

# **Assessment of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs in Sociology**

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## I) Mission of the UWM Department of Sociology

At its meeting on May 2, 2003 the department faculty of sociology approved the following mission statement:

The mission of the Sociology Department is:

- 1) to offer strong, nationally recognized programs of teaching and research in the various areas of general sociology—especially sociological theory and research methods, social organization and social change—which are required for the training of undergraduate majors and graduate students;
- 2) to offer programs of research and teaching of national prominence in the sociology of urban institutions and inequalities—in recognition of the department’s own research and teaching mission and its obligation to support the missions of its colleagues throughout the university;
- 3) to provide a wide range of service activities to our many constituent communities, including those local, national and international, based on the expertise described in statement # 2;
- 4) to promote the department’s commitment to the university goal of diversity.

## II) Assessment of Undergraduate Program Goals

### A) Goals of the Undergraduate Major in Sociology

In October of 1993 the department faculty of sociology developed the following goals for the undergraduate major:

- I) The first goal of the sociology major is to cultivate critical thinking so that students are able to identify and articulate the theoretical vantage points that underlay debates regarding social issues and society in general.
  - a) To this end, the curriculum of the sociology major aims to furnish students with knowledge of the basic analytical concepts and theories of the discipline and their relevance to the study of culture, social structure, social institutions, social change and social differentiation by gender, race, class, ethnicity, and age.
  - b) To this end, the curriculum of the sociology major aims to acquaint students with the history of the discipline, with contributions of key historical figures in its growth and development and with the contributions of contemporary sociological thinkers.
- II) The second goal of the sociology major is to enable students to evaluate the extent to which certain claims about the social world are empirically grounded.

- a) To this end, the curriculum of the sociology major aims to acquaint students with the basic methods used to generate sociological knowledge.
- b) To this end, the curriculum of the sociology major aims to give students a facility in basic statistics and experience in designing a research project from conceptualizing a researchable problem to strategizing about analysis and interpretation.

## B. Evaluation of the Capstone Experience

### 1) The Research Paper and Program Goals

The primary requirement of the capstone seminar in sociology is a research project that calls upon students to utilize the knowledge and skills they have developed as sociology majors. At its meeting of April 4, 2003, the faculty of sociology voted to use the capstone seminar as the central component of its assessment of the undergraduate major. Specifically, based upon the “Goals of the Undergraduate Major,” students who complete the major in sociology are expected to have the following abilities and skills:

- a) The ability to identify a *sociological* issue, i.e. to place an issue, topic, problem, etc. into an appropriate sociological context
- b) The ability to understand and evaluate sociological writings
- c) The ability to analyze sociological data and to interpret the results of sociological research
- d) The ability to use the above skills to develop a sociological investigation and write a scholarly paper that is well organized and coherent.

The capstone seminar paper provides the opportunity to demonstrate and assess these abilities and skills. Specifically, the paper will be evaluated in terms of the following elements:

- a) The statement of the problem or issue *as a sociological topic*
- b) The discussion of how the issue will be dealt with
- c) The discussion of existing sociological work on the topic and, specifically,
- d) The location of the topic within a wider sociological framework
- e) The use of sociological theories, concepts, and/or research findings in the analysis and presentation of the issue
- f) The rhetorical and logical structure of the paper
- g) The adequacy of the bibliography

In order to facilitate the evaluation of the capstone paper, a scale has been developed consisting of five questions with responses framed in a Likert format. (Appendix A)

2) The Student Survey

Along with the standard department course evaluation form, students in the capstone seminar will be asked to complete a survey on their experiences as sociology majors at UWM and their assessment of the sociology undergraduate program in light of the program goals. (Appendix B)

C. Student Evaluation of Sociology Courses in Light of Program Goals

The sociology department course evaluation instruments will be augmented by the inclusion of questions on the degree to which individual course objectives and department program goals have been achieved. (Appendix C)

### III) **Assessment of Graduate Program Goals**

A. Goals of the Graduate Programs in Sociology

At its meeting on May 2, 2003, the faculty of sociology approved the following statement of goals for its graduate programs:

The sociology graduate program is committed to preparing students for advanced academic training and university careers, or for professional careers that allow them to apply their advanced sociological training in service and allied professions. Both trajectories will provide students with advanced methodological and analytical tools and skills with which to examine, explore, advance, and apply sociological knowledge in their area of specialization.

