

**Assessment Report and Action Plan for Sociology and Anthropology
Fall 2013
Prepared and submitted by the faculty**

ANTY 450: Archaeological Theory
Professor: Michael Neeley

Assessment by: Dr. Michael Neeley

Learning Outcome: Students shall understand and articulate key anthropological concepts and theories.

This course provides an in-depth perspective on the methodological and theoretical issues and approaches in the discipline of archaeology. In many ways, it is a complementary course to the capstone offerings (ANTY 425 and ANTY 428) which focus more broadly on anthropological theory and theoretical issues pertinent to social/cultural anthropology. Archaeological theory examines questions of interest to archaeologists and addresses the type of information used, current theoretical and analytical methods, and how this information is applied to enhance our understanding of the past. Specific course outcomes for students include describing the development history of the discipline of archaeology, understanding how archaeological questions are constructed, and assessing and applying current method and theory for understanding the past.

The course material was presented through a combination lecture and discussion. The discussions followed readings in the text (*A History of Archaeological Thought*) and selected readings from archaeological journals. These readings and subsequent discussions gave students an opportunity to examine the role of theory in archaeology and how it has changed over the history of the discipline.

Assignments for the class included three problem sets, each focusing on a different aspect of archaeological methodology (e.g., seriation, culture history and environmental reconstruction, and settlement patterns) and interpretation. In addition there were three exams that covered the theoretical development of the discipline. There was also a final paper project that required the student to apply their understanding of archaeological theory to a topic of their choice. The paper could take one of the three following forms:

(1) A research proposal using historical or archaeological data. This involved selecting an archaeological region or culture for study and identifying a question of interest. Once the question was chosen, a particular theoretical orientation was selected to serve as an interpretive filter for examining the question. This step in the process required the student to realize that theory serves as lens through which to view the archaeological record and helps one identify the necessary data (materials and observations) that link the material remains with theoretical interpretation.

(2) The paper can take the form of a profile of a archaeologist. In this option, the student had to describe the theoretical and material contributions of an archaeologists to the field. Elements to include in this paper were: (1) what did the person research, dig, investigate, and write about?; (2) when did they do this?; (3)

what sort of training did they have and what were their perspectives and philosophical/ theoretical viewpoints?; (4) did this archaeologist's work and approaches change through time?; and (5) what did other archaeologists write about this person?

(3) The student could select one of the following theoretical perspectives and write about its historical development, the basic tenets and ideas of this perspective, examples of successful applications, the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, and the value to the field.

Optimal foraging theory
 Behavioral archaeology
 Agency
 Post-Processual archaeology

Gendered approaches to archaeology
 Evolutionary archaeology
 Marxist archaeology

To quantify the research outcomes for this course, I used the scores on the paper projects and the final exams as a data source and aligned the outcomes with the proposed scoring method. The scoring method as defined in the document that outlines the anthropology learning outcomes is:

Scale:		
Unacceptable	1	For graded assignments = D, D-, or F
Minimally acceptable	2	For graded assignments = D+/C-
Acceptable	3	For graded assignments = C/C+
Exceeds expectation	4	For graded assignments = B's or A-
Exceptional	5	For graded assignments = A/A+

A total of thirteen papers were submitted by the students. The average score for the final paper was 80%. Using the above scale, this suggests that the class **“exceeds expectations”** for the learning outcome of articulating and understanding key anthropological (archaeological) theories and concepts. However, it is noted that this is at the lower end of this measure. On a student by student basis, three students were in the unacceptable range, one in the minimally acceptable, one in the acceptable, seven in the exceeds expectations, and one in the exceptional range.

For students who were in the unacceptable or minimally acceptable range for the paper project, their outputs typically suffered from: (1) failing to run the topic by the instructor for approval; (2) underdeveloped papers (not up to the minimum requirement of 8 pages); (3) inadequate level of research to support their argument; and (4) scattered or incoherent organization/structure to the paper. It is my opinion that these papers were hastily constructed at the last minute prior to the deadline.

The examination of the final exams reveals a similar pattern. The average score for the final exam was 81%, again suggesting an overall rating of **“exceeds expectations”** for this learning outcome. The individual breakdown consists of two students in the

unacceptable range, none in the minimally acceptable, four in the acceptable, six in the exceeds expectations, and one in the exceptional range.

