Assessment Report for Sociology major, including Criminology option
Assessment Report for Sociology minor

May 15, 2017

Assessment: Maggie Thorsen and David Eitle
Learning Outcomes: Sociology as a Discipline

SOCI 499 is an upper division course whose state learning objectives are: (1) think about and apply what you have learned in Sociology to study a specific topic of interest to you from a sociological perspective; (2) develop a theoretically informed sociological research question; (3) situate the research question in the relevant literature; (4) find relevant data to the research question and empirically examine the data; (5) produce a research paper project; and (6) present the paper/proposal to faculty and peers in a poster session to be held at the end of the semester.

We used all 13 papers for our assessment of the learning objective as sociology as a discipline. As identified in our assessment plan, the learning outcome sociology as a discipline is defined as: "Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of society and changes in society." According to the assignment, students were asked to develop a cover letter that accompanies a resume for a specific job/organization or field. Students were required to present themselves as an accomplished sociologist who would bring the characteristics of the field of sociology to this position/field.

We constructed a scoring rubric (below) independent of the paper assignment itself, since the purpose of the assessment is to determine whether learning outcomes are being met. We defined two elements of successful writing about sociology as a discipline (demonstrating an understanding of the discipline and content) and two elements of successful writing more generally (organization and writing skill). It is important to note that the goals of this paper assignment need not be consistent with the assessment of this particular learning outcome.

'A' papers:
As a group, the A papers, which were few in number (1-2 depending upon the reviewer's assessment score), clearly separated themselves from the rest of papers in that they provided a comprehensive presentation of disciplinary concepts and related skills in building a cogent argument for hiring a sociologist into the advertised position. These papers were well written, and the papers provided a good discussion of how the sociological imagination allows for a more objective approach and a consideration of diverse viewpoints. In short, these couple of papers appeared to represent the only efforts to seriously follow the charge of the assignment.

'B' papers:
As a group, the B paper (only 1 identified by the assessment reviewers), wrote a solid, if incomplete cover letter. While this paper did a very good job of using major sociological tenets and perspectives, the author failed to make a clear and convincing connection of how such

assets would translate into a successful candidate for the job. Like the A papers, this paper is fairly well written and organized.

'C' papers:
As a group, the C papers (3-5, depending on the reviewer), were clearly weaker than the A and B papers on each of the four criteria that were assessed. The clearest distinguishing characteristic of these papers is the lack of depth in discussion of the sociological perspective and discipline. None of these papers expressed a clear understanding of how sociology as a discipline can empower the applicant and advantage them in hiring process. Most provided only a very cursory mention of sociology, the sociological perspective, or some of the most basic/fundamental concepts, yet they failed to demonstrate how these would be relevant to the job/organization. These papers tended to be written and organized at an acceptable level, albeit it brevity becomes a major limitation in assessing the overall strength of these artifacts.

Below Average papers:
Unfortunately, the modal category for the assessed papers (5-8 depending upon the reviewer) were categorized as below average in meeting the learning outcome. The typical cover letter in this category simply failed to provide any application of sociological concepts, perspectives, and skills in writing their cover letters—they simply mentioned that they had earned a degree in sociology. Again, these artifacts suffered from brevity, but as a group, they largely failed to address the charge given to them by the instructor.

Recommendations:
It is clear from this assessment that students struggle with making clear and obvious connections between sociology as a discipline and its utility in the marketplace. We would encourage faculty to consider devoting more attention to making these connections explicit for students in all courses (not just the capstone). Similarly, recurrent discussions about sociology as a discipline and its importance should be broached with students throughout the curriculum—not just at the introductory level. Beyond these recommendations, we (again) must recognize the diversity in writing ability among our students. This diversity extends beyond grammar and spelling; the lack of providing a comprehensive and thoughtful response to instructor cues is an issue that we have noted in prior assessments. The authors of such brief and superficial essays are typically those that are unprepared and often have poor attendance and poor performance on other evaluation measures.

Finally, we must recognize that the assignment that we used for this evaluation was far from ideal (for fulfilling our assessment plan) and that the instructor was not originally chosen to provide any artifacts for this assessment. It is imperative that the assessment committee work in advance with faculty so that more appropriate artifacts can be collected and evaluated in the future.

