



Sociology Program Assessment

SLOAT Report – Social Sciences Division

Akil Kokayi Khalfani, Ph.D.

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SOC 101 Fall 2010 Assessment

Prepared by Akil Kokayi Khalfani, Ph.D.

The Social Sciences Division at Essex County College administered an assessment instrument for all students taking Introduction to Sociology (SOC 101) for the 2010 Fall semester. The instrument was administered in 23 sections of SOC 101. These sections were taught by adjunct instructors. No full-time faculty taught this course in the Fall.

The Division was asked to conduct an assessment of a few sections by sampling the Introduction to Sociology classes for the semester, however the Division decided to conduct a census of the available 23 sections for the semester. This approach allowed us to assess approximately 715 students, who represent a great diversity of students from the College because the course is a popular general education requirement for many degree programs across the College.

Course Description: *This class will help students critically analyze the world through a sociological lens. The major theories and methodologies used by sociologists to understand the social world will be examined and applied.*

The assessment instrument contained a set of three questions that were designed to assess the students' understanding of some of the core tenets of the Sociology course. The questions represented a subset of the final exam students took at the end of the semester. There was a rubric designed to analyze and quantify the performance of the Intro students. These questions were designed to assess the first Measurable Performance Objectives from the SOC 101 course outline. The faculty members collected and tallied the data, which was then submitted back to the Division for analysis.

There may be a couple of challenges with the design of the instrument and the way it was administered and evaluated. However, we are confident that this method and these data will provide the Division with a valuable baseline to assess the effectiveness of the teaching and learning in the Introduction to Sociology classes at the College. We intend to use the findings to help in the decision-making process about using a universal final exam for all introductory sociology courses at the college.

Data from four classes had to be discarded because it was clear that the faculty did not understand how to use the instrument or how to properly tally data from the instrument. As

the administrators of the instrument, we must take steps to ensure that adjunct and full-time faculty are properly trained and that we produce clearer instructions for them. Faculty may also require additional time to adequately compile data.

For this first assessment, the instrument was implemented in a variety of formats. Some faculty incorporated the instrument into an existing final exam, while others administered it independently. These different formats may have impacted the outcome of the findings; however we do not have enough information to assess the potential impact of this point at this time.

We analyzed data on approximately 490 students from 18 sections out of the 715 students from 23 sections who took the assessment instrument. Data from five additional sections representing 225 students had to be removed due to reporting errors. These numbers do not reflect enrollment numbers for all SOC 101 classes for the Fall. They only represent the numbers of students who took the instrument on the day that the final exam or the assessment instrument was given and who were enrolled in the classes where these data were properly computed. (The rubric used to grade this instrument follows this report.) Figures 1 – 5 illustrate the findings for this analysis. The questions used in this analysis are as follows:

1. Identify and explain the three major sociological theories and name the major theorists behind each.
 - A. Conflict Theory
 - B. Structural Functional Theory
 - C. Symbolic Interaction Theory
2. State three major contributions to the field of sociology by W.E.B. Du Bois.
 - A. Students needed to identify 3 of 4 possible contributions to get full credit
3. Who coined the term “Sociological Imagination;” and what does it mean?

This instrument was designed to test student achievement of the first Course Goal and part of the second Course Goal for Introduction to Sociology. Additionally the instrument assessed all of the related Measurable Performance Objectives (MPOs) for Course Goal 1 and part of Course Goal 2 as illustrated below:

- 1. Recognize and describe sociological concepts and terms:**
 - 1.1 articulate the three major sociological theories: Conflict, Structural Functional, and Symbolic Interaction;
 - 1.2 explain and apply the concept of the sociological imagination; and
 - 1.3 discuss the methods used for sociological analysis

2. Recognize the names of important figures in the development of sociology and recognize and explain theories and concepts they espoused or critiqued:

- 2.1 identify early European and American sociological thinkers, such as Marx and Du Bois;
- 2.2 describe the contributions of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory and the Chicago School and identify the central scholars who brought recognition to these institutions; and

MPOs 1.1 and 2.1 were tested directly by question 1. We wanted to see if students fully grasped the three components of each sociological perspective: 1) the names of each of the three major theoretical perspectives; 2) the names of one or two proponents of a given theory; and 3) the basic concepts behind each theory. By looking at the rubric, you will see that the point totals for questions 1 and 3 are cumulative. If the student correctly answered step 1, they earned 1 point for the section. They received one additional point for each correct component or sociological theory tested by this MPO. Question 1 contained three 3-point components where each theoretical perspective was worth 3 points for a total of 9 points possible in the section. MPO 2.1 is additionally assessed by question 2 as it focuses specifically on W.E.B. Du Bois, who was one of the founding fathers of American sociology.

MPO 1.2 was directly assessed in question number 3 by looking at the works of sociologist C. Wright Mills. Mills wrote the book *Sociological Imagination* in 1959. Question 3 was structured like question 1 in that it offered students three cumulative point opportunities. Each student received one point for mentioning C. Wright Mills's name; one point for identifying the terms history and biography as they relate to the sociological imagination; and a final point for a total possibility of 3 points for briefly explaining the concept of the sociological imagination.

MPO 1.3 was indirectly assessed by question 2. Students would have had to know something about sociological methodology to correctly answer the question about Du Bois because one of the correct answers for question 2 was that Du Bois along with the Atlanta University Sociology Department developed the idea of method and theory triangulation. This approach to research can improve the reliability and validity of the finding.

