

Detailed Assessment Report  
As of: 10/04/2013 09:16 AM EST  
2012-2013 Sociology BA/BS

**Mission / Purpose**

Through the integration of teaching, research, and service, the program in sociology seeks to support faculty and students as a community of scholars engaged in active sociological inquiry. We strive to prepare students for success in graduate school and/or a career in a field that requires a social scientific background; provide a supportive and engaging educational environment for students; encourage creative integration of the areas of research, teaching, and service; support professional development of faculty; and contribute to the university and to professional communities.

**Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans**

**SLO 1: Understanding of central theoretical concepts**

Students will be able to explain central concepts in classical sociological theory (e.g., Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mead).

**Related Measures:**

**M 1: Performance on relevant theory exam questions**

All sociology majors are required to take Sociological Theory (SOC 482). As part of that class, they will be given exam questions on classical theorists and will be required to explain accurately in their own words the meaning of central theoretical concepts associated with those theorists.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

**Target:**

At least 70% of students will earn a score of 70% or better on discussion questions on examinations in SOC 482 (Sociological Theory) that require explanation of core concepts in classical theory. This course is a required course for all majors and is offered once per year, each fall.

**Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Partially Met**

In Fall 2012, 14/20 students (70%) in Sociological Theory earned a score of at least 70% on the discussion questions on Test 1 regarding core concepts in theory. On Test 2, 12/19 (63%) earned a score of at least 70% on the discussion questions (one student did not take the test). On Test 3, 15/20 (75%) earned a score of at least 70% on the discussion questions.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

**Theory Comprehension**

*Established in Cycle:* 2012-2013

To increase student comprehension of core theory concepts, instructor will institute daily reading quizzes to 1) ensure students...

### **M 2:Exit survey question on understanding of theory**

All graduating students will complete a standardized exit survey. On this survey, students will evaluate (using a five-point scale) their understanding of the theories and concepts of the discipline of sociology.

Source of Evidence: Exit interviews with grads/program completers

#### **Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

#### **Target:**

70% of students will "agree" or "strongly agree" that they have an understanding of the theories and concepts of the discipline of sociology when asked on an exit survey.

#### **Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

100% (17/17) of students graduating with a BA/BS in Sociology in 2012-2013 "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they understand the theories and concepts of the discipline of sociology.

### **SLO 2:Application of classical theory to contemporary society**

Students will be able to apply classical theory to understand contemporary society.

#### **Related Measures:**

### **M 3:Ability to apply theory in a research paper**

All sociology majors are required to take SOC 482: Sociological Theory. As part of the requirements for that course, students must write a research paper in which they apply concepts from classical theory to a contemporary issue facing society. This paper is then evaluated using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric that assesses student ability to apply the concept clearly and logically to the issue analyzed.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

#### **Target:**

At least 70% of students will earn a grade of 70% or better on a paper assignment in SOC 482 (Sociological Theory) that requires them to apply concepts from classical sociological theory to analyze a contemporary social issue. This paper will be graded using a standardized departmentally-developed rubric.

#### **Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

In Fall 2012, at least 70% of students earned a grade of 70% or better on all four paper assignments, all of which required them to apply classical theory concepts to a contemporary issue. The specific rates for each paper are: Paper 1 - 18/20 (95%); Paper 2 - 14/18 (78%); Paper 3 - 19/19 (100%); Paper 4 - 16/19 (84%). On Paper 2, two students did not submit a paper. On Papers 3 and 4, one student did not submit a paper. This course is only offered once per year.

### **M 4:Exit survey question on ability to write about theory**

All graduating students will complete a standardized exit survey. On this survey, students will evaluate (using a five-point scale) their ability to communicate about sociological concepts and ideas in written form.

Source of Evidence: Exit interviews with grads/program completers

### **Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

#### **Target:**

70% of students will "agree" or "strongly agree" that they have the ability to communicate about sociological concepts and ideas in written form.

#### **Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

100% (17/17) of students graduating with a BA/BS in Sociology in 2012-2013 "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they have the ability to communicate about sociological concepts and ideas in written form.