In the case of the final exams, only two fell into the unacceptable range. In both cases, they did not adequately prepare for the final exam as they were allowed to prepare a single page review guide for the exam. One student did not have a guide prepared, and the other's guide was incomplete for the material covered.

In sum, I believe the assessment indicates that students who take this class (and put forth an honest effort) are successful in meeting the learning outcomes of greater understanding of key anthropological theories and concepts.

Assessment by: Dr. Jack Fisher

Learning Outcome: Students shall understand and articulate key anthropological concepts and theories.

The syllabus for ANTY 450 (Archaeological Theory) clearly indicates that the students will be engaged throughout the course in learning about major theoretical perspectives in archaeology and also key archaeological methods, approaches, and practices. These learning opportunities include reading assignments, exercises in methodology and theory, exams, and a research project.

Four Final Exams and three Research Projects were provided for this assessment. The Final Exam consisted of four essay questions. The questions were well designed to test students' knowledge of important theoretical and conceptual approaches in archaeology, and how these relate to the investigation of major archaeological questions, issues, and practices. The students' results ranged from exceeds expectations to unacceptable. The best students showed a good understanding of the relevant theoretical and conceptual approaches, and were able to relate these in a thoughtful fashion to specific archaeological research questions and/or to how archaeology is practiced today. The students who performed poorly either had not prepared adequately (i.e., had not read the relevant materials), or displayed a poor understanding of the topics, as reflected by answers that were brief and superficial.

The Research Project was an excellent opportunity for students to expand and deepen their knowledge of archaeological theory, concepts, and methods, and to integrate these with one another. The three Research Projects ranged from unacceptable to exceptional. The best students' projects were thorough, well researched, showed good integration of theory to the interpretation of the archaeological record, and were well organized and well written. The unacceptable paper was short, rather superficial, and did not explore theoretical or conceptual issues adequately. Additionally, some errors in spelling and grammar detracted from the quality of this students' work.

Both the Final Exam and Research Project offer students excellent venues for learning about anthropological theory and concepts, and to synthesize and

articulate this knowledge. The sample of students' materials that I have examined convinces me that this course "exceeds expectations" with respect to the designated learning outcome that students shall understand and articulate key anthropological concepts and theories.

ANTY 453: Zooarchaeology
Professor: Jack Fisher

Assessment by: Dr. Jack Fisher

Learning Outcome: Engage in field or laboratory research and carry out preliminary analyses of materials from primary materials and/or collections.

This course provides students with a solid introduction to two key areas in the study of animal bone assemblages from archaeological sites. One of these is *osteology* and the *identification* of bones and teeth to skeletal element and to taxon. Emphasis is placed on larger mammals found at Montana archaeological sites, but coverage also includes smaller mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. The second area concerns methods and theory for *analysis* and *interpretation* of archaeological bone assemblages. This includes methods for quantifying bone assemblages; identifying and assessing taphonomic processes; interpreting bone frequencies; identifying and interpreting bone modifications such as stone–tool cut marks, tooth marks, and bone breakage patterns; estimating age-at-death and season-of-death; and inferring & interpreting human activities and behaviors. There is no textbook for this course. Students read numerous articles pertaining to zooarchaeology that are published in professional anthropological journals.

Specific student outcomes include the ability to identify the major bones of the mammalian skeleton, to understand and apply zooarchaeological analytical methods to interpret human behaviors, and to carry out preliminary analysis of zooarchaeological materials using zooarchaeological collections or primary (i.e., published) materials.

Course materials were presented through hands–on learning in osteology and bone identification, and in discussing assigned readings. Students were expected to devote substantial time outside of class to working with bone specimens from the comparative bone collection in the archaeology lab at MSU to learn osteology and bone identification.

Assignments for the class include the following: (1) making detailed drawings of bones from a variety of species provided by the instructor to enhance and reinforce their knowledge and abilities in bone anatomy and identification; (2) writing a 1-2 page synopsis of a small number of journal article reading assignments in which the students were asked to identify the research issue, discuss the materials and methods, specify the major findings and results, and discuss weaknesses and/or strengths of the research; (3) learning and applying to Montana mammals the system of biological taxonomy and classification; (4) learning the major categories of mammalian tooth types; and (4) carrying out zooarchaeological exercises such as analyzing the stage of tooth eruption and wear in bison lower jaws to estimate the age-at-death and season-of-death of the specimens by reference to published criteria. Two bone identification quizzes were given to test students' knowledge and skills in the identification of major bones of the skeleton. There were no formal examinations in this course.

