

ASSESSMENT OF THE UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

**Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Madison**

2008

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Assessment of the Undergraduate Major 2008

Summary

Our assessment of the Sociology undergraduate major is that it has remained of very high quality over the past decade. Surveys of graduating seniors demonstrated in 1998, 2003 and 2008 that students are generally very positive about their experiences, particularly courses offered and quality of teaching. In 2008, students reported greater contact than in 2003 with the Undergraduate Advisor and her staff and also reported substantially increased ratings of advising quality. Students also recognize contributions to their human capital growth, especially with respect to primary goals of the major: To understand how societies function and shape the lives and views of individuals, and to acquire research skills. A very high proportion of graduating seniors have obtained research experience, perhaps related to increases since 2003 in evaluations of career planning and development within the major. Students continue, however, to request increased opportunities for practical experience and additional course offerings at the advanced level.

Introduction

This report is the third in a series of studies initiated in 1998 to assess the quality of the undergraduate major in Sociology. The studies focus on student learning in sociology courses, the sociology program overall, academic advising in sociology, and undergraduate student research. In this report, we also investigate recruitment into and progress through the Sociology major. In all three studies, assessments were based on a survey of graduating seniors in the major conducted at the end of spring semester as well as on administrative data. (See Appendix for further information on both sets of data for 2008.) The 2003 study included a faculty survey to assess faculty perceptions of student preparation for advanced courses and research; in this report, similar questions are addressed with administrative data.

Recruitment to Sociology

In spring semester 2008, 506 students were declared as sociology majors. As shown in Table 1, about 28% had entered UW-Madison after study elsewhere. The second column of Table 1 shows that more than half of current majors declared the major in their second year of study, i.e., as sophomores, while significant proportions waited until their third or later year (including those who entered UW-Madison at later points in their academic careers). This distribution is almost identical to that reported in the survey of graduating seniors, reflecting a steady state of recruitment into sociology after one year of study. The composition of majors at any given point of time should therefore be similar to that in spring 2008, almost half in their fourth year of study and most of the rest in their third year of study (column 3 in Table 1).

Table 1. Year of Undergraduate Study at UW-Madison Entry, Major Declaration, and Spring Term 2008

Year of Undergraduate Study	Year At Entry to UW-Madison (N=506)	Year At Major Declaration (N=506)	Year of Majors in Spring 2008 ^a (N=380)
First year	72.9%	14.0%	1.1%
Second year	17.9%	47.6%	14.7%
Third year	9.2%	27.7%	37.6%
Fourth or later year	0.0%	10.7%	46.6%

^aAs listed in the course history available for 75% of majors. Estimates based on cumulative credits--known for 498 of the 506 majors—produced a slightly higher distribution

Most Sociology majors (58%) made their first contact with Sociology during their freshman year; a substantial minority (36%) did so during their second year of study. First exposures to Sociology were most likely to come in the very popular large introductory courses offered by the Department: America’s Racial and Ethnic Minorities (18%), Marriage and Family (16%), and Contemporary American Society (16%). Another 16% of current majors began their study of Sociology with a required introductory course. Just over two thirds (68%) of our majors took their first Sociology course at least one semester before declaring the Sociology major; the remainder declared Sociology as their major either before or in the same semester as their first Sociology course. The required introductory course (one of the two alternatives listed above) was taken before declaring the major by about 25% of majors. Another 25% declared in the same semester they took the introductory course, the remainder at before taking the course. The upper-division theory course, methods and statistics were very seldom taken before or even in the same semester as declaring the Sociology major. Some of the students who appeared not to have taken a particular course may, however, have taken it at another institution prior to enrolling at UW-Madison.

Progress in the Major

Table 2 shows the pattern of courses taken in Sociology by year of study (including years at other institutions than UW-Madison). The first column shows that Sociology majors typically completed one or two, more typically one, Sociology course during their first two years in college, and about three per year during their upper-level studies. Most fourth-year Sociology majors had completed between 6-9 Sociology courses. The next three columns show the expected shift from elementary to intermediate to advanced courses as students progress through the major. Fourth-year students, however, continued to take elementary and intermediate courses along with advanced courses. Based on medians (not shown), the typical pattern is to take one elementary course during the second year, two intermediate and one advanced course in the third year, and one intermediate and two advanced courses in the fourth year. Note that the courses listed here do not include Sociology courses that may have been taken at other institutions or courses that meet requirements of the Sociology major but are not cross-listed in Sociology (e.g., courses in methods and statistics).

