

**Annual Program Assessment Report**

Academic Year Assessed: 2018-2019

College: Letters & Sciences

Department: Sociology & Anthropology

Submitted by: Maggie Thorsen

Assessment reports are to be submitted annually by program/s. The report deadline is September 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Program(s) Assessed:**

**Indicate all majors, minors, certificates and/or options that are included in this assessment:**

Majors/Minors/Certificate	Options
Sociology Major (B.S. in Sociology)	Both General Sociology option and Criminology option

**Annual Assessment Process (CHECK OFF LIST)**

1. Data are collected as defined by Assessment Plan  
     YES  NO
  2. Population or unbiased samples of collected assignments are scored by at least two faculty members using scoring rubrics to ensure inter-rater reliability.  
     YES  NO
  3. Areas where the acceptable performance threshold has not been met are highlighted.  
     YES  NO  NA
  4. Assessment scores were presented at a program/unit faculty meeting.  
     YES  NO
  5. The faculty reviewed the assessment results, and responded accordingly (Check all appropriate lines)
    - Gather additional data to verify or refute the result.
    - Identify potential curriculum changes to try to address the problem
    - Change the acceptable performance threshold, reassess
    - Choose a different assignment to assess the outcome
    - Faculty may reconsider thresholds
    - Evaluate the rubric to assure outcomes meet student skill level
    - Use Bloom’s Taxonomy to consider stronger learning outcomes
- OTHER: Update the learning outcomes and assessment process (including potentially changing assignments used in assessment, reconsider thresholds, create new/streamlined rubrics, etc.)
6. Does your report demonstrate changes made because of previous assessment results (closing the loop)?  
     YES  NO

**1. Assessment Plan, Schedule and Data Source.**

**a. Please provide a multi-year assessment schedule that will show when all program learning outcomes will be assessed, and by what criteria (data). (You may use the table provided, or you may delete and use a different format).**

ASSESSMENT PLANNING CHART. PROGRAM: Sociology/Criminology					
	<i>Assessment Year and Targeted Courses</i>				
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	<i>Data Source</i>
<i>Learning Outcome 1: Sociology as a Discipline.</i> 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		SOCIxxx  (Upper Division Course)			Essay Question
<i>Learning Outcome 2: Sociological Concepts.</i> Our students will demonstrate a knowledge, comprehension, and relevance of core sociological concepts.		SOCI 311 (Criminology)			Final Project
<i>Learning Outcome 3: Sociological Theories.</i> Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the role of theory in sociology.			SOCI455/ SOCI 311		Essay Questions
<i>Learning Outcome 4: Sociological Application.</i> Our students will formulate research questions based on critical readings and understandings of sociological research.	SOCIxxx  (Upper Division Course)				Final Project
<i>Learning Outcome 5: Oral Communication.</i> Our students will demonstrate the ability to present material orally in an organized and effective manner.			SOCIxxx  (Upper Division Course)		Final Presentation
<i>Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication:</i> Our students will demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective	SOCI 499 (Capstone)			SOCI499	Final Project

written communication and editing skills.					
<i>Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism.</i> Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the roles and uses of evidence in qualitative and quantitative methods.				SOCIxxx  (Upper Division Course)	Essay Question

**b. What are your threshold values for which you demonstrate student achievement?  
(Example provided in the table should be deleted before submission)**

Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source
<i>Learning Outcome 1: Sociology as a Discipline.</i> 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	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student essay questions
<i>Learning Outcome 2: Sociological Concepts.</i> Our students will demonstrate a knowledge, comprehension, and relevance of core sociological concepts.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student final projects
<i>Learning Outcome 3: Sociological Theories.</i> Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the role of theory in sociology.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student essay questions
<i>Learning Outcome 4: Sociological Application.</i> Our students will formulate research questions based on critical readings and understandings of sociological research.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student final projects
<i>Learning Outcome 5: Oral Communication.</i> Our students will demonstrate the ability to present materially orally in an organized and effective manner.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student final presentations
<i>Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication:</i> Our students will demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective written communication and editing skills.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student final projects
<i>Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism.</i> Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the roles and uses of evidence in qualitative and quantitative methods.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 75% of assessed students to score a 3 or above on a 1 to 5 point scale.	Randomly selected student essay questions

