developed. • Apply basic theories or theoretical approaches in at least one area of social reality.
Departmental Decisions	What definition/s of theory will be adopted? Which theories should majors be able to compare and contrast? What depth of historical/cultural context is appropriate in the program? Which theories/approaches should students be able to apply and why?

⁵ These principles generally apply to all the outcomes. Keep in mind that each section contains suggestions and examples, not exhaustive mandates. Also, while the term "program" is broader than "curriculum," the terms are used interchangeably here. Adjust as appropriate.

Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Sociological theory: The systematic explanation of social phenomena; abstract explanations that predict events in the world; theory is probabilistic.</p> <p>Approaches: Functionalism, Conflict Theory and Symbolic Interactionism (Post-modern/Critical/Feminist/Marxist)</p> <p>Historical/cultural context: Major features of late 19th and early 20th century Western Europe and the United States; the Enlightenment—France, England and Germany</p>
Location in the program	<p>To what extent is theory introduced in introductory sociology?</p> <p>What is type and depth of theory coverage in all of your courses?</p> <p>Which theories are covered in your theory course and why?</p> <p>Is theory included in research methods and/or senior seminar?</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Intro: essay question or short written assignment in which students to compare and contrast functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interaction regarding a current issue.</p> <p>Exam questions or papers asking for the identification of main features of theories identified in any of the other courses in your program.</p> <p>Theory: Major papers or essay exams regarding the historical/cultural context of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>Depth of theoretical analysis required: pass/no pass?</p> <p>Features included for excellence: depth, specificity, accuracy, substance</p> <p>Ability to identify limitations and or weaknesses of theories</p>
Closing the Loop	<p>Save samples of student work.</p> <p>Which theories are best understood and why?</p> <p>Where, if appropriate, can theory be strengthened?</p>

Learning Goal 3:	<p>Students can demonstrate understanding of the role of evidence and qualitative and quantitative methods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify basic methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods in building sociological knowledge. • Compare and contrast the basic methodological approaches for gathering data. • Design a research study in an area of choice and explain why various decisions were made. • Critically assess a published research report and explain how the study could have been improved.
Departmental Decisions	<p>Which methodological approaches should students be able to understand and use? How should students understand the conceptualization of quantitative and qualitative—as types of methods or styles of analysis? Should students design a research project? If so, of what type? What type of published research articles will be included for critical assessment?</p>
Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Role of empirical evidence in the scientific method; induction/deduction Role of evidence in the interpretive method Methodologies: survey (questionnaire, interview), experiment, observation, document/content analysis, secondary analysis. Design a primary research study in research methods course or in senior seminar. Select articles from international, national and regional peer reviewed sociology journals, and related fields.</p>
Location in the program	<p>Typical in research methods course; senior seminars that are research based, and upper division electives. Is it addressed in any other courses?</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Major primary empirical research papers in required courses; samples should be saved. Examination questions that compare and contrast methods (intro, research methods course, or senior seminar are typical sources) and apply appropriate design to an example.</p>

	Required paper on journal article critique; some excellent sources can be found in Pryczak publishing documents.
Criteria for Evaluation	Standards for evaluation can be taken from peer review or journal instructions. What is the level of quality expected and why? See resources in Assessment Manual.
Closing the Loop	Assess quality and range of papers, assignments and exam performance through sampling of senior papers. If program is small, no need to sample. Determine what changes might be needed in the seminar and/or in courses that are preparatory.

Learning Goal 4:	Students can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use technical skills in retrieving information from the Internet. • use computers appropriately for data analysis. • write in appropriate social science style for accurately conveying data findings. • identify and apply the principles of ethical sociological practice.
Departmental Decisions	How is information literacy defined at your institution? What type of computer data analysis must students do? Define level of student expertise in presenting findings. Will department adopt the ASA Code of Ethics? Can department adopt the ASA Integrated Data Analysis (IDA) program within the major?

Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>The American Library Association defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." ALA also states that "information literacy is a survival skill in the Information Age." "Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning." lib1.bmcc.cuny.edu/lib/help/glossary.html The ability to locate, evaluate and use information effectively. www.wpi.edu/Academics/Library/Help/glossary.html</p> <p>Students use SPSS for Windows for data entry, analysis, and presentation. Levels of expertise include: frequencies, cross-tabs, regression and correlation, non-parametric tests. The ASA Code of Ethics is on the ASA website: http://www.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html Connect with campus or federal IRB guidelines; include campus processes and practices.</p>
Location in the program	<p>Research methods, senior seminars, or upper division courses requiring major research papers. IDA modules (see ASA website) can be included in all courses. Ethics should be covered in methods; is it addressed in intro? Other courses with human subjects research?</p>
Examples of Methods for Collecting Student Learning Data	<p>Require ethics section in any paper with a methodology section. Ask examination essay questions that pose an ethical problem and require analysis. Provide a case study where students analyze and make a decision using the ASA Code and campus IRB practices as a guide. Ask students to reflect on information literacy in their literature reviews. How complete were the databases? Collect samples of data analysis done with SPSS and samples of IDA modules. Test questions completing data tables.</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>Identify the minimum skills for SPSS and quantitative literacy. Clarify level of skill sociology honors majors must demonstrate. List databases that must be used.</p>
Closing the Loop	<p>Identify how much research actually happens in your program; is it sufficient for the overall mission?</p>

Learning Goal 5:	Students can demonstrate knowledge and comprehension of: culture, social change, socialization, stratification, social structure, institutions, and differentiation by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and class. Students can define and explain the relevance of each concept.
Departmental Decisions	Is this list of concepts adequate? Upon what can the department agree? What should be added?
Operationalization of Learning Goals	Examine intro materials. What shared definitions can be adopted? If a common intro text is used, begin with those definitions. If not, consider definitions that can be agreed upon. If faculty cannot generally agree on what social class is, we certainly can't expect students to clearly know and apply the term. Relevance refers to pertinence and the ability to apply that which can be brought to bear on a particular problem or question.
Location in the program	Introductory Sociology is typical. List the courses where concepts are clearly and intentionally revisited; e.g. race and gender course, a stratification course, family, demography, aging, urban, etc.
Evidence of Student Learning	Standard intro exams. (See other earlier outcomes.) Essay exam questions in social institution based courses (e.g. family, religion, political, education, etc.) Papers that require application of the concepts. Sample and review.
Criteria for Evaluation	Will the definition and application/analysis skills be different for seniors than for lower division students? If so, what level is expected and how will you know it when students have achieved this?
Closing the Loop	Which concepts do students understand and apply most effectively? Are courses adequately reinforcing the use of the concepts? What changes should be made?

Learning Goal 6:	<p>Students can articulate an understanding of how culture and social structure operate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the inter-linkage of institutions and their effects on individuals. • Explain how social change factors affect social structures and individuals. • Describe how culture and social structure vary across time and place and with what effect. • Identify examples of specific social policy implications using reasoning about social structural effects.
Departmental Decisions	<p>What are the main ways students should understand the inter-linkage of institutions and the effects on individuals? How is social change conceptualized? Where are the multi-cultural and global dimensions to be included? Identify specify aspects of culture and social structure and their effect. How are policy implications examined across the program? What type of reasoning should students use?</p>
Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Institutions: "A process or an association that is highly organized, systematized and stable" (<i>Modern Dictionary of Sociology: 165</i>) "The organized, usual or standard ways by which a society meets its basic needs" (James Henslin, 1999) Social change: Alteration of societies and/or cultures over time.</p>
Location in the program	<p>Typically introduced in the basic intro course. Are there topical area courses in your program that meet these goals? e.g. family, sociology of religion, and social change course, social movements. Is policy systematically or idiosyncratically addressed?</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Term papers of appropriate design in "institution" based courses or social change course. Service learning projects that require analysis of institutions, their effects on individuals and aspects of social change. Essay exams that require students to demonstrate comprehension and analysis of policy article from newspaper or case study.</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>At what level must all students perform? Pass/no pass rates? Percentage at what level of quality and rationale for that level? Content rubrics can be developed or borrowed.</p>