Criteria	Excellent 10 points	Approaching Excellence 9 points	Above Average 8 points	Average 7 points	Below Average 6 points	Poor 5 points
Disciplinary Understanding	Successful and original application of disciplinary concepts to topic. Author clearly illustrates an understanding of how the discipline of sociology may be applied to solve "real-world" problems.	Successful application of disciplinary concepts to topic. Author illustrates an understanding of how the discipline of sociology may be applied to solve "real-world" problems.	Solid application of disciplinary concepts. Author alludes to an understanding of how the discipline of sociology may be applied to solve "real-world" problems.	Adequate application of disciplinary concepts. Minimal discussion of how the discipline of sociology may be applied to solve "real-world" problems.	Proper use of disciplinary terms, but no application of concepts. No discussion of how the discipline of sociology may be applied to solve "real-world" problems.	No attempt to use disciplinary concepts in analysis. No discussion of how the discipline of sociology may be applied to solve "real-world" problems.
Content	Content demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of society <u>and</u> societal change. Analysis is supported by many details or examples.	Content demonstrates a clear understanding of society <u>and</u> societal change. Analysis is supported by one or two examples.	Content demonstrates an understanding of society <u>or</u> societal change. Analysis is supported by many details or examples.	Content demonstrates a moderate understanding of society <u>or</u> societal change. Analysis is supported by one or two examples.	Content demonstrates limited understanding of society <u>or</u> societal change. Minimal examples or support.	Content demonstrates no understanding of society <u>or</u> societal change. No examples or support.
Organization	Organization is unified and logical, with excellent transitions.	Organization is unified and logical, with effective transitions.	Organization is unified and coherent and transitions are used.	Organization is clear enough to follow without difficulty.	Organization may lack clear movement or focus, making the writer's ideas difficult to follow.	No organizational structure.
Writing Skill	There are minimal errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. An outstanding command of language is apparent.	There are very few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. An outstanding command of language is apparent.	While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, a good command of language is apparent.	A competency with language is apparent, even though there may be some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.	Numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics show poor control of language and may at times impede understanding.	Severe problems with grammar, usage, or mechanics show very poor control of language and may significantly impede understanding.

Assessment: Maggie Thorsen and David Eitle
Learning Outcomes: Sociological Concepts

SOCI 303 is an upper division course whose state learning objectives are: 1) demonstrate an understanding of social psychology theories from a sociological perspective; 2) demonstrate an understanding of how individuals both affect and are affected by their social environment; 3) analyze the social construction of the self and the social world; and 4) analyze and assess research literature including primary source research materials related to sociological social psychology.

We sampled ten papers—4 'A' papers, 3 'B' papers, and 3 'C' papers for our assessment of the learning objective sociological concepts. As identified in our assessment plan, the learning outcome sociological concepts is defined as: "Our students will demonstrate a knowledge, comprehension, and relevance of core sociological concepts." According to the assignment, students were asked to use terminology from Goffman and other course readings, and to discuss the components of impression management exercised by an actor in a context of their choosing. This could be a role they have played, watched someone play, or anticipate playing at some point. Students were instructed to use the Goffman terminology in their analysis. The papers were required to be between 750-1000 words.

We constructed a scoring rubric (below) independent of the paper assignment itself, since the purpose of the assessment is to determine whether learning outcomes are being met. We defined two elements of successful writing about sociological concepts (critical thinking and content) and two elements of successful writing more generally (organization and writing skill). It is important to note that the goals of this paper assignment need not be consistent with the assessment of this particular learning outcome.

'A' papers:
As a group, the A papers demonstrate strong-to-above average understanding of Goffman's impression management and largely provides adept applications of important concepts of Goffman. However, one reviewer noted that while papers in this range demonstrated that students could define and provide examples of some of these key concepts, they often failed to provide a *comprehensive* presentation of Goffman's concepts. Instead, they limited their analysis to only a couple of concepts. As a group, these papers were well written and more comprehensive than other papers. Students in this group also did a better job incorporating sociological concepts throughout their writing and analysis.

'B' papers:
The students who wrote these papers also wrote solid essays with an above average understanding of key concepts. However, what differentiated these papers from the A papers was either a more limited discussion of concepts overall or the failure to define/discuss the

overarching notion of impression management. These papers, relative to the A's, lack the depth and sophistication of their counterparts. The authors of the B papers also struggled somewhat with providing exemplar examples to illustrate concepts. Nonetheless, these papers do demonstrate a competency in defining Goffman's key concepts.

'C' papers:
Although these papers were clearly weaker overall than the A and B papers, they still demonstrated a rudimentary competency in defining key sociological concepts. Again, the issue of brevity begins to become salient in these papers, with papers that struggle to connect the definitions to the examples, fail to discuss impression management, and/or fails to provide detailed and comprehensive discussion of Goffman concepts. Authors of these papers used more space describing examples rather than analyzing and applying sociological concepts. At times their discussion strayed from the sociological into the anecdotal. Additionally, the papers suffer more from basic writing skills, including a lack of organization.

