Assessment Plan for the Sociology Master of Arts Program

Department: Sociology

Program: Master of Arts

Mission Statement: The mission of the sociology graduate program is to prepare students for advanced academic training, for university teaching careers, or for professional careers that allow them to apply their advanced sociological training. The program facilitates students gaining the sophisticated theoretical, methodological, and analytical skills with which to examine sociological research questions. All courses in the curriculum focus on building these skills to a level in which the student is able to independently engage in research informed by a sociological perspective.

Updated: Fall of 2013. This plan takes beginning Fall of 2013. The Fall 2013 assessment report is based on the previous assessment plan.

Overview of Assessment Plan for the Master of Arts Program

The Sociology Department assesses the four student-learning goals in a four-year cycle in which one goal is addressed each year. The goals contain a mixture of knowledge-based goals and skills-based goals, with all objectives translating goals (where necessary) into specific skills that can be readily measured. The assessment plan details both direct and indirect measures. Each fall, the findings from the previous year’s assessment activities are discussed in a faculty meeting. The graduate director takes the lead in distributing assessment findings and facilitating this discussion.

Part I: Student Learning Goals and Objectives

The student learning goals and objectives are outlined below:

Goal 1: How is sociology distinctive as a discipline? Students should be able to:

  Objective a: Demonstrate an ability to understand empirical sociological studies, including what makes a given study sociological in nature.

  Objective b: Create a sociological research question, including an argument for how it is sociologically informed.

Goal 2: What do sociologists know? Students should be able to:

  Objective a: Utilize existing sociological literature to build a case for a specific research question.

  Objective b: Synthesize existing sociological literature to frame the development of hypotheses.

Goal 3: How is sociological knowledge produced? Students should be able to:

  Objective a: Use theoretical concepts to inform a research question.
Objective b: Develop and implement sociological methods to answer a research question.

Objective c: Analyze data statistically at the multivariate level.

Goal 4: How is sociological knowledge communicated? Students should be able to:

Objective a: Use discipline-specific conventions to communicate sociological research in writing.

Objective b: Create and deliver oral presentations of sociological research using discipline-specific conventions.

Part II: Educational Experiences

Students in the MA program in sociology will encounter a variety of educational experiences. The majority of such experiences will take place during their required coursework. The bulk of such coursework occurs in small seminars, which generally range in size from 4 – 10 students. In their coursework students directly engage in sociological research, with the coursework designed to incrementally guide students through the research process until they are at a point in which they can conduct research independently. Four required courses (Soc. 510, Soc. 511, Soc. 520, and Soc. 521) form the backbone for each student’s program of study. Coursework begins with Soc. 510 (Sociological Inquiry), which helps students learn how to design research that is sociological, and how to frame such research in terms of its contribution to the larger sociological literature. In doing so, this course takes students through the process of writing an introduction and literature review for a research project. Soc. 511 (Contemporary Sociological Theory) provides students with the skills necessary to construct a theoretical perspective to inform sociological research. Another core course, Soc. 520 (Advanced Research Design), facilitates students acquiring the ability to design research methods to address sociological research questions. Soc. 521 (Advanced Analytical Methods) focuses on helping students gain the capacity to design and implement appropriate statistical methods to answer a sociological research question, with attention also given to how to present the results of such research orally.

Students will also be encouraged to attend and present at sociological professional conferences. These conferences buttress the experiences students receive in courses by showing “sociology in action.” Students get to see how “real” sociologists conduct and talk about their research. By the end of their second year, the majority of students will have the experience of presenting at such conferences, which serves to enhance their abilities to successfully convey the results of sociological research following discipline-specific conventions.

The educational experiences of students in the MA program in sociology culminate with the completion of a thesis under the supervision of an advisor and thesis committee. Thesis work entails students undertaking a sociological research project from beginning to end, with students formulating a research question, reviewing the existing literature to inform the research question, designing a research method to address the question, and implementing an analytical strategy
(typically multivariate statistical analysis) to answer the question. Students present their orally present their thesis findings at the thesis defense.

**Part III: Assessment Methods**

The assessment plan for the graduate program incorporates both direct and indirect measures of student learning. Direct methods of student learning are course-specific and designed by the particular instructor responsible for teaching the class that is aligned with the goal. These range according to the goal, and the particular instructor responsible for assessing the goal in question. For example, to assess the ability to understand sociological studies (Goal 1, Objective a.), Soc. 510 uses an article analysis assignment, with a rubric that is used to assess this particular goal. As another example, in order to assess Goal 4, Objective b. Soc. 521 uses a research presentation assignment, with the instructor employing a rubric that assesses the extent to which the student succeeds at various aspects of the oral presentation of sociological research. Goals 2 – 4 are also assessed using the students’ thesis work. Each committee has the responsibility of assessing the students’ performance on these goals using a thesis assessment rubric. Student learning goals are also indirectly assessed through the use of a survey that is administered to all students graduating in a given academic year. The survey indirectly assesses student learning pertaining to whichever goal is the focus of assessment for the given year. The survey measures the extent to which students perceive their participation in the graduate program has improved their abilities related to the goal in question. Indirect assessment focuses on one goal per year in order to keep the survey instrument short, thereby increasing the response rate.

**Part IV: Timeline and Part V: Responsibilities**

The timeline for the collection of assessment data can be found in the table located below. Each year we focus on assessing one goal, with assessment rotating to the next goal the following year.

In terms of responsibilities, the sociology graduate director, is responsible for managing the collection of assessment data. Individual instructors, following the guidelines detailed in the table below, collect direct assessment data, which is then provided to the graduate director. Thesis chairs are responsible for using the thesis assessment rubric to assess goals 2 – 4. These should be assessed for every student who completes a thesis defense. This data is then provided to the graduate director. The graduate director is also in charge of designing and administering the graduation survey. This survey focuses on one goal each year. The graduate director then combines these various sources of data, and uses them to write the annual graduate assessment report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AY 2013-2014</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How is sociology distinctive as a discipline?</td>
<td>a. Demonstrate an ability to understand empirical</td>
<td>Soc. 510</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Article analysis assignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sociological Studies, Including What Makes a Given Study Sociological in Nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soc. 539</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc. 510</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Research question and introduction assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soc. 539</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### AY 2014-2015

**Goal**

2. **What do sociologists know?**

**Objective**

a. Utilize existing sociological literature to build a case for a specific research question.

**Course**

Soc. 510

**Method**

Direct

**Measure**

Literature review assignment

**Goal**

b. Synthesize existing sociological literature to frame the development of hypotheses

**Course**

Soc. 520

**Method**

Direct

**Measure**

Research proposal assignment

#### AY 2015-2016

**Goal**

3. **How is sociological knowledge produced?**

**Objective**

a. Use theoretical concepts to inform a research question.

**Course**

Soc. 511

**Method**

Direct

**Measure**

Writing assignment

#### AY 2016-2017

**Goal**

4. **How is sociological knowledge**

**Objective**

a. Use discipline-specific conventions to communicate

**Course**

Soc. 511

**Method**

Direct

**Measure**

Writing assignment

---

1 This goal is only assessed in thesis work employing quantitative methods.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>communicated?</th>
<th>sociological research in writing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thesis Direct Thesis assessment rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Create and deliver oral presentations of sociological research using discipline-specific conventions</td>
<td>Soc. 521 Direct Research presentation assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. and b.</td>
<td>Thesis Direct Thesis assessment rubric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-- Indirect Graduation survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part VI: Use of Results and Process for Documentation and Decision-Making**

Results of assessment activities will be presented and discussed each fall at a faculty meeting early in the semester. Discussion will focus on determining the extent to which the student-learning goals have been achieved and identifying any areas in which improvement may be needed. In terms of potential improvements, discussion will take the form of using assessment data to determine if any course-level changes or programmatic changes are needed to enhance the achievement of student-learning goals. Discussion will also center on examining trends in the achievement of student-learning goals across time. Assessment data will also be communicated in the Sociology Department’s Annual Report. Each fall the existing assessment plan will be revisited in order to determine if any changes in assessment procedures are warranted.
MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the sociology masters program is to prepare students for advanced academic training, for university teaching careers, or for professional careers that allow them to apply their advanced sociological training. Using a problem based learning format, the program will provide each cohort of students with advanced theoretical, methodological and analytical tools and skills with which to examine, explore, advance, and apply sociological knowledge to a common sociological question. Each course in the core curriculum will focus on different aspects of the common sociological question, and the output of that course will be exploration of the common sociological question from epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and analytical viewpoints.

Goals of the Graduate Program in Sociology

A student completing a Masters degree in Sociology at the University of North Dakota should be able to:

1. Develop a professional identity
   **Objectives:**
   1.1 Students will be encouraged to join one or more professional societies; to attend the Great Plains Sociological Association meetings their first year, and to present a paper at the meetings their second year; and graduate students will be encouraged to attend meetings of other professional societies depending on their interests and funding.

   **Assessment Tools:**
   1.1 The director of graduate studies with assistance of the graduate faculty will keep a database of the number of graduate students who become members of GPSA, the number of first year students who attend GPSA meetings, and the number of second year graduate students who present papers at the GPSA meetings. The database will include a weighted index of the number of students who become members, attend meetings, or present papers at other professional societies (membership = 1 attend meetings = 2 presenting papers = 3)

2. Adhere to a set of ethical standards in their professional endeavors.

   **Objectives:**
   2.1 Through the professional seminar students will become familiar with the ethical standards of the discipline
   2.2 Students will complete the protection of human subjects online training
   2.3 Ethical issues will be incorporated into all core courses
Assessment Tools:
2.1 After reading the ASA Code of Ethics, the AAUP Statement on Professional Ethics, and the chapter “Of Methods and Manners for Aspiring Sociologists: 37 Moral Imperatives” from Larson’s Pure and Applied Sociology, students will explore the ethical issues associated with an ethical dilemma.
2.2 The number of students who complete the human subjects online training,
2.3 The number of courses that include discussion of ethical issues

3. Further develop their sociological imaginations through practical application.

Objectives:
3.1 Students will develop a sociological question and explore its philosophical, theoretical, methodological dimensions through the analysis of existing data.