The students, additionally, had to design, carry out, and write up a major research project on an appropriate zooarchaeological topic of their choosing with approval by the

instructor. Several students created a “bone atlas” in which they compared the bones of two or three animal species whose bones are similar in size and shape, such as wolf and mountain lion. This entailed detailed comparisons of actual bones of the species, identification of anatomical criteria that differentiate between the species, making life size drawings of the bones of all the species, and annotating the drawings with descriptions of the anatomical differences between the species. Others carried out an experiment on a topic of zooarchaeological importance, such as animal butchery with stone tools and the resultant cut marks on bones; or, feeding fresh bones to their dog and analyzing the patterns of bone damage and destruction. They presented their experiment, analyses, and results as a written paper. Several students analyzed bones from an archaeological site and presented their results as a paper. Other students based their project entirely on journal articles and/or other publications.

To quantify the research outcomes for this course, I present the scores on the following items as a data source: (1) analysis of bison teeth for age-at-death and season-of-death; (2) a synopsis of a reading assignment; and (3) the final research project. I will quantify the outcome for each of these three assignments. I aligned the outcomes with the anthropology program’s Indicators of Student Achievement:

Unacceptable	1	(for graded assignments = D, D-, or F)
Minimally acceptable	2	(for graded assignments = D+/C-)
Acceptable	3	(for graded assignments = C/C+)
Exceeds expectation	4	(for graded assignments = B’s or A-)
Exceptional	5	(for graded assignments = A/A+)

1. Bison Teeth: Twenty-four of the 25 students carried out this assignment. The purpose of this assignment in zooarchaeological methods was to give the students hands-on experience in carrying out an analysis of the stage of tooth eruption and wear in several lower jaws of sub-adult bison that had died at different ages and that display corresponding differences in the stage of eruption and wear exhibited by their teeth. These bison lower jaws come from two different archaeological sites in Montana. The students had to assess the stage of eruption and wear for each tooth in these jaws, and from this estimate, by reference to published zooarchaeological criteria, how old the animal was when it died. That knowledge, in turn, provided the basis for estimating the season of year in which the animal was hunted and killed.

The average score for this exercise is 84% (this excludes a score of “0” for the one student who did not turn in this assignment). This indicates that the class as a whole “**exceeds expectations**” for the learning outcome of engaging in field or laboratory research and carrying out preliminary analyses of materials from primary materials and/or collections. Five students’ work was unacceptable. One student’s work was acceptable. Eight students’ work exceeded expectations, and the work of the remaining 11 students was exceptional.

Students who performed poorly on this assignment generally did not correctly assess the stage of eruption of individual teeth and/or did not correctly assess the amount of

wear present on individual teeth. The assessment of tooth eruption and wear was discussed and presented to the class as a whole in preparation for this assignment. The results of this assignment suggest that some students struggled in their understanding of these concepts, and that they would benefit from additional instruction in assessing tooth eruption and wear.

2. Synopsis of Reading: Twenty-four students submitted a synopsis of this reading assignment. The purpose of this assignment was to have students critically analyze a professional journal article that focuses on an important methodological topic in zooarchaeology. The average score was 85% (this excludes a score of “0” for the student who did not turn in this assignment). This indicates that the class as a whole “**exceeds expectations**”. Two students’ work was unacceptable, and two more were minimally acceptable. One student’s work was acceptable, 12 students exceeded expectations, and eight were exceptional.

For students who performed poorly on this assignment, their work typically suffered from superficiality in their analysis of the article as reflected by the failure to: (1) identify the main research issue of the article; (2) assess the weaknesses/strengths of the research; and/or (3) summarize the main research findings and their significance.

3. Research Project: Twenty-two students turned in a final research project. The purpose of this project was to have students carry out a meaningful research project in zooarchaeology. The average score was 84% (this excludes a score of “0” for the three students who did not turn in this assignment). This indicates that the class as a whole “**exceeds expectations**”. Two students’ work was minimally acceptable, and a further two produced acceptable work. Fourteen students’ work exceeded expectations, and five students’ work was exceptional.

For students whose research project was “minimally acceptable” or “acceptable”, their product typically suffered from one or more of the following shortcomings: (1) the project was somewhat superficial as reflected by inadequate depth and detail in its substance, analyses, and conclusions; (2) the student presented little or no critical evaluation/assessment appropriate to their project; (3) there were problems with organization and/or with writing (such as clarity of expression and/or punctuation); and (4) the bibliography had missing or incomplete entries.