Recommendations:
All of the papers demonstrated at least a basic competency in defining some sociological concepts. The biggest distinction across the papers was the degree of sophistication in understanding and applying sociological concepts. The papers with the B and C grades seemed more focused on application/example than on the concepts themselves, and there was overall a poorer integration of concepts into the papers. Further, papers at the C level seemed to make few inferences/connections to the readings, which was a requirement of the assignment. Among the recommendations that we would forward would be to continue to emphasize the integration of sociological concepts into writing assignments, emphasizing that examples should not drive analyses, and helping students understanding the difference between simple definitions of concepts and the application of concepts. Students should also be reminded of the importance of discussing organizing principles (in this case, impression management) before the discussion/application of specific concepts.

Finally, we should note that it is important that we assess student command of sociological concepts in courses that emphasize social structure, such as social stratification, so that we can evaluate to what extent students can apply concepts that concern social structure and organization and larger social forces, in addition to social psychological and concepts that are more micro-oriented.

Criteria	Excellent 10 points	Approaching Excellence 9 points	Above Average 8 points	Average 7 points	Below Average 6 points	Poor 5 points
Critical Thinking	Successful and original application of course concepts to topic. Demonstrates a clear and sophisticated understanding of how concepts are interrelated.	Successful application of course concepts to topic. Demonstrates a clear understanding of multiple, related concepts.	Solid application of course concepts. Demonstrates understanding of several, related concepts.	Adequate application of course concepts. Demonstrates adequate understanding of a concepts, but not how they are interrelated.	Proper use of terms, but inadequate application of concepts. Does not demonstrate a very clear understanding of concepts.	No attempt to use course content in analysis.
Content	Content directly and logically relates to the main topic. Analysis is supported by many details or examples	Content directly relates to the main topic. Analysis is supported by several details or examples	Content clearly relates to the main topic. Analysis is supported by 1-2 details or examples	Content generally relates to the main topic. Analysis is mostly supported by details or examples.	Content deviates from main topic. Analysis is weakly supported by details or examples.	Content rarely relates to the main topic. Analysis is not supported by details or examples.
Organization	Organization is unified and logical, with excellent transitions.	Organization is unified and logical, with effective transitions.	Organization is unified and coherent and transitions are used.	Organization is clear enough to follow without difficulty.	Organization may lack clear movement or focus, making the writer's ideas difficult to follow.	No organizational structure.

| Writing Skill | There are minimal errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. An outstanding command of language is apparent. | There are very few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. An outstanding command of language is apparent. | While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, a good command of language is apparent. | A competency with language is apparent, even though there may be some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. | Numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics show poor control of language and may at times impede understanding. | Severe problems with grammar, usage, or mechanics show very poor control of language and may significantly impede understanding. |

Learning Outcomes Summary for Fall 2016-Spring 2017

The Sociology Assessment Committee met and reviewed two different courses: SOCI 499 Senior Thesis Capstone and SOCI 303 Society and the Individual (Spring 2017). This assessment report targeted two learning outcomes: a) sociological concepts—demonstrate a knowledge, comprehension, and relevance of core sociological concepts; and b) sociology as a discipline—demonstrate an understanding of the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of society and changes in society. Our review procedures entail using constructed rubrics designed (prior to using) to evaluate the learning outcomes with samples of student coursework.

Learning Outcomes: Sociological Concepts

As noted in the above assessment, the differences between the A papers and the others were varied but included the degree of sophistication in understanding (and illustrating) sociological concepts, the comprehensiveness of the essays, the discussion and recognition of the organizing principles that unite the concepts discussed, as well as basic writing and organization skills. We discuss some options to improve the application and use of sociological concepts in the Action plan (below).

Learning Outcomes: Sociology as a Discipline

As is the case with our assessment of sociological concepts, the quality artifacts were comprehensive in their response to the instructor charge. Furthermore, the quality papers made a sophisticated argument for how and why being trained as a sociologist advantaged them in the marketplace. The biggest issue was that few students actually responded to the instructor's prompt and made connections between sociology as a discipline and its usefulness in marketing oneself as an applicant for a particular position. Indeed, our assessment was that the modal category of student response was devoid of any presentation of the power of sociology, concepts, theories, and associated skills, and was largely limited to the mere mention

of having obtained a degree in sociology. Again, we discuss some options to improve student understanding of the power and application of sociology as a discipline.

Action Plan

Based upon the assessment, we have decided on the following actions:

1. Promote faculty conversations with students about the power of sociology and how to discuss the advantages of a sociology degree with employers, beyond broaching the topic in the capstone.

2. Continue to consider a writing intensive course to promote writing in the discipline.

3. Continue to promote providing peer models of successful work to fellow students so that they can model their papers accordingly.

4. Work with faculty at the beginning of the academic year to identify assignments/exercises that can provide suitable assessment products.