**Table 2. Participation in Sociology Program
by Current Year of Undergraduate Study (N=380)**

Current Year Of Study	Number of Completed Sociology Courses				Grade-Point Average	
	All courses	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced	Overall	Sociology
First/second year	1.45	0.88	0.45	0.12	3.00	3.20
Third year	3.77	1.17	1.65	0.92	3.08	3.33
Fourth year	7.33	1.33	3.11	2.79	3.14	3.29
Total	5.06	1.20	2.14	1.66	3.10	3.29

The last column in Table 2 shows the average grade-point-average for majors in Sociology by year of study. The average Sociology major has a GPA of 3.10,¹ and there is only a slight difference across years of study – presumably reflecting selection as students with lower grades drop out of UW-Madison. Grades in Sociology courses are about .15-.20 higher, but again do not vary much by year of study. Lack of ‘improvement’ in grades is not surprising if they reflect grading of performance relative to increasingly demanding course requirements. A more detailed breakdown of the grade distribution (not shown) shows that the top 10% of our students attain an overall GPA of 3.75 and above, while the top 25% attain a GPA of at least 3.5. The median GPA of Sociology students is 3.15; a GPA of 2.8 and lower lands a student in the lower quartile of the distribution, and a GPA of 2.4 and lower in the bottom 10% of the grade distribution.

As shown in Table 3, graduating seniors in Sociology had often included in their studies other majors, certificates and honors programs. More than half had a second major (which may have been their first major). The vast majority of second majors were in another social scientific discipline. More than one third completed requirements for a specialty certificate, including the Department’s Concentration in Analysis and Research and 15 percent had achieved honors in the College of Letters and Sciences or as a major in Sociology or another discipline. Taken together, more than three-fourths of graduating seniors had added credentials beyond the Sociology major and University degree.

A major goal for the Sociology program is to provide as many undergraduates as possible some element of research experience. Opportunities include the Concentration in Analysis and Research – in which students take advanced methods and statistics courses and complete a research internship and capstone course; senior theses; independent research projects; working on faculty projects; etc. The last two rows of Table 3 demonstrate remarkable success in meeting this goal. More than 60 percent of majors had participated in research to some degree, increased to almost three-fourths when group research projects – typically undertaken as part of a course – are included.

¹ GPA figures for the full (N=506) sample of current Sociology majors were somewhat lower than for those with full course histories.

Table 3. Additional Majors, Certificates, Honors and Research Experiences of Sociology Graduating Seniors, 2008

	Percent
Other Major	50.7%
Certificate	35.4%
Honors Program	15.0%
Any Add'l Major, Certificate, Honors	76.1%
Research Experience excl group project	62.1%
Research Experience incl group project	73.1%

Note: Percentages based on 60-66 respondents

Student Preparation for Advanced Study in the Major

In 2003, all faculty who taught upper level courses (400-600) or independent study courses were asked to respond to a series of questions about students' preparedness for their classes, for independent research, and for their future careers. Faculty considered their students, on average, to be poorly prepared in both statistical skills and methods, and moderately well prepared in theory and writing skills. A few attributed the problems in preparation to the fact that methods, statistics and theory were not required for enrollment in their classes. They also noted the high variability in student preparation, making it difficult to teach the course at an advanced level.

In 2008, we used administrative data to assess the relationship between performance at earlier and later stages in the program. Table 4 shows the grade distributions for Sociology majors in their first Sociology course and, for those who had completed the course, for required introductory, methods, statistics, and theory courses. Three-fifths of Sociology majors received an A or AB in their first Sociology course. Grades were higher in the required introductory (one of two) and theory (one of two) courses. Majors performed somewhat less well in the required methods and statistics courses. Note that many of the majors in our database had not yet completed one or more of these courses by the end of fall term 2007.

