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/2022	Primary Assessment Contact: Joel Jennings, MBA PhD
In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2021-2022	
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 #3: Sociology majors will understand the role of qualitative and quantitative research methods in sociology.

Learning Outcomes:

a) compare and contrast methodological approaches for gathering data

b) design a small study

c) critically assess a published research report

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 Soc 2000: Research Methods exam papers. The exams were written as a partial requirement for the completion of the foundational course requirement for sociological methods. These papers were part of the evaluation for the Soc 2000 course in spring 2022. This course was taught in person.

Madrid artifacts were not included.

We were once again able to undertake focus groups with graduating seniors this year to explore their experience and facility with sociology methods. This mode of indirect data gathering was conducted by Dr. Joel Jennings and Dr. Scott Harris in an in-person focus group following the completion of the semester. It is worth noting that the students' whose artifacts are assessed in this report *were generally not* the students who participated in the focus groups as Soc 2000 is a sophomore-level course and most students complete it before their senior year.

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:

1) During June 2022, a committee (Dr. Hisako Matsuo and Dr. Fran Pestello) evaluated a randomly selected sample (using a random number generator) of Soc 2000: Research Methods exam essays (5 of 9) using a rubric that focused on the three learning objectives outlined above (Assessment plan rubric is submitted as Appendix 1.1). One point of note is that the random sample was comprised of students who *are* sociology majors. Non-majors were excluded from the sample.

Indirect Methods:

    1) We also gathered data from graduating seniors using focus groups that explored their experiences with theory in the Sociology major. The focus group questions specifically interrogated the student's understanding of and comfort with the role of research methods in sociology, as well as a broader set of issues related to the major.

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 moderately successful at accomplishing the learning objectives set forth by the department. On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the most desirable score, students consistently scored lower than is desirable, but the scores also reflect a mismatch between the questions asked on the exam and the learning objectives in the assessment document.

    a) (2+2+4+3+2+2+4+4+3+3)= 29/10=2.9
    b) (3+4+5+3+2+4+3+3.5+3+3)= 33.5/10=3.35
    c) (1+2+2+1+1+3+3+3+3+3)= 22/10=2.2

The quantitative results as reported from the Goal #3 rubrics indicate a lower degree of success in achieving the departmental aims than is desirable. Students were more successful completing learning objectives 'a' and 'b', while the reviewers noted that item 'c' was not well-addressed in the exam question. This mismatch led to overall lower outcomes between both reviewers. It is also worth noting that both reviewers relative scores were consistent, though Reviewer #1's range was slightly lower. Overall, the qualitative and quantitative feedback from the reviewers indicated that students were achieving the aim of understanding the role of theory in social analysis.

The indirect findings from the focus groups also indicated that students were more successfully able to understand the methods of social analysis than the quantitative numbers suggested. We had 9 students complete the focus group process, and students broadly indicated that their coursework had prepared them to engage with research methods. Specific classes cited crossed disciplinary boundaries within the department. Students cited Dr. Karamehic Muratovic's health inequality course, Dr. Sandoval's methods course, Dr. Bruce O'Neill's ethnography course, and STAT 1300 as being particularly valuable for research. A GIS methods course was raised as a possible future course. Students generally indicated they felt confident that they had the ability to design a small study based on experiences they had with mentors. Students also agreed that they were competent to critically assess a published research report.

Overall, students indicated that their course work had provided the opportunity to engage with and develop an understanding of the role of methods in social analysis at multiple points in their undergraduate experience. They indicated greater comfort with qualitative than quantitative methods when it came to conducting actual research.

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

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

Our findings from this assessment process suggest two different points worthy of consideration. First, the Sociology program needs to consider the instruments that we are using to undertake our methods assessment. The findings outlined above illuminate a disconnect between the outcomes the program is trying to measure and the artifacts used to measure them. We develop this part of the discussion further below in the section on closing the loop.

Second, the mid-range to low quantitative scores and generally positive indirect feedback suggests that students are encountering methods at multiple points in their coursework, but their comfort with research methods is uneven at this point. This would suggest that we have space for improvement as a program and department in terms of Goal #3. Comparison between the first cycle in 2018 and 2022 is of limited value due to an error in data collection in 2018 that resulted in the wrong artifacts being collected for assessment. However, it is clear that the department has significant room for improvement in research methods, both in terms of the delivery of methods and in terms of ensuring that the artifacts that we collect in future cycles accurately address the three learning objectives.

6. **Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of <u>Current</u> Assessment Findings**
    A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

    Sociology has now into the third year of our second full assessment cycle. Every fall semester 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 8/22/2022. The meeting was conducted in person and was led by Department Chair (and recent Undergraduate Director) Dr. Joel Jennings. We used our findings this year to examine the alignment between Goal #3 and associated learning objectives and the larger aims of the sociology program as it relates to research methods.

    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 implement a new means of structuring the assessment protocol. We have a new Associate Chair in the department who has been assigned responsibility for 'setting up' the assessment protocol. This will create a new process whereby the Associate Chair will meet with the instructors of classes from which assessment artifacts are being assigned early in the fall semester. The aim of this meeting is to ensure that the instructor teaching the assessed course has an assignment that 'matches' with the assessment protocol. These classes are generally (though not always) run in the spring semester, which gives the Associate Chair time to address any assignment deficiencies with the instructor.

    The program made the decision not to update or alter Goal #3 or the Learning Outcomes based on the disconnect between artifacts collected and intent of the goal. The sense of the faculty was that Goal #3 and associated Learning Outcomes were appropriate, but did not fit well with the assignments that were used to assess them.

> If no changes are being made, please explain why.

> n/a

7. **Closing the Loop: Review of <u>Previous</u> 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 #3

Paper # _____   Last Name_____

1) Does the student demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast methodological approaches for gathering data?

Poor   Adequate   Excellent

1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

2) Does the student demonstrate the ability to design a small study?

Poor   Adequate   Excellent

1   2   3   4   5

Comments:

3) Does the student demonstrate the ability to critically assess a published research report?

Poor   Adequate   Excellent

1   2   3   4   5

Comments: