

**UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**  
**June 2006**

**Goal 1. Students will learn the conceptual framework of sociology.**

**Research:** The plan calls for collecting papers and exams from the required theory course and scoring them on a three point scale—exemplary, acceptable, unacceptable—with respect to specific knowledge and concepts drawn from three classical sociological theorists and three sociological perspectives.

The three professors who teach the course) reviewed the assessment material collected from 65 students enrolled Spring 2006 in the two sections of Sociological Theory (SOC 352). Both sections covered the six topics to be assessed (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, functionalism, symbolic interactionism and feminism). One section emphasized these six topics, the other included other topics. One section emphasized primary texts, the other commentaries.

**Findings:**

I. Knowledge of Marx, Weber and Durkheim

There is still a wide variation in the students' performance.

The assessment materials available for review provide incomplete evidence regarding students' achievement of the learning objectives for Durkheim and Weber. The materials from one section bear only on Suicide and the Protestant Ethic/Spirit of Capitalism. The materials from the other provide somewhat unsystematic evidence on a variety of topics, as the questions students were required to answer do not directly confront the learning objectives in most cases.

A. Durkheim: for the most part students had at least an acceptable grasp of the following:

- a. three types of suicide
- b. mechanical and organic solidarity

Students seemed much more confused about Durkheim's sociology of religion – e.g., one student who referred to Durkheim's view that religion was "bogus" (not true) and a relative lack of awareness of the central connection between religion and community in Durkheim's theory.

There was very little evidence on the other two objectives (social fact/normal and pathological). A few students used the term social fact, but in a mechanical way (repeating the criterion of externality without indicating comprehension). There was one student who did a good job on this however, even giving an example (distinguishing suicide rates from individual acts of suicide).

## B. Weber:

- a. Types of action: students mostly had an acceptable grasp of this
- b. Protestant Ethic: There was a wide range of answers regarding the Protestant Ethic. Two or three students had really exemplary answers on this (connecting the doctrine of predestination to the spiritual crisis of the Calvinist believer and linking this to labor in the calling as an external sign of grace).. Others were confused: many seemed to think that labor in the calling INCREASED one's chances of salvation, which is the opposite of the point. Most answers seemed to have the various pieces of the theory straight, but didn't connect them well.
- c. Rationalization: Only a few students commented on this, largely in the context of a discussion of disenchantment. Hard to tell from their answers if they actually understand what the term meant to Weber.
- d. Class: Only a few students commented on this. One student did a very good job (contrasting Weber and Marx quite effectively: multiple classes, potential community, other aspects of stratification). The others provided mechanical answers that didn't seem to reflect real comprehension.
- e. Only one student answer contained information on types of authority – it was unacceptable.
- f. Only one student commented on objectivity – that answer was probably acceptable.

The answers on Marx showed that students had a good grasp of the material on class and class conflict, alienation and exploitation. There was a mixed set of answers on modes of production and historical materialism and nothing on the Marx's analysis of the State.

## III. Knowledge of Functionalism, Feminism and Symbolic Interactionism

There is still wide variation in what instructors are including in their classes. This is predictable given the scope of the material. However, for the sections to be consistent, the basic content of these three components needs greater standardization. The answers on functionalism and symbolic interactionism were acceptable. Students had the most difficulty with Parsons, which is to be expected. The material for symbolic interactionism was often handled well by students, with answers on Goffman scoring particularly well. There was less material on Merton, but there were signs that at least some students had a very good grasp of his contribution.

The answers on feminism showed that students could distinguish between different schools of thought. More effort could be made to identify key feminist theorists and to link their ideas to the rubric. There was evidence that students had grasped information about pioneers in the field.

### **Actions:**

1. The theory committee should determine the amount of the course that should be allocated to the six topics of the rubric.
2. The theory committee should determine what role primary texts play in the course and how students' knowledge of primary texts should be evaluated.

3. The theory committee needs to discuss ways to ensure that the rubric is being covered systematically and that the examinations and papers embody a significant emphasis on the topics included in the rubric.
4. So that change can be assessed from one year to the next, the theory committee will agree by next fall on a way to assess outcomes systematically so that the materials collected can be assessed on the scale specified in the assessment plan.

**Goal 2: Students will learn the sociologist's ways of knowing.**

**Research:** The plan calls for using a rubric to score papers and/or exams collected from the required research methods and statistics courses. For the three sections of SOC 354 Quantitative Social Research taught during the 2005-2006 academic year, the instructors identified items on tests that corresponded to the material specified in the learning outcomes. Although a brief report was made last year, it was incomplete and difficult to compare to this year's report. A year ago, the percentages of students who demonstrated that they learned specific topics were all between 73% and 80%.

**Findings for SOC 354:** The two faculty members who taught three sections of the course assessed exams.

- I. Students will learn how to use and apply the basic tools of descriptive statistics (frequency distributions in tabular and graphical form, central tendency and dispersion measures)

	Section 1 (n = 36)	Section 2 (n = 30)	Section 3 (n = 16)
A. Frequency distributions (tables)	91%	83%	78%
B. Frequency distributions (graphs)	97%	87%	100%
C. Central tendency*	95%	63%	68%
D. Dispersion*	57%	63%	61%

- II. Students will be introduced to the fundamentals of sampling, probability, and inferential statistics

	(n = 31)		
A. Sampling	71%	68%	65%
B. Probability	65%	sampling/prob combined	
C. Inferential statistics	77%	81%	88%

- III. Students will learn to differentiate between independent and dependent variables and to develop testable hypotheses.

