Assessment Report for Interdepartmental Sociology Master's Program

Sociology and Rural Sociology

Year 2012-13

Expected Outcomes

1. Competency in use of sociological terms and concepts

Students will convey ability to utilize in context the terms and concepts within the discipline of sociology. It is the program’s expectation that students are able to comprehend and relate these key components to diverse social phenomena in a variety of contexts. Students are expected to demonstrate understanding of sociological theory and be able to appropriately apply a framework to explain a social phenomenon.

Method of Assessment:

The basis of the assessment method is the committee members’ evaluation of students’ research. The measure used is the average of scores on a 9-point Likert scale of questions 2, 3 and 6 from the Post-Oral Graduate Thesis/Research Paper Summary Evaluation Sheet. The evidence used for assessment are scores for items 2, 3 and 6 from the Post-Oral Graduate Thesis/Research Paper Evaluation Sheet. The method of assessment was changed from the previous year to identify with greater specificity items that reflect use of sociological terms and concepts.

Items

2. Degree to which students were familiar with basic concepts and principles in the discipline.

3. Degree to which students understood the research process.

6. Degree student’s thesis/research paper conveys theory that is conceptually developed.

Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>3 - Advanced Proficiency</th>
<th>2 - Proficient</th>
<th>1 - Non-Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competency in use of sociological terms and</td>
<td>Highly articulate conveyance and comprehensive application of concepts and principles</td>
<td>Articulate conveyance and good application of concepts and principles</td>
<td>Demonstrates basic understanding of concepts and principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Scale Score Values:

There were changes made to the scale score values from previous year. The values now are: ‘Advanced Proficiency’ with a score range of 7.0 or above, ‘Proficient’ with a score range of 5.0-6.9 and ‘Non-Proficient’ with a score range of 0-4.9. A decrease in the range of score that indicates a competency of ‘Proficient’ will assist in identifying with greater specificity problems which students may be experiencing. Likewise, the addition of the category ‘Advanced’ will assist in identifying with greater specificity areas of strengths among students.

Findings:

The average score was 7.8 which indicate student’s “Advanced Proficiency” in use of sociological terms and concepts. (N=5)

Individual item average score are as follows:

2. Degree to which students were familiar with basic concepts and principles in the discipline. The average score was 8.0.
3. Degree to which students understood the research process. The average score was 8.0.
6. Degree student’s thesis/research paper conveys theory that is conceptually developed. The average score was 7.3.

Strengths: Students demonstrated particular strengths in familiarity with basic concepts in and principles in the discipline of sociology and understanding the research process.

Weaknesses: Students had the most difficulty with conceptualizing a theoretical framework to explain their research. Although the average score was lower than the average score on other items, it still fell into the ‘Advanced Proficient’ category.

Plan:

Faculty met to discuss developing and requiring a pro-seminar that would include sections on conceptualizing sociological phenomena, developing research questions and writing a thesis. In addressing the lower average score pertaining to conceptualization of a theoretical framework, faculty will work toward increasing student’s familiarity with the existing research that is relevant to the student’s research topic.

2. Competency in oral and written communication

Students will show competency in oral and written communication (use of language, clear conveyance of ideas, linkages between abstract concepts, etc.). Students will be expected to convey verbally their thesis/research paper in an organized, articulate, and informed manner reflecting command of subject material. Students will be expected to present written work in an organized, clear, concise and comprehensible manner.
Method of Assessment:

The basis of the assessment method is the committee members’ evaluation of students’ research and oral presentation. The average scores on a 9-point Likert scale of questions 1, 4, and 5 of the Post-Oral Graduate Thesis/Research Paper Summary Evaluation Sheet. The method of assessment is items 1, 4, and 5 from the Post-Oral Graduate Thesis/Research Paper Evaluation Sheet.

Items

1. Degree to which students were prepared to make an oral presentation of their thesis/research paper.

4. Degree to which students’ thesis/research paper is readable.

5. Degree to which students’ thesis/research paper uses correct: spelling and grammar.

Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>3 - Advanced Proficiency</th>
<th>2 - Proficient</th>
<th>1 - Non-Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competency in oral and written communication.</td>
<td>Highly articulate communication of oral and written work; reflects professional level writing in the discipline</td>
<td>Articulate communication of oral and written work; reflects good attention to writing style within discipline</td>
<td>Poor oral communication and written work: many grammatical and spelling errors; lacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale Score Values:

There were changes made to the scale score values from the previous year. The values now are: “Advanced Proficiency” with a score range of 7.0 or above, ‘Proficient’ with a score range of 5.0-6.9 and ‘Non-Proficient’ with a score range of 0-4.9. A decrease in the range of score that indicates a competency of ‘Proficient’ will assist in identifying with greater specificity problems which students may be experiencing. Likewise, the addition of the category ‘Advanced’ will assist in identifying with greater specificity areas of strengths among students.

Findings:

The average score was 7.8 which indicates student’s ‘Advanced Proficiency’ in oral and written communication. (N=5)

Individual item average score are as follows:

1. Degree to which students were prepared to make an oral presentation of their thesis/research paper. The average score was 8.2.

4. Degree to which students’ thesis/research paper is readable. The average score was 7.7.

5. Degree to which students’ thesis/research paper uses correct: spelling and grammar. The average score was 7.5.
**Strengths:** Students demonstrated in relation to their thesis/research paper particular strengths in oral presentation and written communication that was readily comprehended by reader.

**Weaknesses:** Students had the most difficulty with written presentation of thesis/research paper with respect to grammatical content. Although the average score on this item was lower than the average score on the other items, it still fell into the ‘Advanced Proficient’ category.

**Plan:**

Faculty met to discuss the findings. Students will continue to be informed of opportunities and encouraged to participate in various forums where they can present research. Several students participated in professional activities to include presentations as professional meetings and during Auburn University Research Week. Within the department, Brown Bag series provided a venue for students to rehearse and obtain constructive feedback on content of their work and presentation style. Further, continue consideration of developing and requiring a pro-seminar that would include sections on conceptualizing sociological phenomena, developing research questions and writing a thesis. In addressing the lower average score pertaining to grammatical issues with written communication, addition to working with faculty, students will be encouraged to utilize resources on campus that provide a context for instruction and feedback of their written work.

3. **Competency in conducting research**

Students will be able to conceptualize a sociological issue or problem, develop an appropriate methodology to research the problem, carry out the research, write the findings, and present research results. Students will be expected to know the underlying, conceptual framework of social scientific research and the core skills of research design, implementation, and evaluation. It is expected that students will follow the research protocol and style of writing consistent with the discipline.

**Method of Assessment:**

The basis of the assessment method is the committee members’ evaluation of students’ research. The average scores on a 9-point Likert scale on questions 7-10 of the Post-Oral Graduate Thesis/Research Paper Summary Evaluation Sheet.

**Items**

7. Degree to which the findings in the thesis/research paper made a contribution to knowledge in the field.

8. Degree to which methods of analysis were well chosen or executed.

9. Degree to which interpretation and generalization of results was done well.

10. Degree to which the thesis/research paper is publishable.
Rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>3 -Advanced Proficiency (7.0-9)</th>
<th>2-Proficient (5.0-6.9)</th>
<th>1-Non-Proficient (0-4.9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competency in conducting research</td>
<td>Thoughtful, in-depth analysis of a timely and important topic; theory applied with high level of specificity; comprehensive methodology; logical and highly informative interpretation of findings</td>
<td>Complete analysis of timely and important topic; theory applied consistent with arguments; appropriate methodology; logical and informative interpretation of findings</td>
<td>Argument is vague and poorly constructed; little logical “flow”; content is confusing; little theoretical application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale Score Values:

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Findings:

The average score was 6.9. which indicates ‘Proficiency’ in conducting research. (N=5)

Individual item average score are as follows:

7. Degree to which the findings in the thesis/research paper made a contribution to knowledge in the field. The average score was 7.1.

8. Degree to which methods of analysis were well chosen or executed. The average score was 7.5.

9. Degree to which interpretation and generalization of results was done well.
   The average score was 7.0.

10. Degree to which the thesis/research paper is publishable. The average score was 5.9.

**Strengths:** Students demonstrated in relation to their thesis/research paper particular strengths in contributing to the knowledge base in the field, selection of analytical technique and implementation of analysis in their research, and interpretation and generalization of research results.

