

SOCIOLOGY

Instructional Program Review

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I. Program Description and Scope

The discipline of sociology at Ohlone College is oriented primarily toward a dialogue between teacher and student that explores how to think sociologically and why it is worth doing. The content of the dialogue takes the student on a journey into the exploration of self, society, and their dynamic relationship.

The core curriculum in sociology is oriented toward furthering intellectual and cultural awareness, and critical and independent thought in preparation for higher education or absent further formal education.

The courses offered at Ohlone College in the sociology department are remarkably consistent with the core curriculum offered at other two-year colleges nationwide. The current course offerings at Ohlone include:

Sociology 101

A general introductory course designed to familiarize the student with basic sociological concepts, theories, and methods.

Sociology 102

A course, which investigates the nature of social problems through a research design.

Sociology 105

A sociological analysis of the institution of marriage and family which analyzes marital practices and family structures in a variety of cultural settings.

As indicated by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, the fact that 100 percent of the community colleges offers sociology establishes the popularity and acceptance of the discipline. Sociology has been, since its inception at Ohlone College, a widely accepted part of the curriculum. For many years the sociology department had as

its primary objective the offering of courses closely linked to contemporary social issues. Over time it has matured and evolved into a discipline whose focus has been a core curriculum that clearly delineates it from other academic departments on campus. In its present state, the department better serves the varied needs of students in terms of general education requirements, skills and competencies outside the educational community, background in multicultural perspectives, and articulation with four-year institutions. One of the most dynamic features of sociology is its transforming nature. It strives to remain current by reflecting social changes in its course content thereby making its course offerings relevant, necessary, and important. Students who have elected to experience sociology acquire a comprehension of the many ways of life found in this postmodern era and a better understanding of their place in it.

All three sociology courses contribute toward fulfilling the General Education Area II graduation requirement for an associate in arts and associate in science degree. The general principles and social problems courses also fulfill the General Education Area VI cultural diversity graduation requirement. All three courses are transferable to four-year colleges and meet lower division requirements for advancing to junior year status in a sociology major.

Student enrollment in sociology courses at Ohlone have steadily increased over the years from an average daily attendance of 37 in 1988 to well over 50 in 2005 with at least one section per semester averaging over 135 students. Student retention has also increased in the core courses to approximately 85 percent while the national average for sociology courses is approximately 80 percent. Sociology generates steadily over 900 WSCH. There are presently 1.6 total instructors teaching all of the sociology course sections offered. The full time faculty member teaching in the department holds a doctorate degree while the national average of faculty members in sociology with a Ph.D. is very low. Sociology courses are offered in the day, evening, through contract education, self-paced, and online. Grade distribution has been consistent throughout the department which has helped to maintain academic rigor among the various course offerings. The sociology department has promoted an articulation plan with local high schools through their counseling staff and has encouraged student transfer to four year colleges by constantly updating academic preparation in keeping with new requirements. Sociology students and staff have been involved with community service organizations in a variety of research projects. The Ohlone sociology staff in conjunction with 150 sociology students conducted a one year long Tri-City voter survey of over 5,000 households on behalf of the League of Women Voters, and a two year long Fremont city wide consumer study on behalf of the Fremont Chamber of Commerce.

II. Relationship to College Mission and Goals

The sociology department is continually focused on developing and presenting course material in keeping with institutional values and goals.

Two of the core course offerings are designated as meeting the cultural diversity requirement which promotes appreciation for and understanding of diverse races and cultures.

Three modalities are being used in the presentation of course offerings, in-class, self-paced, and online. Utilizing methods and technologies that promote quality education for the widest student population is consistent with the core values of open access and active reach-out.

One mission of Ohlone College is to serve the community by providing a center for learning, cultural development, and career education. The sociology department affirms its commitment to these goals by orienting its courses toward the teaching of critical thinking, cultural awareness, creativity and innovation, and satisfaction of student interests. The diversity of goals seeks to match the diversity of students. Sociology by its nature has the rather unique ability to relate the substantive nature of its content to students' everyday lives. The goal is to meet the needs of students in the areas of general education which are consistent with lifelong learning and a continuity of course content applicable to the transfer oriented student.

III. Program Student Learning Outcomes

Program Teaching Objectives

The sociology faculty endorses the following objectives in their approach toward facilitating student-learning outcomes:

- A. Provide instruction to enable students to understand the interrelationships between the social, cultural, and biological basis of human behavior.
- B. Help students to achieve competence in understanding, critically assessing, and using sociological concepts.
- C. Introduce students to the various theoretical perspectives of sociology and encourage an appreciation for the historical development of the discipline as a social science.
- D. Equip students with a knowledge of research methods applicable to design research.
- E. Encourage in students a rich understanding of and appreciation for cultural diversity through knowledge of social organization from a cross cultural perspective.