Table 4. Grade Distribution in Selected Sociology Courses

	First Sociology Course	Introduction	Theory	Methods	Statistics
A	29.9%	45.0%	42.5%	31.9%	28.9%
AB	29.9%	24.0%	28.0%	42.7%	26.3%
B	19.4%	21.4%	13.1%	16.0%	20.2%
BC	13.3%	5.3%	5.1%	4.7%	12.3%
C	5.2%	3.1%	7.0%	3.8%	12.3%
D	1.7%	0.8%	3.3%	0.9%	0.0%
E/F	0.6%	0.4%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%
GPA	3.28	3.49	3.38	3.45	3.24
N	345	262	214	213	114

In the following analysis, we assess whether students' early performance in the Sociology program served as an indicator of later performance, especially in required courses. Table 5 presents estimated associations between grade in first Sociology course and the two indicators of the speed with which students engage with the Sociology program. We control for years enrolled at UW-Madison and find that those with higher grades in their first sociology class declared the major earlier than those with lower grades (negative coefficient). In the second column, we control for the year of major declaration as well as time at UW-Madison and find that the first Sociology grade is also positively associated with the number of courses completed by fall 2007. More specifically, students who scored an A rather than a C in their first Sociology class took on average one more Sociology course and declared the Sociology major a semester earlier than a student who received a C. Of course all of the students declared a major in Sociology; without a larger database we cannot determine whether grades in a first Sociology class are predictive of declaring the major.

Table 5 – Participation patterns in Sociology program by first Sociology grade (N=345)

	Year of Sociology major declaration	Number of Sociology courses
	B coefficient	b coefficient
Grade in first Sociology class	-0.17**	0.49**
Years at UW	0.57**	1.81**
Year of Sociology major declaration	-	-1.32**
R ²	0.534	0.428

Note: OLS regression results, statistical significance levels: *) p<.05, **) p<.01

The data also permit us to assess whether students' initial Sociology grades predict subsequent performance in the program. Table 6 shows correlations between first Sociology grade and grade in required courses, for students who were in their third or fourth year and likely to have taken these courses. We see a clear positive correlation between students' grades in their first Sociology course and grades in required courses, for the most part taken after the first Sociology course. We also find a positive correlation between grades in the first Sociology course and average grades in other courses, including required and elective courses. These associations may, of course, simply reflect the underlying abilities and effort of different students, from the beginning to the end of their study in Sociology. But the very strong association between grades in the first Sociology course and the required methods course suggest that the courses through which we typically recruit Sociology majors provide a good initial introduction to the scientific principles of sociological inquiry.

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients: Grade in First Sociology Course and Grades in Sociology Required Courses, Upper-level Students Only

	Course				
	Intro	Theory	Methods	Statistics	All Sociology Courses ¹⁾
Grade in first Sociology course	0.34*	0.44**	0.58**	0.39**	0.56**
N	238	206	207	108	317

Note: analysis excludes cases where the course in question was the first Sociology course; ¹⁾ excludes grade in first Sociology course; statistical significance levels: *) p<.05, **) p<.01

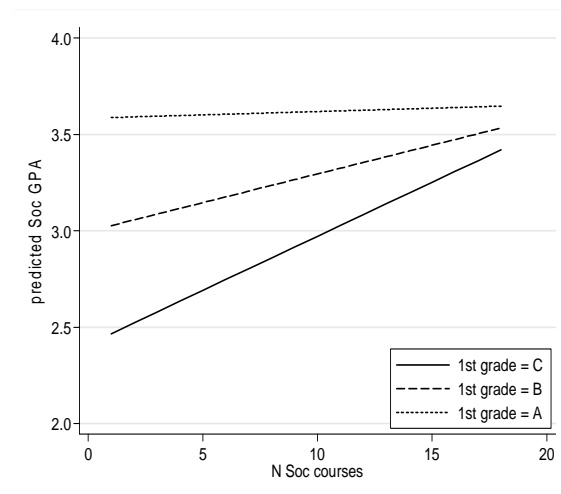
We further refined the analysis of average performance in subsequent Sociology courses to account for the number of courses a student had completed by the end of fall term 2007. Table 7 shows the relationship between students' first Sociology grade and their overall Sociology GPA, where the strength of the relationship is permitted to vary by the number of Sociology courses taken. The negatively signed interaction coefficient indicates (as shown in the Figure) that the predictive power of success in the first Sociology course for subsequent grades decreases as the student takes more Sociology courses. The weakening relationship is due entirely to action in the bottom of the grade distribution, i.e. students with low grades in their initial Sociology course improve their grades, the more Sociology courses they take.

