

Academic Program Assessment Report

Academic Year(s) Assessed: 2024-2025

College: Letters & Science

Department: Sociology

Department Head: Cody Warner

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Program(s) Assessed

List all majors (including each option), minors, and certificates that are included in this assessment – add or subtract rows as needed – please use official titles:

Majors	Minors, Options, etc.
Sociology	General Sociology or Criminology Option
	Minor in Sociology

Section 1. Past Assessment Summary.

Response: The 2023-2024 assessment report was very positive, with all ratings excellent or outstanding. The Assessment and Outcomes Committee (AOC) commended our program for consistently demonstrating strong student performance, innovative use of artifacts from multiple courses to assess program learning outcomes (PLOs) across program levels, a collaborative approach to enhancing assessment strategies, and clear documentation and assessment of data. In addition, the committee found our program’s proactive strategy to transition from D2L to Canvas, the new Learning Management System at MSU, to be thoughtful and commended it.

Regarding specific recommendations, the AOC reviewers provided two constructive comments. First, our program could benefit from collecting indirect evidence, such as surveys of students, alumni, or advisory councils, to support curricular or program changes, and changes leading to better direct evidence artifacts/data. Second, our program could benefit from considering how assessment results will be used to support the 7-year Program Review Reporting cycle, thereby enhancing our ability to close the loop and better inform future planning. First, we thank the reviewers for these thoughtful recommendations. Aligning with the first piece of advice on collecting indirect evidence, our department previously organized “Snacks and Suggestions,” an informal event where we invited students to provide feedback on various department-related issues, including courses, advising, and learning experience. Therefore, in response to this recommendation, we have been discussing strategies to continue engaging students with the department and, most importantly, collect indirect evidence to support program improvement. This has been an on-going discussion at recent faculty meetings as we discuss the advising goals and how to assess advising. There are opportunities to collect data useful for program assessment while collecting data useful for advising assessment. Similarly, in response to the second recommendation, we discussed possible strategies during the faculty meetings to incorporate assessment results and support the 7-year cycle of Program Review. We completed our last Program Review in 2021, so the feedback was a timely reminder that we will need to start putting pieces in place for the next review. We continue to explore ways to leverage these assessment results to improve future assessments and achieve our program's learning outcomes.

Section 2. Institutional Assessment Data Request.

Based on the rationale on the Instructions page, please review your program learning outcomes (PLOs) and identify whether you have PLOs that address the Core Qualities. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

Identify 1-2 major-required courses that might have student assignments designed to meet these objectives at least at a surface level. If you cannot identify a course in your program that aligns with this request, please check the appropriate box. At this juncture, this is for information gathering as we plan future institutional assessment endeavors.

Core Quality LOs are Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO)	PLO overlaps with MSU Core Quality Mark X if program has at least one PLO that overlaps with an ILO	Beginning Level e.g. CORE Courses (US, W, Q, IN, CS, IA, IH, IS, D)	Developing Level e.g. list one 200- or 300-level course	Proficient Level e.g. list one 300- or 400-level courses, Capstone, Research (R) Core courses	Not Applicable (N/A) No course exists in our program that addresses this Core Quality / ILO
Thinkers & Problem Solvers	X	Core classes are designed to address an introductory, foundational level of Core Qualities. Some may overlap into the developing level, but most intermediate-to-developing or proficient/mastery level courses will exist within the majors.	SOCI 311		
Effective Communicators	X			SOCI 499	
Local & Global Citizen	X			SOCI 325	

Section 3. Actionable Research Question for Your Assessment.

Response: Can 70% of students score at level 3 or above (1-4 scale) on rubrics measuring sociological application (i.e., relationship between personal experience and wider society) and sociological evaluation (i.e., use of critical thinking to evaluation evidence or conclusions)?

Section 4. Assessment Plan, Schedule, and Data Sources.

- a) Did you change the previously established Assessment Plan Schedule. If yes, how was it changed?

The assessment plan was not changed during this cycle, but this is the last AY of our previously established plan. The faculty will meet as part of assessment this cycle to update the plan.

- b) Please provide a multi-year assessment schedule that will show when all program learning outcomes will be assessed, and by what criteria (data). List your PLOs in full for reference. Add rows as necessary.

ASSESSMENT PLANNING SCHEDULE CHART						
PLO#	PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	Data Source*
1	Sociological Principles	X	-			SOCI 455 (student essays)
2	Sociological Application	-	X			SOCI 499 (final projects)
3	Sociological Communication	X	-			SOCI 318 (research projects)
4	Sociological Evaluation	-	X			SOCI 311 (course projects)

- c) What are the threshold values for which your program demonstrates student achievement? Provide a rationale for your threshold values.

