

**Innovation in Teaching and Learning Grant Proposal
Enhancing the Sociology Curriculum: Responding to an External Review**

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Did recipients complete what they set out to complete?

Our proposal included four goals for this ITL. The department met four times over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year to address each of these. Below is more information on each goal and the work done to accomplish that goal.

- Goal 1: Evaluate and redesign the structure of the department curriculum.

Using the 2017 external review as a general guide, we reviewed the departmental curriculum broadly and in detail. We focused our discussion on integrating skills and content across the introductory, intermediary, and advanced level classes with special attention given to required courses in principles of sociology, sociological theory, and sociological methods. We engaged in curricular mapping to connect departmental learning goals to course content and skills and standardize these across all 100, 200, and 300 level classes. In order for students to obtain all the skills and subject matter necessary to achieve departmental learning goals, we implanted a 300-level course requirement. Finally, as we mention below, we also reclassified our required sociological theory class from a 300-level to 200-level to better reflect our course goals and expectations.

- Goal 2: Evaluate and redesign the senior thesis process.

We thoroughly revised our senior thesis sequence (SOC490 and SOC492/498). We converted the fall semester to a four-credit class and discussed explicit ways to keep the capstone component of the course while allowing greater opportunities for thesis preparation that semester. We altered fall assignments designed to prepare students for the senior thesis process to include greater emphasis on the integration among theory, research question/s, and methods. We also decided to change the composition of the senior thesis committee from three to two members. In addition, the length of the oral exam was shifted from 75 minutes to 60 minutes that cover more standardized questions and topics. We also identified changes in timeline and language for the spring semester aimed at providing more consistent and timely feedback to students on not-final drafts of their theses.

- Goal 3: Evaluate and redesign methods and theory instruction.

We discussed the structure and content of both the methods and the theory courses to ensure greater connections and integrations with our revamped curriculum (including with our introductory course, SOC117, which also now includes more emphasis on both in assignments

and exams). For methods, we decided to introduce a greater number of hands-on assignments to familiarize students with a broader range of methodological approaches in sociology. This will be implemented with a dedicated “lab” component of the methods course, starting in Fall 2019. We also discussed various options and decided to move away from an expensive course textbook to a more affordable alternative that still meets the pedagogical needs to the course. We also introduced changes to the required theory course. We decided that while it was important to hold on to the canonical readings (especially, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim), we also recognized the utility of including more contemporary theorists. This was accomplished by compressing or cutting eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories at the beginning of the semester to make room for other readings at the term’s end. Finally, we decided to move the required theory course to the 200 level because the readings and assignments were more in line with other courses at the intermediate level.

- Goal 4: Assess equity in advising and course workload.

We believe that our move to offer multiple sessions of Principles of Sociology SOC117 taught by multiple professors will reduce the advising burden placed on a single faculty member offering SOC117 (historically Professor Janning). We believe we are already seeing this happening, though it is too soon to know for sure. The fact that Professor Cordner is likely to serve as both major advisor and first reader on the thesis for ES-Sociology majors means that there are structural barriers that limit our ability to make substantial changes regarding equity in advising and course workload. Nonetheless, we continue to monitor the situation. In addition to greater course rotation for the introductory required course, our move from three to two thesis committee members was, in part, designed to alleviate the disparity in senior thesis advising. We also encourage members of the department who serve as a major advisor to ≥ 15 students to decline to take on first-year advisees at the start of the academic year.

What are the products of our efforts in terms of content, format, and public dissemination?

Our entire curriculum has been revamped. We clarified student learning goals and then worked to explicitly align course content and skills development with those goals. This was achieved through a scaffolding approach whereby courses at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels are sequenced in such a way as to build knowledge and skills in order to more intentionally prepare students for the senior thesis. In terms of public dissemination, the students enrolled in SOC117 in Spring 2019 were informed of the upcoming changes. In addition, we held an informal information session for prospective majors and minors with the new requirements listed. In 2019-2020 we will likely offer another information session with both current and prospective students.

Do any of these have potential long-term positive effects on the curriculum or academic program more generally?

Yes. We believe that our ITL work will impact students significantly. Our revised departmental curriculum with more explicit connections among department learning goals and course content

and skills development will directly impact all sociology majors and minors. This will result in a more enhanced experience as a sociology major at the College. Non-majors that take sociology courses will also benefit from course improvements as well.

How many students were directly involved or indirectly impacted by the grant?

No students were directly involved in the grant, except in terms of informing them of the changes based on the external review (which heavily involved student input). As stated above, we believe that these changes will be of benefit to students across the College in terms of the content and clarity of our learning goals for majors, minors, and those taking courses for distribution or as electives.

Did the project enhance the quality of learning experiences offered to students?

Yes, the project has directly enhanced the quality of learning experiences offered to sociology majors and other students across the campus taking sociology classes, through a better formulation of department learning goals, greater availability of Principles of Sociology, clearer course sequencing, and a required 300-level course for sociology majors that includes deep engagement with sociological content and written communication. The long-term impact will be assessed via our ongoing assessment efforts.

What were the limitations or failings of this project, and how, in retrospect, might they have been better addressed or remedied?

We have not identified any limitations or failings of this project. We will be in a position to determine potential limitations or failings as we implement the above ITL changes.