**Assessment Committee Feedback (August, 2009): Sociology**

**Assessment Committee Contact Person:  Drew Dunham**

**Plan also reviewed by: Cheryl Blackwell and Dean McCurdy**

First, thank you for all of the work that your department put into the development of this assessment plan.  You've done some great work and the department will benefit from it.

  In general, there were a few themes that the Assessment Committee noticed. First, it is most helpful when the progression from Step 2 to Step 3 and Step 3 to Step 4 are clear. That is, after you have articulated your learning goals, the clearest proposals are explicit in how the courses/experiences in Step 3 directly support the learning goals. And Step 4 should take full advantage of all of the places in Step 3 where data might be collected. Second, make strategic use of both direct and indirect measures[[1]](https://docs.google.com/a/albion.edu/Doc?docid=0AfwoCz4UuHKzZGY4NGtmOTlfM2h4a3ZqZ2Y&hl=en" \l "_ftn1" \o "" \t "_self), and think about whether data can be collected at the beginning, during the program of study, and at the end. This gives a richer sense of where and when your work contributes strongly to learning goals and where improvements might be made. Third, make your plan manageable! All data need not be collected annually; some can be done every other year. And you may choose not to measure for all of your learning goals right now. Make claims that you can (a) intellectually, ethically stand behind and (b) find resources to measure.

Please don't hesitate to contact any of us about any of the comments that we provided below.  The Assessment Committee wants to make this a successful process for you.  We will be happy to work with you on revisions or development of the next steps.

Comments specific to your plan:

Step 1: (Mission)

Comments: Looks good and covers both departmental structure and student learning.

Step 2: (Goals & Outcomes):

Comments:  Very good outline of the 4 major learning objectives.  These are directly related to the departmental mission statement.

Step 3: (Identify Program Components):

Comments:  The mapping of the specific courses offered by the department to the four learning objectives is excellent.  As you stated, "...students have a wide range of choices for each of our four learning goals."  The challenge here is to make sure that while offering a wide range of courses, each is still assessing student learning tied to the departmental learning goal.

Step 4: (Select methods/data sources and instruments):

"To better assess our learning goals, in 2009 the department implemented a mandatory 90-minute short answer/essay exit exam that is taken by graduating seniors in the Spring semester. The exam includes questions addressing each of our learning goals. Students do not need to obtain a particular grade on the exam; they simply need to take it to graduate. Department faculty will grade the exams, assess student learning, and then adjust course syllabi to address any objectives that are not being met."

Comments:  The adoption of a senior exit exam can be a good assessment tool for the department.  We would like to also suggest that while the exam is comprehensive in nature and includes questions addressing each of the four departmental learning goals, the department should assess the learning goals individually through the courses you mentioned in Step 3 above as well.   This will give the department and the course instructor more immediate feedback on how well the student's understand and meet the learning objectives while the senior assessment will give the department an overall assessment of student learning over time.  
  
"Capstone courses culminate with a final paper requiring original research. Professors for the respective capstone courses will evaluate seniors' papers to assess student learning and report to the other faculty with the same goals of the exit exam evaluation in mind."

Comments: This is a good direct measure of student learning.  It might be easier for the department to generate assessment data if these weren't necessarily evaluated like the exit exam.  It might be more useful if the final papers were used to assess student learning at a deeper level in one or two of the four areas.

"The department also assesses student learning through less formal qualitative methods, including students’ performance in research projects (FURSCA, theses, directed studies, research assistants), as well as post-graduation success: getting into graduate schools and securing desired employment.

Comments: These are some good indirect measures of student learning to compliment the direct evidence that you will be collecting.

**Next Steps:**

In coordination with your Assessment Committee reviewers and their feedback, please observe the following deadlines for your assessment cycle:

·       September 15: Revisions to Steps 1-4 due (if necessary)

·       October 1: Completion of Steps 5 & 6 using preliminary data

·       November 2: Final Fall 2009 plans due