### **SLO 3: Ability to conduct independent research**

Students will be able to design and conduct an independent research project and develop a well-written and coherent sociological paper on the results.

#### **Related Measures:**

#### **M 5: Ability to design and carry out independent survey and interview research**

Students in SOC 462: Research Methods (required for all majors) will be required to design their own research project utilizing both survey design/implementation and in-depth interviewing techniques. The data each student collects will be incorporated into his/her paper for the class in a style consistent with accepted sociological academic publications. These final papers will be graded using a departmentally agreed-upon rubric that assesses students' ability to conduct and present research as well as to present it in written form.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

#### **Target:**

At least 70% of students enrolled in SOC 462 (Research Methods) will earn a grade of 70% or better on the independent research paper assigned requiring them to design and carry out their own research project (using surveys and interview data) and write a paper on the process and results. This paper will be graded using a standardized departmentally-developed rubric.

#### **Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

In Fall 2012, 14/16 (87.5%) students enrolled in SOC 462: Research Methods earned at least 70% on their research paper. This course is offered once per year.

#### **M 6: Ability to design and carry out independent observational research**

All senior sociology majors will take the Capstone Seminar (SOC 401), in which they are required to design, conduct, and write a paper on their own independent observational research. The project is evaluated using a standardized, departmentally agreed-upon rubric that evaluates the quality of student research design, data collection, and presentation.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric

**Target:**

At least 70% of students will earn a grade of 70% or better on their independent observation-based research project and associated paper in SOC 401, the senior capstone course. This project will be graded using a standardized departmentally-developed rubric. This course is offered once per year.

**Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Not Met**

In Spring 2013, 54% of students (7/13) scored 70% or better on their independent observation-based research project and paper when graded using the standardized rubric. This course is offered once per year.

**Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**

For full information, see the *Details of Action Plans* section of this report.

**Capstone Research Project**

*Established in Cycle:* 2012-2013

The target was not met for M6. The primary reason this target was not met was due to students not fully completing the assignme...

**SLO 4: Development of oral presentation skills**

Students will be able to create and give a professional oral presentation on sociological topics.

**Related Measures:****M 7: Research presentation in capstone seminar**

All students enrolled in the required senior Capstone Seminar (SOC 401) will give a professional presentation of their own research. This presentation is designed to be similar to one that would be given at a professional academic conference. The presentation is graded according to a departmentally agreed-upon rubric that evaluates organization, clarity, style, professionalism, and content.

Source of Evidence: Presentation, either individual or group

**Target:**

At least 70% of students will earn a grade of 70% or better on an oral presentation on their research project in the senior Capstone seminar. This presentation will be graded using a standardized departmentally-developed rubric.

**Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2013, 92% of students (12/13) students received a grade of 70% or better on the formal oral presentation in the Capstone seminar. This course is taught once per year.

**M 8: Oral communication confidence**

Graduating students will be given a standardized exit survey. On that survey they will be asked to evaluate (on a five-point scale) their ability to communicate sociological concepts and theories orally.

Source of Evidence: Presentation, either individual or group

**Target:**

At least 70% of students will "agree" or "strongly agree" that they are able to communicate sociological concepts and theories clearly in oral presentations.

**Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

100% (17/17) of students graduating with a BA/BS in Sociology in 2012-2013 "agree" or "strongly agree" that they are able to communicate sociological concepts and theories clearly in oral presentations.

**SLO 5: Professional preparedness**

Students will demonstrate preparation for employment and/or graduate school upon graduation.

**Related Measures:****M 9: Mock Interview and Resume**

All students enrolled in the required capstone course (SOC 401) will give a presentation about their research and sociology major modeled on a mock interview which includes a written resume. The presentation and resume will be graded using a standardized departmentally-developed rubric that evaluates the student's ability to interact with a potential employer who may or may not understand what sociology is and present their ideas in a clear and organized fashion.

Source of Evidence: Presentation, either individual or group

**Target:**

At least 70% of students enrolled in SOC 401 (Capstone) will earn a grade of 70% or better on the presentation about their research and sociology major modeled on a mock interview which includes a written resume. The presentation and resume will be graded using a standardized departmentally-developed rubric that evaluates the student's ability to interact with a potential employer who may or may not understand what sociology is and present their ideas in a clear and organized fashion.

**Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

In Spring 2013, 100% of students (16/16) students received a grade of 70% or better on the presentation about their research and sociology major modeled on a mock interview which includes a written resume.

**M 10: Exit survey question on preparedness for work or grad school**

Graduating students will be given a standardized exit survey. On that survey they will be asked to evaluate (on a five-point scale) how prepared they believe they are to enter the job market or graduate school in sociology or a related field.

Source of Evidence: Exit interviews with grads/program completers

**Connected Document**

- *Exit Survey*

**Target:**

When asked on a departmental exit survey, at least 70% of students will "agree" or "strongly

agree" that they are prepared to enter the job market or pursue graduate school in sociology or a related field.

**Findings (2012-2013) - Target: Met**

100% (17/17) of students graduating with a BA/BS in Sociology in 2012-2013 "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they are prepared to enter the job market or graduate school.

**Details of Action Plans for This Cycle (by Established cycle, then alpha)**

**Increase the percent of students writing a thesis**

Work with eligible students to promote thesis-writing and completion.

**Established in Cycle:** 2009-2010

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Increase availability of online courses**

Students on the coast and those unable to campus have indicated a desire for a broader availability of classes not taught in-person in Hattiesburg. The program in sociology introduced its first online course in fall 2010. To accommodate student need, we plan to offer a second course, Sociology of Film, as an online class in fall 2011 and propose a third course, Nonprofits in Social Change, for the 2012-2013 academic year.

**Established in Cycle:** 2010-2011

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Responsible Person/Group:** Department chair and faculty in sociology

**Create teaching assistant training opportunities**

Many of our undergraduate students go on to graduate school in sociology. For these students, we want to encourage their successful application by giving them additional experience related to teaching, in terms of lecture preparation, assignment development, and grading.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** Finished

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** In 2012-2013, faculty will work with advanced and highly successful undergraduate majors to assist with grading and assignment development, and students will also be encouraged to present their own research in front of classes as appropriate.

**Projected Completion Date:** 05/09/2013

**Responsible Person/Group:** Amy Miller

**Increase undergraduate student research partnerships with faculty**

Undergraduate students need additional research experience prior to graduation, whether they are going to graduate school or straight into careers. Faculty can fruitfully work with undergraduate students on research projects.

**Established in Cycle:** 2011-2012

**Implementation Status:** In-Progress

**Priority:** High

**Implementation Description:** In 2012-2013, at least half of the faculty members in sociology will work with undergraduate students on research projects that lead to professional presentations and/or publications.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Amy Miller

### **Capstone Research Project**

The target was not met for M6. The primary reason this target was not met was due to students not fully completing the assignment. This was despite an extension in the deadline. Students indicated they needed more time to complete this assignment, and the deadline was extended to the last day of class. Student procrastination and lack of organization also appear to have played a role, and this problem was noted by some students to the professor.

**Established in Cycle:** 2012-2013

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** High

#### **Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Ability to design and carry out independent observational research |

**Outcome/Objective:** Ability to conduct independent research

**Implementation Description:** The instructor, in consultation with the other sociology faculty and the library, will determine additional ways to motivate students, keep them on track, and improve their organization skills. The instructor will also provide students who are having significant difficulties completing their coursework with information about university resources to help struggling students.

**Responsible Person/Group:** Capstone Instructor

### **Theory Comprehension**

To increase student comprehension of core theory concepts, instructor will institute daily reading quizzes to 1) ensure students are keeping up with their reading and 2) allow instructor to better address issues in comprehension prior to the exams.

**Established in Cycle:** 2012-2013

**Implementation Status:** Planned

**Priority:** High

#### **Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):**

**Measure:** Performance on relevant theory exam questions | **Outcome/Objective:** Understanding of central theoretical concepts

**Responsible Person/Group:** Theory Instructor

### **Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers**

#### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?**

In 2012-2013, the program continued to address ways to increase student learning in the core discipline areas of theory and research while at the same time bringing in more career preparation components, especially in the capstone course. Graduating seniors continued to strongly agree/agree on the exit survey that the program is doing well in these areas. And four of the six direct measures of student learning -- ability to apply theory in a research paper, ability to design and carryout

independent survey and interview research, ability to present research in an oral presentation, and ability to create a resume and present self successfully during a mock interview -- were met indicating that students are indeed doing well in these areas. Faculty have continued to mentor students both in and out of class to increase their academic skills and career preparedness.

