

Institutional Effectiveness Report
Academic year 2013-2014
Department of Sociology

Dr. Lisa Eargle

Mission of the Sociology Program

The Department of Sociology offers a major, minor, and collateral in sociology. The program operates in accord with the general purpose of Francis Marion University by providing an educational program within the liberal arts tradition by presenting a balance of theoretical views and varied analytical orientations. The bachelor's degree in sociology provides students with an understanding of sociology as the scientific study of human social life. The degree focuses on applying objective and systematic methods of investigation to identify patterns of social life and to understand the processes by which these patterns are established and changed. The program enables students to learn to think critically, to communicate effectively, to appreciate individual and cultural diversity, and to develop their skills in computer applications and library research. The program also provides student with opportunities for internships in applied settings. A major in sociology provides students with a broad-based education that will prepare them for entry-level positions in business, government, and a wide variety of human service organizations. The major also prepares students to pursue further education in areas such as law, medicine, business, religion, and social services, as well as sociology.

Measurement:

- Analysis of senior survey responses regarding learning experiences, faculty performance, attributes of program
- Analysis of students' performance in several courses, including Sociology 403, which serves as the program's capstone, without being so designated formally, and Sociology 419, another course taken by Sociology majors and minors.
- Summarize faculty productivity in research and service

Goal 1. Students will have the ability to understand and apply the core concepts and principles of sociology.

No "objective" measure. When asked how well sociology classes prepared them "to understand the sociological perspective and its relevance," and "to read and understand research articles in sociological journals," seniors responded with a average rating of "very well prepared." When asked how well sociology classes had prepared them "to understand different cultures," the average response was "somewhat well prepared." These subjective measures indicate that the goal is met. Students' ratings of understanding research articles did improve slightly over the previous year, however the decline in understanding different cultures shows need for improvement, suggesting need for faculty attention. Continuing small declines in recent years concerning understanding different cultures suggest the need for more emphasis. (For year-by-year comparisons, see IE report from 2012-2013 as well).

Goal 2. Sociology students will understand the core concepts and principles of sociological theory.

No “objective” measure. When seniors participating in the exit survey were asked how well their sociology courses have prepared them “to understand sociological theories,” the average response for the current year was “very well prepared.” Students’ ratings increased slightly in the last year, perhaps reflecting increased course requirements. In recent years, application of theories has been stressed. While there is room for improvement, we consider this goal to be met.

Goal 3. Students will understand and be able to apply the core methodologies of sociology.

When asked how well their sociology courses have prepared them to:

“analyze and interpret sociological data;” and to

“understand how sociologists collect information about the social world.”

and “to communicate effectively, both orally and written,”

seniors indicate that they view themselves as “very well prepared” in collecting data and communication; however a slight decline in perceptions about analyzing and interpreting data suggest renewed attention should be devoted to this issue. These ratings indicate that the goal is met, but with room for improvement in perceptions of abilities to analyze data.

We consider this goal to be met.

Goal 4. To provide students with information about careers in sociology-related occupations and to help students develop skills for professional careers in sociology-related occupations.

Seniors were asked in the exit survey, “How well have your sociology courses prepared you to have a career? The average response was “somewhat prepared.” Student comments on the exit surveys urge us to give this important matter more attention. We meet this goal, but with room for improvement. Materials have been ordered from the American Sociological Association to assist faculty in making improvements in this area.

This year, we placed 7 interns in different agencies. The evaluations by both the students and on-site coordinators were uniformly positive. In written and telephone evaluations, on-site coordinators specifically noted the students’ reliability, willingness to assume responsibility, appropriate dress and demeanor, sensitivity to boundaries, and positive contributions to the host agencies. We are making efforts to encourage more students to take advantage of the internship opportunity. We consider this goal to be met.

Goal 5. Sociology faculty will deliver quality instruction.

A. Course availability and quality

When asked about “the availability of course offerings,” seniors’ average rating was “very good.” Students’ comments on the exit surveys and in conversation with faculty were more critical.

When asked about “the extent to which class objectives were specified and met,” the “overall quality of courses you took in sociology” and the “overall fairness of grading in sociology classes” the average rating is “very good.”