Table 7. Student Performance in Sociology Courses by Grade in First Course (N=288)

Independent variable	b coefficient	GPA in All Sociology Courses
Grade in first Sociology course	0.59**	
N Sociology courses	0.11*	
Grade in first Sociology course x N Sociology courses	-0.03 ^o	
Years at UW	-0.03	
Year of Sociology major declaration	-0.02	
R ²	0.34	

Note: OLS regression results, statistical significance levels: ^{o)} p<.10, *) p<.05, **) p<.01. Dependent variable excludes first Sociology course.

(a) Regression results



(b) Conditional effect plot: Grade in first Sociology course by N Sociology courses taken

Because we offer a wide variety of upper-division courses with which students may meet their major requirements, the number of majors who have enrolled in a particular course is generally too small to determine whether prior enrollment in methods or statistics produces better performance. Two courses, Criminology and Introductory Social Psychology, had sufficient numbers of students to estimate such effects (91 and 75 students, respectively). About 60% of students had taken the required methods course before or at the same time as taking one or the other of these courses; fewer had taken or were taking the required statistics course. We did find that students with coursework in research methods received higher grades in Criminology than those who had not completed the required methods course, but no other advantages – even for courses with smaller numbers of majors enrolled – of taking methods or statistics were found. The lack of difference may, of course, be due to the fact that students could have had statistics or methods courses in other departments or institutions that prepared them for the advanced-level courses.

Assessment of Program Dimensions

In this and following sections we present student assessments of their experience in the Sociology major. Table 7 provides descriptive statistics for ratings of several dimensions of the major, comparing responses in 2008 to those obtained in 1998 and 2003. Overall, students' views of the program are very positive and on most dimensions the ratings are higher in 2008 than in previous years. In all three years, more than 80% of respondents rated their "overall experience as a major in the Sociology Department" as either "excellent" or "very good." In 2008, the percentage was 92%. In all three years, students rated the following dimensions of the Sociology major as particularly strong: quality of curriculum and courses in the major; quality of faculty teaching; and availability of faculty. Higher scores in 2008 on the overall experience and overall quality of curriculum and courses may be related to increases in course availability, quality of faculty teaching, and quality of TA teaching.

Table 8
Mean Ratings of Program and Teaching Quality,
Graduating Seniors in Sociology, 1998-2003-2008

Dimensions	1998	2003	2008
Overall experiences	4.07 (65)	4.03 (75)	4.45 (66)
Overall quality of curriculum and courses in major	4.02 (65)	4.00 (75)	4.34 (67)
Course availability	N/A	3.55 (75)	3.79 (66)
Overall availability of faculty	4.08 (65)	3.96 (75)	4.07 (67)
Overall quality of faculty teaching	3.93 (65)	4.05 (75)	4.22 (67)
Overall quality of TA teaching	3.59 (64)	3.74 (73)	3.91 (66)

Note: All ratings are on a scale ranging from 5 = excellent to 1 = poor. N/A = Not asked

Positive responses about the overall program, courses and teaching quality also predominated in students' open-ended comments. Many students expressed heartfelt thanks to the department in general as well as to specific individuals for what they had learned and how they were taught. Several wished they could continue in their undergraduate studies to take courses they had not been able to fit into their schedules. Suggestions for improvement were also offered: more opportunities for practical experience; stronger marketing of the Concentration in Analysis and Research; more emphasis on qualitative methods; providing 'slots' in popular elective courses for majors; more upper-division courses. Only one of the 43 students who provided open-ended responses had only critical remarks, and most of those expressing positive feelings did so in very glowing terms (e.g., *Everything has been great! I love this program and its courses. Had some of my best instructors in college in soc. I am very grateful to have people like you, thank you again. I love you all. Great 4 years – wonderful faculty, I've learned so much! Thanks!*)

As shown in Table 9, improvements were also found in students' evaluations of advising. More than half of respondents rated advising on the Sociology program as excellent and the average rating was almost a whole point higher on the 5-point scale than in 2003. Among those who sought advising on courses outside Sociology or career advising (87% and 81%, respectively), ratings were also much higher than in 2003. Several respondents singled out the Undergraduate Advisor for extreme praise in their open-ended comments. One student, however, expressed dissatisfaction with information about major requirements and another would have liked clearer

information about potential overlap in content between Sociology courses and similar courses in other departments.

