

**Undergraduate Sociology Curriculum Review Committee  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
Adopted November 21, 1997**

(Borrowed and adapted from the American Sociological Association's 1990 Report "Study in Depth in Sociology")

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**Graduate Program in Sociology**

With faculty input, the Graduate Program Committee submits as of May 15, 2001 the following for assessment purposes.

Goals for the students in our Sociology Master's program:

- 1) to acquire increased breadth and depth of substantive and theoretical sociological knowledge;
- 2) to acquire quantitative and qualitative research skills, including research design, data collection, analysis/interpretation, and application, and be able to demonstrate skills in at least one of these research paradigms in a public presentation;
- 3) to demonstrate ability to utilize the sociological perspective, including the reciprocal relationship between context (cultural, structural, historical) and human agency;
- 4) to demonstrate ability to conduct sociological research, culminating in the successful completion of a Master's thesis under the mentorship of program faculty.
- 5) to acquire an awareness of career and educational opportunities available with a Master's degree in Sociology.

**Sociology Graduate Program Assessment Plan  
May 30, 2002**

Overview:

The graduate program in Sociology has a major assessment tool, which has both summative and formative elements, and that is the Master's thesis. Many Master's programs have a thesis option, but ours is required, and thus every student must design and complete the thesis before graduating from our program. Each graduating student is asked to write a reflective essay about this experience and is also expected to leave a copy of his/her thesis for the department library, in addition to the Graduate School's required copies that remain permanently in Milner Library's collection. To help us also assess course contributions to the goals, we have identified a number of embedded assessment tools in the assignments used by faculty in their graduate Sociology courses. For longer-term effects of the program on graduates' careers, we will utilize results from alumni surveys that are administered as part of the regularly scheduled program review process. As an interim measure on the success of the program on graduates' careers, the Graduate Coordinator will keep records on our graduates' acceptance to doctoral programs each year, as well as career job placements.

Each measurement phase is described in more detail below:

1. The Master's Thesis:

- a) The formative assessment component of the thesis is based in the development of the student's thinking and research skills. In other words, the thesis is not just a product, but also a process, one that involves genuine active learning. Students move from initial idea, to completed proposal and IRB approval, data collection/analysis, and finally to the completed thesis that they write and defend in an oral hearing. During this process the thesis chair and committee guide the student through a literature review designed to increase both substantive and theoretical knowledge in the student's topic area. Working with the student to hone the problem statements and research design, the faculty mentors help in ways that enhance the sociological perspective in the thesis. In order to answer the research question of the thesis, the student learns specific methodological and analytical skills.

Assessment Tool: A brief reflective essay is being requested from each graduating student. This essay will help us document the process of students' development during their thesis experiences, described from their point of view. They are asked to address in the essay what they have learned from completing the Master's thesis, as well as how coursework contributed to the knowledge gained in the program, and what future plans they are making. The reflective essay will be content analyzed to assess the student's perception of Goal #1, 2, 3, and 4.

- b) The completed thesis itself represents the summative assessment document. The department has copies of Master's theses dating back to 1953. (This archive would represent a resource of assessing program development in thesis expectations and student accomplishments, if there were ever at some point resources and time to pursue such a comparison over time.)

Assessment Tool: The completed theses in our program indicate the success in reaching Goal # 4 for each graduating student, but the thesis chair for each graduating student will be asked to write a brief assessment of the relation of this thesis to Goals # 1, 2, and 3, as well.

## 2. Embedded Assessments

- a) Research Proposal Assignments – Sociology 471 & 472

As part of the curricular reform of the Graduate Program, Sociology 471 & 472, required methods courses in our graduate core, were reorganized. They are now courses in quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively, and they each include a thesis proposal paper. These assignments provide students opportunities early in their graduate program to begin thinking sociologically about a research problem of particular interest to them. In these two classes, taken in back-to-back semesters (regardless of what term—Fall or Spring—they entered the program), students are required to design a thesis project using a quantitative approach (471) and a qualitative approach (472). Thus, they must think through their ideas using these different methodological paradigms. All students in our program take both classes, although occasionally a few can substitute 473 (Advanced Qualitative Methods) for 472, e.g. our Peace Corps & ACED Fellows.

