

Institutional Effectiveness Report

Assessment Summary

Department or Division: Sociology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice, with Marriage and Family Therapy

Degree Program: Masters Degree in Sociology

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Assessment Cycle: Accreditation in 2004 with annual reports; reaccreditation scheduled for 2009-2010

Mission (related to VSU mission): The Masters Degree in Sociology at Valdosta State University will provide students with advanced theoretical, methodological and analytical tools and skills with which to examine, explore, advance, and apply sociological knowledge to improve the lives of people and organizations.

Assessment History (discuss here how and when the program developed its current assessment program, what it used prior to starting that program to assess its effectiveness, etc.):

The Masters Degree Program in Sociology developed its distinctive applied sociology identity as a result of meetings of the program faculty in 1998-2001 to discuss curricular changes which would better train students to meet the needs of organizations and communities. There is greater emphasis on applied, clinical, and public sociology across the discipline of sociology and faculty-led curriculum revision resulted in the present program, one which features an applied sociology perspective. Students are required to complete 240 hours of supervised field work after successfully passing a comprehensive exam. The exam measures retention of sociological knowledge gained through program course work, and the required Sociological Practice field experience provides students with an opportunity to apply sociological knowledge to solve social programs under the supervision of both a faculty and field supervisor.

In 2004 the Program earned initial accreditation by the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology (CACS) by producing a successful Self-Study Report and hosting Commission site visitors who conducted a thoroughgoing program assessment. In response changes were made to refine the linkage between course learning objectives and program learning goals. The program will undergo reaccreditation in 2009 and initial preparations are underway to assemble data and documents needed for the Self-Study phase of this process.

It is within the Sociological Practice course that students are given a hands-on experience with applying sociology in real world settings. The Sociological Practice Manual which contains instructions for students on course requirements, how to set up a practice site placement, various procedures and forms, etc., has been reviewed by the faculty and updated in May, 2005. Updates to the program web pages have also been made on a regular basis as faculty have meet and discussed ways to provide the most accessible and useful program information to prospective, current, and former students.

Expected Student Learning Outcomes: Graduates will be able to –

1. Apply sociological knowledge for the purpose of making positive change at the individual, organizational, community, or societal level;
2. Develop a professional identity with respect to the practice of sociology;
3. Promote ethical standards of sociological practice;
4. Value diversity and display subjective cultural understanding from the point of view of community members;
5. Use sociological knowledge to inform the public and decision-makers as advocates on behalf of vulnerable and less powerful members of families, organizations and communities.

Assessments (include when and to whom these are administered, and align goals with specific assessments):

- Comprehensive Exam (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, & 4)
- Sociological Practice Course (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5)
- Self-Study as part of CACS Accreditation (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, & 4)
- Annual Reports for CACS (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5)

2005-2006

Assessment Results (submit an electronic file of the data collected):

- **Comprehensive Exam:** A Comprehensive Exam is administered prior to the start of each semester to eligible students. Students who earn a grade of Satisfactory are permitted to register for 03-06 credit hours of Sociological Practice, a required program course featuring 240 supervised hours of experience in applying sociology. (Objectives 1-4)
- **Sociological Practice Course:** Students eligible to enroll in the required Sociological Practice course contact the Graduate Program Coordinator to identify and secure a site placement and are assigned to a program faculty member who serves as course instructor. Successful completion of the course is assessed by the course instructor who consults with the field supervisor and student to determine whether Sociological Practice learning objectives have been met and required field hours completed. The course is graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory basis and a course learning product, such as a report for the host agency or community organization is prepared by the student and evaluated by the instructor. Documents required as part of the Sociological Practice course are maintained within the program including the statement of acceptance by the host organization and student paper (Objectives 1-5).
- **Revision of the Sociological Practice Manual:** Throughout the academic year, program faculty meets on a routine basis and reflects on aspects of the degree program experience. Whenever necessary,

suggestions to improve the Sociological Practice course, such as updating or revision of its manual will take place. The most recent revision of the manual was a result of these meetings and discussions in 2005.

- **Accreditation Annual Report:** The Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology requires that accredited programs supply the Commission with an Annual Report in June describing program updates, changes or responses to findings of the Self-Study process. Annual Reports are maintained by the Department Head and Program Coordinator.

2006-2007

- **Comprehensive Exam:** The Graduate Program Coordinator brought an idea to the faculty to change the Comprehensive Exam from four essay style questions to be completed within a four hour exam setting, to three. Based on monitoring of student exam performance and informal feedback on the exam experience, faculty approved changing the exam from four questions to three. The Graduate Program Coordinator sought faculty input on possible changes to the format and administration of the Comprehensive Exam. Citing alternative models currently in use in other master's degree programs within the department, it was an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of our Comprehensive Exam procedures and to consider ways to enhance the linkage between learning objectives embedded within courses and how to measure student learning and program outcomes.
- **Sociological Practice Course:** Student files are maintained documenting the learning experience in this required course. An electronic spreadsheet is maintained as a master listing of student placements in Sociological Practice courses (Objectives 1-5).
- **Annual Report:** Accredited programs supply the Commission with an Annual Report in June describing program updates, changes or responses to findings of the Self-Study process. The MS Sociology Program Coordinator consults with the faculty in preparation of the report.

2007-2008

- **Comprehensive Exam:** The program is assembling pass/fail data for students who have taken the Comprehensive Exam in order to further assess its effectiveness in measuring program and learning outcomes. Data should be available by the end of the academic year and will assist faculty in determining whether changes in the administration, format, and content of the exam are warranted (Objectives 1-4).
- **Sociological Practice Course:** Since the inception of the Sociological Practice course as part of the degree program, a problem has been observed regarding staffing of the course. Typically 2-5 students enroll in the course (a function of the size of our program) and this means instructors assigned to teach the course did so as an overload. Recognizing that this is a recurring structural problem, a proposal was introduced by the Department Head to create a new position in the overall sociology program (undergraduate and graduate) titled, Coordinator of Internships and Sociological Practice. This new position would include instructional responsibility for staffing all undergraduate Internship course

sections and all sections of Sociological Practice at the graduate level. The proposal to create this new position within the sociology program and thereby resolve the problem of how to staff the Sociological Practice course sections was approved by program faculty and is expected to be implemented in 2009. This modification is a sound improvement to the program providing students with greater certainty about getting assistance and instruction while it also reduces student stress about time delays in getting Sociological Practice sites arranged waiting on an instructor to be assigned to the course. It is anticipated that this internal modification to the program will better serve students, faculty, and enhance the learning experience the Sociological Practice course signifies.

- **Sociological Practice:** Efforts are underway to strengthen the electronic database of Sociological Practice student placements. Data will be available by the end of the academic year to examine the number and types of placements and update existing records in preparation for the Self-Study next year.
- **Exit Survey:** The University collects data on a voluntary basis from all graduates of the program measuring experience and satisfaction with such things as financial aid, the Registrar’s Office, student life, and advising. Recently an opportunity arose to add department-specific questions to the questionnaire distributed by the university. Faculty has been asked for input into designing additional questions which may improve program assessment in 2008-2009.

Dept. Head/ Director	Date	Dean	Date	VPAA	Date
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Adapted from: University of Alabama SACS site (<http://sacs.ua.edu/degreeInfo2.cfm?college=2&dept=50>) and

University of Western Kentucky SACS Accreditation Review Process (<http://www.wku.edu/sacs/assessmentmanual.htm>)

Dr. Marila Palmer, LeTourneau University, presentation materials from SACS 2008 Summer Institute