

Sociology M.A.
Assessment Plan Report

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Department of Sociology

Sociology

M.A.

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1. Introduction

The M.A. program in sociology trains students in the advanced theories and methods of sociological inquiry concerned with the various problems woven into the complex fabric of social life. The program fosters students' abilities to think critically and reason logically, to write and speak persuasively, and to apply hands-on empirical analysis to a range of intellectual and policy questions. Together, sociological skills and knowledge gained through the program provide the framework for successful careers beyond those available with a baccalaureate degree in both the public and private sectors as well as the intellectual foundation for further graduate work.

During about the past five years, the M.A. program has undergone change as a response to declining enrollment demand. The program's focus on preparing students for future doctoral-level training rather than as a culminating post-baccalaureate degree limited the appeal of the M.A. program for other types of interested students that are in need of the advanced skills learned in a M.A. program such as our program but yet not seeking to pursue additional training at the doctoral level. In prior years, approximately 1-in-4 graduates of our program have continued on to doctoral programs in sociology, but most pursue careers in public service within governmental agencies in criminal justice, health, social services, social work, and research.

To more closely align our program with the needs of the students and increase program demand, we are now in the process of reviving an internship option to degree completion, which will allow us to additionally meet the graduate degree demands of non-doctoral-oriented students, including mid-career professionals. The internship (non-thesis) option will highlight an applied focus that requires the completion of an internship project. In the 2017-18 academic year, the internship (non-thesis) option for our Master's program will become available in the catalog. Students in the program will thus now have the option of either completing a thesis involving original research or completing the internship route option. We are hopeful this program route will increase both enrollments and degrees awarded as the failure to successfully complete a thesis project involving original research is the primary reason students fail to complete the degree.

2. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

The graduate program in sociology is designed to prepare students to understand social processes through the critical application of sociological theory and evaluation of empirical evidence that has been acquired through advanced methods of scientific inquiry. Four learning outcomes represent these objectives of the graduate major in sociology. The four student learning outcomes (SLOs) examined in this status report on the Sociology M.A. program include the following:

SLO1: Students will demonstrate a deep and enriched understanding of key sociological theories and their implications for advanced research initiatives. These theoretical orientations will include classical and contemporary social theories as well as the dominant conceptual frameworks within the student's programmatic emphasis.

SLO2: Graduates of the program will demonstrate advanced abilities in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, including various computer-based technological tools of sociological inquiry.

SLO3: Students will be able to write a thesis, demonstrating the scholarly ability to design, investigate, analyze, and draw conclusions related to the in-depth study of a topical area of interest.

SLO4: Those students who terminate at the M.A. level will demonstrate the education and practical skills necessary for successful careers beyond those available with a baccalaureate degree in community agencies, government, private employment, and not-for-profit organizations.

3. Program-by-Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes Matrix

Not applicable to M.A. program.

4. Curriculum Map

Course	Program Student Learning Outcomes			
	1. Understand and apply multiple Sociological theories and their research implications	2. Demonstrate advanced abilities in quantitative and qualitative	3. Write a thesis demonstrating the scholarly ability to design, investigate, analyze, and draw conclusions	4. Demonstrate the education and practical skills necessary for successful careers
SOCI 670	D,P			D
SOCI 671	P			D
SOCI 674		D	B,D	D
SOCI 675		D,P	D	D
SOCI 677		D,P	D	D
SOCI 699	P	P	P	P
<i>Note.</i> Course supports the outcome at the B=beginning, D=developing, or P=proficient level.				