**Weaknesses:** Students had the most difficulty with written aspect of thesis/research paper with respect to degree it was publishable. Although the average score on this item was lower than the average score on the other items, it still fell into the ‘Proficient’ category.
Plan:

Faculty met to discuss findings. Faculty will continue to be proactive to facilitate student’s acquisition of research skills. Additionally, there will be continued consideration of developing and requiring a pro-seminar that would include sections on conceptualizing sociological phenomena, developing research questions and writing a thesis. The item in which the average score was lowest assessed extent to which in the current form the document was publishable. Faculty will be more proactive in addressing and fostering professional writing style with students. In addressing the lower average score pertaining to extent to which thesis/research paper is publishable, in addition to working with faculty, students will be encouraged to utilize resources on campus that provide a context for instruction and feedback of their written work. Also, faculty will encourage student to read scholarly research to familiarize themselves the publication standards in the field to including required format, writing style, content, etc.

4. Timeframe of program completion

It is expected that students will complete MA/MS work in a timely manner. Program curriculum requires students take three core sociology courses, additional coursework and satisfactory completion of a thesis or major research paper.

Method of Assessment:

Percentage of students who complete program within three years of starting the program. We consider 36 months to meet the definition of a timely manner, though we expect most students will complete their degree in a shorter timeframe. Data limitations allow for assessment of students over a seven year time period who completed the program between academic years 2006-07 and 2012-13.

‘Satisfactory’ which represents 75% or more of the students completed the program within three years of starting the program and ‘Unsatisfactory’ which represents less than 75% of the students completed the program within three years of starting the program.

Findings:

Forty-one students completed the program during the time frame. Eighty-seven percent (36 of 41) students completed the program within three years of starting the program. This indicates ‘Satisfactory’ time of students in the program to completion of degree.

There were five students (13%) who finished the program who had taken an inordinate amount of time to finish the degree.

Faculty met to discuss findings. The percent of students who completed the program within three years of starting the program was found to be ‘Satisfactory’, but concern was expressed that some students were taking over 36 months to complete their work. Faculty will work more closely with students on developing a timeline to accomplish tasks leading to completion of degree.
5. Pursue advanced graduate work or employment in field of interest

Students completing the MA/MS program who apply for more advanced graduate work or who seek employment in their fields of interest will be successful in securing these positions. The academic coursework and professional socialization students receive during the program is expected to assist them in being competitive candidates for admission to Ph.D. and other professional programs, as well as for employment within their field or related area.

Method of Assessment:

We are measuring two possible outcomes: (1) the percentage of those who apply and are accepted into Ph.D. programs, and (2) the percentage of those who apply and obtain employment in their field of interest. Data limitations allow for assessment of students who graduated from the program over a three year time period between academic years 2009-2010 to 2012-13.

‘Satisfactory’ which represents 75% or more of the students who either apply to Ph.D. programs or for employment in their field of interest who are successful in these efforts. ‘Unsatisfactory’ which represents less than 75% of the students who either apply to Ph.D. programs or for employment in their field of interest who were not successful in these efforts.

Finding:

Ninety-five percent (22 of 23) of the students who either applied to Ph.D. programs or pursued employment in their field of interest were successful in securing these positions. The other graduate is not in the job market. This indicates ‘Satisfactory’ accomplishment of students obtaining entry into Ph.D. program or employment in the field post degree completion.

Plan:

Faculty met to discuss findings. Faculty will address with students earlier in their program interest in advanced educational/career aspirations and avenues for identifying those career educational/opportunities.

Successful degree completion led to one graduate currently attending in a top Sociology Ph.D. program in the country. Another graduate is working within the agriculture field in their native county.
POST-ORAL GRADUATE THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER SUMMARY EVALUATION SHEET

To be individually completed by all thesis readers and committee members at the end of the final oral examination, collected by the Major Professor, and submitted to the Department Head for filing and subsequent analysis.

Please rate the oral and written aspects of this student’s performance in the graduate program. This information is to be used for program diagnostic purposes and not the assessment or grading of the individual student.

**Oral Presentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poorly-prepared</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Well-prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student was unfamiliar with basic concepts and principles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>The student was able to articulate and apply concepts and principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student did not understand the research process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Student had a good understanding of the research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Written Thesis Material**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not readable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Readable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling and grammar problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>No spelling or grammar problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas: theory, conceptual development is lacking or incomplete</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ideas: theory, conceptual development is complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings: make little contribution to knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Findings make important contribution to knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of analysis poorly chosen or executed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Methods of analysis well-chosen and executed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation and generalization of results is absent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interpretation and generalization of results are insightful and important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not publishable in a refereed journal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Readily publishable in a refereed journal</td>
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</tbody>
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