**2. What Was Done**

**a) Was the completed assessment consistent with the plan provided? YES   x   NO       
If no, please explain why the plan was altered.**

**b) Please provide a rubric that demonstrates how your data was evaluated.**

*Rubric for Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication:* Our students will demonstrate appropriate writing practices and formats and effective written communication and editing skills

<b>Grading Criteria</b>	<b>Poor (1)</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (2)</b>	<b>Average (3)</b>	<b>Above Average (4)</b>	<b>Sophisticated (5)</b>
<b>Motivation of Topic</b>	The topic is unclear with no general introduction to the paper	The topic is known but there is essentially no introduction that motivates the paper.	The topic is clearly stated, the paper has some introductory material, but the importance could be more strongly stated.	The topic is clear and the introduction motivates the paper, but importance of the topic could be more strongly stated.	The paper begins by clearly stating the topic, the relevance, and their contribution.
<b>Review of Relevant Literature</b>	Student provides little or no evidence that relates to the topic.	Student provides limited evidence, but sources are not clear and not applicable (e.g., Wikipedia entries).	Student discusses some of the relevant literature, but does so one-at-a-time with no discussion of how they related to one-another.	Student discusses and integrates the literature, but is unclear how their specific topic fits into this discussion.	Student provides a literature review that discusses how findings relate to one-another, and uses this to identify gaps in knowledge that inform the topic.
<b>Structure and Organization</b>	The essay is confusing with no organization.	The main points of the essay are ambiguous, making the writer's ideas difficult to follow.	Writing has minimal organization and a basic thesis statement, but does not go beyond the basics.	Writing follows a unified and logical organization, but sometimes drifts from the thesis.	Organization is unified and logical, with excellent transitions
<b>Grammar and Punctuation</b>	Severe problems with grammar, usage, or mechanics show very poor control of language and may significantly impede understanding.	Numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics show poor control of language and may at times impede understanding.	The essay has a few major errors and multiple minor errors, but almost all sentences are clear and understandable.	The essay has few major errors. There may be multiple minor errors as long as they do not interfere with understanding.	The essay has no major grammatical and punctuation errors and very few minor errors. Any minor errors do not interfere with the understanding of the essay.

*Rubric for Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism:* Our students will demonstrate an understanding of the roles and uses of evidence in qualitative and quantitative methods.

<b>Grading Criteria</b>	<b>Poor (1)</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (2)</b>	<b>Average (3)</b>	<b>Above Average (4)</b>	<b>Sophisticated (5)</b>
<b>Student can distinguish between qualitative and quantitative data and methods</b>	No indication of understanding the difference between quantitative and qualitative data and methods	Demonstrates limited understanding that quantitative and qualitative methods are different; may only demonstrate understanding of one	Indicates some basic understanding of difference between qualitative and quantitative methods, may lack clarity or indicate some confusion	Demonstrates clear understanding of different methods and forms of data involved in quantitative and qualitative research	Shows clear and sophisticated understanding of the different forms of data and the appropriate methods to gather that data
<b>Student understands the different roles qualitative and quantitative research play in sociological knowledge</b>	No indication of understanding how quantitative or qualitative research contributes to sociological knowledge	Demonstrates limited understanding of how quantitative and/or quantitative research contributes to the production of sociological knowledge.	Indicates some basic understanding of how quantitative and/or qualitative research could be interpreted	Demonstrates clear understanding of how quantitative and qualitative data is interpreted	Shows clear and sophisticated understanding of the appropriate interpretation of the data and what inferences can and cannot be made.
<b>Student demonstrates knowledge about strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research</b>	No indication of understanding that different methods have strengths and weaknesses	Discussion of strengths and weaknesses are ambiguous and doesn't demonstrate clear understanding of utility and limits of methods	Demonstrates a basic but incomplete understanding of strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative research	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each method, may not completely demonstrate an understanding of limits in inference for each method	Demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the advantages and limitations of each method including the logistics of their implementation and limits of what can be inferred from the data.

