



CRIMINOLOGY (BA)

Program Learning Assessment

2011-2015 Assessment Planning Cycle Key Findings and Proposed Actions

October 1, 2015

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Executive Summary

In recent years the criminology major has grown in terms of variety and scope of course offerings, the number of sections scheduled and filled, and the number of students declaring Criminology as their major. The assessment process has been an integral part of the success of the program. We are constantly looking for ways to ensure that our mission statement is fulfilled and that our learning objectives materialize through solid and innovative pedagogy.

We provide regular feedback to instructors through peer evaluations and by collecting and monitoring syllabi. It is our goal in 2016 to make available syllabi for each course on Blackboard. In addition a model syllabus has been developed that contains specific learning objectives for criminology courses. The yearly assessment of selected courses follows a five - year plan. The next plan will reflect the fact that sociology is now a separate major.

Many courses offered by the department of sociology, including for example juvenile delinquency, social deviance and theories of social order, may be considered either sociology or criminology courses. Since the department did not offer a major in sociology until recently, all courses within the department counted toward a major or minor in criminology. Now, even though numerous courses like the ones mentioned above may count for either major, they will be differentiated for assessment purposes in keeping with two separate five-year plans.

The findings of the current assessment reflect those of previous assessments with incremental improvements but also persistent problems in reading comprehension and writing. What has worked best in the past is writing intensive courses. But we have been unsuccessful in gaining administrative approval for more of these types of courses. We continue to advocate for the expansion of writing intensive courses across the curriculum as well as other forms of support for students who struggle with reading comprehension and writing – including for instance with the addition of writing fellows in the department.

Mission Statement

The overall purpose of the Criminology Major is to encourage critical thinking about the social construction of crime; the nature and causes of crime; the behavior of offenders; and how society reacts to crime and criminals. It aims to communicate the perspectives of the leading criminological theories and research. The Major is firmly grounded in sociology; thus current criminological discourse is linked with its roots in classical sociological theory. It also stresses the connections between theory, methodology, and social policy.

Assessment Philosophy

The goal of the outcomes assessment exercise is to review the learning goals of the Criminology Major and to identify areas in need of improvement. It aims to enhance the learning experiences of current and future students. The Criminology Major went through a

major review in 2007. The 2011-2015 learning outcomes exercise provided a further opportunity to revisit the lessons learned and insights gained from the review process.

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes for the major are listed below. Given that they were revised in 2009 and 2012, the faculty does not anticipate the need for immediate revision but will consider potential revisions with the input of the new Chair.

Students Will Be Able To Demonstrate:

- Thorough knowledge of the core literature and debates that make up the discipline of criminology
- An understanding of the key components of criminological theory and the ability to apply theory to specific contexts
- An understanding of the methods of criminological research
- The ability to make reasoned and informed judgment on issues relating to crime and punishment
- The ability to organize thoughts and communicate arguments effectively in writing

Assessment Cycle

The Sociology Department has developed the learning goals for the Major (see above). The assessment process began with SOC440 the Senior Seminar, which is the capstone course. The Senior Seminar is intended to serve as a culmination of the academic experience in that it aims to integrate and consolidate prior work in the Criminology Major. Thus, it should reflect the overall learning goals of the Major. Results from the assessment of the Senior Seminar will have implications for both this course and particularly for lower level courses where students are expected to have received the foundations in knowledge and skills necessary for achieving the learning goals in the Senior Seminar. This particularly relates to the foundation courses in Criminology (SOC203) and Theories of Social Order (SOC314) and the research methods course (SSC325).

Following the assessment of Senior Seminar, the Sociology Department then embarked on a similar process for SOC203 Criminology, SOC314 Theories of Social Order and SSC325 Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences; these courses, together with Senior Seminar, constitute four of the five disciplinary requirements for the Major. The theoretical and methodological knowledge and critical thinking skills gained from these courses are expected to feed into and/ or complement the content of the additional courses required for the Major (for example, the ability to apply theory to specific contexts). At each stage the department ~~will~~ reviewed the findings and modified the curriculum as necessary to ensure the learning goals are being met. In the final year of the cycle a thorough review of all the data collected took place with a consideration as to whether major curriculum changes are needed.

Assessment Cycle Review

Overall, according to our most recent self-assessments, the curriculum is fulfilling the learning outcomes of the major. However, we are still finding problems with students' lack of preparedness. In particular, we have found significant problems with regard to writing and more specifically with writing assignments that require critical engagement with theoretical concepts and debates and with methodological issues and problems associated with social research. We have taken steps toward remedying these problems, including repurposing and standardizing Soc 203 (Criminology) so that it now serves as a course about the foundations of criminology. In light of the development of a new major in sociology, which began in the fall of last year, and which contains two separate courses in sociological theory, we are in the process of repurposing Soc 314, which thus far has served as both a criminological and sociological theory course. It will become a course in advanced criminological theory. In addition, our major, revised in 2009, now contains additional scaffolding, with greater sequencing and scaffolding of courses. The major is now comprised of five parts, with lower level foundational courses as prerequisites for advanced, topical, and multidisciplinary courses. The chair and deputy chair have begun collecting syllabi of adjuncts teaching courses in section three (applications of criminology) in order to ensure that they are taught from a criminological rather than a criminal justice perspective. We intend to expand and shift this oversight and review function to the Department curriculum committee this coming year.

