

SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

STUDENT/COURSE BASED ASSESSMENT

The course-based assessment of students (homework assignments/exercises, exams, papers, projects) provides feedback to instructors regarding student-level mastery of learning objectives and the intentional course-based curricular organization. Individual instructors draw on this information as well as student course evaluations to make adjustments to course organization on an on-going basis. Faculty report on these efforts in their annual or periodic departmental review materials.

The Department of Sociology is also committed to the collection of data from students about their experiences in the program. We have begun the process of formalizing a feedback cycle regarding curricular reform that will incorporate the individual-level course information collected by instructors. In response to concerns raised by faculty teaching capstone courses, for example, a new course was developed (Sociology 310, Methodological Applications of Social Research) that standardized student academic preparation for the capstone course.

PROGRAMMATIC ASSESSMENT

In addition to the student/course based assessment process, the Department has begun programmatic assessment. The first stage was the administration of an alumni survey (See Appendix 2). Several questions in this survey are intended to collect information that will feed back to the curricular organization of the department. We also intend to survey capstone instructors as to their impressions of the adequacy of student preparation for their capstone projects. This information will be used for feedback to instructors who can then modify their course expectations accordingly.

We also plan on instituting an on-line senior exit survey to obtain feedback from students directly about their perceptions of the educational experience that they have had as sociology majors. This survey will inquire about specific academic skills that have been acquired, instructional techniques, and the extent to which they perceive that their work as a sociology major has prepared them for their next experience (work, graduate school, other).

Relevant excerpts from the WWU Alumni Survey (2006) are included in the Appendix. We utilize the standard data collected on the Alumni survey as well as a special subset of questions for program assessment purposes.

CHALLENGES

Faculty and staff in the Sociology Department have devoted considerable effort to curricular reform and student advisement while maintaining active research agendas and professional involvement. We firmly believe that these activities are related synergistically, and

contribute to making our department strong. We are committed to providing a very high level of instruction to our students. Sociology students acquire a very diverse set of skills, including verbal and written communication, technological facility, research literacy, and ability to reason through and formulate a coherent argument. The nature of our curriculum often involves a great deal of individual or small group student/faculty interaction, even as the number of our majors and minors has grown. The challenge for our faculty and staff is to meet the varied needs of our students while achieving our overall goals with limited staffing resources. We remain committed to delivering a high level of educational training while facilitating the movement of students through the major.

Students who graduate with a sociology degree are prepared for a wide range of careers, given the skills that they have acquired. Our program incorporates attention to writing, computation, and technological skills as well as research literacy. That is, students are not only trained to analyze published research, they engage in the process themselves. This allows them to become more informed citizens and more effective contributors to the workplace. Many of our students have pursued advanced degrees in a variety of fields, including sociology, social work, education, and psychology. Our students also work in a variety of fields. Although we have some data on our students' post-graduation activities, we do not have confidence that the limited response rate of graduates to the questionnaires is representative of our graduates on average.