### **What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?**

It is clear that there are areas that require continued attention. In particular, fewer students excelled in the Capstone Seminar than should have. Students are trained in our core classes in both theory and research, but in Capstone some still flounder when conducting an independent research project. The students are confident in their ability to present research (100% agree that they can do so when asked on the exit survey) and indeed earn high marks for such presentations. However, their papers score more poorly, with 6/13 students in the Capstone seminar earning below 70% on their research project and paper. Although the target was met for 2011-2012 cycle, pro-active changes were made in the course to improve student outcomes. More specifically, in 2012-2013, students were provided with supplementary detailed hands-on instruction. Extra checkpoints were created throughout the semester to assess students' continued progress toward final assignments. More class time was spent exploring applications of the final assignments. Despite these changes, the target was not met in this cycle. A few students did have significant personal problems which affected their performance in the class, leading two students to receive final grades of Incomplete. Some other students had academic problems, measured by overall GPA in sociology and other courses. For 2013-2014, the chair and sociology faculty will again meet to review student papers, the course syllabus, and student feedback on evaluations to see if particular problems can be identified, or whether new assignments should be implemented to increase student success. The instructor will also provide students who are having significant difficulties completing their coursework with information about university resources to help struggling students. As many of the same issues were observed with students in the required theory course, faculty will continue to examine ways to track and strengthen students' understanding of the discipline's central theoretical concepts.

## **Annual Report Section Responses**

### **Program Summary**

The sociology program is an undergraduate-only program offering both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees for our students. Although not a large department, over the past few years the number of majors has grown from 31 (Spring 2007) to 54 (Spring 2013) and we anticipate this trend to continue. The program continues to attract high quality students who succeed both in and out of the classroom. We consistently have students named to the President and Dean's lists. Six seniors were inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta, the sociology honor society. We had students present their research at university (Undergraduate Research Conference) and professional conferences (Mid-south Sociology Association and Southern Sociological Society). At the USM Undergraduate Research Conference, two students won multiple first and second place awards: 1st place in use of quantitative methods, 1st place in education topic, 2nd place in use of qualitative methods, 1st place in gender topics. A major was also chosen as the recipient of the Committee on Service and Research for Women's undergraduate paper award. Each year we have several students completing Honors theses.

The faculty in 2012-2103 consisted of four full-time tenured/tenure-track faculty, the chair, and one visiting faculty position. Faculty members teach a variety of courses in both the General Education Curriculum and the major. SOC101 is a popular GEC course, quickly filling to capacity each semester. In addition to classroom interaction, each faculty member works with students outside of class on Honor's theses, graduate-level theses (in Anthropology and other disciplines), independent study projects, and ongoing academic and career advising. In 2012-2013, faculty members successfully



applied for resources to enhance student education and professionalization resulting in grant money to take students to a professional conference and the visit of a nationally known sociologist to give a public lecture and a workshop for faculty and students. Although the sociology program is heavily focused on undergraduate teaching, the faculty maintains a productive research program having published 19 peer-reviewed articles, completed a book manuscript (to be published August 2013), and given 32 presentations at professional conferences over the last five years. The faculty continues to look for opportunities to integrate students into their research both to enhance student skills and to increase productivity.

Finally, the sociology program, as part of a larger initiative of the College of Arts and Letters, completed a strategic planning process in spring 2013. Four long term objectives were identified: (1) expand educational and professionalization opportunities for students, (2) grow the major (number and quality of students), (3) enhance faculty research productivity, and (4) raise the profile of the program. Some initial steps to meet these objectives were completed in 2012-2013 including hiring a new tenure-track faculty member to start fall 2013 and implementing an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant program. The program looks forward to further meeting these objectives and supporting student and faculty success in 2013-2014.

