

## **Sociology Major Assessment Report AY 2014-15**

**Submitted to Department Chair for Department Approval August 27, 2015**

**Approved by Department September 9, 2015**

**Approved by HSS LOAC October 14, 2015**

### **Learning Objectives Assessed:**

This report covers the learning goals that were assessed in SOC 302: Quantitative Research Methods, which is a required course in the sociology major usually taken in the sophomore or junior year. Students are expected to demonstrate an intermediate level of competency on three learning goals associated with this course:

Critical Thinking: Students will be able to abstract general propositions from textual, observational, and quantitative evidence; identify logical relations among general propositions, and test the applicability of these propositions against new evidence

Social Research Methods: Students will be able to explain causality and to posit interesting and important sociological research questions, analyze quantitative and qualitative data, interpret their findings and effectively communicate their results to appropriate audiences

Communication: Students will be able to demonstrate an ability to write and speak logically and cogently, to convey ideas and research findings to large audiences and small groups, to listen to others and respond constructively, and to demonstrate leadership skills and collaboration skills

### **Methods:**

There were four sections of SOC 302 offered in AY 2014-15. All sections follow essentially a common syllabus regardless of professor. In this period, two professors taught two sections each. For both, the final regression paper ("Paper C") was the document used for assessing learning outcomes. Paper C is sequentially written, with at least two opportunities for feedback and revision on earlier drafts. The population of student submissions for these assignments were collected (58 total, 29 from Fall 2014 and 29 from Spring 2015), and some information about each student author was recorded by the program assistant (student year, number of semesters as a soc major, and how a student satisfied the STA 115 prerequisite). Identifying information was removed (name, instructor name, semester, section, etc.) and each was assigned a random number. Nine papers from each professor's sections were randomly selected (about one third, or 31 percent, of all 58 papers). Two copies of each blinded paper were made; to avoid having a professor review a paper from his or her own class, the program assistant randomly selected 4 papers from the other professor's sections. The remaining papers were distributed evenly among participating faculty members, although care was taken to make sure that the same two faculty members were not reviewing the same set of papers. All members of the department's tenure-line faculty and a visiting assistant professor participated in reviewing and assessing papers, including the instructors for SOC 302 (a total of nine reviewers).

Assignment instructions were distributed to all participating faculty. Faculty then determined a rubric for classifying students on all three learning goals as either "Exceeds Expectations" (Coded 3),

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“Meets Expectations” (Coded 2) or having only “Emergent Understanding” (Coded 1). After a discussion, the faculty settled on the following criteria for each score in each learning goal:

Scoring criteria:

	Critical Thinking	Social Research Methods	Communication
Exceeds Expectations (3)	Hypothesis well posed, linked explicitly to literature review	Uses data to test hypothesis correctly and clearly interpreted in text (non-quantitatively)	Polish in writing; little revision necessary for submission to Journal of Student Research
Meets Expectations (2)	Has a hypothesis, with clear independent and dependent variable	Indicates correctly difference between significant and not significant; attempts to test hypothesis and answer research question	Logical and cogent structure in writing, including “clear but clunky sometimes”
Emergent Understanding (1)	Doesn’t have a clear hypothesis (no clear causal structure)	Attempts to use quantitative data	Deficient logic in organization and structure in writing

Each faculty member then scored each paper independently, so each student paper was read and coded on all three criteria by two faculty members. In 7 of 18 papers (39%), at least one faculty member coded a paper as “Emergent Understanding” for at least one learning goal; in these cases, a third reader also reviewed the paper. A total of 43 observations were made, with 11 papers reviewed by two faculty members (22) and 7 reviewed by three faculty members (21). Intercoder reliability was moderately high in terms of distinguishing those who at least met expectations (scored 2 or 3) from those who did not (scored 1), with 11 papers (61%) scored as at least meeting expectation by both initial reviewers. In all 7 cases where one faculty member scored a paper as “emergent understanding,” only one reviewer indicated this score. However, in 5 of these 7 cases (71%), the third reviewed scored the paper as “emergent understanding” on at least one criteria.

For critical thinking: of the original 18 papers (36 observations), one third (n = 12) of observations indicated that papers exceeded expectations, the majority (21, or 58%) of observations indicated met expectations, and a minority (3, or 8%) did not meet expectations. In addition, four papers were scored as “emergent understanding” by a third reviewer.

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For social research methods: of the original 18 papers (36 observations), just over one third ( $n = 13$ ) of observations indicated that papers exceeded expectations, about half (18, or 47%) of observations indicated met expectations, and a larger minority (5, or 14%) did not meet expectations. In addition, four papers were scored as “emergent understanding” by a third reviewer.

For communication: of the original 18 papers (36 observations), a small number ( $n = 5$ , or 14%) of observations indicated that papers exceeded expectations, the majority (25, or 69%) of observations indicated met expectations, and a larger minority (6, or 17%) did not meet expectations. In addition, three papers were scored as “emergent understanding” by a third reviewer.

### **Findings**

Although a majority of students are at least meeting our expectations on all three learning outcomes associated with SOC 302, the department expressed concern that more than a third of papers were coded as not meeting expectations on at least one of these learning goals.

We proposed that students who had not taken STA 115 at TCNJ (which is a prerequisite for the course) might be a problem in performance, but only 1 of the 7 students whose papers were marked as not meeting expectations transferred in the STA 115 equivalent.

We also proposed that students who had recently transferred into sociology as a major might have less experience making sociological arguments, but this did not bear out either (the majority of all students took SOC 302 one semester after declaring the major).

We also proposed that students taking the course too early might struggle more, but 6 of 7 students who had a paper scored as not meeting requirements were juniors and seniors, whereas the remaining 11 papers were distributed across all four classes (first-year, sophomore, juniors, and seniors).

