

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. Twenty-four students enrolled in Soc 620 Proseminar in Sociological Theory. All but one successfully completed the course by the end of the semester. One took an incomplete that has now been completed, thus all students have demonstrating an understanding of theoretical approaches as presented in the course.

Four students completed theses during the 2002-2003 academic year and at least two more will probably finish over summer. All of these students have a theoretical framework in their theses 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 have the required course in theory and all courses (required and elective) contain some element of theory. We will continue to monitor student theses to make sure that they are 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 (Computer Applications 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: There were 21 students enrolled in the research methods course (Soc 610), of which 17 successfully completed the course with a B or better. Twenty three students enrolled and 21 student completed the computer applications and data analysis course (Soc 640) with a B or better. Finally, 24 students enrolled in the statistics course (Soc 630), the majority (18) completed the course successfully. These are all rigorous courses and their completion demonstrates a mastery of research methods and statistics. Given the nature of courses and the large class sizes with several students accepted on a provisional basis, it is not surprising that a few did not successfully complete the courses.

All four 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 sample of citizens, domestic violence data from military families, migration and HIV data from a province in China, county level crime and social support data, and a web-based survey. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, scaling, 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 research and statistical techniques to contribute to the scientific literature.

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 proposal and their completed thesis in an oral examination before a three member committee in no more than two attempts.

Summary of Assessment Data Collected for Outcome 3: Nine students enrolled and 8 completed (3 during the semester and 5 after) Soc 650 (Research Seminar) during the fall 2002 semester. All of the eight also successfully defended their theses prospectus before their committees. During this academic year four students successfully defended their theses thus demonstrating their oral communication skills (three others are defending this summer). Two of the graduate also presented their research at the first annual Sociology and Criminal Research Event sponsored in the spring. One graduate student presented a term paper at the Women's studies research in progress workshop and another presented research at regional conference.

Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 3 to Improve Academic Program: The fact that our students are successfully presenting their theses both before their committees and outside of the department, college and university is a good sign. We will continue encourage the students to present their work at professional meetings. Several faculty members have been discussing ways of getting funding for students to present at regional and national meetings. Several students plan to attend (to be exposed to professional presentations) at the National Institute of Justice Professional Conference series in July 2003.

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 theses.

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. Writing includes the preparation of statistical results and interpretation, as well as theoretical and substantive arguments.

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 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. Acting as editor and peer reviewers of other students provides an opportunity for professional socialization and to better their own editorial skills. This process will continue. We might also want to consider recommending that instructors have students critique each others papers and to re-write papers at least once in certain required and/or 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 2002-2003 academic year, both student that specialized in Criminal Justice completed a thesis related to the field. Topics were juvenile delinquency and domestic violence in the military. One of these students will be entering a Ph.D. program in the fall, the other will continue her career in the navy.

The two students who specialized in general sociology also completed topics related to their fields. Topics were subcultures and demography. One of these students has already entered a Ph.D. program, the other will enter one in the fall.

Use of Assessment Results from Intended Outcome 5 to Improve Academic Program: The three tracts seem useful to most students. We seem to draw more students into the CJ tract and this is important because it is growing in terms of academic and nonacademic jobs. We should obviously continue to pursue this area, but we should also consider more specialized tracks within the general sociology tract that might attract students. We should also better promote the women's studies concentration and encourage students to think about area of study.