Over the last several years, the department has assessed many of the classes in the major and there is a regular assessment cycle that the department has embarked upon to ensure that all of the classes are regularly assessed.

In 2011 the ATF reviewed Soc 440 (Senior Seminar) and administered a diagnostic test to students in multiple sections. It was determined that there were significant gaps in background knowledge regarding criminological literatures and methodological concepts. Proposed actions included the implementation of a review session of key principles in criminological theory and a review of the statistics course to see if it fits our major. An additional methods course was developed in response. In addition, instructors of 440, the capstone, are now expected to provide an early-term theory and method refresher. In 2012 Soc 203 (Criminology), Ssc 325 (Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences), and Soc 420 (Women and Crime) were reviewed. It was determined that a significant number of students in Soc 203 were not able to grasp key components of the discipline of criminology, including with regard to competing paradigms, and unable to adequately distinguish theoretical argumentation from personal opinion. In response, Soc 203 was repurposed to provide foundational knowledge. In 2013 Soc 420 was reviewed. After an examination of multiple syllabi across sections, it was determined that there were significant inconsistencies in content and pedagogy. In response, instructors were encouraged to communicate with each other and share ideas about what works best. Models of best practice were placed on the blackboard site. In 2014 Soc 216 and 309 were reviewed. It was determined that an unacceptable number of students were falling short of expectations in critical thinking and writing skills. The writing intensive version of 309 was the exception. In response, the department is now actively engaged in discussions regarding the need to expand writing intensive courses throughout the department.

The department began a yearly assessment of its required courses for the criminology major in 2011. The last assessment dealt with Soc 216 (Probation and Parole) and Soc 309 (Juvenile Delinquency). This academic year three courses are examined: Theories of Social Order (Soc 314), which is a required course, and Sociology of Violence (Soc 308) and Criminology of Deportation (Soc 290), which are both electives. The Assessment Task Force (ATF), an ad hoc committee assembled by the major coordinator, is responsible for the yearly report.

In the current (2015) assessment, the ATF used a sample of 20 papers from Soc 314, 20 papers from 308, and 10 final exams from Soc 290. This is the first time that the ATF has examined a course taught online (Soc 308). It is also the first time that the ATF examined an experimental course (Soc 290).

The overall scores in each category (corresponding to learning objectives) for each course were determined by averaging the scores of committee members. The learning objectives used for Soc 314 and Soc 308 were drawn from the instructor's syllabus that corresponds to the model syllabus developed in 2011. The relevant learning objectives for Soc 290 were drawn from the instructor's syllabus. The rubric of learning objectives for the criminology major, from which the course specific objectives are drawn are mapped on to course objectives.

The four outcomes assessment reports, 2011-2014, demonstrate that while the majority of our majors are performing at expected levels, a greater emphasis on teaching theoretical concepts and modes of analyses is needed.

Among the changes in the assessment process itself are included the inclusion of grading rubrics in the committee's report with more clear scoring systems to categorize essays and term papers.

Our assessment tools have been limited to review of selected courses at the end of the academic year and examination of selected syllabi. There is room for improvement with regard to assessment by expanding the number of courses under review and formalizing the review process by transforming the ATF into a permanent (rather than ad hoc) committee with elected members who serve for a period of one year.

Conclusions. The assessment process reveals improvement in the number of students meeting expectations – albeit with a limited sample. Results from the course Criminology of Deportation warrant the consideration of making this course a permanent elective. Given the phenomenal increase in deportation for criminal offenses over recent years, the inclusion of this type of course within the major seems long overdue. Results from Sociology of Violence warrant the consideration of offering more online courses. Given ostensibly growing student demand for online courses, the successful instance of Sociology of Violence should be extended. Results from Soc 314 were solid. However committee members were concerned with the problem of substantial overlap between this course and newly developed courses in Classical Sociological Theory and Contemporary Sociological Theory. Given the creation of a separate sociology major in the department of sociology, it is worth considering repurposing this course as a course in advanced criminological theory.

Each of these recommendations will be presented to the curriculum committee of the department of sociology in the fall.

Implementation of Last Year's Recommendations. In the outcomes assessment report of 2014 the ATF recommended that Soc 216 be either repurposed or eliminated. The recommendation is currently under discussion by the curriculum committee. In the same report, the ATF recommended the offering of a greater number of writing intensive courses. The curriculum committee affirmed this recommendation. In Spring 2014 there were 4 writing intensive courses. In Fall 2014 there were 9. In Spring 2015 there were 7.