Threshold Values		
PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME	Threshold Value	Data Source(s)*
PLO#1 – Sociological Principles: Our students will demonstrate an understanding of sociology’s core conceptual, theoretical, and empirical principles.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 70% of assessed students to score at or above 3 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	Responses to multiple-choice or short-answer exam questions, essays, and/or individual research projects.
PLO#2 – Sociological Application: Our students will demonstrate the ability to apply the “sociological imagination” to understand and analyze social institutions, groups, and processes. The sociological imagination is the awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 70% of assessed students to score at or above 3 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	See above.
PLO#3 – Sociological Communication: Our students will demonstrate the ability to communicate sociological knowledge effectively.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 70% of assessed students to score at or above 3 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	See above. Also, oral presentations.
PLO#4 – Sociological Evaluation: Students will develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the evidence, conclusions, and underlying assumptions of academic and non-academic sources of knowledge.	The threshold value for this outcome is for 70% of assessed students to score at or above 3 on a 1-4 scoring rubric.	See above. Also, oral presentations.

Section 5. What Was Done?

- a) Self-reporting Metric (required answer): Was the completed assessment consistent with the program’s assessment plan? If not, please explain the adjustments that were made.

Yes No

- b) How was the data collected and analyzed and by whom? Please include method of collection and sample size.

Two faculty members volunteered to collect and submit samples of artifacts assessing PLO#2 or PLO#4 from the designated course. They submitted the following.

- Artifacts for PLO#2: Final papers from SOCI 499 Senior Thesis Capstone were collected and provided as artifacts to assess sociological application. A total of 10 artifacts were reviewed, representing approximately 40% of the Spring 2025 enrollment in the course.
- Artifacts for PLO#4: Final course projects from SOCI 311 Criminology were collected and provided as artifacts to assess sociological evaluation. A total of 10 artifacts were reviewed, representing approximately 20% of the Fall 2024 enrollment in the course.

- c) Please provide a rubric that demonstrates how your data was evaluated.

PLO#2 – Sociological Application: Our students will demonstrate the ability to apply the “sociological imagination” to understand and analyze social institutions, groups, and processes. The sociological imagination is the awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society.				
Indicators	<i>Unacceptable (1)</i>	<i>Marginal (2)</i>	<i>Acceptable (3)</i>	<i>Advanced (4)</i>
Application of Sociological Imagination	Student does not demonstrate a "sociological imagination" and may not understand how social and historical forces shape contemporary social structures.	Student demonstrates an understanding of the way social and historical forces shape contemporary social structures but is unable to clearly apply this perspective to an analysis of social institutions, groups, or processes.	Student demonstrates understanding of how social and historical forces shape contemporary social structures and is able to apply this perspective to an analysis of social institutions, groups, or processes.	Student demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how social and historical forces shape contemporary social structures, is able to apply this perspective to an analysis of social institutions, groups, or processes, and may connect social patterns across societal contexts.
Threshold Values: 70% of students will meet or exceed level 3 competency				

PLO #4: Sociological Evaluation: Students will develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the evidence, conclusions, and underlying assumptions of academic and non-academic sources of knowledge.				
Indicators	<i>Unacceptable (1)</i>	<i>Marginal (2)</i>	<i>Acceptable (3)</i>	<i>Advanced (4)</i>
Evidence	Evidence is not accurately interpreted or evaluated. The viewpoints of experts are not questioned.	Evidence is inconsistently interpreted and evaluated. The viewpoints of experts are not thoroughly questioned.	Evidence is accurately interpreted and its quality fairly evaluated. The viewpoints of experts are thoroughly questioned.	Evidence is accurately interpreted and its quality is fairly evaluated, the viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly, and the work's overall validity is assessed.
Conclusions	Conclusions are misrepresented or not analyzed for quality.	Conclusions are mostly represented accurately and analyzed logically, but mistakes remain evident.	Conclusions are accurately represented and logically analyzed based on the quality of the evidence presented.	Conclusions are accurately represented, logically analyzed based on the quality of the evidence presented, and evaluated for overall validity.
Underlying Assumptions	Does not identify or evaluate their own or others' assumptions.	Identifies but does not fully or consistently analyze their own or others' assumptions.	Identifies and analyzes their own and others' assumptions and presents a substantiated position of the appropriateness of those assumptions.	Identifies and analyzes their own and others' assumptions, presents a substantiated evaluation of the appropriateness of those assumptions, and connects these assumptions to the work's overall validity.
Threshold Values: 70% of students will meet or exceed level 3 competency				

Section 6. What Was Learned.

- a) Based on the analysis of the data, and compared to the threshold values established, what was learned from the assessment?

For PLO#2:

- a. Impressively, 100% of the students in the sample scored at or above our threshold of 3 or above, with 30% of them scoring a 4.

For PLO#4:

- b. The assessment scores ranged between 2 and 4. 90% of the students in the sample scored at or above our threshold of 3, with 40% of the students scoring a 4.

- b) What areas of strength in the program were identified from this assessment process?