In order to prepare students, we will provide them with the following:

- 1) A demonstrable knowledge of sociology in broad foundational areas and in at least one area of sociological specialization
- 2) The theoretical and methodological tools to develop and answer sociological questions. These tools will include training in theory, methods, and statistics
- 3) The ability to participate in the key debates in their field of specialization, and in the discipline of sociology more broadly

B. Evaluation of the Capstone Experience

The capstone experience in the sociology graduate program can follow one of three options: the traditional master's thesis; a master's paper; or, a master's examination. Each of the three options is overseen by a committee consisting of three members of the faculty.

Upon the completion of the capstone requirement each member of the committee will be asked to complete individually a form in which they evaluate the capstone project in terms of each of the learning objectives for the master's program. (Appendix D)

C. Student Evaluation of the Graduate Program in Light of Program Goals

Graduate students who have completed their course work and capstone project will be asked to complete a survey that covers their experiences as graduate students in light of the goals of the graduate programs. (Appendix E)

## **IV) Assessment Follow up**

Each year the Undergraduate and Graduate Committees of the Department of Sociology will hold special meetings to review the assessment data collected the year before and to develop recommendations, as appropriate, for action on the part of the Sociology Department Faculty.

## Appendix A

Capstone Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Semester \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Based on your evaluation of the written work and class participation of this student please respond to the following questions:

1. The student can frame a problem or issue in a sociological context.  
SA                    A                    N                    D                    SD
  
2. The student can employ and evaluate sociological theories and concepts when presenting an issue.  
SA                    A                    N                    D                    SD
  
3. The student can analyze sociological data and can interpret research findings.  
SA                    A                    N                    D                    SD
  
4. The student can develop an appropriate research plan for a sociological investigation, including the use of an appropriate methodology if collecting data.  
SA                    A                    N                    D                    SD
  
5. The student can write a scholarly sociology paper that is organized and coherent.  
SA                    A                    N                    D                    SD

**Appendix B**  
**An Exit Questionnaire for Graduating Seniors**

This survey is part of the Department of Sociology's Assessment. Please take your time to answer the questions as best as you can. We appreciate your cooperation.

**1. To what extent, if any, do you feel that you have gained knowledge in the following areas of sociology?** *(Circle one number for each item)*

	<b>Not at All</b>	<b>Small Extent</b>	<b>Moderate Extent</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>
a. Understanding of society and social reality.....	1	2	3	4
b. Research skills to evaluate evidence about social life.....	1	2	3	4
c. Statistical skills to conduct research about society.....	1	2	3	4
d. Sociological concepts, such as culture, stratification, self, and deviance.....	1	2	3	4
e. How the self is shaped by society.....	1	2	3	4
f. Understanding of how institutions like the family, education, and the economy are interrelated.....	1	2	3	4
g. Understanding of the significant variations in social experience by race, social class, gender, and age.....	1	2	3	4
h. Understanding of cultures different from our own.....	1	2	3	4
i. Understanding of the place of American society in the international global context.....	1	2	3	4

**2. Please rate your computer skills in each of the following areas:**

*(Circle one number for each item)*

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>
a. Finding information related to society (e.g., literature searches, locating data sources, library searches) .....	1	2	3	4
b. Communicating information (e.g., word processing, creation of presentations, graphics).....	1	2	3	4
c. Use of statistical software packages (e.g., SPSS).....	1	2	3	4

**3a. Sociology courses are taught by professors, lecturers, and teaching assistants. Thinking about all of the various ways in which you can communicate with an instructor, including email, by telephone, and in-person, how accessible did you find sociology *professors and lecturers* to be outside the classroom?**

- Very accessible
- Somewhat accessible
- Not accessible at all
- Not applicable; I never sought help outside the classroom

**3b. Including email, by telephone, and in-person, how accessible did you find sociology *teaching assistants* to be outside the classroom?**

- Very accessible
- Somewhat accessible
- Not accessible at all
- Not applicable; I never sought help outside the classroom

**3c. Please provide comments concerning accessibility:**

**4a. Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of instruction you received in sociology courses?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**4b. Please provide comments concerning the overall quality of instruction:**