(NOTE: this rubric has been changed since this learning outcome was last assessed in 2014-2015, as the previous rubric was designed for assessing this outcome in a methods course and was not appropriate given the data source used in the current assessment).

### **3. How Data Were Collected**

#### **a) How were data collected? (Please include method of collection and sample size).**

**Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication.** A random sample of 8 final papers from SOCI 499 (Senior Thesis Capstone) taught in Fall 2018 were selected for evaluation (out of the 15 projects completed in the course). All papers were provided to the committee from the instructor, and then the committee chose a random sample of papers.

**Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism.** A random sample of 10 exams from SOCI 327 (Sociology of Deviance) taught in Spring 2019 were selected for evaluation of two essay questions on the exam (out of the 34 exams completed in the course). All exams were provided to the committee from the instructor, and then the committee chose a random sample of exams. The questions asked students the following:

Briefly describe the strengths and weaknesses of data based on survey research.

Briefly describe the strengths and weaknesses of data based on field research.

#### **b) Explain the assessment process, and who participated in the analysis of the data.**

Both members of the assessment committee (Maggie Thorsen and Colter Ellis) independently reviewed and scored students' papers based on the assessment rubrics. After initial assessment, the committee met to discuss overall impressions of students' work, alignment with the learning outcomes, and performance at meeting assessment criteria as outlined in the rubrics. The outcome of this evaluation process was to determine whether or not students' are meeting the learning outcomes, areas for improvement, and recommendations for faculty to improve student learning based on our analysis.

### **4. What Was Learned**

#### **Based on the analysis of the data, and compared to the threshold values provided, what was learned from the assessment?**

**Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication.** Of the 8 papers sampled, based on our assessment, 2 fell into the 5 "Sophisticated" category, 2 fell into the 4 "Above Average" category, 2 fell into the "Average" category", and 2 fell into the "Unsatisfactory" category. This means that we met our threshold in which at least 75% of our students scored a 3 or higher on our 5 point scale.

**Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism.** Of the 10 exams sampled, based on our assessment, 3 fell into the 5 "Sophisticated" category, 3 fell into the 4 "Above Average" category, 2 fell into the "Average" category", and 2 fell into the "Unsatisfactory" category. This means that we exceeded our threshold in which at least 75% of our students scored a 3 or higher on our 5 point scale.

#### **a) Areas of strength**

**Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication.** Generally speaking students motivated their topics well, and provided fairly clear theses for their papers. For the papers scored in the 5 range

and some in the 4 range, students did a nice job reviewing the relevant literature and integrating information from a variety of sources. Students did a nice job incorporating appropriate, disciplinary-specific vocabulary into their writing.

**Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism.** Students generally have a very strong understanding of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research. Students could clearly articulate that qualitative data is richer and gets more at the meanings behind social phenomenon. Students very clearly could articulate that quantitative data is more generalizable to a larger population. Students seem to be able to distinguish when a particular data source is quantitative and when it is qualitative.

#### **b) Areas that need improvement**

**Learning Outcome 6: Written Communication.** Some of the writing mechanics and structure of the writing could have been stronger. Several students failed to proofread, leaving significant grammatical and spelling errors in their final papers. A handful of students struggled with writing clear, succinct sentences. Run-on sentences were a problem. There is room for improvement in how students review the literature. Some students need to work on identifying appropriate, academic literature and incorporating it into their discussion. Some struggled with integrating literature in a way that synthesizes ideas and doesn't just go through articles one-by-one.

**Learning Outcome 7: Empiricism.** There was a lot of variation in the depth of understanding of these research approaches. Students in the "5" category demonstrated a richer and more sophisticated understanding of the methods, the inferences that could be made, and the relative validity of different approaches. Answers to the exam questions varied in their degree of completeness, in terms of how comprehensive their answers were about the strengths and weaknesses. Few students could articulate the limits of quantitative research, in particular the role of bias and the importance of data collection methodology. Generally students didn't clearly demonstrate an understanding of what the data products give us (e.g. quantitative data can give us information about trends and rates) and how to go about using them. This may be a product of the exam questions used in the assessment, which don't explicitly ask them to do this.