These students might benefit from receiving additional guidance and support from the instructor as they design, carry out, and write up their research project.

In sum, assessment of these assignments indicates that this course as a whole is successful in teaching zooarchaeological method and theory and in providing an effective learning environment for students to develop their abilities to successfully carry out zooarchaeological analyses and research.

Assessment by: Dr. Michael Neeley

Learning Outcome: Students shall engage in field or laboratory research and carry out preliminary analyses of materials from primary materials and/or collections.

Based on the syllabus for ANTY 453 (Zooarchaeology), there are numerous assignments in which students can engage in laboratory research with archaeological materials. Two of the assignments were provided for this assessment. One was a lab-based exercise in which students had to identify the age of the animal (bison) at death based upon the tooth eruption pattern. This is an excellent example of a hands-on, lab-based exercise that has direct application to questions of archaeological interest: how old was the animal at death and what was the season (e.g., spring, summer, fall, winter) at death. Five examples of the student work were provided representing a range of skill from exceptional to unacceptable. The best students were able to identify the necessary tooth wear and eruption landmarks to assess the age and seasonality of death. Less skilled students typically could identify the areas of wear, but were unable to properly interpret or contextualize the pattern of wear in order to determine age and seasonality.

The second lab-based example consisted of three of the final student projects. In this case, they created an atlas of selected bones for similar sized species (usually 2-3). This included drawing and labeling several different views of the animal skeletons. In this case, the examples ranged from exceptional to exceeds expectations. Differences in the student outcomes generally involved the level of detail in the projects, particularly as it pertained to the individual skeletal landmarks that differentiate the species from one another.

Both of these assignments are excellent learning tools for students using lab-based skills. Students are able to apply concepts learned through class instruction and apply them to focused exercises and independent projects. From this sample of student materials, I believe that the course “exceeds expectations” in terms of the designated learning outcome of engaging in laboratory research and conducting a preliminary analysis of materials from primary materials and/or collections.

Learning Outcomes Summary for Fall 2012-Spring 2013 ANTHROPOLOGY FACULTY RESPONSE

The faculty of the Anthropology Program met to review the assessment plan for the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 terms. The reviews were of two upper division courses. The first of these was Anthropology 450, Archaeological Theory, which was assessed to ascertain the success in accomplishing the learning outcome to “understand and articulate key anthropological concepts and theories.” The second course was Anthropology 453, Zooarchaeology, which was assessed to measure the learning outcome to “engage in field or laboratory research and carry out preliminary analyses of materials from primary materials and/or collections.” The

enrollments for these courses were 15 students (Archaeological Theory) and 30 students (Zooarchaeology). Our review procedures involve having the instructor use the relevant criteria to review his/her own course and have the second specialist in this sub-discipline (archaeology) read a subset of the materials submitted by the students to see if the relevant criteria has been met.

For Archaeological Theory, the instructor (Dr. Neeley) determined that the course, on average, exceeded expectations (4 on a scale of 5) in meeting the learning outcome. The second reviewer (Dr. Fisher), reading a sub-set of the student exams and projects, agreed that the course exceeded expectations in providing students with an opportunity to understand and articulate key anthropological concepts and theories. In the second course, Zooarchaeology, Dr. Fisher assessed that the course had exceeded expectations (4 on a scale of 5) in providing students with lab opportunities to conduct analysis of primary materials or collections. The second reviewer (Dr. Neeley) read a sub-set of the student projects and independently agreed that the course exceeded expectations with regard to the proposed learning outcomes.

While we agree that the courses under review here are successful in meeting the learning outcomes, there are typically a handful of students who are unsuccessful in the course. As part of our assessment, this is an opportunity to reflect upon the methods and strategies used and suggest ways in which the student outcomes can be improved. One concern with student projects is the rush to complete the project at the last minute. These projects generally are under-researched and tend to fail to meet the desired learning outcome. One way to force students to engage in the research process is to require them to submit project ideas, outlines, and drafts at selected times during the semester in order to provide critical feedback for the success of the project. While these benchmarks are often used in lower level anthropology classes with project assignments, implementing them more consistently at the upper level will ensure that students are moving toward their final research goals in a timely manner.