5. Assessment Methods

EXPLANATION OF ASSESSMENT METHODS TABLE

Assessment Method	Explanation					
	Description	Student-Level Achievement ^a	Program-Level Target ^b	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible	SLOs
Comprehensive Exam	All M.A. students take a standardized comprehensive essay exam, designed to test in-depth sociological theory as well as quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The exam is administered three times during each academic year and is graded using an appropriate rubric (see attached) by a rotating graduate faculty committee and the Director of Graduate Studies.	<p>2012-13: There was no specific student-level target set for 2012-13.</p> <p>2013-2016: The targets were based on accumulating a specified number of points based on the rubric; a “high pass” grade required the student to accumulate at least 75% of the maximum number of points on the rubric; a “pass” grade required accumulating 50-74.99% of the maximum number of points, and the “low pass/fail grade” was for scores at less than 50% of the maximum number of points on the rubric.</p>	<p>2012-2013 Target Grade Distribution: 25% High Pass; 50% Pass; 25% Low Pass</p> <p>2014-2016 Target Grade Distribution: 45% High Pass, 45% Pass; 10% Low Pass/Fail</p>	Each time exam is administered (up to 3 times a year)	Director of Graduate Studies	1,2,3

<p>Master's Thesis and Oral Defense</p>	<p>The master's thesis is intended as preparation for doctoral-level research. Under the supervision of a faculty advisor (i.e., the thesis director), the student must demonstrate the ability to design, execute, analyze, and write about a topic of sociological significance that contributes to knowledge in the field. The final thesis is a formal document that must be orally defended to and approved by the student's thesis committee members. The Assessment Committee assesses the oral defense and final thesis using an appropriate rubric (completed by the thesis chair) indexed to the learning goals of the program</p>	<p>2012-13: The targets were based on accumulating specified number of points based on the rubric; for a "high pass", the student needed to accumulate at least 75% of the maximum number of points on the rubric, a "pass" required accumulating 50-74.99% of the maximum number of points, and the "low pass/fail" outcome for less than 50% of the maximum number of points on the rubric.</p> <p>2013-2016: The targets were based on accumulating specified number of points based on the rubric; for a "high pass" grade, the student needed to accumulate at least 80% of the maximum number of points on the</p>	<p>2012-2013 Target Outcome Distribution: 45% High Pass; 45% Pass; 10% Low Pass/Fail</p> <p>2013-2016 Target Outcome Distribution: 60% High Pass; 30% Pass; 10% Low Pass/Fail</p>	<p>Annually, on a rolling basis</p>	<p>Thesis Committee and Assessment Committee</p>	<p>1,2,3</p>
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Assessment Method	Explanation					
	Description	Student-Level Achievement ^a	Program-Level Target ^b	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible	SLOs
		rubric, a “pass” grade required accumulating 60-79.99% of the maximum number of points, and the “low pass/fail” grade for less than 60% of the maximum number of points on the rubric.				
Evaluation of Internships	Assess the quality of the students’ internship work and the relationship of training and performance to program goals, drawing on a summary of the surveys of supervising employers in the internship program, distributed each semester to employers of interns by Career Services.	None set	None set	Annually or as available	Director of Graduate Studies	5
Alumni Surveys & Supplementary Questionnaires	Use Assessment Office’s alumni survey to survey assesses the usefulness of the graduate sociology major to alumni’s current employment, evaluating various aspects of the degree program and offering suggestions for improvement to the sociology program.	None set	None set	Annually or as available	NIU Assessment Coordinator and Assessment Committee	1-5

Assessment Method	Explanation					
	Description	Student-Level Achievement ^a	Program-Level Target ^b	When Data Will be Collected	Person Responsible	SLOs
<i>Note.</i> ^a Student-level target is the score or performance an individual student must demonstrate to say the student met the student learning outcome. ^b Program-level target is the percent of all students that must demonstrate they meet the student learning outcome.						

ASSESSMENT METHODS-BY-OUTCOMES MATRIX

Assessment Method	Program Student Learning Outcome			
	1. Understand and apply multiple Sociological theories and their research implications	2. Demonstrate advanced abilities in quantitative and qualitative	3. Write a thesis demonstrating the scholarly ability to design, investigate, analyze, and draw conclusions	4. Demonstrate the education and practical skills necessary for successful careers
Comprehensive Exam	S,D	S,D	S,D	
Master's Thesis and Oral Defense	S,D	S,D	S,D	
Evaluation of Internships				S,D
Alumni Surveys				S, I
<i>Note.</i> F=formative assessment, S=summative assessment, D=direct assessment, and I=indirect assessment. See the paragraph above for an explanation of each type of assessment.				