Students in SOCI 499 Senior Thesis Capstone were able to fully explore the sociological imagination where they successfully drew connections between their personal experiences and wider societal context. All student artifacts demonstrated an understanding of how social and historical forces shape contemporary social structures. Given that this course is taken by seniors in the final stage of the program, the artifacts strongly demonstrated meaningful, reflective, and conscious engagement of students in the final project, providing evidence of meeting PLO #2.

Majority of the students in SOCI 311 Criminology demonstrated their critical thinking skills to sociologically evaluate a focus crime based on theory and empirical evidence, supporting successful achievement of PLO #4.

- c) What areas were identified that either need improvement or could be improved in a different way from this assessment process?

As we reflected on this assessment process and discussed on the AOC's recommendations, in addition to collecting artifacts from multiple course assessments, considering to collect indirect evidence such as student feedback as a part of the program assessment might be helpful in the future. There may also be value in gathering student artifacts from other courses. Students in SOCI 499 are near graduation and SOCI 311 is a required course for student majors. The department might get value from reviewing student artifacts or other evidence beyond these courses with such explicit development of skills related to the program learning outcomes.

Section 7. How We Responded.

- a) Describe how "What Was Learned" was communicated to the department, or program faculty. How did faculty discussions re-imagine new ways program assessment might contribute to program growth/improvement/innovation beyond the bare minimum of achieving program learning objectives through assessment activities conducted at the course level?

The assessment findings were disseminated during our faculty meetings, and the faculty members discussed the results. The faculty discussions focused on making improvements in

assessment designs to continue achieving the PLOs. In addition, the faculty discussions re-imagined several strategies for collecting student feedback around PLOs, and improving student engagement in those feedback collection process, so that the assessment activities extended beyond the multi-course level. Lastly, faculty discussed on lessons learned from past assessments, and showed commitment to continue the practice of reflective assessment of particular PLOs at each assessment cycle.

- b) How are the results of this assessment informing changes to enhance student learning in the program?

The results of this assessment have informed the benefits of using proven assessment design for course assessment. In doing so, the course assessment not only successfully evaluate the course learning outcomes but the PLOs as well. Moreover, such practices would enhance overall student learning experience in the program. Therefore, we plan to revisit the (a) constructive alignment of our individual course learning outcomes with the PLOs, and (b) improvement of course assessments to effectively assess both the course learning outcomes as well as the PLOs.

- c) If information outside of this assessment is informing programmatic changes, please describe that.

N/A

- d) What support and resources (e.g., workshops, training, etc.) might you need to make these adjustments?

As MSU has transitioned to Canvas as the new Learning Management System (LMS), we have been sharing our best practices, knowledge, and challenges surrounding effective designs of assessments in Canvas. Our faculty representative to the Faculty Senate also shared faculty inputs regarding Canvas use, including designing assessments in Canvas.

Section 8. Closing the Loop(s).

Reflect on the program learning outcomes, how they were assessed in the previous cycle (refer to #1 of the report), and what was learned in this cycle about any actions stemming from the previous cycle.

- a) Self-Reporting Metric (required answer): Based on the findings and/or faculty input, will there be any changes made (such as plans for measurable improvements, realignment of learning outcomes, curricular changes, etc.) in preparation for upcoming assessments?

Yes

No

- b) In reviewing the last report that assessed the PLO(s) in this assessment cycle, what changes proposed were implemented and will be measured in future assessment reports? What action will be taken to improve student learning objectives going forward?

We are currently working on improving student engagement. In addition to continuing assessment of multi-course artifacts, we plan to incorporate indirect evidence by collecting student feedback to assess PLOs. To improve student learning objectives, we have already begun revisiting whether our course learning outcomes align with the PLOs.

- c) Have you seen a change in student learning based on other program adjustments made in the past? Please describe the adjustments made and subsequent changes in student learning.

Yes, by incorporating proven assessment designs we have seen improved student learning and performance. For instance, the SOCI 499 final project assessment was designed based on a workshop that the faculty member attended on improving sociological writing. Adoption of the strategy enabled students to follow the prompts, own their writing, link personal experience and wider society, consequently enhancing their sociological imagination. These adjustments contributed to significant improvement in student learning and their performance in the PLO#2 compared to the last time our program assessed the PLO #2.

- d) If the program sees anything emerging from this assessment cycle that it anticipates would be a factor or an item of discussion in its 7-year program review cycle, please use this space to document that for future reference.

There are clear links between the annual assessment cycle and the 7-year program review. Indeed, an entire section of the program review is dedicated to assessment of educational programs. As such, we appreciate the reminder here to think about how these reports fit into that larger picture. That students in our Senior Capstone courses and required theory courses are showing evidence of achieving our program learning outcomes should be highlighted in the report. These courses are central to our curriculum, and provide students with content and assignments that are most clearly aligned with our program goals. As we move towards the next program review, we should probably assess outcomes in our elective courses as well. This would help us determine if some of these substantive courses need revision to bring them in alignment with larger program goals.

Submit report to programassessment@montana.edu

Update Department program assessment report website.

Update PLO language in CIM if needed ([Map PLOs to Course LOs](#))