Closing the Loop	<p>Are our courses meeting these goals? Why or why not? How focused on social change, institution and policy is the program? Are there elective courses that should be required? Might tracks or concentrations meet these outcomes differentially?</p>
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Learning Goal 7:	<p>Students can articulate the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how the self develops sociologically. • Explain how society and structural factors influence individual behavior and development of the self. • Explain how social interaction and the self influences society and social structure. • Compare and contrast the sociological approach to the self with psychology and economic approaches.
Departmental Decisions	<p>Where is there agreement on these goals? Does it work to use psychology and economics? What definitions of the self do those disciplines offer? What explanations are students expected to demonstrate?</p>
Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Self: "The unique human capacity of being able to see our selves 'from the outside'; the picture we gain of how others see us." (Henslin: 1999) "An individual's awareness of, and attitudes toward, his own psychic and biologic person." (<i>Modern Dictionary of Sociology</i>) Social interaction: "two or more actors mutually influencing one another" (<i>Modern Dictionary of Sociology</i>)</p>
Location in the program	<p>To what extent is this topic covered in intro courses? Is it done so universally? Is there a separate social-psychology course? Does it build upon intro or is there no pre-requisite?</p>
Evidence of student learning	<p>Papers in social psychology class. Examinations and written assignments on these topics. Primary research done in social psychology course.</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>At what level must all students perform? Pass/no pass rates? Percentage at what level of quality? What standards are embedded in existing courses? How do these translate across the program?</p>
Closing the Loop	<p>Is there sufficient evidence of student understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society? If not, what changes might be made?</p>

Learning Goal 8:	<p>Students can articulate the macro/micro distinction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast theories at one level with theories at another. • Summarize research documenting connections between the macro and micro. • Develop a list of research issues that should be pursued to understand more fully the relationship between the two levels.
Departmental Decisions	<p>Are macro and micro theories included in the curriculum? How much research students be asked to do? Where? Why? How does a list of research issues fit into the program? In what areas? Should student's skills be about equal between micro and macro?</p>
Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Macro theories: study of total social systems, particularly societies, such a functionalism and conflict theory Micro theories: study of segments or groups within social systems. Examples of research that summarizes these connections. Identify both theoretical and empirical dimensions.</p>
Location in the program	<p>Typically, functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interaction are introduced in the first course. Are other theories presented in other areas of the curriculum? Social theory course may or may not require link to current research issues. Stratification courses or advance social problems courses may address this dimension.</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Exam essays or papers can document comparison and contrast of theories and of research. A specific example or case study can be offered and analyzed with both levels.</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>What is the depth of articulation between the two that is expected by majors?</p>
Closing the Loop	<p>Is the department satisfied with how macro and micro levels of explanation are balanced? Should strength be added in one area more so than the other? Are theory</p>

	and research both adequately addressed? If not, what can change?
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Learning Goal 9:	Students can articulate at least two specialty areas within sociology in depth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize basic questions and issues in each area. Compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations and middle range theories in each area. Summarize current research in each area. Develop specific policy implications of research and theory in each area.
Departmental Decisions	Is the program broad enough so students can have depth in two areas? Do requirements versus electives facilitate this goal or create a barrier? What level of depth should students accomplish?
Operationalization of Learning Goals	Specialty areas: race/gender, family, religion, crime/deviance, urban, demography, social movements/change, organizations Methods: qualitative or quantitative skills or theory?
Location in the program	At what levels of the curriculum are specialty areas offered? At all four levels? Which required courses allow in depth research projects?
Evidence of Student Learning	Types of research papers assigned; perhaps gathered in a student portfolio (see Manual).
Criteria for Evaluation	Degree of depth and criteria will be dependent on decisions made. See Manual for examples.
Closing the Loop	Are faculty satisfied with specialty areas available in the program? Are students roughly equally good in both? Should opportunities for depth in specialty areas be changed? Can the size of the program support two areas?