**5a. Academic advising consists of providing guidance concerning courses and majoring in sociology. How satisfied are you with the quality of academic advising you received from *professors and lecturers in the sociology department*?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Never saw an academic advisor in the Sociology Department

**5b. Did you ever seek *career advice* from professors or lecturers in the sociology department?**

- Yes -----*Go to Question 5c*
- No ----- *Go to Question 5d*

**5c. How satisfied are you with the quality of *career advising* you received from professors and lecturers in the sociology department?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**5d. Please provide comments concerning the overall quality of academic and career advising:**

**6. Overall, how satisfied are with the courses you took in sociology?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

7. **In which of the following areas would you have liked to have seen additional upper-division courses (300- and 400-level) offered?** *(Check all that apply)*

- Race and Ethnic Minorities
- Social Organization
- Social Psychology/Small Groups
- Social Movements/Collective Behavior
- Deviance
- Technology
- Gender
- Health and Medicine
- Sports
- Theory
- Research Methods
- Statistics
- Family
- Work and Occupations
- Body/Sexuality
- Children and Adolescents
- Population/Demography
- None of the above

8. **Are there any courses that are now NOT offered by the Sociology Department that you would have liked to have taken?**

**Yes ----- Please describe:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**No**

**9. To what extent do you think your sociology major helped you increase your knowledge and skills in the following areas? (Circle one number for each item)**

	<b>Not at All</b>	<b>Small Extent</b>	<b>Moderate Extent</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>
a. Reading.....	1	2	3	4
b. Writing.....	1	2	3	4
c. Statistics.....	1	2	3	4
d. Data analysis.....	1	2	3	4
e. Analytical thinking.....	1	2	3	4
f. Critical thinking.....	1	2	3	4
g. Computer use.....	1	2	3	4
h. Interpersonal skills.....	1	2	3	4
i. Communication skills .....	1	2	3	4

**10a. If you had to do it again, would you major in sociology?**

- Definitely Yes
- Probably Yes
- Probably No
- Definitely No

**10b. Why or why not?**

**11. Please describe a memorable learning experience you had in a sociology course:**

## Background Information

This exit survey is administered by the sociology department to try to monitor and improve the quality of our program. In order to see whether different groups of students have different experiences, we have included the following questions concerning your age, gender, and ethnicity. For some students it is possible that this information could identify them. We assure you that the information you provide will be used only to evaluate the program. As with all of the questions in this survey, your responses to these questions is optional.

**1. Are you:**

- Male
- Female
- Other/Do Not Wish to Identify

**2. How do you define your race/ethnic background? (Check all that apply)**

- African American/Black
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic American/Latino (of any race)
- Native American Indian or Alaska Native
- White
- Other; Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_**

**4. Cumulative GPA to date \_\_\_\_\_**

**5. Which of these provided financial support for your education? (Check all that apply)**

- Parents
- Spouse or Significant Other
- Grants
- Loans
- Scholarships
- Self/Own Work

6. **Which of these was the *primary* source of financial support for your education?**  
(Check only one)

- Parents
- Spouse or Significant Other
- Grants
- Loans
- Scholarships
- Self/Own Work

7. **In what year of college did you declare your major in sociology?**

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other

**Thank you for your time!**

Appendix C  
University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee  
Department of Sociology  
Course Evaluation

Course Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Semester/Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Your instructor will not see this evaluation until after submission of final grades. The results of these evaluations are used in Department and College decisions concerning continued employment for instructors and merit salary increases and promotion decisions for faculty. Please do not write your name anywhere on these evaluation sheets.

		<u>Ineffective</u>	<u>Below Average</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Above Average</u>	<u>Highly Effective</u>
1.	My overall rating of the instructor is:	1	2	3	4	5
		<u>Poor</u>		<u>Average</u>		<u>Excellent</u>
2.	My overall rating of the quality of this course is:	1	2	3	4	5
		<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree Somewhat</u>	<u>Agree Somewhat</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	
3.	The instructor's lectures or presentations were understandable and clear.	1	2	3	4	
4.	The instructor appeared well-prepared for class.	1	2	3	4	
5.	The course requirements were reasonable.	1	2	3	4	
6.	The grading policy was fair.	1	2	3	4	
7.	The course met the objectives stated in the syllabus.	1	2	3	4	
8.	The instructor stimulated me to think critically about the course subject.	1	2	3	4	
9.	I would recommend that others take this course.	1	2	3	4	
		<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree Somewhat</u>	<u>Agree Somewhat</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Not Applicable</u>
10.	The instructor provided individual help when requested.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	The assignments helped me learn the material presented in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Exams reflected assigned readings and material covered in class.	1	2	3	4	5

