Annual Assessment Report 2021

Department: Sociology and Anthropology
Academic Year: 2020-2021
Date of Submission: September 15, 2021
Department Chair: Sarah L. Jirek

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

Item: The PRC encouraged the department to conduct an assessment of our Oral and Written Communication PLO	**Response:** The department conducted this assessment of the Oral and Written Communication PLO. The results are below.
Item: The PRC requested additional information regarding the curricular models that our department is considering	**Response:** We debated the pros and cons of three models. Model #1 was based loosely on the English department's curricular structure—which would entail the Sociology major having clear guidelines but significant flexibility in the core requirements and electives. Model #2 was based loosely on the Philosophy department's curricular structure—which would entail the Sociology major having core requirements and then recommended electives for a variety of foci or concentrations. Model #3 was based loosely on the Political Science department's curricular structure—which would entail the Sociology major retaining its three distinct tracks while providing additional flexibility in course selection. We have tentatively chosen Model #3.
Item: The PRC requested information regarding our department's next steps and possible timeline for the various curricular changes that we are considering (e.g., internship, lower-division courses, the role of anthropology, etc.)	**Response:** The department aims to submit the entirety of our Sociology curricular revisions to the Academic Senate by the end of Fall 2021, so that the changes will go into effect with AY 2022-2023. Curricular revisions involving Anthropology are currently on-hold, due to the current vacancy in the anthropology line in our department. Our next steps are to hold approximately two Fall meetings on curricular revisions, make final decisions on topics we have discussed at length over the course of several years, divide up the remaining work, and then draft the proposed changes.
Item: The PRC requested a progress report on the department's efforts to check and update the	**Response:** Due to the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic (and the extra time and energy required to teach throughout it), the department postponed work on

language in all GE courses' syllabi for compliance with certification requirements (as a follow-up to our last 6-year review)	this project. We intend to review and update GE syllabi language during AY 2021-2022.
Notes:	

II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.

Program Learning Outcome	Oral and Written Communication ("Students will be able to effectively communicate their ideas, research, and arguments in public presentations and reports")
Who is in Charge /Involved?	Entire department
Direct Assessment Methods	Rationale: Our department decided to assess the <u>oral</u> communication component of the "Oral and Written Communication" PLO this academic year. Our rationale for focusing on oral communication was that two relatively-recent PLO assessments (for 2015 and 2016) involved scoring written communication (i.e., student papers) while evaluating our "Research and Methods Competence" and "Competence in Core Knowledge" PLOs, respectively. Given the time and energy limitations of faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic, we could not evaluate both oral <u>and</u> written communication, and we believed that assessing the oral communication component would yield more actionable insights at this time. Moreover, having had our seniors participate in the College's AY 2017-2018 Oral Communication ILO, our department was particularly interested in having further discussions on this aspect of our majors' skill development. Methods: The SOC/AN 197 (Senior Research Capstone) seniors' final research presentations were assessed via a scoring rubric developed this year. A copy of the rubric is included in the Appendices. We assessed seven elements of oral communication: argument, evidence, organization, components, delivery, Q&A, and visuals. Each element was scored on a 5-point scale: excellent (score = 5), good (score = 4), satisfactory (score = 3), barely acceptable (score = 2), and unacceptable (score = 1). There were six students enrolled in the course and each completed a presentation over Zoom. All five faculty members separately scored each research presentation.

	N/A
Major Findings	All data were inputted into an Excel spreadsheet and summary statistics were calculated. Specifically, the total points per presentation were tallied, along with the presentation mean and standard deviation. The seven category totals, means, and standard deviations were also calculated. A copy of the spreadsheet is included in the Appendices. The total possible score per presentation was 175 (i.e., 7 elements x 5 points x 5 faculty scorers). The total possible score per category / element was 150 (i.e., 6 students x 5 points x 5 faculty scorers). Presentation scores ranged from 126 to 159, with a mean of 147 (SD = 12). In other words, the average "grade" was an 84% (i.e., 147 / 175). Category totals for the seven elements ranged from 117 to 132 (out of 150). Category means ranged from 3.9 to 4.4, with the highest scores in Organization (M = 4.4, SD = 0.67) and Q&A (M = 4.37, SD = 0.61), and the lowest score in Visuals (M = 3.9, SD = 0.99).
Closing the Loop Activities	1) Each department member needs to identify which "building blocks" and forms of oral communication (e.g., participating in class discussion, leading class discussion, crafting empirically-based oral arguments, getting accustomed to asking and answering questions, creating visual aids) their various classes will teach and build upon, even if an individual presentation is not a part of the course. One of our goals is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to give some sort of presentation (and receive feedback on it) prior to the advanced, formal presentation required in Senior Research Capstone. 2) In order to teach these "building blocks," each department member needs to clearly share expectations with students ahead of time, showcase examples of good oral communication wherever possible, and provide meaningful feedback that allows for students to make adjustments. 3) Prior to assessing this PLO in the future, our department needs to come to a working consensus regarding our own expectations for what good oral communication entails—especially with regard to delivery and visual aids. In addition, given that there were instances where a student received substantially disparate scores in a category from different faculty scorers (e.g., receiving 3s and 5s), making room for qualitative comments from the scorers on the rubric—and then discussing instances where scores are substantially different—might be useful. 4) Our department needs to have continued conversations regarding the specific goals we have for our SOC/AN 197 (Senior Research Capstone) course and the varied purposes the course currently strives to serve. It is possible that we are trying to squeeze too many course components and goals into one semester. Perhaps we need to find ways for students to begin their research projects earlier in their college careers, use existing sources of data, and/or reduce the course requirements.