SOCI414: Family Violence

Professor: Steven Swinford

Assessment by: Dr. Steven Swinford

Learning Outcome: Sociology as a Discipline

This learning outcome was assessed by the attached rubric, and all students who took the final exam (n = 34) were scored according to the rubric. The readings for the course were comprised of a combination of peer-reviewed articles and an advanced, comprehensive textbook. The course was divided into four different topical sections (theory/methods, child abuse, intimate partner violence, and elder abuse) with quizzes, papers, and exams covering all material. Classes were conducted as a combination of lecture and discussion of the course readings. Students were frequently called upon to engage in meaningful classroom discussions to the extent possible in a course enrolling more than 30 students.

Of the 34 students, 31 of them received a rubric score at the minimally acceptable level. This indicates that these students met the expectations for this learning outcome. The three students who did not score as minimally acceptable did so due to a lack of preparation for the exam. All three students also missed numerous class meetings as well, often for University athletic competitions. Of the 31 who met the minimal threshold, the distribution of scores were: 6 scored as Exceptional, 8 scored as Exceeds Expectations, 15 scored as Acceptable, and 2 scored as Minimally Acceptable.

Across the six criterion categories in the rubric, students excelled most in the Disciplinary Understanding and Content categories. Organization of answers varied across students and was associated with poor writing skills. The three students who did not achieve the minimally acceptable standard provided answers that lacked understanding, content, and clarity in the presentation of the material. This level of work was not inconsistent with other classroom-based written work from them throughout the semester.

Most answers reflected an understanding of the main disciplinary concepts necessary to answer the question, the content of the course materials (readings and lecture based information), and were organized at a level consistent with a 400-level course. The reading took approximately 180 minutes per week to read if the student took adequate notes while doing so. The instructor encouraged note taking by allowing their use on in-class quizzes. None of the three students who did not meet the minimal standard on the assessment item were ever witnessed using their notes when taking quizzes, an indication that the reading was likely never completed by these students.

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 takes a strong position on the issue and clearly states objectives.	Successful application of disciplinary concepts to topic. Author takes a strong position on the issue and states objectives	Solid application of disciplinary concepts. Author clearly states objectives and takes a moderate position on the issue.	Adequate application of disciplinary concepts. Author adequately states and supports a position on the issue.	Proper use of disciplinary terms, but no application of concepts. These papers weakly state and support a position on the issue.	No attempt to use disciplinary concepts in analysis. These papers do not state a position on the issue.
Content	Content demonstrates understanding of society <u>and</u> change. Analysis is supported by many details or examples.	Content demonstrates understanding of society <u>and</u> change. Analysis is supported by one example.	Content demonstrates understanding of society <u>or</u> change. Analysis is supported by many details or examples.	Content demonstrates understanding of society <u>or</u> change. Analysis is supported by one example.	Content demonstrates limited understanding of society <u>or</u> change. Minimal examples or support.	Content demonstrates no understanding of society <u>or</u> 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

SOCI 335: Juvenile Justice System

Professor: Sara Rasch

Assessment by: Dr. Leah Schmalzbauer

Learning Outcome: Sociological Concepts

Soci 335 is an upper-division criminology course whose stated learning objectives are: 1) to understand the evolution of the policies and practices of the juvenile justice system; 2) be able to identify the types of social change that triggered changes in the juvenile justice system; 3) understand the purpose and objectives of juvenile policing and adjudication, and 4) recognize the rationale behind specialized correctional, prevention and intervention programs for juveniles.

I randomly selected nine papers to assess for the students' use of sociological concepts – three A papers, three B papers, and three C papers. There were no D or F papers for this specific assignment. The papers I assessed were three-page reflection papers in which Prof. Rasch assigned the class a specific essay question to which they had to respond. Prof. Rasch assigned three reflection papers throughout the semester, each focused on a particular course reading. Students were required to use two academic references for the paper beyond the course text book, and to engage criminological concepts from the course. Attached is the grading rubric with Prof. Rasch used to grade the papers.

“A” papers:

The A papers were excellent. They were well written, the students structuring their theses around appropriate sociological concepts and staying close to the relevant sociological literature. I was most impressed with the students' ability to develop a sophisticated and coherent argument using concepts from the course. Students interwove concepts into their analysis, thus presenting sophisticated arguments that were also clear.

“B” papers:

The students who earned B's wrote solid papers. Yet, unlike the students who earned A's on their papers, the students in the B group presented arguments which were less clear, and did not define the concepts they used in as complete a manner. While they still demonstrated good use of the outside academic sources, they did not as effectively use the concepts from these sources in their arguments. Overall, the papers, while good, were less clear and coherent.