Table 9
Mean Ratings of Advising,
Graduating Seniors in Sociology, 1998-2003-2008

Dimensions	1998	2003	2008
Academic advising: on sociology	3.22 (64)	3.49 (75)	4.39 (67)
Academic advising: on courses outside sociology	N/A	2.95 (75)	3.84 (58)
Career advising	2.48 (46)	2.46 (46)	3.57 (54)

Note: All ratings are on a scale ranging from 5 = excellent to 1 = poor. N/A = Not asked. The question on academic advising on the sociology program was changed in 2003. 1998: "How would you rate the academic advising you received as a Sociology major?" 2003 & 2008: "How would you rate the academic advising you received about the Sociology program?"

Improvements in the perceived quality of undergraduate advising are likely associated with the increases in access. As shown in Table 10, while telephone contacts remain quite low, email and in-person contacts with the undergraduate advisor have been much higher than in 2003. Graduating seniors estimated that they met with the Advisor, on average, about 3.5 times during the course of the current academic year and had another 3 exchanges by email. The median number of meetings was two, the median number of email exchanges was one. Despite the increase in electronic communication throughout the university, students continue to more often seek help in person than by email. Note further than these numbers translate into about 350 individual meetings and 300 email exchanges with students nearing graduation. If all majors required as much assistance as graduating seniors, the numbers would translate into about 100 telephone conversations, 1500 email exchanges, and 2250 in-person meetings. Even if the numbers are a bit less, the fact that satisfaction has increased while demand is also on the rise attests to the hard work of the Undergraduate Advisor and her staff.

Table 10
**Communications with the Undergraduate Advisor during Current Academic Year,
 Graduating Seniors in Sociology, 2003 & 2008**

Communication by...	2003 Mean	2003 SD	2008 Mean	2008 SD
Telephone	0.50	1.49	0.23	0.76
E-mail	1.74	3.38	2.94	4.11
In Person	2.84	2.86	3.49	3.02

Contribution of Sociology Courses to Human Capital Growth

In this section we examine student ratings of Sociology with respect to a series of core academic objectives of the undergraduate program. One principal objective of the undergraduate program is to teach students how societies function and how societies shape the lives and views of individuals. A second important set of objectives is to teach students how data and methods can be used to study society and to equip them with the skills needed to conduct research.

The results in Table 11 speak to our achievement of these and other objectives as judged by our graduating seniors. These results reflect responses to the question: “How much did the Sociology courses you took as a major contribute to your growth in the following areas?” Along the left-hand side of the table are listed the dimensions of growth, i.e., program objectives, that students were asked to evaluate.

Again, with respect to specific program objectives, we find considerable stability or improvement over the past 10 years. Students continue to recognize substantial contributions to understanding how society works and understanding connections between individuals and society; nearly as much is gained in key skills such as critical thinking, understanding the conduct of social research, and independence; and lesser contributions are perceived to more specific skills – writing, statistical analysis, computing and speaking. Although contributions of the program to students’ developing career plans are rated on average only ‘good’, ratings on this dimension have increased substantially. Despite the focus in this question on learning in sociology courses, improvements in career advising reported above may also play a role in the higher ratings.

Table 11
Mean Ratings of the Contribution of Sociology Courses to Growth in Selected Areas,
Graduating Seniors in Sociology, 1998-2003-2008

Area	1998	2003	2008
Understanding how society works	3.52 (65)	3.59 (74)	3.77 (66)
Understanding connections between individuals and society	3.61 (65)	3.57 (74)	3.81 (67)
Knowledge of how social research is conducted	3.45 (65)	3.34 (74)	3.43 (67)
Critical thinking skills	3.34 (65)	3.27 (74)	3.54 (67)
Working effectively on own	3.34 (65)	3.36 (74)	3.52 (67)
Working effectively in groups	3.18 (65)	3.01 (74)	3.07 (67)
Understanding statistical data and analysis	3.15 (65)	3.11 (74)	3.10 (67)
Writing skills	3.14 (65)	3.03 (74)	3.21 (66)
Computing skills	2.55 (65)	2.26 (74)	2.58 (67)
Speaking effectively	2.43 (65)	2.30 (73)	2.79 (67)
Developing career plans	2.21 (65)	2.18 (74)	2.91 (66)

Note: All ratings are on a scale ranging from 4 = "a lot" to 1 = "not at all."