Given that these possibilities did not bear out, the discussion turned to curricular-based interventions. The faculty discussed two possibilities to increase the quality of student outcomes:

1. Developing a required 200-level required course in the major
2. Developing a faculty-led required laboratory that would reinforce the learning outcomes, modeled on the lab sections in the natural and/or computer sciences

We believe that both would help students who are on the verge of meeting expectations, and agreed to pursue both strategies moving forward.

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### Appendix 1: Learning Objectives for the Sociology Major Approved by LOAC 12.03.12

Critical Thinking: Students will be able to abstract general propositions from textual, observational, and quantitative evidence; identify logical relations among general propositions, and test the applicability of these propositions against new evidence

*Assessed in SOC 101, 302, 499*

Concepts and Paradigms: Students will be able to explain sociological understanding of culture, social structure, and social processes using the functionalist, conflict and interactionist perspectives in the context of the United States and other societies.

*Assessed in SOC 101, 301, 499*

Application: Students will be able to connect sociology to their public and private lives-as members of families and organizations and as citizens of local, national, and global communities

*Assessed in SOC 101, 301, 499*

Social Research Methods: Students will be able to explain causality and to posit interesting and important sociological research questions, analyze quantitative and qualitative data, interpret their findings and effectively communicate their results to appropriate audiences

*Assessed in SOC 101, 302, 499*

Communication: Students will be able to demonstrate an ability to write and speak logically and cogently, to convey ideas and research findings to large audiences and small groups, to listen to others and respond constructively, and to demonstrate leadership skills and collaboration skills

*Assessed in SOC 101, 301, 302, 499*

Information Literacy: Students will be able to distinguish between scientifically-grounded observation, logical proposition, anecdote, and opinion.

*Assessed in SOC 101, 499*

### Annual Assessment Plans:

Year	Course Focus	Learning Goals Assessed
2013-14	SOC 301	Intermediate Levels: Concepts and Paradigms Application Written Communication
2014-15	SOC 302	Intermediate Levels: Critical Thinking Social Research Methods Written Communication
2015-16	SOC 499	Advanced Level: All
2016-17	SOC 101	Introductory Level: All
2017-18	SOC 101 SOC 301 SOC 302 SOC 499	All Levels: Oral Communication

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### Appendix 2: Sociology Major Assessment Plan Matrix

Learning Objectives	Assessed in	Assessment Strategy	Cycle
<u>Critical Thinking</u> : Students will be able to abstract general propositions from textual, observational, and quantitative evidence; identify logical relations among general propositions, and test the applicability of these propositions against new evidence.	101 (Introductory level) 302 (Intermediate level) 499 (Advanced level)	Portfolio analysis of research papers in 302, & 499; syllabus review in 101  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision for each level during planned year of assessment.	SOC 101: AY 2016-17 SOC 302: AY 2014-15 SOC 499: AY 2015-16
<u>Concepts and Paradigms</u> : Students will be able to explain sociological understanding of culture, social structure, and social processes using the functionalist, conflict and interactionist perspectives in the context of the United States and other societies.	101 (Introductory level) 301 (Intermediate level) 499 (Advanced level)	Portfolio analysis of conceptual assignments in SOC 101, 301, & 499;  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision for each level during planned year of assessment.	SOC 101: AY 2016-17 SOC 301: AY 2013-14 SOC 499: AY 2015-16
<u>Application</u> : Students will be able to connect sociology to their public and private lives-as members of families and organizations and as citizens of local, national, and global communities.	101 (Introductory level) 301 (Intermediate level) 499 (Advanced level)	Portfolio analysis of application assignments in SOC 101, 301, & 499;  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision;  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision for each level during planned year of assessment.	SOC 101: AY 2016-17 SOC 301: AY 2013-14 SOC 499: AY 2015-16
<u>Social Research Methods</u> : Students will be able to explain causality and to posit interesting and important sociological research questions, analyze quantitative and qualitative data, interpret their findings and effectively communicate their results to appropriate audiences	101 (Introductory level) 302 (Intermediate level) 499 (Advanced level)	Portfolio analysis of research papers in 302 & 499; syllabus review in 101  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision for each level during planned year of assessment.	SOC 101: AY 2016-17 SOC 302: AY 2014-15 SOC 499: AY 2015-16
<u>Communication</u> : Students will be able to demonstrate an ability to write and speak logically and cogently, to convey ideas and research findings to large audiences and small groups, to listen to others and respond constructively, and to demonstrate leadership skills and collaboration skills.	101 (Introductory level) 301/2 (Intermediate level) 499 (Advanced level)	Oral communication skill will be assessed by (1) collecting baseline data in SOC 101; (2) observation of SOC 302 research presentations; and (3) observation of student presentations in SOC 499 capstone.  Writing skill will be assessed by (1) collecting baseline data by analyzing written assignment from a random sample of SOC 101 students; (2) analysis of the papers in SOC 301 & 302; (3) analysis of final paper in SOC 499  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision for each level during planned year of assessment.	Written Communication SOC 101: AY 2016-17 SOC 301: AY 2013-14 SOC 302: AY 2014-15 SOC 499: AY 2015-16  Oral Communication assessment will be developed and implemented in AY 2017-18
<u>Information Literacy</u> : Students will be able to distinguish between scientifically-grounded observation, logical proposition, anecdote, and opinion.	101 (Introductory level) 499 (Advanced level)	Common assignment to be developed across SOC 101, portfolio analysis in 499  Ongoing discussion with regard to rubric development and revision for each level during planned year of assessment.	SOC 101: AY 2016-17 SOC 499: AY 2015-16