SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Sociology	Department: Sociology and Anthropology
Degree or Certificate Level: BA	College/School: Arts and Sciences
Date (Month/Year): September/2023	Primary Assessment Contact: Bruce O'Neill, Ugrad Director
In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2022–2023	
In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? 2021	

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

Goal #4: Sociology majors will have the skills necessary to communicate effectively in written and oral forms.

Learning Outcomes:

a) write a clear and convincing sociological analysis of an event, issue, or problem
b) make an oral presentation that is succinct, clear, convincing, and professional
c) use computerized and online resources to find information (e.g., databases, reputable internet websites, government statistics, etc.)
d) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assess which references are appropriate for academic research

2. Assessment Methods: Student Artifacts

Which student artifacts were used to determine if students achieved this outcome? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered (a) online, (b) at the Madrid campus, or (c) at any other off-campus location.

We analyzed a randomly selected sample of five papers from SOC 4840: Sociology Capstone as well as the PowerPoints the students used to make their presentations. The papers were written as a main requirement for the completion of the senior thesis for the major. This course was taught in person but in tutorial format; students work individually with their Capstone mentors.

Madrid artifacts were not included.

We also conducted a focus group with seven graduating seniors to explore their broad experiences in the major and with the specific learning outcomes listed above. This mode of indirect data gathering was conducted by Dr. Joel Jennings and Dr. Scott Harris, in-person, on 5/9/23. The students whose artifacts are assessed in this report partially overlap with the students who participated in the focus group.

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the student artifacts, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

Direct Methods:

During May–June 2023, a committee (Dr. Elizabeth Chiarello and Dr. Ness Sandoval) evaluated a randomly selected sample of five papers and PowerPoints from SOC 4840: Sociology Capstone using a rubric (see Appendix 1.1) that focused on the four learning objectives outlined above. All Capstone students are graduating sociology majors.

Indirect Methods:

We also gathered data from seven graduating seniors using a focus group (see Appendix 1.2) that explored their experiences more broadly and also in relation to the four learning objectives. The focus group questions specifically interrogated the student's understanding of and comfort with (a) writing a clear and convincing sociological analysis of an event, issue, or problem; (b) making an oral presentation that is succinct, clear, convincing, and professional; (c) using computerized and online resources to find information (e.g., databases, reputable internet websites, government statistics, etc.); and (d) evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assessing which references are appropriate for academic research. We inquired about each of the four learning outcomes, one at a time.

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcomes? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

The outcomes of the direct measures indicated that students were generally successful at accomplishing the learning objectives set forth by the department. On a scale of 1–5 (with 1 = poor, 3 = adequate, and 5 = excellent), students scored mostly well, with the exception of the fifth paper.

Reviewer 1's scores + Reviewer 2's scores[1]

a) (5+5+5+3+2) + (4.5+5+5+4+2.5) = 41/10 = **4.1**
b) (4+5+5+3+4) + (3+5+5+4+4) = 42/10 = **4.2**
c) (5+5+5+4+2) + (5+5+5+4+2.5) = 42.5/10 = **4.25**
d) (4+4+4+3+1) + (3.5+5+4+3+2) = 33.5/10 = **3.35**

Students were more successful completing learning objectives (a), (b), and (c) than they were at (d), due partly to the low scores on the fifth paper. It is also worth noting that both reviewers' scores were relatively consistent. Overall, the quantitative feedback from the reviewers indicate that students generally achieved the aim of demonstrating the skills necessary to communicate effectively.

