Central Washington University
Assessment of Student Learning
Department and Program Report

Please enter the appropriate information concerning your student learning assessment activities for this year.

Academic Year of Report: _2010____College: ___COTS_________
Department ___Sociology__________ Program: Sociology, Social Services_

1. What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?

Building on the foundation laid in the previous years, the Department of Sociology assessed two student learning goals this academic year: #3 and #6 in the Sociology assessment plan and Social Services assessment plan. Both goals apply to both sociology and social services programs.

Student Learning Goal #3: Students are expected apply a sociological perspective by describing the similarities and differences between sociology and other social sciences, identify the contributions of sociology to understanding social reality, define key concepts and apply key sociological concepts. These outcomes are related to CWU goals 1 & 2 to maintain and strengthen an outstanding academic and student life. The goal is also related to the college goals 1 & 2 of providing an outstanding academic and student experience. It relates to the department goal of developing students’ interest and involvement in social policies and community service organizations that elicit social justice and social change. This goal was selected for assessment because the department wanted to know whether students were acquiring and applying the sociological perspective to their communities and daily life.

Student Learning Goal #6: Students are expected to show knowledge in substantive areas within sociology. Outcomes include the ability to summarize existing knowledge, current questions, and important issues in at least one substantive area within sociology and to suggest specific policy implications of research and theory in one area. This goal is related to CWU goals 1 & 2 to maintain and strengthen an outstanding academic and student life. The goal is also related to the college goals 1 & 2 of providing an outstanding academic and student experience. It relates to the department goal of offering a sociology program that emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving skills. This goal was selected for assessment because the department wanted to know student’s level of competence in the substantive areas within sociology and their ability to apply theory in analyzing social problems.

2. How were they assessed?

1. Student Learning Goal #3 was evaluated through the course work in the senior seminar class SOC 489 in Fall, Winter and Spring quarters 2009-2010. This course is required of
all those majoring in sociology. A rubric was used to assess the extent to which students were able to apply a sociological perspective to a current social problem. In this case students were asked to assess the current economic crisis from a sociological perspective. Students were to answer the following question: The United States is going through a financial crisis unprecedented since the Great Depression of the 1930’s. This crisis has broad implications and ramifications. Looking at this from a sociological perspective, how would the central ideas of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber direct our attention to different aspects of the crisis and shed light on it. Students’ response to this question was assessed on a pass/fail basis. More than 90% of the 44 students that were assessed Fall, Winter and Spring quarter met the standards established in the take home essay exam rubric.

2. Student Learning Goal #6 was assessed in the Senior Capstone course SOC 489. Evidence used for the assessment of student knowledge in the substantive areas of sociology included the use an essay exam question, which asked students to answer essay exam questions in two substantive areas. A grading rubric was designed to address the extent to which students were able to define and apply key sociological concepts in specific substantive areas. Students were able to choose two questions from a series of question from different substantive areas. Student responses to those questions were assessed using a rubric designed on a pass/fail basis. Minimal level of mastery is 90% of sociology/social service majors earn a passing grade on those two questions. More than 90% of the 44 students that were assessed Fall, Winter and Spring quarters met the standards established in the take home essay exam rubric.

3. What was learned?

The Sociology Department is pleased with the results of student learning assessment. Students’ work and performance was overall very solid. In the assessment of these two learning outcomes 90% or more students met or exceeded departmental standards and earned a passing grade. All department majors graduated with GPA at or above 2.25. In addition all graduating seniors were able to apply the sociological perspective and showed substantive knowledge in sociology as indicated in the responses to the essay questions.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?

Our assessment data confirmed that we offer a strong academic program and students are doing well in their coursework. We will continue offering high quality courses to serve our majors as well as students in other disciplines.

The department assessed two student learning goals primarily through the senior seminar course, taught by different faculty members in fall, winter and spring. The primary measure for outcomes #3 and #6 was a departmental assessment exam that was taken by
all graduating seniors. It would be beneficial to use a variety of assessment measures in the future, which could include the portfolio in which students submit work from other courses, focus groups, and the exit interview. We developed common measures for the Senior Seminar course, including common rubrics and common course requirements used by the diverse faculty who teach this course.

5. What did the department or program do in response to the feedback from last year's assessment report?

There was concern expressed that we did not have measureable outcomes that addressed dispositions/attitudes necessary for success in Sociology. The department is in the process of developing an instrument to measure the extent to which students understand the Code of Ethics established by the American Sociological Association. The ASA Code of Ethics is the primary criteria by which we are able to assess the extent to which students’ have the dispositions/attitudes necessary for success in Sociology. There was concern expressed that the numbers of students assessed was not reported. In this assessment period the number of students assessed was reported. In order to examine the assessment data in a more detailed manner the department has developed a rubric to more specifically identify improvements that can be made to the program. It was suggested that we make our assessment results available on our Sociology website. Both the 2008 and 2009 report are available on our website, as well as, student learning outcomes. In addition, the assessment reports are shared with the sociology curriculum committee and the department as a whole. The results are discussed and an action plan is developed in a faculty retreat that occurs during the academic year.