Annual Outcomes Assessment Report
Department of Sociology
University of Alaska Fairbanks
2010-11

1. Our department implemented a portion of the outcomes assessment plan according to the most recent plan. Our program review pointed out flaws in our past outcomes assessment plan, and thus faculty anticipate a major overhaul of our outcomes assessment process during the next academic year.

2. Outcomes assessment data collected this year (2010-11) include:
   a. **pre-test and post-test**: Students in four sections of SOC 100X took the pre-test in Spring 2011. A total of 164 valid pre-tests were analyzed. The post-test was administered to nine students in SOC 490, the Capstone seminar. The purpose of this assessment is to directly measure student learning by comparing cohort scores at different points in students' progression through our program. This assessment is administered annually.

3. Although the following have in the past been part of our outcomes assessment plan, we did not administer them this year:
   a. **advanced student survey**
   b. **eligibility for membership in AKD**
   c. **exit interview**

4. Next year (2011-12) we plan a major overhaul of our outcomes assessment plan to address critiques by the 2011 Program Review committees.

Review of Outcomes Assessment Data, 2010-11

During this assessment period, the Department of Sociology collected data using one assessment tool—comparison between a pre-test and a post-test given to students at different cohort stages. Overall, the outcomes assessment indicates that as students progressed through our program, they increased their understanding of the discipline and craft of sociology. Below are summaries of the data obtained this year.

**Pre-test and post-test**

This year, we measured the direct learning of sociological concepts among students in four sections of SOC 100X and one section of SOC 490. The comparison survey, "Social Facts or Fallacies?" consists of 20 statements that students answer as true or false. The statements summarize key sociological ideas and test students' understanding of core sociological concepts. Past outcomes assessments revealed a strong positive difference in sociological understanding between advanced sociology majors in our Capstone course (SOC 490) and beginning students in the core course, SOC 100X. We hypothesized that students in the department's core course would demonstrate little sociological understanding at the beginning of the semester, given that SOC 100X is designed to be taken by first year students regardless of their major.

The pre-tests and post-tests were administered in Spring 2011.
As the chart to the right demonstrates, students exhibit a wide range of understanding of sociological concepts in the SOC 100X course during the first week of class. But few students had more than a rudimentary grasp of key sociological concepts. The vast majority of students answered less than a third of the questions correctly. These results are not at all surprising, as the test is designed to discover whether students can discern the difference between "common sense" assumptions and sociologically empirical facts. The data demonstrate that at the beginning of the semester, very few SOC 100X students know the difference between their preconceived notions and assumptions and sociological reality. Because SOC 100X is a core requirement, most SOC 100X students are not sociology majors, but are instead drawn from the general population of UAF.

Compare the top chart with the chart below. The bottom chart, which illustrates scores among senior sociology majors in the Capstone course, documents that by the time sociology students are ready to graduate, they are able to answer well over three quarters of the questions correctly. Nearly half of the class answered 80-89% of the questions correctly, demonstrating a good command of the key ideas in sociology.

Note also that the range of scores narrows as students progress through their degree program. This is evidence that at least in these groups of students, no sociology major achieves senior status without having a solid grasp of sociological concepts. The number of students in SOC 490 is small compared to SOC 100X, but the positive trend in student learning outcomes is clear.

The chair of the department, Dr. Sine Anahita, analyzed which questions the Capstone students answered with ease and which gave them the most trouble. The fact that all students answered at least half of the questions
correctly demonstrates that our curriculum is extremely strong and that most student demonstrate sociological competence in key areas of the discipline.

As our 2006-07 and 2009-10 outcomes assessment reports note, a question about religion and beliefs about the family proved problematic. In fact, all but one student in the Capstone course this year answered this question incorrectly. To address this shortcoming, this past year we taught SOC 242, The Family in Cross-Culture Perspective, for the first time in over a decade. However, because this is a lower-division, 200-level course, it is unlikely that any of the Capstone students had taken the Family course. Other questions that proved problematic include two other questions related to contemporary American families and one about youth and violent crime rates. Because the number of students in this particular Capstone section was small (only nine), we want to acknowledge potential gaps in our curriculum while not putting inappropriate emphasis on the results of data from such a small sample.

Looking to the future

In late fall 2010, the dean of CLA, Burns Cooper, and the Provost, Susan Henrichs, authorized our department to create a new half-time tenure line. Beginning in Fall 2011, Dr. Sine Anahita will move to half-time status in Sociology. We hired a new assistant professor, Kara Dillard, to take her place as a full-time faculty member. At our annual retreat in August, we look forward to discussing our curriculum and brainstorming the changes that we may undertake now that our program will be fully staffed for the first time in many years. An updated outcomes assessment plan will be an important agenda item for the year to come. Our most recent outcomes assessment plan was critiqued as not having enough direct measures of student learning. We will ensure that our new plan will contain sufficient direct measures of student learning so that we can meet the University's criteria for effective outcomes assessment plans.