Collaboration and Communication

A few days after Sarah J tallied up scores and calculated summary statistics, we met as a department for 90+ minutes to discuss a variety of

topics related to this assessment. In terms of our seniors' oral communication skills, we were not surprised that the average "grade" was a mid-B—in other words, that the presentations were largely good, but that there was still a fair bit of room for improvement. In terms of the rubric categories, we were pleased that our students had developed skills in smoothly and logically transitioning from one section of the presentation to another (i.e., organization), and that they were quite adept at fielding an audience member's questions in a professional manner, thinking on their feet, and responding appropriately. Amongst ourselves, there was disagreement regarding our own expectations for students' delivery—specifically regarding how much value to place on an extemporaneous presentation style versus reading prepared remarks, as well as how much to penalize for "filler" words (e.g., "um," "like") which are more likely to arise in extemporaneous oral communication. We were least impressed with the visual aids (i.e., slides) that our students prepared, although we believe that this is partially explained by how rushed students feel at the end of this course—wherein they typically produce a presentation poster, conclude data analysis, finish writing up the actual research paper, and prepare for the oral presentation in an extremely condensed time-frame. Nonetheless, the standard deviation for the visuals category was the highest of the six, which was reflected in our departmental discussion. There are differences among us regarding what "good visuals" entail and how much text should appear on each slide. Prior to their presentations, students received varied examples of conference presentation slides from the course instructor, but they were given minimal instructions regarding the expectations for their visual aids.

Our department next engaged in a robust discussion of where we are currently teaching the various components of oral communication skills in our curriculum. We discussed the spectrum of informal to formal oral communication—ranging from students speaking up extemporaneously during a class discussion to a conference-like presentation of one's research at the culmination of a research project. We realized that, although several of us require a presentation in at least one of our courses, there are "building blocks" of oral communication that we can teach and incorporate into all of our courses (e.g., participating in class discussion, leading class discussion, crafting empirically-based oral arguments, getting accustomed to asking and answering questions, creating visual aids, etc.).

We also discussed being more proactive in encouraging our most academically talented students (and anyone considering doctoral programs) to complete a year-long major honors project. Moreover, we brainstormed possible ways that the final projects in our two research methods courses (i.e., Qualitative Research Methods and Quantitative Research Methods) might be altered to allow our seniors to later draw upon those data-sets in their senior research capstone projects.

We also acknowledged the toll that the COVID-19 pandemic had upon our students, which likely increased their stress levels and decreased the amount of time and energy that they could devote to their end-of-year endeavors.

In summary, this assessment was very useful in giving our department an opportunity to examine where we are (and are not) teaching the various components of oral communication, how each faculty member thinks about good oral communication (and where our

perspectives differ), the current strengths and weaknesses of oral communication amongst our graduating seniors, and various places where we need to make additions / adjustments to our teaching in order to more effectively prepare our majors for various types of oral communication.

or/and

II B. Key Questions

Key Question	N/A—We focused on our assessment of the Oral and Written Communication PLO this year.
Who is in Charge/Involved?	
Direct Assessment Methods	
Indirect Assessment Methods	
Major Findings	
Recommendations	
Collaboration and Communication	

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	Last year, we posed the following questions: How should the curriculum revision proceed? In piecemeal format, with the internship requirement first? Or implement the revision as one holistic overhaul?
Who was involved in implementation?	The entire department
What was	At the end of AY 2019-2020, we decided to implement the entirety of our curriculum revisions at one time, even

decided or addressed?	though that meant delaying the implementation of the internship requirement. We had consulted with the Registrar (Michelle Hardley) about this decision and she encouraged us to avoid a piecemeal approach. We examined 3 possible models for addressing various curriculum-related issues and decided to continue that conversation during AY 2020-2021.
How were the recommendations implemented?	

Collaboration and Communication   Please see below, under Section IV, for details regarding our department's progress and discussions on curriculum revisions during AY 2020-2021.