Assessment Tool: A sample of the class proposals could ultimately be compared to the students' final Master's thesis projects, but as course assignments, this sample can be read and analyzed for evidence of the students' level of achievement from learning Goals #1, 2, & 3 by looking at the quality of the proposals, while recognizing that the focus of the proposal project is also to prepare the groundwork for designing a Master's thesis (Goal #4).

- b) Understanding & Using Statistics – Sociology 440

In this course, required of all Sociology MA students, assignments utilizing the General Social Survey data in computer files ask each student:

- (1) to classify variables, calculate descriptive statistics, create tables with cross-tabulations, and then write out interpretations of those tables.

- (2) to compute chi squares, with various tests of significance, and explain the results. Students need to explain assumptions underlying statistics and tests of significance. (See Assignment A attached.)
- (3) to use correlation, regression, path analysis, and analysis of variance statistical techniques to test hypotheses.

Assessment Tool: Assignment #2 will be used to show students' experience in managing large data sets and testing such data with sociological hypotheses. This assignment relates especially to Goals #2 & 4.

c) Pre-thesis Opportunities to Conduct Research (gather and analyze original data)

Assignments in Soc. 472 (required course) and in elective courses ask students to gather data, analyze those data, and write a report are integrated:

(1) *472 Qualitative Research Design and Analysis*

Dr. Bjorklund requires mini research projects – see description in Attachment for 472. These are hands-on exercises for which students generate and analyze qualitative data.

(2) *473 Advanced Qualitative Research Methods*

Dr. Heyl's students are required to design and carry out a semester long qualitative research project.

(3) *469.10 Seminar in Personal Relationships*

Dr. Sprecher's research paper assignment, Option (a), calls for students to gather new empirical data during the semester and write up a scholarly paper on the analysis of these new data.

(4) *469.03 Seminar in the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*

Dr. Toro-Morn's Research Paper Option involves researching and writing a scholarly article on the theory and substantive material pertaining to a problem related to course topics. Students are urged to present these papers to the Graduate Research Symposium or the Women's Studies Symposium.

Assessment Tool: A sampling of such projects can be used to measure progress toward Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4. Frequently these projects are presented in a public forum by the students, and would thus serve as preparation for future career and educational opportunities, contributing to Goal 5.

Note: Although these embedded assessment assignments focus on research, the syllabi of our graduate theory and elective graduate courses reveal that our sociology seminars require extensive reading in the theories and substantive areas of sociology (Goals 1 and 3). This substantive and theoretical knowledge of the sociological perspective, however, should also be apparent in the assessment tools of the completed research projects noted above.

Relating to Goal 5, several courses have assignments related to professional development. (Since these courses are not taught every year, data will not always be readily available on these embedded assessment tools.

*469.10 Seminar in Personal Relationships:* Dr. Sprecher has three assignments on professional development (see attachment for this course).

*469.12 Community Sociology:* Dr. Beck has a "Grant Project," which requires students to write a grant proposal for submission to the National Science Foundation or to a community or state-level funding source for communities (see attachment for this course).

### 3. Impact of the Sociology Graduate Program on Students' Professional Socialization and Future Career Plans

- a) The students' reflective essays upon graduation will tell us what immediate plans they have and how they feel the program has helped them to prepare for their future goals.

Assessment Tool. The reflective essays will be read each year for the data pertaining to all five program goals.

- b) Tracking longer-term effects on graduates' career will utilize the alumni survey data that are collected as part of the regular program review process. Interim data will rely each year on what graduates share with the Graduate Coordinator or in their reflective essays regarding their jobs and acceptances to doctoral programs.

Assessment Tool. The program review alumni survey data will be read and coded for key findings related to all five goals. The Graduate Coordinator will tabulate the yearly data on acceptances to doctoral programs and career placements of our graduates.