Program Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students should be able to demonstrate that they understand a variety of explanations accounting for human behavior (in evolutionary and/or

- contemporary contexts) and to account for differences in terms of the interplay among society, culture, and biology.
2. Students should have competence in defining, critically assessing, and using sociological concepts.
 3. Students should have a familiarity with various theoretical perspectives and their historical development in the discipline.
 4. Students should be able to identify and employ various research designs and their appropriate application to the study of social life.
 5. Students should have an understanding of cross-cultural differences and an understanding of the importance of cultural context.

Program Assessment of Outcomes

Student learning outcomes are assessed utilizing a variety of measurement techniques.

They include but are not limited to:

Objective exams

Written papers

Class Involvement

Student/Instructor consultations

Anecdotal evidence

Student achievement data (retention, completion, enrollment, etc.)

IV. Student Success in Reaching Outcomes

TYPE OF ASSESSMENT FOR EACH OUTCOME

Course Outcome#1 Outcome#2 Outcome#3 Outcome#4 Outcome#5

SOC. 101	I,T	I,T	I,T	I,T,	I,T
SOC. 102	I,T	I,T	I,T	I,T,D	I,T
SOC. 105	I,T	I,T	I,T	I,T,	I,T

I = Introduced and discussed

T = Tested (written or objective)

D = Demonstrated through research project

Based on the I,T,D assessments used in each course, in combination with the less quantifiable measures of student outcome success, the sociology department has shown continual improvement in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Quantitatively, the following trends have emerged between 2001-2005.

1. FTES has remained constant
2. Student enrollments have remained constant
3. Sections offered have increased by 30%
4. Total WSCH has remained constant at 927

5. Classroom retention from start has remained constant at 102
6. Classroom retention from census has remained constant at 85
7. Overall grade distribution has gone up with fewer students failing
8. Successful completion rate has increased from 76 to over 80

Beyond quantitative measurement of student success, most assessments of student success in the sociology department are based upon anecdotal evidence. Over the years a number of students who have been sociology majors at Ohlone have gone on to complete their baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees. Many reported that having a good foundation in the discipline served them well in their upper division and graduate studies. Other students have indicated that their background in sociology has enabled them to excel in other academic areas by providing them with a broader social context for understanding and applying what they learn. Students continually remark that the skills and tools they have acquired through sociology have enhanced their ability to be promoted or increased their prospects for getting a better job. Additionally, employers have indicated that their employees find it easier to be “team players” and have a better “sense of themselves” after experiencing sociology through contract education at their place of employment.

The fact that sociology has been made a requirement or option in a number of other departmental curricula is indicative that the skills, information and learning outcomes of the course are important and relevant.

Qualitatively, the following trends are based on student interests, which have emerged between 2001-2005 and have affected course content or classroom environment.

1. Increased relevance of sociology with changes in student demographics.
2. Greater desire to understand the dynamics of collective behavior since 9/11.
3. Student realization that people skills become less obsolete and oftentimes more marketable than technical skills.
4. Students more interested in the changing social structures of the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
5. Student desire to learn more about publics and public opinion polling.
6. Renewed interest in the relationship between the religious and secular movements in the world.

V. Review of the Teaching Learning Process

The student learning outcomes seem relevant to the extent students who achieve such outcomes are well prepared for upper-division work, grounded in the principles of the discipline, and capable of applying what they know beyond the classroom.

The student learning outcomes are appropriate and current for a lower-division student exploring a new academic discipline. Much of the subject material students are exposed to will serve them in many contexts outside the academic environment.

In addition, there are student-learning outcomes, which are implicit or unstated that may not be measurable. Sociology teaches an ability to understand the positions of others and thus contributes to empathy and tolerance. Sociology cultivates a deepening of human experience, an increase in self-awareness, and appreciation for the complexity of the issues human beings face. Whether or not such outcomes can be documented is less important than they be pursued as ideals.

The assessment technique primarily used in sociology to measure the success of a learning outcome is tests. Because most sociology courses are large, ranging from 45 to 175, the method of documentation is objective exams consisting of multiple choice and true-false. The smaller number of students attending the Sociology 102 course typically face other assessment methods, including essay exams and a group research paper.

Measuring learning outcomes “objectively” is a challenge for a discipline like sociology. Many of the perspectives, concepts and theories taught take time to mature and crystallize, and therefore may not be immediately measurable.

It is important for the sociology department to remain mindful that increased standardization in measurement of student learning outcomes may adversely affect creative and individualized learning. While it is recognized there is a need for assessing student success and evaluating academic programs for accreditation, it is nonetheless incumbent upon us to not dismiss the specter of perhaps rationalizing and homogenizing one of the most important institutions in American society.