		<b><u>A</u></b>	<b><u>B</u></b>	<b><u>C</u></b>	<b><u>D</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>
13.	My expected grade for this course is:	1	2	3	4	5
		<b><u>Freshman</u></b>	<b><u>Soph.</u></b>	<b><u>Junior</u></b>	<b><u>Senior</u></b>	<b><u>Other</u></b>
14.	My year in college is:	1	2	3	4	5
		<b><u>below 1.0</u></b>	<b><u>1.0 B 1.9</u></b>	<b><u>2.0 B 2.9</u></b>	<b><u>3.0 - 4.0</u></b>	<b><u>Unknown</u></b>
15.	My cumulative grade point average is:	1	2	3	4	5

16. What, if any, changes would you recommend (for example, in exams, course outlines, assignments, papers, organization of material, texts)?

17. Comment on the strong points of the instructor's performance as a teacher, if any.

18. Comment on the weak points of the instructor's performance as a teacher, if any.

## Appendix D

### M.A. Capstone Committee Member Assessment of Completed Student Project, Utilizing Department Goals

Student's Name:

Project Title:

Student's areas of specialization in sociology:

Please assess the student's completed project in terms of the following Department Goals. The questions move from a general assessment to assessment of specific learning goals.

Graduate Program Goals:

*"The sociology graduate program is committed to preparing students for advanced academic training and university careers, or for professional careers that allow them to apply their advanced sociological training in service and allied professions. Both trajectories will provide students with advanced methodological and analytical tools and skills with which to examine, explore, advance, and apply sociological knowledge in their area of specialization."*

1. In general terms, please assess how well this project demonstrates the student's application of analytical and methodological tools in a way that examines, explores and advances sociological knowledge.

*In order to prepare students, we will provide them with the following:*

*"A demonstrable knowledge of sociology in broad foundational areas and in at least one area of sociological specialization."*

*"The theoretical and methodological tools to develop and answer sound sociological questions. These tools will include training in theory, methods, and statistics."*

*"The ability to participate in the key debates in their field of specialization, and in the discipline of sociology more broadly."*

2. More specifically, please assess how well this project demonstrates the student's knowledge in broad foundational areas of sociology and in an area of sociological specialization. Specifically address the student's mastery of theory and methods, and his or her participation in debates in the discipline and field of specialization.

## Appendix E

### Graduate Student Exit Survey

The Graduate Student Exit Survey is currently under construction. It will include the questionnaire that is currently being used for the evaluation of graduate courses (attached) along with questions that will be lifted (with permission) from the Survey of Graduate Student Experience that is published by The Graduate School.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Department of Sociology

**Graduate Course Evaluation**

Course Title \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number \_\_\_\_\_

Semester and Year \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

1. Consider the content of the course. Please comment on the topics covered, the scope of material, the overall breadth and depth of material assigned and presented, its degree of difficulty, relevance and usefulness to you. What material did you find to be the most helpful? The least useful?
2. Consider the structure of the course. Please comment on the organization of the course, the way in which class sessions were used, the quality and usefulness of class discussions, the degree of articulation between reading, lectures, discussions, and writing assignments, the extent to which objectives and requirements were clear, etc.
3. Consider the work for the course. Please comment on the usefulness of specific assigned readings or books (which readings were the most interesting and informative; which were the least), the amount of weekly reading, the degree to which writing and oral assignments, and/or examinations were fair and appropriate to the course.
4. Consider the instructor for the course. Please comment on her/his knowledge, degree of preparation and organization, attitude toward students, communication skills, accessibility and helpfulness outside of class. What are the strengths of this instructor? What suggestions would you make to the instructor to improve her/his teaching of this course? Would you recommend her/his to others? Assign her/him a grade for her/his performance in this course. [A=excellent; B=good; C=fair; D=poor; F=unacceptable.]
5. Please provide any additional suggestions for how the course might be changed.