The indirect findings from the focus groups also indicated that students had largely acquired the skills described in the four learning outcomes. Seven graduating majors attended our focus group, and students broadly indicated that their coursework had prepared them to communicate effectively in written and oral form. We asked about each of the learning outcomes, one at a time, and invited student feedback. Students cited courses taught by Chiarello, Monti, Pestello, and O'Neill as helpful for outcome (a). For outcome (b), the students mentioned the Capstone course as helpful for learning to make an oral presentation, and one student mentioned Pestello's course on deviance. Students did not have much to say about outcome (c), but generally agreed that this was a skill that was sufficiently covered in their major. Regarding (d), students felt they had learned to critically assess sources, in part by examining the authors and reputation of the outlet. Two mentioned a librarian classroom visit as helpful — a practice that could be continued or expanded.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

The main finding from this assessment process indicates that additional attention could be given to helping our majors with learning outcome (d), "evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assess which references are appropriate for academic research." Combining the quantitative data with the qualitative exit interviews, it might be useful to include more librarian classroom visits in key parts of our curriculum. Other strategies may be useful as well *[[as brainstormed and discussed below in #6b]]*.

[1] We report means to provide a sense of data; we are aware that means are generally not used in statistical analysis of ordinal data that is not normally distributed.

On the other hand, some additional information is necessary to **contextualize the main finding**, especially in relation to the scores for outcome (d) on the fifth paper, which received the lowest marks from both reviewers. The reviewers rightly pointed out flaws in the manuscript. However, some of their criticism stems from the student's focus on a 1969 book and the use of "only" eleven references. It is important to note that the student focused on that book at their faculty mentor's suggestion. The book is a classic in the subfield and still highly regarded today. So, what the reviewers took as outdated, the instructor might cast as a landmark text worthy of an undergraduate's close attention. Additionally, the capstone mentor also encouraged their student to supplement the 1969 book with 5–10 other resources. The student used 10. So, the reviewers' perspective was, in part, that "newer is better and more is better," whereas the student followed their instructor's advice and gave more in-depth attention to a classic. Thus, an important caveat is that the low scores for the fifth paper may not indicate a failure in the sociology curriculum as much as the different teaching philosophies and/or different views of the subfield between the capstone mentor and reviewers. One take-away is perhaps that instructors, students, and assessment reviewers may need to be socialized to consistent perspectives regarding the quantity of publications that should be included in Capstone papers, and possibly a benchmark for the recency of those publications or built-in flexibility if a student decides to devote extra attention to a classic text.

Finally, a note regarding outcome (b): Although PowerPoints were provided, we could have given the committee more information to facilitate their evaluations of the students' ability to make oral presentations. In future years, we could attempt to record presentations and provide those to the committee, when assessing Goal #4. Alternatively, we could sample students in advance and ensure that reviewers can attend, in person, all the selected students' presentations.

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

The sociology program is now into the fourth year of its second full assessment cycle. Every August the sociology faculty use the departmental retreat to review the previous year's findings and consider any structural adjustments that need to be made to the program based on our findings. This year's data was discussed at a meeting of the Sociology faculty on 8/18/2023. The meeting was conducted in person and was led by Department Chair Dr. Joel Jennings. We used our findings this year to examine the alignment between Goal #4 and associated learning objectives and the larger aims of the sociology program.

B. How specifically have you decided to use findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies	• Course content • Teaching techniques • Improvements in technology • Prerequisites	• Course sequence • New courses • Deletion of courses • Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings
Changes to the Assessment Plan	• Student learning outcomes • Student artifacts collected • Evaluation process	• Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics) • Data collection methods • Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of the findings.

The Sociology faculty decided to ....

- *[[[If necessary, at the retreat, perhaps have Soc faculty brainstorm strategies to do better on outcome **(d)**.]]]*

- *[[[We could attempt to record presentations and provide those to the committee, when assessing Goal #4. Alternatively, we could sample students in advance and ensure that reviewers attend, in person, all the selected students' presentations.]]]*

- We will determine who will do the assessments before the capstone presentations and then make sure that the papers being assessed are either in the same room or that they go first and last in two different rooms so the assessors can switch rooms. We will also create a form for the assessors based on the outcome that is being assessed so they can assess it while watching the presentation live. The Associate Chair will be responsible for assigning assessors and communicating which goal is being assessed and reminding faculty before capstones.

