

Sociology Students' Application of Core Concepts in Research

Sociology MA – College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Step 1: Student Learning Outcome

Graduate students will apply core concepts in an area of research specialization through the interpretation of sociological data, using such concepts.

Step 2: Methods and Measures

This assessment focuses on how well students apply core concepts in an area of research specialization through the interpretation of sociological data, using such concepts. A key goal is for students to deepen their analytical training within sociology and demonstrate that knowledge using core concepts within their research field of specialization, to analyze research data. Typically, students demonstrate this knowledge in the data analysis section of their thesis or project, in the “subject area” or “methods/stats” comprehensive exam. Two faculty members who serve on (1) their thesis committee (not the thesis chair), (2) the graduate committee (not the project chair), or (3) the comprehensive area exam grading committee assess the final written work using a 3-point rubric: (1) "Does not meet expectations/poor," (2) "Meets expectations/average," or (3) "Exceeds expectations/excellent."

Step 3: Criteria for Success

75% or more of graduate student theses, projects, or comprehensive exams are rated "meets expectations/average" or "exceeds expectations/excellent."

Step 4: Results

Tenure track faculty from sociology assessed all the theses and comp exams (there were no projects assessed) completed by students during the fall of 2021 through summer 2022, which totaled 15 pieces of written work.

A total of 27 forms were assessed, with 93% overall at the “average” or “excellent” level, which exceeds the target for success, with score distribution as follows:

- Theses (n = 12): Excellent = 6 (50%) / Average = 6 (50%)
- Comps (n = 16): Excellent = 2 (12.5%) / Average = 12 (75%) / Poor = 2 (12.5%)

Results reveal that at the completion of the program, students demonstrated the ability to explain key sociological concepts, articulate and discuss sociological concepts when applying them to data, and are thinking critically about core sociological concepts.

Student work was more likely to be in the excellent category for theses compared to comps exams. The only students' whose work did not meet the standard of average or above took comps exams. This may have resulted in those students not finishing the program or retaking the exams to score better. So, this is not necessarily reflective of graduates of the program.

Step 5: Improvement Actions

It was noted that there were no projects over the time-period, and it appears that there are declining numbers of projects being completed. This may stem from some confusion over the nature and goals of the project. Upon further review, it was confirmed that the two “poor” evaluations were from a student who failed their comprehensive exams and then subsequently re-took and passed (evaluated as “average” for both assessments). The program will continue to monitor the support provided to graduate students for their comprehensive exams and reassess the outcome in fall 2024.