

Sociology MA

Sociological Competency

Goal Description:

Graduate students who complete the MA program in Sociology will be competent in the area of sociological theory, research methods, and analysis.

Providing Department: Sociology MA

RELATED ITEMS/ELEMENTS

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

1. Sociological Competency In Research

Learning Objective Description:

On completing their graduate study in Sociology, M.A. students must demonstrate their ability to: (i) both synthesize and critique empirical, sociological work in at least one substantive area (e.g., class, race/ethnicity, gender, community, social movements, etc.), (ii) develop and articulate an appropriate research design to answer an original research question, and (iii) appropriately interpret and employ statistical analyses to address sociological questions.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

1-1. Thesis

Indicator Description:

M.A. Sociology students enrolling in the Spring 2014 and after have the option to choose the thesis-track.

A successful SOCI MA thesis will not be less than 50 and not more than 100 printed pages of referenced, original SOCI research or a meta-analysis of existing research including primary and/or secondary data analysis. The thesis track entails two semesters of work. First, students must take SOCI 6098 Thesis Practicum and successfully defend their thesis proposal. Following the successful defense of their thesis proposal, students then enroll in SOCI 6099 Thesis.

Criterion Description:

All students enrolled in SOCI 6098 Thesis Practicum will successfully defend their thesis proposal. All students enrolled in SOCI 6099 will successfully defend their thesis.

The committee members of each student will assess their thesis proposal and thesis using the associated rubrics. See attached.

Attached Files

 [Attachment 1- Thesis Proposal rubric](#)

 [Attachment 2 -Thesis rubric](#)

Findings Description:

SOCI 6098: Thesis Practicum

Two students enrolled in SOCI 6098 during the 2021-2022 academic year.

One completed their thesis prospectus within one semester, and earned exemplary marks.

The other will need to take a second semester of SOCI 6098 to complete the prospectus in Fall 2022.

SOCI 6099: Thesis

Term	# of students enrolled	# of successful completions

Summer 2021	2	0
Fall 2021	3	0
Spring 2022	4	1

One student who was enrolled in SOCI 6099 in each of the three semesters, completed his thesis project in Spring 2022; his project was scored as proficient per the rubric.

One student enrolled in his first three credit hour course of SOCI 6099 in Spring 2022. He has completed all data collection, transcription, and coding. All that remains is his formal write up of the results.

The two remaining students who were enrolled in SOCI 6098, who have yet to complete their thesis projects have enrolled in more than two, consecutive semesters of SOCI 6099 coursework to complete their analyses. One, whose data collection effort was directly impacted by COVID-19, have finished all data collection, transcription, and coding – all that remains is the formal write up of analyses. The other, has completed data collection and is in the process of finishing transcription.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

1-1. Thesis

Action Description:

Many students who choose to do the thesis track continue to make steady progress in completing theses and go on to complete the project. Many of our students have been directly impacted by the pandemic, which has stalled progress on thesis in some instances. Yet, all thesis students remain in regular contact with their advisors.

In contrast to SOCI 6098, most thesis students continue require additional coursework in SOCI 6099 to complete their theses. In most cases, our students are doing some sort of original data analyses, which takes time to complete. At advisement, we continue to transparently notify students that most who pursue the thesis option end up taking some additional semesters (with a mere one credit hour) to complete the thesis. Given the demographics, working obligations of our students, and the pandemic, we do not consider their time to degree on the thesis as a problematic concern so long as they continue to make progress and remain satisfied with their pace of progress.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

2. Comprehensive Exams

Learning Objective Description:

SOCI MA students will sit for comprehensive examination as a powerful tool for demonstrating overall student learning outcomes. MA SOCI students will demonstrate competence in applying sociological theories, sociological research methodologies and statistics, and research literature reviews of a selected, substantive sociological field.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

2-1. Comprehensive Exams

Indicator Description:

M.A. Sociology degree candidates will complete a written comprehensive exam. The specialty area will be assessed by an in-depth exploration of sociological literature on a topic of the students choosing, written answers to questions pertaining to sociological theoretical perspectives and

appropriate research methodologies. In each case, an examination committee will be convened to discuss the performance of the students. A panel of at least two graduate faculty per each of the three examination areas will assess the quality of the written examination to determine student sociological mastery. Students failing to demonstrate the required level of content mastery will be allowed to retake that area of the exam in the subsequent semester. A second failure will result in termination from the program.