In their open-ended comments, many students put substance behind the first two ratings: *My sociology classes have given me a new, broader way [in] which I examine current events and situations. Sociology gave me a lot of insight into how society works. ... I have a solid foundation for understanding society.... I really appreciate how well my courses fostered increased awareness of the world. ... I found new ways of looking at the world and society. ... Sociology opens students to a new way of thinking. ... I really appreciate how well my courses fostered increased awareness of the world.* In terms of research opportunities and skills, several students mentioned the Concentration in Analysis and Research, the methods course, independent research and jobs on research projects as having contributed to their professional development: *The CAR program is a fantastic program that offers education in useful skills and real experience in doing social science research. ... I feel that I am leaving the University with lots of valuable knowledge and skills.* A student who did not enroll in CAR mentioned that she had taken courses for honors and *was able to conduct some small original research projects and write longer research papers than some of my peers.* She noted that it would have been helpful to have funding for research expenses to support undergraduate research. As noted above and indicated by lower ratings for the program's contribution to career planning, several students wanted more 'hands on' experience: *The program ... gave me no practical experiences. ... more opportunities need to be presented [to make] a difference in the community. ... I do wish there had been a bit more discussion about the practical application (i.e., jobs) of a B.A. in soc.*

The questions used in the Sociology questionnaire cover learning goals that are central to the Sociology curriculum and allow comparisons across three surveys. In addition, however, the survey conducted in 2008 included items very similar to those used in the assessment of the Quantitative Reasoning-A requirement for undergraduates. The items were modified slightly to take into account that Sociologists use both quantitative and qualitative data and methods. Thus, "Use data and statistics to evaluate factual claims" was modified to "use data to evaluate factual claims." Table 12 presents the ratings given by students in the QR-A assessment as comparison to those provided by graduating seniors in 2008. On all dimensions, graduating seniors rated their learning very high, about 4 on a scale from 1-5.² The fact that their ratings are higher than those provided in the QR-A assessment is consistent with the greater likelihood that respondents had taken required courses in research methods and statistics.

² Note that in comparison to the items summarized in Table 11, these questions have 5 categories (rather than 4) and begin with the negative (rather than the positive) category.

Table 12
Mean Ratings of Learning in Selected Areas,
Graduating Seniors in Sociology, 2008, and Quantitative Reasoning-A Assessment

How much did the courses and educational experiences in Sociology teach you to do each of the following ...	QR – A	Graduating Seniors 2008
Recognize logically sound arguments?	3.57	3.97
Understand the difference between correlation and	3.15	4.10
Use data to evaluate factual claims?	2.94	3.81
Recognize when arguments use evidence well?	3.85	3.94
Know when it is valid to infer that one thing causes another?	3.60	3.89

Notes: All ratings are on a scale ranging from 5 = “a great deal” to 1 = “not at all.” The QR-A assessment asked about using “data and statistics” to evaluate factual claims; estimates are based on approximately 93 students (Halaby, Westphal-Johnson, Tortorice, and Klein 2005).

Summary and Implications

The 2008 study demonstrates that the Sociology program has maintained its high quality and made significant improvements. Graduating seniors are very positive and often glowing in their evaluations of the overall program, course offerings and teaching quality. They are also for the most part extremely appreciative of their experience with undergraduate advising, much more so than in previous assessments. Increased contact with the Undergraduate Advisor and her staff has likely contributed to increased satisfaction. Because access and satisfaction with undergraduate advising were particular concerns in the 2003 assessment, we are glad to know that efforts in the Department, the College and the University to provide increased advising resources have paid off.

Students also recognize the contributions of their studies in Sociology to their human capital growth. They attribute their increased understanding of how societies function and shape the lives and views of individuals, and of how to conduct and interpret research, to their studies in Sociology. The program has been remarkably successful in providing students with undergraduate research experience. Sociology majors also benefit in their human capital growth from a high rate of engagement with other majors, certificate programs or honors programs.

Areas in which the most improvement is needed appear to be related to preparation for post-graduate careers. Although ratings of career development and advising are higher in 2008 than in previous assessments, they are not as high as ratings of other program goals. In open-ended comments, many students either praised the ‘practical’ dimensions of training in sociology – research experiences and particularly the Concentration in Analysis and Research. And others asked for more opportunities to apply the ideas and skills they had acquired in Sociology courses.