“C” papers:

These papers though clearly weaker than the A and B papers in my sample, were still not terrible. They were separated from the stronger papers first and foremost by the simplicity and shallowness of their arguments in which they often failed to use appropriate sociological concepts, or did not use them correctly. The papers were short and were much less closely wedded to the academic literature. As a result, they read in large part like opinion pieces, which were not analytically sound. It is clear that these students do not understand the distinction between sociological concepts and media newsbytes. Nor do they fully appreciate the importance of using sociological concepts to develop a clear and coherent argument.

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. Author takes a strong position on the issue and clearly states objectives.	Successful application of course concepts to topic. Author takes a strong position on the issue and states objectives	Solid application of course concepts. Author clearly states objectives and takes a moderate position on the issue.	Adequate application of course concepts. Author adequately states and supports a position on the issue.	Proper use of Juvenile Justice terms, but no application of concepts. These papers weakly state and support a position on the issue.	No attempt to use course content in analysis. These papers do not state a position on the issue.
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.
Support and Proper Citations	All sources are accurately documented in the desired format (ASA).	All sources are accurately documented, but there may be some inconsistency in the use of the desired format (ASA).	Most sources are accurately documented in the desired format (ASA).	Most sources are accurately documented, but may not be in the desired format (ASA).	Many sources are not accurately documented, nor are they in the desired format (ASA).	Too many sources are not accurately documented and there is no format used.
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 2012-Spring 2013 SOCIOLOGY FACULTY RESPONSE

The faculty of the Sociology program discussed the assessment plan for the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 terms. The reviews were conducted on two different classes: SOCI 335 Juvenile Justice System and SOCI 414 Family Violence. The learning outcomes that were assessed, based on a prior assignment of learning outcomes from our assessment plan, was a) sociology as a discipline (SOC 414); and b) sociological concepts (SOC 335). Our review procedures entail using constructed rubrics designed (before use) to evaluate the learning outcomes with samples of student coursework.

Learning Outcome: Sociology as a Discipline

A few of the patterns revealed by the assessment of SOCI 414 (by Steve Swinford) are recurrent themes that prior assessments have found. Our C students struggle with writing assignments and the ability to organize their writing in a clear, concise, and fluid manner. We discussed the possibility of assigning our students a second writing course to strengthen student writing. Scott Myers reported that he had recently talked with a couple of our recent graduates and they each expressed a wish that we would offer a course—early on (at the 100 or 200 level)—that would teach them how to read and write in sociology. Scott reported that he had a similar course at Vanderbilt during his undergraduate years. It was a semester-long course, taken after the introductory course, where students read different types of professional writings as well as a rigorous review of writing in the social sciences.

Steve Swinford also noted that the marginal students (i.e., those who performed poorly in achieving this learning outcome) that the students manifested some of the typical signs of a lack of preparation—no notes present (when students were allowed to use notes on quizzes), poor attendance, and poor performance on other evaluations. While this is clearly a campus-wide problem (indeed, a problem that besets all colleges and universities), the faculty agreed that we need to consider strategies that we can use to respond to this enduring problem among some of our majors.

Learning Outcome: Sociological Concepts

Leah Schmalzbauer noted that while some of the reviewed papers showed that these students could develop a sophisticated and coherent argument using concepts from the field (and discussed in the class), we also have a number of students whose use of the concepts showed a simplicity and shallowness that often reverted to “opinion pieces” instead of properly demonstrating the requisite understanding of sociological concepts. Faculty discussed these findings and possible responses that may reduce this issue, including such simple strategies as emphasizing the importance of learning and using the concepts and not using preconceived notions when writing for a sociology course.

Action Plan

Based upon the assessment and our faculty discussion, the faculty have decided on the following actions:

1. Explore the possibility of adding a lower division course (majors only) that will teach writing and reading in sociology;
 - a. The faculty will be meeting shortly about curriculum changes in our major, so we can discuss the possibility of substituting such a course for another required course
2. Considering a policy dictating that faculty make a referral to the Office of Student Success once certain warnings (poor attendance, grade failure, lack of prep) have been triggered
3. Emphasizing (to students) the importance of learning and using the concepts and not using preconceived notions when writing for a sociology course, including specific language in syllabi, reminders before each exam, and other strategies.