Learning Goal 10:	Students can articulate the internal diversity of the United States and its place in the international context. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe variations by race, class, gender and age. Make appropriate generalizations across groups.
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Departmental Decisions	<p>Are these dimensions of diversity sufficient? How do they fit with institutional mission and general education?</p> <p>Should any areas be added? i.e. disabilities, sexuality, religion, ethnicity?</p> <p>What are appropriate generalizations?</p> <p>Where should students resist stereotypes and where are they encouraged?</p>
Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Race: socially determined on the basis of physical characteristics</p> <p>Ethnicity: socially determined on the basis of cultural characteristics</p> <p>Class: typically, social stratification based on income, education, and occupational prestige; determined by the relationship to the means of production;</p> <p>Gender: social characteristics associated by society with being male and female</p>
Location in the program	<p>To what extent are these concepts covered in intro sociology?</p> <p>Where are these topics addressed in addition to a race and class, stratification or gender course?</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Examinations</p> <p>Analysis in papers and portfolios</p> <p>Oral exam/exit interviews</p> <p>(See Manual and previous outcomes.)</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>Must all students take a stance of cultural relativism?</p> <p>How will views of diversity fit here?</p> <p>If faculty intentionally teach values, do students recognize that?</p>
Closing the Loop	<p>Is the student's understanding of diversity what is intended? How internalized is it? Does that understanding cross over into other courses students take? How does this support institutional mission and general education learning goals?</p>

Learning Goal 11: "Generic"	Students can demonstrate critical thinking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate skills in recall, analysis and application, and synthesis and evaluation. • Identify underlying assumptions in theoretical orientations or arguments. • Identify underlying assumptions in particular methodological approaches to an issue. • Show how patterns of thought and knowledge are directly influenced by political and economic social structures. • Present opposing viewpoints and alternative hypotheses. • Engage in teamwork where many different points of view are presented.
Departmental Decisions	Should Bloom's Taxonomy be adopted? What other models of critical thinking are used? Can/are those adopted? Is critical thinking in every course? Does it change over the course of the program? Is critical thinking viewed as "automatic" or something about which the department needs to be very intentional? Is critical thinking just expected or are students explicitly taught how to do it? What are overall skills expected versus particular courses? Is a model of critical thinking offered that students can recognize and articulate?
Operationalization of Learning Goals	Bloom's taxonomy. Your campus general education models.
Location in the program	If it is <i>not</i> somewhere, why not? If it is not everywhere, why not?
Evidence of Student Learning	Course embedded assignments. College wide senior assessments in which sociology majors can be sorted out.
Criteria for Evaluation	All students pass 70% on critical thinking instruments.
Closing the Loop	How does our critical thinking reinforce that of general education? Where is the value added by the sociology program?

Learning Goal 12: "Generic"	<p>Students will develop values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate the utility of the sociological perspective as one of several perspectives on social reality • Explain the importance of reducing the negative effects of social inequality.
Departmental Decisions	<p>Is there agreement on these values? Are they consistent with the mission? Is the department's mission consistent with the institution's mission and general education goals? Do others support these values?</p>
Operationalization of Learning Goals	<p>Students can do a competent sociological analysis of any problem presented. Students can bring their sociological understanding to bear in other non-sociology courses.</p>
Location in the program	<p>Cuts across the program as a whole; may or may not be emphasized in particular courses.</p>
Evidence of Student Learning	<p>Senior seminar educational autobiographies. Exit interviews, done individually or in groups Honors projects.</p>
Criteria for Evaluation	<p>Depends on the level of conceptualization of the two goals; is utility critical? Where is there agreement on importance of reducing negative effects of inequality: as a discipline or as a department?</p>
Closing the Loop	<p>Such values should lead to thoughtful discussion among the faculty and with students; it may be an area where the capacity to ask the appropriate questions is as significant as the correct answers.</p>

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