In the 2003 report, we raised concerns about access to required courses early in students' sociological studies in order to better prepare students for studies in upper-division courses. We did not find clear evidence for the value of having taken required methods and statistics courses for performance in later courses, but our analysis is limited by the number of students taking a particular upper-division course and absence of information on students' coursework in other institutions and departments.

As a caveat, we should note that the quite favorable responses from the survey of graduating seniors could reflect to some degree a selection bias in responding to the survey. To investigate this possibility, we examined the relationship of summary scores – average ratings of learning, courses and teaching, advising and the overall program rating – to students' engagement in the major and their university studies. We found absolutely no relationship between summary assessments and students' having a second major, obtaining a certificate, participating in honors programs, acquiring research experience, or various combinations of these experiences. We do not, of course, know whether those who did not respond would have been less engaged and/or had even lower evaluations.

We learned a great deal in this study about the recruitment and progress of Sociology majors but we would like to know more. Our experience in this study will be used therefore to formulate a more detailed plan for the next assessment in 2013.

References

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University of Wisconsin-Madison

2008

Appendix

Administrative Records

For all students who had declared the Sociology major and were enrolled in late spring semester 2008, we obtained data on the timing of students' enrollment at UW-Madison, and declaring the Sociology major. We also extracted cumulative UW-Madison credits and grade-point average. These data are available for 506 majors. Detailed course histories, including grades, were obtained for Sociology courses taken through fall semester 2007. We were able to match records for 380 students (75%).¹

Senior Survey

In 1998 and 2003, questionnaires were distributed to graduating seniors (planning to graduate in May or August of the respective year) in courses with the largest number of major enrollees. In 2008, all graduating seniors were requested up to five times by email to pick up a questionnaire with a special gift and a cookie. Advising staff kept track of students who picked up and returned completed questionnaires but no identifying information remained on the questionnaires themselves. We estimate that 153 students will have graduated in May or August and received questionnaires from 67 or 44%. This compares to 47% in each of the previous survey years. Had we followed the same procedure for data collection in 2008, however, the maximum number of respondents would have been 58.

We merged the indicator of students' having picked up and completed a questionnaire to the administrative data to identify any potential bias in respondents. As shown in Appendix Table 1, below, survey response was higher among students who had declared the Sociology major soon after entering UW-Madison; and among those with higher cumulative grade-point averages. Among students with full course histories, response was not related to having entered UW-Madison as a first- or later-year student but was higher for those who had taken more sociology courses, especially advanced-level courses. Taken together, these results suggest that survey respondents are somewhat more engaged with and successful in the Sociology major than the typical graduating senior.

¹ We discovered at a very late date that the model offered by the Query Library for matching did not return all of the data available. Missing course histories were less likely, the more recently a student had enrolled in UW-Madison, the earlier they declared the Sociology major after enrolling and the higher their cumulative GPA. No differences were found by year of declaring the sociology major or by cumulative course credits midway through the 2007-2008 academic year.

Appendix Table 1. Differentials in Survey Participation, Graduating Seniors, May and August 2008 (N=164)^a

	Number of Students	Percent Responding
All Students	164	37.8%
Academic Year Entered UW-Madison		
2004 or earlier	45	15.6% *
2005 or later	119	46.2%
Years after Entry Declared Soc Major		
Same year	15	53.3% *
Year after Entry	77	42.9%
Two Years after Entry	47	34.9%
Three or More Years after Entry	25	20.0%
Cumulative Grade Point Average		
< 2.5	21	33.3% *
>= 2.5, < 3.0	41	24.4%
>= 3.0, < 3.5	60	40.0%
>= 3.5	40	52.5%
All Students with Course Histories	134	41.0%
Year of Study Entered UW-Madison		
1 st year	106	40.6%
2 nd or later year	28	42.9%
Advanced Sociology Courses Completed		
Two or less	49	30.6% *
Three	41	31.7%
Four or More	44	61.4%

^aThe survey response indicator was coded for 164 majors, 9 more than 153 estimated to graduate in May or August. But only 62 of those who returned questionnaires were found on the administrative data file. The analysis of survey response is thus based on an estimated 38% response rate.

* Differences are significantly different from zero, $p < .05$