

# Applied Sociology M.A.

## *Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose*

### **Institutional Mission Reference**

The M.A. in Applied Sociology supports the University's mission of the advancement of knowledge and pursuit of truth by providing advanced professional education and specialized programs. The M.A. provides students with knowledge about the fundamentals of sociology and advances their social research competence. Students in the program select one of three areas of specialization, either general sociology, criminal justice, or women's studies. Graduates are prepared to enter numerous professions, both public and private as well as to continue their graduate education at the doctoral level. The program also supports the university mission of developing each student's capacity for critical reasoning.

### **Institutional Goal(s) Supported**

The M.A. in Applied Sociology supports the second initiative of the University's 2000-2005 Strategic Plan. Our goal is to provide an excellent graduate program and exceptional opportunities for scholarship, research, creative work and service. Our faculty members play a vital role in meeting this goal by integrating their own research into courses. Students are required to complete a thesis which develops their creativity and research skills. The program is also dedicated to attracting culturally and ethnically diverse students from the state, region, nation, and the world.

## *Intended Educational (Student) Outcomes, Methods for Assessment, Criteria for Success, Assessment Results, and Use of Results*

### **Intended Outcome 1**

: Students will demonstrate an understanding of theoretical approaches in sociology.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 1 and Criterion for Success:** Outcome 1 is assessed in three ways. First, all students must successfully complete SOC 620 (Sociological Theory). Second, all students will include a theoretical framework in their thesis. Third, students are required to demonstrate their knowledge of either a specific theory or several related theories during their oral thesis defense. . No student can complete the program without successfully defending their thesis before a three-member committee in no more than two attempts.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 1:** Summary of Assessment data. Sixteen students enrolled in Soc 620 Proseminar in Sociological Theory. Fifty percent (8 students) successfully completed the course, thus demonstrating an understanding of theoretical approaches as presented in the course. Five students completed theses during the 2000-2001 academic year. All of these

students had a theoretical framework in their thesis and passed their oral defense.

**Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 1 to Improve Academic**

**Program:** We feel that the program is providing students with a strong theoretical background. We will continue to monitor student theses to make sure that they theoretically grounded.

**Intended Outcome 2**

Students will demonstrate mastery and application of research methods and statistics.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 2 and Criterion for Success:** . First, students must successfully complete the required core courses that place emphasis on research and statistics. These courses include SOC 610 (Applied Research Methods), SOC 630 (Applied Statistics), and SOC 640 (Sociological Application of Computer and Data Analysis). Second, students must include a research methodology chapter in their thesis that demonstrates their mastery of research methods and statistical techniques. Third, students will present their thesis research methodology during their oral defense. No student can complete the program without successfully defending their thesis before a three-member committee in no more than two attempts.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 2:** All students enrolled successfully completed the research methods course (Soc 610). All but one student completed the computer applications and data analysis course (Soc 640). One student received an incomplete. Finally, five students successfully completed the social statistics course (Soc 630). One withdrew and another was given an incomplete. These are rigorous courses and their completion demonstrates a mastery of research methods and statistics.

All five completed student theses contained a chapter on research methods that was presented during their oral defense. The data gathered and analyzed was impressive. For example, data analyzed included nationally representative samples, a funded survey of Ireland residents, and official sentencing data. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics and bivariate and multivariate analyses (e.g., OLS and Logistic regression.

**Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 2 to Improve Academic**

**Program:** Our program is very strong in helping students develop research methods and data analysis skills. This is especially important because it helps students find jobs and get into Ph.D programs. With new hires we bring in new methodologies that that will be

incorporated into the graduate courses. We will continue to monitor student use of sophisticated strategies for better understanding our society.

**Intended Outcome 3**

Students must demonstrate their ability to orally communicate their knowledge and skills acquired in the M.A. in Applied Sociology program.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 3 and Criterion for Success:** Outcome 3 is assessed in three ways. First, in order to successfully complete the required and elective courses, students are required to present orally either formally (prepared presentations) or informally (contributing to class discussion). Second, students are required to prepare and defend orally their thesis prospectus in SOC 650 to successfully complete the course. Third, students are required to successfully defend their thesis in an oral examination before a three member committee in no more than two attempts.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 3:** Of the five students enrolled in Soc 650 (Research Seminar) during the fall 2000 semester, three successfully defended their theses prospectus. There was one incomplete and one who never attended. During this academic year five students successfully defended their theses thus demonstrating their oral communication skills. In addition, one of the theses was presented at the annual meetings of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (April 2000).

**Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 3 to Improve Academic Program:** The fact that our students are successfully presenting their theses at regional and national conventions is a good sign. We will continue encourage the students to do so.

**Intended Outcome 4**

Students are required to demonstrate their ability to communicate effectively in writing.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 4 and Criterion for Success:** Outcome 4 is assessed in two ways. First students must be able to demonstrate their writing skills in order to successfully complete the required and elective courses. Second students must successfully complete their thesis.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 4:** All graduate courses have writing components. Students who successfully completed Soc 610, 620, 630, 640, and 650 demonstrated their written communication skills through in-class and take-home exams, term papers, and their masters theses.

**Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 4 to Improve Academic**

**Program:** While all courses include writing assignments, we believe it is the practicum course that helps the students the most. Here students write and re-write the first three chapters of their theses. They are critiqued by both the instructor and the other students. This process will continue. We might want to consider such a process in other required and elective courses.

**Intended Outcome 5**

Students are required to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in one of the areas of specialization offered in the M.A. in Applied Sociology.

**Method for Assessing Outcome 5 and Criterion for Success:** Outcome 5 is assessed in two ways. First students must successfully complete required and elective courses in their chosen track. Second, students must focus on their area of specialization in their thesis.

**Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 5:** During the 2000-2001 academic year, each student that specialized in Criminal Justice completed a thesis related to the field. Topics included: victimization, delinquency, mediation, and electronic monitoring. At least two of these theses are being submitted to student paper competitions conducted by the American Society of Criminology and the Southern Criminal Justice Association.

The student who specialized in sociology focused upon discrimination and sectarianism in her thesis on Northern Ireland. A version of this thesis was presented at the annual meetings of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences in Washington DC (April 2001).

**Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 5 to Improve Academic**

**Program:** The three tracks seem useful to most students. We seem to draw more students into the CJ track and we should continue to attract them as we implement the MA in Criminal Justice. We should also consider more specialized tracks within the general sociology track that might encourage students to apply and offer them a more specialized emphasis.