Seniors average ratings of the “overall quality of instructional strategies” were “very good,” slightly higher than the past year. We consider this goal to be met.

B. Faculty Performance

As in the past, seniors evaluations of:

“faculty’s overall knowledge of the subject matter” had a average rating of excellent.

Seniors’ responses to questions about:

“faculty’s overall course conduct”

“faculty’s treatment of students in the classroom”

“each faculty member’s approachability and availability”

all yielded average ratings of “very good,” above 5 in a range from 1 to 6. We consider this goal to be met.

Goal 6. Sociology faculty will emphasize an individualized approach to education through personalized attention to academic advising.

Senior exit data indicate that sociology faculty meet this goal. When asked to rate “the quality of advising you received,” the average rating was “very good.” This important goal is met.

Goal 7. Sociology faculty will be engaged in productive scholarly activity.

This has been an active and productive year for sociology faculty: Scholarly activities include:

- Articles published in peer-reviewed journals –6
- Co-authored research papers published in edited collections – 2
- Conference presentations – 8

APPENDIX

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIOLOGY COURSES

Overall summary of each course (from Dr. Jessica Burke):

SOCI 403:

- Given the difficult material presented in the course as a whole, I incorporated several in-class assignments that were completed in either pairs or groups. The students worked well together and turned in work that showed effort. These assignments resulted in student success in writing literature reviews and survey instruments.
- Each student had to complete a research paper. The overall strengths of the paper were the literature review and the methods section which provided detailed information on their survey and data collection methods.
- The students also grasped how to design a survey instrument quite well overall.
- Students found much difficulty in using appropriate citations within their research papers. I found this with the majority of the students enrolled in the class. Citations were inconsistent if used at all. This was the case even though I provided a detailed “how to” worksheet and instructed the class on how to use ASA citation style.
- Students did not struggle with using SPSS overall and the vast majority grasped how to create and manage a data file. However, I found that they could not grasp how to interpret SPSS output for their research papers. This was especially the case for t-tests and regression output.

SOCI 310:

- Students were required to give an oral presentation of a current event related to race. Overall, students produced well-designed PowerPoint slides and the vast majority of students presented within the appropriate amount of time (5-6 minutes). Only 7 of 38 students fell short on presentation length.
- Another weakness that is noteworthy is the overall quality of the current event papers turned in. Grammar was poor throughout several of the papers. A handful of students could not grasp the instructions for writing the paper, such as page length, including a title page, or selecting an event in the appropriate time frame (2009-2014).

SOCI 201:

- A current event presentation was assigned to students taking both sections of my 201 course. This assignment proved difficult for most students. The majority of students fell very short on length.
- Students had difficulty grasping the distinction between race and ethnicity, and other issues pertaining to race: succession, genocide and expulsion, etc.
- Another weakness for the majority of students was exam questions that required application of the material.
- There were some general topics that students appeared to have grasped well: Culture, Family (Division of Household Labor), and Conformity and Obedience. These three areas sparked the most interest and discussion among students. I also showed video clips in conjunction with culture and conformity and obedience. These videos really seemed to help students connect the material and spark discussion.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PAPERS AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS FROM SOCIOLOGY 419 (FROM DR. LISA EARGLE):

Two objectives of this course is to improve students' research skills and written/oral communication skills. Student performance for these objectives was assessed using a written research paper and an in-class power point presentation.

Paper Component	Percent of Students Performed Correctly
Introduction	87
Theory	78
Hypotheses	65
Data & Methods	52
Data analysis w/SPSS	83
Results interpretation	35
Conclusion, including limitations	48

These results suggest major improvements are needed in the areas of hypothesis creation, understanding data sources and data collection methods, and analysis' results interpretation.

Presentation Component	Percent of Students Performed Correctly
Ability to explain paper parts correctly	55
Spoke clearly and loudly enough to be heard	100
Looked at audience occasionally	100
Did not read presentation notes verbatim	55
Came appropriately attired	100
Exhibited positive attitude	100
Spoke required length of time	55

The major weaknesses observed in the presentations were students' ability to discuss their research findings, variables' measurement, or theory used. This made many student presentation lengths be too short (required 6 minute presentations). The quality of students' power point displays was fine.