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	Revision of Major Requirements and Curriculum Structure
Who is in Charge /Involved?	The entire department
Major Findings	Our department has decided to move forward with a curricular model (Model #3) that is loosely based upon the Political Science department's curriculum structure—a model that retains the Sociology major's three distinct tracks, but that also provides additional flexibility in course selection.
Action	Due to the stresses and extra time commitments required to teach throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our department was able to make only modest progress on our curriculum revisions project. However, we made an important decision and anticipate being able to submit the entirety of our Sociology-related curriculum changes at the end of Fall 2021.

Collaboration and Communication

Our department devoted one of our department meetings to our discussion of the three models (summarized in the first section of this report) we were considering as a framework for our curricular revisions. After discussing the pros and cons of the various models, we tentatively chose Model #3, which is loosely based upon the Political Science department's curriculum structure—a model that retains the Sociology major's three distinct tracks, but that also provides additional flexibility in course selection. We also appreciate that this model makes it easier to gauge student progress on WebAdvisor, as tracks (but not concentrations) are delineated on the platform.

V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing
This is NOT an additional adjustment request, but simply re-stating our assessment schedule as proposed in our 2020 report		2021-2022: Faith & Learning 2022-2023: Research & Methods **2023-2024: Six Year Review** 2024-2025: Core Knowledge Competence 2025-2026: Core Knowledge Application 2026-2027: Oral & Written Comm

VI. Appendices
    A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data: **SOC/AN 197 Presentation Instructions**
    B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data: **SOC/AN 197 Scoring Rubric for Oral Communication**
    C. Relevant assessment-related documents (optional): **Spreadsheet of Scores and Summary Statistics**

Appendix A: SOC/AN 197 Presentation Instructions

[Note: Students received oral instructions in-class, as well as some written instructions, via Canvas. We have included the content of both here.]

SOC/AN 197 Instructor Notes on Presentation Instructions

*Format for digital presentation
        10-12 minutes + q&a→PRACTICE. Feel free to write out a script if that's helpful to you (especially if you're nervous/anxious!)

        Introduction—situate the project; what are the main research questions? What's the "problem" or "puzzle" that your research helps us to address?
        Literature review/framing—what are a few key ideas in existing literature that situate your research?
        Methods—how did you study this?
        Findings—what are some important themes that emerge from your study?
        Conclusion—implications, key takeaways, possibly a note or two about future research

→ 3 examples of academic conference presentations are posted to Canvas; take a look for some guidance (one is all text/no images; one is lots of images/little text; one was of content analysis that has some basic tables)

*Refresher of presentation tips, generally (based on tips given for Research Symposium—some of this will be more/less applicable)
1. Ground yourself in what you know about your project
    a. Write down a 2-3 minute explanation/statement of your project, and memorize it.
        i. Key research question
        ii. Key data (i.e., interviews, content analysis, survey; of whom/how many)
        iii. Key finding(s)
    b. Write down some possible questions you might anticipate
    c. →Some key responses to have about those questions
2. Lines to learn:
    a. "Well, since my study was on xyz, I can't speak directly to abc, but abc does make me think about *either* x1, y1, or z1 *OR* here are other questions that should be researched: a1, b1, or c1"
    b. "That's an interesting question, I'd have to give that more thought."
    c. For the persistent questioner, who's not satisfied with your answer, "you make a good point, but I think it's important to also remember:" →point to one of your key findings
    d. "Future research would be needed to address that"
3. Do not either oversell or undersell yourself or your project—be reasonable about what your findings are truly about…and don't pretend like your data can say more or less than what it actually can. Own the limitations, and state what we learn anyway.

<u>Canvas Announcement: Plan for Presentations</u>

Here are some important final details:

1. Please join the class Zoom meeting at 3:15 on Thursday. Joining fifteen minutes before others arrive will give us time to connect, make sure the technology is working, and give you time to settle in. I've set up a 'waiting room' in the Zoom meeting so I'll wait to let people in once you're settled and ready. I'll then briefly welcome people & introduce the format, then turn it over to our first presenter.

2. You should plan on a 10-12 minute presentation, followed by 3-5 minutes of Q&A.

3. Likewise, finalizing our plan for the Q&A: I'll prompt people to indicate their interest in asking a question by putting a note in the chat, and then I will call on people to unmute & ask (so, you won't need to handle these logistics -- just answer the question that's asked). At the conclusion of each presenter, I will transition us to the next presenter.

4. Be sure you follow the overall format/structure for the presentations that we discussed in class, and that is modeled in the various examples I've uploaded. If you have any questions about this, please email me and/or sign up for office hours Wednesday. If office hours get fully booked, please email me asap to set up an alternative meeting.