Possible examination grading outcomes are: High Pass, Pass, and Fail (see Attachment #3).

Attached Files

- [Methodology Comprehensive Rubric](#)
- [Sociological Essay Rubric](#)
- [Statistics Rubric](#)
- [Attach 3.CompExamRubric14.15](#)
- [Comprehensive Writing Rubric](#)

Criterion Description:

All M.A. candidates taking the comprehensive exam will complete all components of the examination with a score of High Pass or Pass.

Findings Description:

	Essay		Methods		Statistics	
Term	# of attempts	# of passes	# of attempts	# of passes	# of attempts	# of passes
Fall 2021	4	2	4	3	4	2
Spring 2022	1	1	0	0	1	1

Among four students taking comprehensive exams during Fall 2021, all were initial attempts. Two of these students successfully passed all exam components. One, earned a high pass on two out of three exam components.

The one student taking comprehensive exams during Spring 2022, was a *partial retake (i.e., Essay and Statistics)*. The student participated in a personalized remediation plan and was able to successfully complete all remaining comprehensive exam requirements to meet the criteria to graduate.

The remaining student whose Fall 2021 comprehensive exams were an unsuccessful first attempt (i.e., failing all three components), intends to participate in the remediation plan and second attempt during the Fall 2022 semester.

The department is in the process of replacing the comprehensive exams with a capstone requirement. Although the capstone was not yet implemented in the 2021-22 assessment plan, three students have successfully earned their degree requirements via the capstone (see table below). One of these successful degrees was a former student who failed the comprehensive exam in the 2020-21 academic year.

	Teaching Portfolio	Systematic Review of Research
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Term	# of attempts	# of passes	# of attempts	# of passes
Fall 2021	1	1	0	0
Spring 2022	2	2	0	0

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

2-1. Comprehensive Exams

Action Description:

Data continue to indicate that the students, who take advantage of the remediation plan and second attempt on the exam are successfully completing the comprehensive exam within two cycles. Separately, data consistently demonstrate a high level of success with capstone project submissions and completion.

Next year's assessment will be the last that needs to report data on comprehensive exams due to changes in our graduate student handbook and program requirements. In addition to reporting data on the one remaining student who attempts to satisfy their degree requirements through the comprehensive exam, the 2022-23 assessment data for the MA in Sociology will be updated to include Capstones as a learning objective indicator.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Recruitment and Retention of High Quality Students

Performance Objective Description:

The Sociology Department aims to recruit and retain high quality students for its Masters of Arts Program.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Student Recruitment and Retention

KPI Description:

To assess student recruitment and retention, the following data will be collected and measured:

Recruitment:

1. Number of applications to the program
2. Number of students accepted.
3. Number of students denied
4. Number of students enrolled

Retention:

1. 1-year retention
2. 2-year retention
3. Average semester to graduation

Results Description:

See attached spreadsheet.

During the 2021-22 academic year, our acceptance rate (i.e., 70%) was consistent with recent history, which has generally ranged from 70-75%. More selective admissions standards continue to coincide with steady improvement in our retention rates, which are now quite high (e.g., 67% and 62% for one- and two-year retention, respectively). Data indicate that most students who exit our

MA program without completing their degrees do so during the first semester through withdrawing/resigning. Admissions data for 2021-22 were less optimistic. Although the majority (i.e., 68%) of those admitted to our MA program in 2021-22 did enroll in our courses, we witnessed a decline in new student enrollment (and the percentage of admitted students who enrolled in our program), which may well reflect pandemic effects.

The average time to graduation for those completing the MA in 2021-22 was 10.14 semesters, which slightly exceeds two years. As most of our students work full-time, we are quite pleased with the average time to degree reported in the last academic year.

Attached Files

 [21_22. CHSS Graduate Admissions, Retention, and Completion Template.MASoc.xlsx](#)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Student Recruitment and Retention

Action Description:

The department will continue to compile data with regards to both application and retention with the intent to continue to monitor its progress with regards to both retention and recruitment.