### **5. How We Responded**

#### **a) Describe how "What Was Learned" was communicated to the department, or program faculty. Was there a forum for faculty to provide feedback and recommendations?**

The committee emailed the assessment report to the faculty and solicited feedback. Several faculty responded with thoughtful suggestions and ideas for how to better satisfy our learning outcomes. These comments and suggestions have been incorporated into the next section.

**b) Based on the faculty responses, will there any curricular or assessment changes (such as plans for measurable improvements, or realignment of learning outcomes)?**

YES  \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

There is a growing discussion of a significant revision of the departments learning outcomes. The incoming committee chair (Colter Ellis), in collaboration with the outgoing committee chair (Maggie Thorsen), will initiate a department wide discussion to revise the department's stated learning outcomes. This process will be paired with an improved assessment process that more clearly measures student's mastery of key sociological principles. This will result in completely revised program learning outcomes and an updated assessment plan.

Based on faculty feedback, several suggestions were put forth to improve student learning of the currently described learning outcomes. These include:

- Encouraging students to seek out help from the Writing Center more frequently, and trying to change the culture so it's not seen as a "punishment" but rather a part of the writing process. Inviting the writing center to present in our classes was also suggested.
- Providing students anonymous examples of "5" high quality papers/projects, and other writing resources.
- Faculty highlighted a challenge to assessing Empiricism in upper-division coursework, given the current curriculum. Students are not required to take research methods before enrolling in upper division coursework. Therefore, the variation that we see in students' comprehension of different research methods and data forms is likely due to different levels of exposure. There is already a culture within the department in which faculty advise their students to take methods as soon as possible. However, a formal change to curriculum would be difficult, as requiring students to take methods before any upper-division coursework would create a "bubble" and an infeasible gate to upper-division coursework. Therefore, if a learning outcome related to Empiricism is evaluated in the future, then perhaps Capstone or Research Methods would be a more appropriate course to evaluate this outcome.
- Faculty also recommended that instructors in upper-division coursework strive to discuss the roles and limitations of evidence produced from qualitative and quantitative methods, when they are reviewing empirical research. Highlighting high quality research, and the methods used to generate conclusions from the research, would enrich students understanding of both methods and the substantive topic.

**If yes, when will these changes be implemented?**

These changes will be implemented through a "0 Year Planning Cycle" in which a re-evaluation of the entire assessment process will be undertaken, during the 2019-2020 academic year. As of now, our department has seven learning outcomes. We would like to see this number reduced to three or four. This will allow the assessment committee and faculty to better focus their attention on improvements in these core goals. The revision of learning outcomes needs to be a department-wide discussion so no outcomes are currently "targeted" for change.

**c) When will the changes be next assessed?**

After re-assessing and developing new program learning outcomes in 2019-2020, the department will have a “0 Planning Year” for the 2020 reporting period (reported in Fall 2020). Then we will implement those changes and have our first assessment of the 2020-2021 academic year, reported in Fall 2021.

**6. Closing the Loop**

**a) Based on assessment from previous years, can you demonstrate program level changes that have led to outcome improvements?**

It is not currently possible to compare the current assessment to previous assessments of these learning outcomes. In the past, different rubrics and assessment targets have been used. Past reports have largely provided qualitative assessments, with limited quantitative data from rubric scoring to compare to our current assessment. Further, there has been variation in how the sample of assessment targets has been collected (e.g. papers). Based on last year’s assessment, we did collect a random sample of data (e.g. papers and tests) in order to facilitate future comparisons. Further, as we are going to be changing our learning outcomes to better align with curriculum and program learning goals, it will be difficult in the future to make comparisons and assess how changes are leading to improvements until multiple evaluations can be made in a more systematic fashion.

The general opinion of the committee is that overall our students are meeting target thresholds for learning outcomes. There is of course variation among students and room for improvement. Continued discussion among faculty about strategies to improve student learning may help to reduce variation among students and lead to overall improvements.

Submit report to [programassessment@montana.edu](mailto:programassessment@montana.edu)