### **Continuous Improvement Initiatives/Additional Action Plans**

The sociology program has several ongoing initiatives that we continue to implement related to strengthening student research skills and improving access to courses. In terms of student research skills, the faculty continue to work with eligible students to promote thesis-writing and completion. For many students this means intensive mentoring in time management skills so that they stay on track with their research projects that are not tied to specific class assignments. The faculty are also working to increase undergraduate student research partnerships with faculty. These partnerships provide undergraduate students needed additional research experience prior to graduation, whether they are going to graduate school or straight into careers. They also provide faculty in an undergraduate-only program with needed research assistance.

Access to courses is increasingly important in order to move students through the program in a timely manner. Better access to courses should positively impact both retention and graduation rates, especially for non-traditional students. Students on the coast and those unable to travel in-person to campus have also indicated a desire for a broader availability of classes not taught in-person in Hattiesburg. As the number of faculty is very small, the program has moved towards online courses to better meet the needs of students. The program introduced its first online course, SOC 101, in fall 2010. An upper division course, Sociology of Film, was also implemented as online course in fall 2011. The program is assessing additional courses with high demand, SOC 214: The Family and SOC 405: Nonprofits and Social Change, for online delivery.

In addition to specific academic skills, the program continues to identify ways to increase students' career preparedness upon graduation. We have revised our Sociology Practicum course to focus on career related skills and to allow students to job shadow careers of interest. Evaluations of this course are overwhelmingly positive with many students stating that they feel more confident in translating their major into a career. The sociology program is also incorporating more applied and career related content into the capstone course.

A major challenge for the program continues to be understaffing. This affects the number and types of courses offered and the time available to advise and mentor students outside of the classroom. The program was able to hire a one year visiting position for the 2012-2013 academic year and to hire a permanent position starting in fall 2013. The program will continue to pursue additional faculty lines that will enable program growth. The faculty continue to work together to identify available resources

to promote teaching and research productivity.

### **Closing the Loop/Action Plan Tracking**

In the past several cycles, the sociology program has met its targets for its SLO specific measures. Therefore, rather than generating specific action plans tied to the SLOs, the program has worked to increase the number of students meeting the target. This has involved continued evaluation of courses by the faculty and increased mentoring of students by faculty. However, we have had some problems within the last year (2012-2013) meeting two of our targets (see Continued Attention section). Two action plans have been generated this cycle to address these issues. If these problems are due to lack of faculty resources, the program will identify ways to get faculty the resources they need to support students, e.g. mentoring skills both in and out of the classroom. If the problems are due to issues faced by students not directly related to the classroom, the faculty will identify university resources that can help students resolve issues that are negatively impacting their academic coursework.

The program has several continuous improvement initiatives (not related to specific SLOs) that were established in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 cycles. Three are still being implemented and one has been completed. The three that are still being implemented -- access to online courses, faculty/student research partnerships, student thesis completion -- are described above in the Continuous Initiatives section. Although we have made progress in these areas, continued work is needed. We currently have two online courses (SOC 101 and one upper division course) and are assessing new courses for online delivery. We currently have several students completing theses; however we have also had several eligible students graduate without finishing their theses. Especially with student research, time management continues to be an ongoing issue with students starting projects but then dropping them as they focus on required courses prior to graduation. Additional training in mentorship may be needed for faculty to help students manage multiple and sometimes competing tasks.

The program has completed one continuous improvement initiative through the creation of an undergraduate teaching assistant program. Many of our undergraduate students go on to graduate school in sociology. For these students, we want to encourage their successful application by giving them additional experience related to teaching, in terms of lecture preparation, assignment development, and grading. In 2012-2013, a framework for the program was created and two advanced and highly successful undergraduate majors were chosen to assist faculty teaching SOC 101. The students participated in grading and assignment development and were encouraged to present in front of the classes as appropriate. The students also met outside of the classroom to discuss pedagogy theory and methods. The program was viewed as a success by both the two students and the two faculty members with whom they worked. Now that the program has been established, the faculty will continue to identify advanced undergraduates to participate in the undergraduate teaching assistant program.