Assessment Tool:
3.1 Through Soc. 528 (Research Seminar) first semester students will use a common data set to explore the research process by writing a sociological question, reviewing key pieces of literature, developing propositions and hypotheses, identifying concepts and measures, determining analysis techniques appropriate to the data, conducting analysis, and reporting results.

4. Understand how sociologists perceive, understand, and study social phenomenon.

Objectives:
4.1 In an essay format, 90 percent of the students will be able to discuss epistemological dimensions of a sociological question.

Assessment Tool:
4.1 After having completed Soc. 510 (Sociological Inquiry), students will identify and explore approaches to perceiving, understanding, and studying sociological questions.

5. Use sociological theories, concepts, and propositions to explain or interpret sociological questions.

Objectives:
5.1 Ninety percent of students will be able to use theories, concepts, and/or propositions from several theoretical domains to explain or interpret sociological questions.

Assessment Tool:
5.1 Upon completion of Soc. 511 (Sociological Theory), all students will write an essay in which they identify relevant concepts of several theoretical approaches and assess the strengths and weaknesses of those approaches in analyzing a sociological question.
6. Describe the basic differences in the purposes and procedures of multiple method research designs including both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Objectives:
6.1 Upon completion of Soc. 520 (Advanced Research Design), students will be able to formulate both a multiple method research design for a sociological question.

Assessment Tool:
6.1 Students enrolled in Soc. 520 will produce a series of papers in which they discuss both qualitative and quantitative research designs for a sociological question.

7. Formulate and articulate answerable research questions and develop appropriate empirical procedures, both quantitative and qualitative, to answer them, so as to successfully conduct and report research for theses.

Objectives
7.1 Upon completion of Soc. 521 (Advanced Analytical Methods) students will be able to develop procedures to analyze the qualitative and/or quantitative data for the research designs they developed for Soc. 520.

Assessment Tool:
7.1 Students enrolled in Soc. 521 will produce an analytical research strategy involving qualitative and/or quantitative procedures. They will be able to identify appropriate procedures, discuss their properties and assumptions, and be able to interpret them.

8. Determine a sociological question and its associated theoretical, methodological, and analytical dimensions as well as judgments concerning the merit and value of the findings examine published research (papers, reports, monographs, articles and books).

Objectives
8.1 Upon completion of core courses, all students will conduct a literature review about a sociological question in which they will critique the research and specify the strengths and weaknesses, value, and merit of the findings.

8.2 Upon completion of the literature review, all students will produce a thesis proposal based upon their problem-based work produced in the core courses and discuss the proposal before their thesis committee.

Assessment Tool:
8.1 Students will be required to identify the sociological question, the theoretical orientation, the propositions, major concepts, the research hypothesis, operationalization of concepts, the dependent and independent variables, the unit of analysis, the data source, the kinds of analysis used, statistical tests used and their purposes, the major results, whether the results support the proposition, and the sociological significance of the results.
8.2 Students, working with their thesis advisor, will discuss their thesis proposal with their thesis advisory committee.

9. Demonstrate ability to conduct sociological research, culminating in the successful completion of a Master’s thesis under the mentorship of program faculty.

Objectives:
9.1 All students will successfully defend their thesis before their thesis advisory committee.

Assessment Tool:
9.1 Students, working with their thesis advisors, will defend their thesis before their advisory committee.

10. Explore career options and find employment in an appropriate setting.

Objectives:
10.1 Students will explore career options available to them in academic settings, private business, and public agencies.
10.2 Over a period of five years, students will find subsequent opportunities relevant to their degree (approximately 20% each on teaching, government agencies, applied settings including private business or NGO’s, and Ph.D. programs.).

Assessment Tools:
10.1 Through readings students enrolled in Soc. 500 (Professional seminar) and visits from alumni and faculty will explore careers in a variety of settings.
10.2 They will be required to investigate the opportunities in at least two career settings.
10.3 The director of graduate studies with the assistance of thesis advisors will develop a database of graduates, their current places of employment, or their enrollment in Ph.D. programs.
Implementation

Prior to Thesis Proposal

All graduate students must, in addition to all other requirements for graduation, complete a portfolio as a reflection of what they have learned through their efforts in graduate school. The portfolio will contain the assessment outcomes for the core courses. Before the beginning of the next semester, graduate students should submit their portfolio for the prior semester to the Director of Graduate Studies. The director will convene a meeting of the graduate faculty to review the portfolios in relation to the sociology graduate program outcomes as outlined in the assessment plan. As this assessment is primarily to determine the extent to which the graduate curriculum is meeting the graduate program outcomes, the focus is on the program and not on the student. If the graduate faculty note in their overall assessment, however, that a particular student is having difficulty in realizing the program outcomes, that student’s advisor will meet with the student to discuss what may be done to improve their performance.

Thesis Proposal
The thesis advisor will convene the thesis advisory committee so that the masters student will discuss his or her thesis proposal.

Thesis Defense

The thesis advisor will convene the thesis advisory committee so that the masters student will defend his or her thesis.