

## **Sociology Students' Critical Thinking Skills**

### **Sociology BA – College of Humanities and Social Sciences**

#### **Step 1: Student Learning Outcome**

Students will demonstrate critical thinking from various sociological perspectives, such as reflecting on their social location, evaluating the implicit assumptions of everyday life, challenging commonsense understandings, and assessing the structure of an argument.

#### **Step 2: Methods and Measures**

**Direct:** Senior “theory application” paper in all sections of SOCI 410 (Theories of Social Behavior). Paper assignments varied by instructor. A sociological critical thinking rubric, adapted and developed by committee, includes the following five dimensions:

1. Explanation of Issues
2. Evidence
3. Influence and Analysis of Context
4. Student's Position and Assumptions
5. Conclusions and Related Outcomes

The rubric is calibrated on several student cases to reach consensus by all three-committee members and one GA. The final rubric is applied to a sample of 40 senior paper assignments. Each dimension is evaluated on four levels (1-4): “Not sufficient,” “Developing,” “Proficient,” and “Advanced.”

**Indirect:** “Student Success and Critical Thinking” survey administered online among majors responding to a series of questions on their perceptions of how the sociology department's curriculum (classes and faculty) helped cultivate different aspects of critical thinking. The survey briefly defined critical thinking to students as “analyzing and questioning information while understanding the broader social and cultural contexts”. Three dimensions of critical thinking, 1) Analysis of Sociological Context, 2) Use of Evidence and 3) Critical Standpoint were conceptualized and operationalized through sets of different questions (e.g. Frequency of critical thinking applications in real life), and items (e.g. “Reflecting on how you use what you have learned in the sociology classes that you have taken at CSUF and in your assignments, please indicate how often you do the following...”).

#### **Step 3: Criteria for Success**

**Direct:** 75% of student essays are rated at 3 or above for each dimension of critical thinking.

**Indirect:** 75% of students rate themselves as 3 (agree) or 4 (strongly agree) to a statement concerning their critical thinking skills.

#### **Step 4: Results**

##### **DIRECT:**

1. **Explanation of Issues:** 70% (n=28) of seniors met or exceeded expectations (at the Proficient or Advanced level), while only 2 of 40 seniors scored at the “Not Sufficient” level. The average score for this dimension across the four evaluators was 3 (Proficient).
2. **Evidence:** 60 % (n=24) of seniors met or exceeded expectations (at the Proficient or Advanced level). Only 4 of 40 seniors scored at the “Not Sufficient” level. The average score for this dimension across the four evaluators was 3 (Proficient).
3. **Influence and Analysis of Context:** 60% (n=24) of seniors met or exceeded expectations (at the Proficient or Advanced level). Only 3 of 40 seniors scored at the “Not Sufficient” level. The average score for this dimension across the four evaluators was 3 (Proficient).
4. **Student’s Position and Assumptions:** 35% (n=14) of seniors met or exceeded expectations (at the Proficient or Advanced level). Six of 40 (15%) seniors scored at the “Not Sufficient” level. The average score for this dimension across the four evaluators was 2 (Developing).
5. **Conclusions and Related Outcomes:** 43% (n=17) of seniors met or exceeded expectations (at the Proficient or Advanced level). Eight of 40 (20%) seniors scored at the “Not Sufficient” level. The average score for this dimension across the four evaluators was 2 (Developing).

On average, across all critical thinking dimensions, students scored at the proficient level, however only 55% (n=22) met or exceeded expectations across all dimensions at the proficient or advanced level which did not meet the criteria for success (75%).

##### **INDIRECT**

The Student Success and Critical Thinking survey was administered online among majors in spring 2018. Of a total of 957 majors enrolled, 249 (26%) students completed the survey.

On average, more than 60% of majors typically scored high on most critical thinking items across the three dimensions (Analysis of Sociological Context, Use of evidence, Critical Standpoint). High scores for at least 5 items exceeded 80%, while the lowest percentages were found on the 3 items related to whether students had practiced in “most or all classes” use of evidence and critical standpoint.

Most students (72.73%) “agreed or strongly agreed” with the statement, “I choose sociology classes based on how I am able to analyze societal issues and their relationships with the individual.” However, this percentage did not meet the set criteria of success. Considering that this was the first time the critical thinking survey was piloted, other indirect thresholds of success—beyond this agreement/disagreement single statement—will be determined in the future.

### **Step 5: Improvement Actions**

Although a majority of students scored high on many measures—both indirect and direct—overall percentages did not meet criteria of success of 75% at the proficient or above level.

The committee recommends that instructors clearly and explicitly explain what sociological critical thinking and its various dimensions are to students as part of their assignments on the syllabus. These explicit dimensions and explanations should be reflected on the assignment prompts and rubrics as well.

Finally, the committee found direct ratings for “student’s position and assumptions” and “conclusions” to be unsatisfactory and recommends special emphasis on these dimensions in light of the results. Part of the problem was that prompts for the embedded assignments that were assessed often did not give clear instructions or explanations on student’s critical positionality, assumptions, and conclusions. Moreover, the committee recommends that more classes in the sociology program adopt explicit critical thinking skills, especially considering that some indirect measure items under dimensions “Evidence” and “Standpoint” reflected very low scores. The Undergraduate Curriculum and Assessment Committee reviewed findings. After approval, results were sent to the Chair for distribution and discussion by the entire faculty to review and recommend next steps