5. Be sure you practice in advance! Write out exactly what you will say, practice presenting while screen sharing in Zoom, practice your timing, be sure you know when to go to the next bullet point or slide, etc. This will do a lot to help you feel prepared.

Appendix B: SOC/AN 197 Scoring Rubric for Oral Communication

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Barely Acceptable	Unacceptable
Argument	Argument is robust, precise, and compelling; claims are insightful and sophisticated	Argument is clear and competent; claims are thoughtful	Argument is discernible but underdeveloped; claims show some thoughtfulness	Argument and claims are vague	Argument is indecipherable
Evidence	Chooses highly relevant, specific examples with precise, strategic quotations	Chooses relevant, specific examples with effective quotations	Chooses examples whose relevance is not clear; provides quotations that are too long or too short	Chooses several vague examples; contains only one or two examples; provides an incorrect or irrelevant quotation	Fails to provide examples and quotations
Organization	Very well organized; has strategic transitions	Well organized; has effective transitions	Some organization; has adequate transitions	Disorganized; has ineffective or awkward transitions	No discernible organization; has no transitions
Components	Includes clear and compelling explanation of the research question, methods, relevant literature, findings, and conclusions	Includes effective explanation of the research question, methods, relevant literature, findings, and conclusions	Articulates the research question, methods, relevant literature, findings, and conclusions, but may be unclear in explaining one or two elements	Is missing explanation of one or two key elements; or includes all key elements but provides inadequate explanation of most of them	Is missing explanation of multiple key elements; or provides inadequate explanation of all elements
Delivery	Speaks with a confident and assertive voice; no fillers (um, like); effective pauses; clear enunciation; composed demeanor	Speaks with a clear voice; infrequent fillers; mostly effective pauses; occasional unclear enunciation; mostly composed demeanor	Speaks with a somewhat faltering voice; somewhat frequent fillers; somewhat effective pauses; enunciation is somewhat unclear; is sometimes ruffled	Often difficult to hear and understand; frequent fillers; overly long pauses or very rushed presentation; mostly unclear enunciation; is often ruffled	Indecipherable voice; frequent fillers; distractingly awkward pauses or complete lack of pauses; unclear enunciation; flustered
Q&A	Speaker is able to discern intent of Qs; answers Qs in a well-reasoned and compelling way	Speaker is able to discern intent of Qs; answers Qs in an effective way	Speaker falters in ability to discern intent of Qs; answers Qs in a somewhat unclear way	Speaker is often unable to discern intent of Qs; answers Qs inadequately	Speaker is not able to discern intent of Qs; fails to answer Qs or answers are entirely off base
Visuals	Slides use appropriate and strategic amount of text; use of tables/figures/images enhances presentation, if applicable	Slides occasionally include either too much or too little text; effective use of tables/figures/images, if applicable	Slides include several examples of too much or too little text; appropriate but not very effective use of tables/figures/images, if applicable	Most slides contain either too much or too little text; ineffective use of tables/figures/images, if applicable	Presentation is overwhelmed by poor use of text on slides; inappropriate use of tables/figures/images, if applicable

Appendix C: Spreadsheet of Scores and Summary Statistics

	Argument	Evidence	Organization	Components	Delivery	Q&A	Visuals		
Student A	4	5	5	4	5	4	5		
	4	5	5	4	4	4	4		
	3	4	4	4	4	4	5		
	4	4	4	4	3	4	4		
	5	4	5	5	5	5	3	Student A's Total	149
Student B	4	4	3	4	3	3	2		
	4	4	4	3	4	4	3		
	5	4	5	4	5	4	2		
	5	5	5	5	4	5	4		
	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	Student B's Total	141
Student C	4	3	5	4	4	4	4		
	4	5	5	5	5	4	4		
	4	5	4	4	5	4	2		
	5	5	5	5	4	5	4		
	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	Student C's Total	155
Student D	3	5	5	4	5	5	5		
	4	4	4	4	4	4	5		
	5	5	5	5	4	5	3		
	5	5	5	5	5	5	5		
	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	Student D's Total	159
Student E	5	4	5	5	5	5	5		
	4	4	4	4	4	4	4		
	4	4	5	4	5	4	4		
	5	5	5	4	5	5	5		
	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	Student E's Total	154
Student F	4	3	3	3	3	4	3		
	3	2	3	3	3	4	3		
	4	4	4	4	4	4	3		
	5	4	5	5	4	5	5		
	3	2	4	3	4	3	3	Student F's Total	126
Category Totals	126	125	132	126	127	131	117		
Category Mean	4.20	4.17	4.40	4.20	4.23	4.37	3.90	**Mean Total**	147.33
Category Std. Dev.	0.66	0.83	0.67	0.71	0.68	0.61	0.99	**Total Std. Dev.**	12.14