

Annual Assessment Progress Report, 2008-2009

Department of Sociology
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Option 1

1. What goals or learning objectives/outcomes were assessed in the AY ending May 30, 2009.

2: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to study, review, and reflect on the role of theory in sociology.

The student should be able to:

- Define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge.
- Compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations.
- Show how theories reflect the context in which they are developed.
- Describe and apply basic theories or theoretical orientations.

10: The sociology major at CSU Sacramento will be expected to think critically.

The student should be able to:

- Move easily from remembering through analysis and to synthesis and evaluation
- Recognize underlying assumptions in theoretical orientations or arguments
- Identify basic premises in particular arguments
- Present opposing viewpoints and alternative hypotheses on various issues.

2. How did you assess these learning outcomes?

Three different formats: Direct quantitative, Indirect quantitative, Interpretive qualitative.

- a. Describe the measures you used and the information gathered? (Description, date administered, results)

Direct quantitative: online 30 question exam that focus on topics/concepts in the field of Sociology, administered to graduating seniors at the end of every semester.

Date Administered: Letter sent to students 4/17/09 to inform them of their access to the exam.

Information Learned: Learning objective 2 was assessed, with an 88% passing rate for our students in the last year. (Learning objective 10 not assessed directly because of difficulty with operationalizing the concepts to do so.)

Indirect quantitative: online survey about experiences in and attitudes about the Sociology program that are administered to graduating seniors at the end of every semester.

Date Administered: Letter sent to students 4/17/09 to inform them of their access to the survey.

Information Learned: Learning objective 10 was assessed, with a 100% success rate of our students feeling they developed critical thinking skills. (Learning objective 2 was not assessed through this means because too general and vague because too difficult to operationalize to gain an adequate measurement of it through indirect means.)

Interpretive qualitative: Analysis of student ability concerning the learning outcomes being assessed by faculty who teach core classes in the areas related to the learning outcome (theory). We looked at paper and idea development via exams, papers and class discussions over the course of one year (2008-2009 school year). It should be noted that the theory class was structured in conjunction with the learning expectations of learning objective 2, allowing for ease of assessment for this learning objective.

Date Administered: Ongoing throughout the year, but assessment submitted at the end of the year by identified faculty.

Information Gained: Learning Objective 2: Faculty relayed that our students, for learning objective 2, displayed an excellent aptitude for learning about theories and all of their applications. As one faculty member expressed, "Over the semester students work to be able to synthesize material and use C. Wright Mills' "sociological imagination" to move between the historical and the present, the personal and the public when engaging theory." Still, as expressed by faculty, there exists a group of students who struggle with some of the learning expectations within the objective. Students struggled with distinct components of the third and fourth learning expectations (reflecting context in which they are developed and applying theories), as students struggled much more complex engagements of theories. While a distinct percentage of these students are likely graduating students who suffer from, "senioritis," there is a group of students who struggle with the theoretical expectations in learning objective 2, in particular the more applied components as these students may be "theory-phobic" and have convinced themselves that they are unable to do the hard work required of the class, and so never fully apply themselves." In particular, "students struggle with theoretical developments of race, gender and sexuality. More fundamentally, students find it difficult to apply the concept of social construction to the issue of gender, sexuality and race." A potential response to this issue, which has been raised by faculty (and may be discussed at our upcoming faculty retreat) is to further emphasize and integrate theory throughout our other classes (in particular classes that address inequality, but not limited to those, as most classes can engage theory and apply it to such areas). As theory is a major aspect of all of our classes, this would entail being more explicit in our references and discussions of theory throughout classes. This would consistently inform students of the use and application of theory with the intent of reducing their fear of it. As stated, this will be discussed at our faculty retreat to determine a course of action.

Information Gained: Learning Objective 10: Faculty from a range of classes were asked to evaluate student critical thinking ability, ranging from core classes (theory, research methods) to general education classes (race and ethnicity, gender). Faculty in general expressed that most students were able to reflect and apply critical reasoning in their arguments and ideas. While some faculty expressed concerns with an area that students struggled with critical thinking skills, there did not appear to be a consistent issue with such abilities by our students, allowing the department to conclude that students in general do well in Learning Objective 10. Specifically, focusing on papers, students showed a growing ability over time to move from remembering ideas to developing their own argument. For example, in our research methods classes, students learn the basic concepts of methods, and then are able to apply these ideas as they work through their own research study. While each professor may emphasize a different idea, all students create, develop and present their own research paper, showing critical thinking skills throughout the process. In the second semester of the sequence (102b) in some of the classes, students go beyond this and develop their own research project. Some students even present their research and findings at conferences, showing that their critical thinking skills are accepted in the academic world. Additionally, faculty who teach general education courses express that they are able to identify which students are sociology majors because of their ability to address ideas from a more sociological position, synthesizing and engaging ideas from a more critical perspective, utilizing their sociological imagination in discussions in class.

- b. As a result of these assessments what did you learn about the program's success in helping its students achieve these learning outcomes?
We have a high success rate in both the direct and indirect measures for both learning outcomes. Our interpretive assessment further displayed students develop a better understanding and ability in using their sociological imaginations the longer they are in the program. Our program could use some adjustments with helping students to feel comfortable with theory and its application.
- c. In what areas are students doing well and achieving expectations?
Most of our students show an excellent understanding of theory as well as how to critically apply theory to a multitude of situations. In effect, our students showed an excellent achievement of the presented learning outcomes. They are able to connect theory and concepts to a multitude of situations, including their lives, their work, and their family, so critical thinking is not a concern, and neither is the comprehension and application of theory.
- d. What areas are seen as needing improvement within your program?
As expressed above, it is not so much all students, but a distinct group of students who are theory-phobic and/or struggle with applying theory in more difficult areas. As identified above, we are discussing possible ways of addressing this issue.

3. As a result of faculty reflection on these results, are there any program changes anticipated? No overarching changes, although discussion will be engaged of the best way to reduce theory phobia among our students. This potentially could lead to changes, but at this time, massive changes are not anticipated.

a. If so, what are those changes? Adjustments on discussions and emphases of theory in classes.

b. How will you know if these changes achieved the desired results? Future assessments of these learning objectives will show progress, limiting the number of students who have this phobia. We may include questions in the exit and entrance survey to help measure this more quantitatively.

4. Did your department engage in any other assessment activities such as the development of rubrics, course alignment?

Continued development of our writing assessment (began this last year, and will continue through next year). Beginning work on our assessment of our research methods classes, including the development of a rubric. This potentially could impact the above discussion.

5. What assessment activities are planned for the upcoming academic year?

We have a faculty member who is presently assessing the department assessment plan and procedures specifically, and is planning to offer suggestions to changes for the upcoming year. We are also talking about developing a working group to review the graduate program assessment plan, learning objectives and goals. This is on our agenda for our departmental retreat that we are implementing this summer.