- *[[[We could give set a specific number of publications that need to be included in Capstone papers, so that students, instructors, and assessment evaluators have a shared understanding. There might also be a benchmark for recency of those publications, or flexibility if the student says they want to focus in-depth on a classic text.]]]*

- We recommend that the curriculum committee take up this issue and consider how to reshape the capstone especially in relation to the new core. We suggest that they consider the issues of recency and quality that were raised in this assessment. We agree that there should be some common expectations about the standards for capstone papers and presentations and that those should be communicated by the person in charge of the capstone. We think that the capstone should demonstrate skills such as using library resources to gather a large number of materials (in the range of 20-30), synthesize them, and reference them (possibly using reference software). We think that analyzing a single powerful reference may be a good assignment for a class, but is unlikely to demonstrate the skills necessary for a capstone project. We also think that the references used should include both classic and recent sources. We think there should be shared standards across Sociology and Anthropology to the extent possible. We also think that the capstone instructor of record should meet with the students early on to share the expectations and perhaps bring in a reference librarian and teach them to use library resources and reference software. Weekly meetings with the capstone instructor are advisable and encouraged. We think students should be encouraged to think about their capstone projects and their mentors early on, before the fall, so they can start the project prepared.

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If no changes are being made, please explain why.

n/a

7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

Based on feedback received on Goal #1 last year, the Sociology faculty assigned a subcommittee to rework the Assessment Goal #1 in fall of 2020. The Sociology faculty voted to accept the suggested refinements to the Assessment Protocol and will implement these changes in the next cycle of assessment.

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

We will assess the efficacy of the changes made to Goal #1 when we undertake the third cycle of assessment in about two years. We are currently halfway through our second cycle.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

The findings of these assessments will be reported in full when we undertake Step #1 in cycle three. They have not yet been assessed.

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

The Sociology faculty are actively reviewing and discussing the relevance of each Goal and Learning Outcome as we proceed through the assessment process. After each step we evaluate both the content and the process to ensure that we are meeting our programmatic goals. We will assess the changes that we are making to the Goals and Learning Outcomes in the next cycle and use that information to inform additional revisions to the assessment protocol, to the classes that we teach, and to the processes we use for assessment.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.

Appendix 1.1

Rubric for Assessing Goal #4

Paper # _____ Last Name_____

1) Does the student write a clear and convincing sociological analysis of an event, issue, or problem?

Poor		Adequate		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

2) Does the student make an oral presentation that is succinct, clear, and convincing, and professional?

Poor		Adequate		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

3) Does the student use computerized and online resources to find information (e.g. databases, reputable internet websites, government statistics, etc.)?

Poor		Adequate		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

4) Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assess which references are appropriate for academic research.

Poor		Adequate		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Appendix 1.2

Focus Group Questions for Exit Interviews — Sociology 2023

[An online survey was also emailed to graduating students.]

~~1. What was the most interesting question on the questionnaire?~~ [Questionnaire handled by email this year.]

2. What was/were your favorite courses in the major?

3. What elective courses would you suggest we create?

4. Weakness in the curriculum — What required courses would you suggest we create?

5. Do you have a sense of the breadth of knowledge of this discipline?

6. Were courses with hands-on-experience helpful?

7. Do you think you received helpful guidance from your mentor?

8. Do you believe you have received sufficient training in social science theories to think and discuss information critically? To ask critical analytic questions about the logic of an argument?

9. Now, the same question about methods: Do you believe you have received sufficient training in social science methodology to follow and critique the logic and empirical bases of information presented? To ask questions about the empirical basis of arguments?

10. Other Issues:
    a) Facilities?
    b) Research Experience?
    c) Security issues?

11. [Assessment Goal #4: Sociology majors will have the skills necessary to communicate effectively in written and oral forms.]
Do you think that your major prepared you to:
    a) write a clear and convincing sociological analysis of an event, issue, or problem?
    b) make an oral presentation that is succinct, clear, convincing, and professional?
    c) use computerized and online resources to find information (e.g., databases, reputable internet

websites, government statistics, etc.)?
d) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, and assess which references are appropriate for academic research?

12. What additional questions should we be asking?