	(n = 35)		
A. Independent vs. dependent variables	71%	90%	100%
B. Hypothesis formation	A & B combined		94%

In two of the nine topics (Central tendency and Dispersion), less than 65% of students demonstrated knowledge in at least one of the sections.

**Actions:** Instructors of the courses will review the results and continue to discuss ways to improve students' understanding of concepts, especially Central tendency and Dispersion.

**RESEARCH FOR SOC 353:** For SOC 353 Research Methods each of the three instructors who taught a section of the course reported the percentage of correct answers to questions identified as measures of the concepts specified in the outcomes. Exam questions identified to test knowledge of each concept differed among the three courses. Each instructor tallied the outcome for his/her course. Most of the questions were true/false or multiple choice. For short-answer questions, if an answer was given more than half of the points, it was counted as correct.

	2005*	% correct 2005-2006**		
		Section 1	Section 2	Section 3
1. Independent vs. dependent variable	61	72	65	75
2. Hypothesis	72	72	48	72
3. Unit of analysis	52	58	72	42
4. Sampling	77	67	72	48
5. Conceptualization	86	76	75	NA
6. Operationalization	62	53	58	50
7. Survey instrument	75	80	74	NA
8. Observation and interviewing	70	NA	68	NA
9. Inductive/deductive reasoning	66	60	58	50
10. Univariate analysis	81	69	74	36
11. Bivariate analysis	72	74	62	33

\*Based on 46 final exams from 2 sections of the course

\*\* Based on 112 final exams from 3 sections of the course.

For none of the outcomes was there marked improvement or decline. The marked declines noted in Section 3 of the course may stem from differences in measurement. That is, short answer, true/false, and multiple choice questions may generate different percentages of correct answers. Section 3 relied almost exclusively on short-answer questions.

In addition, 15 final papers to which to apply the rubric were randomly chosen, 5 from each section of the course. Ten papers were quantitative and five were qualitative. Two faculty members used the rubric to evaluate the quantitative papers independently. For the quantitative papers, the 15 papers were evaluated as follows:

#### Findings May 2006

	<u>Research Design</u>	<u>Adequate Data</u>	<u>Data Analysis</u>
1.	Exemplary/Acceptable	Exemplary	Exemplary
2.	Exemplary	Exemplary	Exemplary
3.	Exemplary	Acceptable	Acceptable
4.	Unacceptable	Unacceptable	Unacceptable
5.	Acceptable/Unacceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable/Unacceptable
6.	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Unacceptable
7.	Unacceptable/Acceptable	Acceptable/Unacceptable	Acceptable/Unacceptable

8.	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable/Unacceptable
9.	Exemplary/Acceptable	Exemplary/Acceptable	Exemplary/Acceptable
10.	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Unacceptable/Acceptable

To construct the table to compare this year's with last year's findings, where there was disagreement between the evaluators, the *lower* evaluation was chosen:

	Findings May 2005 and 2006					
	Exemplary		Acceptable		Unacceptable	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Research Design	2	2	5	6	3	2
Adequate Data	0	2	6	4	4	4
Data Analysis	1	2	4	2	5	6

Of the three criteria, as evident in these papers, Data Analysis remains the biggest problem, with at least one-third of the papers in both years being judge unacceptable in this category.

Application of the rubric to the qualitative papers proved problematic.

Common problems identified were:

1. Students continue to have difficulties performing data analysis.
2. Concern that students in one section of the course focused on qualitative methods at the expense of learning enough about quantitative methods.
3. Concern that questions used to measure outcomes are not comparable across the sections of the course.

**Actions:** The three instructors discussed the possibility of focusing almost exclusively on quantitative research rather than trying to give equal weight to quantitative and qualitative research; using the same textbook in the future for all sections of the course; and developing homework assignments that could be graded by a TA who could also serve as a tutor.

**Goal 3: Students will learn a working understanding of a focused sample of the accumulated research knowledge base in sociology.**

**Research:** The assessment plan calls for selecting two 300-level substantive classes for assessment, which will rotate from year to year. Instructors are asked to develop a set of objectives for that class and to identify items on exams and/or essays that could be used to assess student achievement of those outcomes. Only instructor completed the assessment for SOC 341 Juvenile Delinquency. The instructor whose course was selected as the second course failed to do the assessment.

**Findings:** Undergraduate assessment, Soc 341 (Juvenile Delinquency)  
Course objectives as stated on syllabus & percent correct answers on monitoring questions (4 Q for each objective)

IV. Students will learn about historical and contemporary approaches to youth, and the invention of juvenile delinquency.

A. 54 students; 85%, 89%, 85%, 91%.

V. Students will become familiar with theories for explaining deviant and criminal behavior by youths.

A. 52 students; 73%, 65%, 85%, 83%.

VI. Students will learn about the definition and measurement of crime, and issues that arise in collecting data on delinquency.

A. 54 students; 95%, 93%, 87%, 46%.

VII. Students will become acquainted with social reactions to youth deviance by official control agencies, and through programs aimed at reducing juvenile delinquency.

A. 52 students; 75%, 77%, 79%, 75%.

**Action:** These findings will be discussed at a faculty meeting in the fall. In May 2007, three courses will have been assessed and it will be possible to discuss findings from three courses to determine whether the percentages of students who learn is adequate and, if not, how to increase them.

### **Indirect Assessment Mechanisms**

**Research:** A dozen students were invited to an exit interview over lunch during finals week, but only one sociology major came. Next year a more concerted effort will be made to insure that students participate in the exit interview.

**Alumni Survey:** In April 2006 a survey was distributed to alumni who graduated from CSU with a major in Sociology between 1992 and 2002. The response rate was disappointing but a report currently is being compiled.