Criminology (BA)

Program Learning Assessment. Key findings and proposed actions
(2011-2015)

Program Learning Goals

1. Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the core literature and debates that make up the discipline of criminology.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the key components of criminological theory and the ability to apply theory to specific contexts.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the methods of criminological research.
4. Demonstrate the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements on issues relating to crime and punishment.
5. Demonstrate the ability to organize their thoughts and communicate their arguments effectively in writing.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed ¹	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? ⁴ Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2011				
Assessment Context²: Capstone SOC 440 (n=41), Tool³: Diagnostic Test				
2	20	Need to address gaps of key criminological literatures.	Review session on key principles of crim theory (Sp12).	
3	30	Need to address gaps of key methodological concepts.	Review STAT250 to assess if it fits goals of major (Sp12).	
Assessment Context: Capstone SOC 440 (n=14), Tool: Paper				
1	50	Need to address gaps of key criminological theories	Review session on definition of crime and deviance (Sp12).	Sp 13 29 ↓
2	64	Need significant improvement in this area.	Review syllabi 308/309. Develop guide crim theory (Sp12).	Sp 13 63 ↓
4	92	Some deficiencies with respect to referencing and the constructing of bibliographies.	Good examples of innovative teaching disseminated (F11).	Sp 13 91 ↓
5	71		Info on referencing/constructing bibliog in syllabi (Sp12).	Sp 13 40 ↓
Assessment Context: Capstone SOC 440 (n=27), Tool: Survey for Seniors				
		Students agreed that coursework prepared them to succeed in seminar (70%) and that a stronger background in criminological theory would have better prepared them for the course (67%). Findings support those reported above.		
2012				
Assessment Context: SOC 203, Tool: Diagnostic Test (n=41), Short Essay (n=22)				
1	48	Retain theory more readily than some aspects of the general literature. Sizable # not grasping key components.	Consider redesign and split SOC203 in two courses, but assess impact to transfers from Justice Academy (Sp13).	
2	56			
4	63	Contextualize thoughts, not simply personal opinions.		
Assessment Context: SOC 325, Tool: Diagnostic Test (n=30), Short Final Paper (n=17)				
3	75	Good grasp of practicalities and applications of methods.	Topics communicated in advance to students. Previews of SSC325 syllabi distributed in SOC203 (F12).	

(1) Percent represents ratio of students who met or exceeded expectations. Where scores represent mean performance, the mean score and highest scale value are indicated (e.g., 3.3 out of 4). (2) Assessment context may relate to comprehensive program review, specific academic setting (e.g., course #, capstone, internship), class standing (e.g., seniors, transfers, alumni), post-graduation outcomes (e.g., placement, further education, employers ratings of employee skills), or indicators of learning progress. (3) Examples of tools include exams, portfolios, research projects, lab reports, papers, essays, surveys, licensure tests, performances, presentations. (4) Re-assessment of learning follows the implementation of actions to determine their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes.

Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2013				
Assessment Context : SOC 420, Tool : End of Term Diagnostic Test (n=16), Critical Review (n=24), Essay (n=22)				
1	29	Numbers on course too small to generalize.	Results to be fully analyzed and communicated (F13).	
2	63	Understand feminist theory and critique of criminology.		
4	91	Majority able to make reasoned and informed judgements.		
5	40	Remains a concern that half were not able to organize their thoughts and communicate arguments effectively.	Communicate need for WI courses to College Admin (Su13).	
Assessment Context : All courses, Tool : Syllabi Review				
		Courses reviewed to ensure compliancy and consistency in terms of subject matter. Some inconsistencies remain. Model syllabi available for all courses.	Inconsistencies communicated to course teams. Instructor encouraged to communicate with each other and share ideas about 'what works best.' Models of best practice placed on blackboard site (F13).	
2014				
Assessment Context : SOC 216, Tool : Final Paper (n=20)				
1	20	Tool not ideal to assess goal 1. Papers were too focused.	More appropriate means to assess goal 1 (F14).	
4	40	Unacceptable number of students falling short of expectations in critical thinking and writing skills.	Identify strategies to enhance critical thinking and writing skills (F14).	
5	40			
Assessment Context : SOC 309 Writing Intensive (10), Non Writing Intensive (10)				
5 - WI	70	Significant difference in outcomes, with WI students performing better than students in NWI courses.	WI courses should be expanded throughout the department (Sp15).	
5 -NW	40			
2015				
Assessment Context : SOC 290, Tool : Paper (n=10)				
2	70			
3	70	The assessment process reveals improvement in the number of students meeting expectations, albeit with a limited sample.	Consider making this course a permanent elective.	
4	80			
5	70			
Assessment Context : SOC 308, Tool : Paper (n=20)				
1	40			
2	80	Results warrant offering more online courses.	Given ostensibly growing student demand for online courses, the successful instance of Sociology of Violence should be extended.	
4	60			
5	80			

Outcomes Assessment

Program Learning Goal #	% Meet / Exceed	Key Findings	Proposed Actions (Semester Implemented)	Was action effective? Follow-up assessment Sem. Year % Meet / Exceed
2015 (cont.)				
Assessment Context : SOC 314, Tool : Paper (n=20)				
1 5	50 60	Results were solid. However, committee members were concerned with the substantial overlap between this course and newly developed courses in Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory.	Given the creation of a separate sociology major in the department of sociology, it is worth considering repurposing this course as a course in advanced criminological theory.	