Over the last four years, our primary concern has been curriculum, instruction, and retention – rather than recruitment. Data from recent graduates continue to demonstrate students are pleased with their experiences in our program. Moreover, we have seen steady increases in retention as well as the quality of student performance and engagement. To that end, our assessment data suggest increasing effort should now prioritize recruitment (which is expounded in our plan for continuous improvement).

Update to Previous Cycle's Plan for Continuous Improvement Item

Previous Cycle's Plan For Continuous Improvement (Do Not Modify):

Closing Summary

Begin the process for significant curriculum revision and development with regards to elective course offerings. Moving forward, we will strive to more carefully structure our elective offerings around broader faculty interests and a generalist approach to sociology, which will allow for greater flexibility in scheduling courses and diversify faculty involvement in our graduate curriculum. We will also develop a system for faculty to propose their unique specialization course (if the content does not align with other faculty expertise) through the existing SOCI 6360 mechanism.

Update our department's webpage concerning the graduate program. These changes are designed to (1) simplify content, (2) provide information in a more engaging manner (including infographics and professionally recorded videos), (3) more effectively convey pertinent information to (a) prospective students, (b) current students, and (c) former students.

Finalize and implement department-specific orientation curriculum and partner with SHSU online to develop a Blackboard shell for SOCI graduate student orientation in Fall 2021 and roll out the orientation for our incoming Fall 2022 cohort in August of 2022. If this orientation proves successful, next steps will be taken to remove SOCI 5100 as a core curriculum requirement for the MA program given the new orientation processes.

Increase synchronous, virtual interactions (1) among current students, (2) between department-level administrators and graduate students, (3) between faculty and graduate students, and (4) between alumni and current graduate students.

Update of Progress to the Previous Cycle's PCI:

Begin the process for significant curriculum revision and development with regards to elective course offerings. Moving forward, we will strive to more carefully structure our elective offerings around broader faculty interests and a generalist approach to sociology, which will allow for greater flexibility in scheduling courses and diversify faculty involvement in our graduate curriculum. We will also develop a system for faculty to propose their unique specialization course (if the content does not align with other faculty expertise) through the existing SOCI 6360 mechanism.

- Given student satisfaction with our course offerings and an upcoming transition into the Graduate Director role, we did not aggressively pursue this plan.

Update our department's webpage concerning the graduate program. These changes are designed to (1) simplify content, (2) provide information in a more engaging manner (including infographics and professionally recorded videos), (3) more effectively convey pertinent information to (a) prospective students, (b) current students, and (c) former students.

- We have addressed each of these factors. Our new graduate program website is much improved and far more user-friendly. We plan to continue to capitalize on this momentum to feature testimonials from former and current students to bolster recruitment efforts, to be elaborated on in the plan for continuous improvement.

Finalize and implement department-specific orientation curriculum and partner with SHSU online to develop a Blackboard shell for SOCI graduate student orientation in Fall 2021 and roll out the orientation for our incoming Fall 2022 cohort in August of 2022. If this orientation proves successful, next steps will be taken to remove SOCI 5100 as a core curriculum requirement for the MA program given the new orientation processes.

- Due to the lag in catalog revisions, we were not yet able to remove SOCI 5100 from the core curriculum. However, the catalog revision is under review and slated to take effect in Fall 2023. In the meantime, SOCI 5100 has been radically revised to function more as an orientation module (i.e., for credit) than a traditional course. As early as Fall 2021, students' experience in SOCI 5100 reflected this 'orientation' approach, which they have found highly effective per IDEA scores and student feedback.

Increase synchronous, virtual interactions (1) among current students, (2) between department-level administrators and graduate students, (3) between faculty and graduate students, and (4) between alumni and current graduate students.

- Steady progress was made in synchronous, virtual interactions for all groups with the exception of alumni and current students. Most of our offerings now have some sort of optional zoom component, which has steadily coincided with higher levels of engagement and performance of our students.

New Plan for Continuous Improvement Item

Closing Summary:

Facilitate the transition of graduate directors and develop a transition memo to aid in this process in the future. In addition, the new graduate director will identify a vision for the graduate programs in sociology moving forward.

Update website to feature additional student testimonials rather than faculty perspectives in the intent to bolster recruitment.

Develop a recruitment plan for the MA and certificate programs.

Update assessment plan for 2022-23 to include the capstone project as a key performance indicator.