MPO 2.2 was directly assessed in question 2 on W.E.B. Du Bois. He was the preeminent scholar affiliated with the Atlanta University Sociological Laboratory. Students who answered this question correctly would have to have some understanding about the differences between the sociology programs at Atlanta University and the University of Chicago. There were 4 possible answers to this question. If a student answered three questions correctly, they earned full credit.

Data Analysis

QUESTION 1

The first pattern we notice in these data is that on average only 50% of the students are able to articulate their understanding of the three major sociological perspectives, including the name of the theory, the authors and a brief description of the perspective. However, a great majority of the students were able to list at least one of the three components of the three major sociological perspectives. This demonstrates that MPO 1.1 and 2.1 are being addressed in the class, but that more attention needs to be stressed on them throughout the semester. Figures 1a, 1b, and 1c, illustrate these similarities.

These data also show that in certain classes students had a propensity to answer the first step in this section, thereby awarding them only one point. It is not clear if this is due to how the question was administered, poor communication between the student and the professor, or maybe because the professor did not fully understand how to use the assessment instrument. Further analysis would be necessary to ascertain this information.

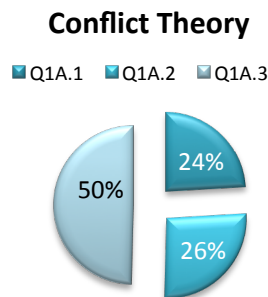


Figure 1A

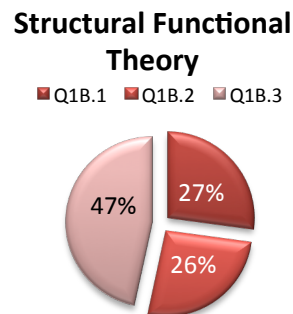


Figure 1B

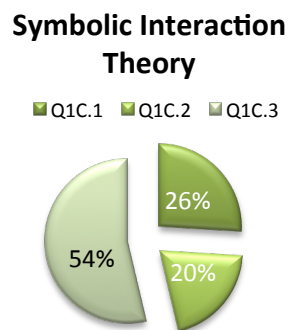


Figure 1C

QUESTION 2

Figure 2 on the next page represents data from question 2 on W.E.B. Du Bois. This question directly tests two MPOs from the second course goal: 2.1 and 2.2. The first MPO assessed whether students knew that Du Bois was an important figure in the founding of American sociology. The second MPO directly assess a student's knowledge about the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory. Although the institution was started 1895 two year prior to the arrival of Du Bois, he was the most prominent sociologist at Atlanta University after the department's founding. Students could state any 3 of 4 possible answers to receive full credit for this question.

The question on Du Bois also indirectly assessed MPO 1.3 which examined students' understanding of sociological methodology. Du Bois helped to develop the ideas of method and theory triangulation, so in the process of studying about his contribution to sociology they would acquire some knowledge about methodology.

Out of the 490 students who took the assessment, less than 50% correctly chose any single correct answer. Below in Table 1, we can see the numerical distribution of the correct answers. Figure 2 illustrates the percent distribution for this question, where we see that the majority of the correct answers centered on Du Bois's ethnographic work and his contribution to the University of Atlanta.

It is not clear if the students did not answer the question or if they answered it incorrectly. We would need to look at the exam in addition to the summary sheets we received from the faculty members to make this distinction.

Table 1: Numerical Distribution of Correct Answers for Question 2

1) If the student mentions Method and/or Theory Triangulation	148
2) If the student says Du Bois was one of the founding fathers of American Sociology	160
3) If the student says Du Bois began the ethnographic study of race in the U.S.	224
4) If the student says Du Bois developed the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory or sociology at Atlanta University	205

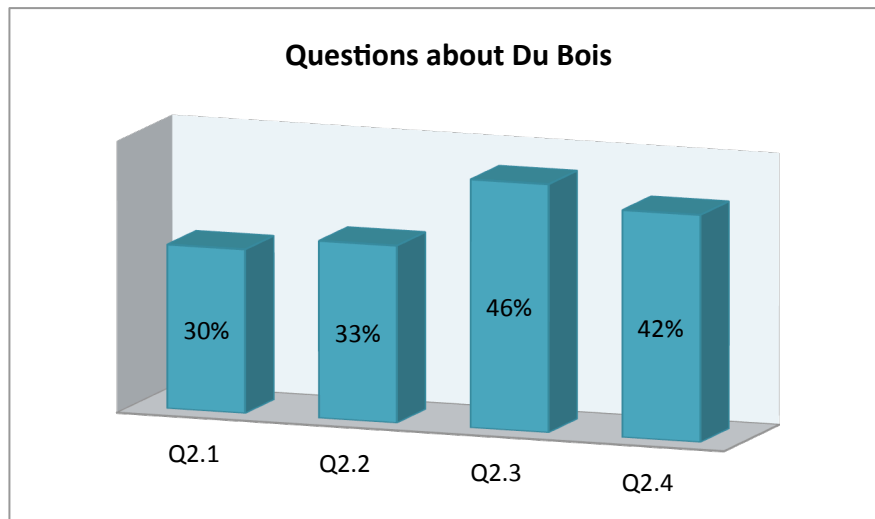


Figure 2

QUESTION 3

Data from question 3 assessed MPO 1.2. We were testing to see if students understood the concept of the sociological imagination and knew that C. Wright Mills coined the term. Figure 3 shows that 65% of the students attained this level of proficiency. An additional 19% of the students knew about Mills and at least the basic tenets of the concept. This means that 84% of the students had a good understanding of the sociological imagination which is an essential notion in sociology.

We had to do some extra cleaning of these data because two classes had insufficient data inputted for this question.

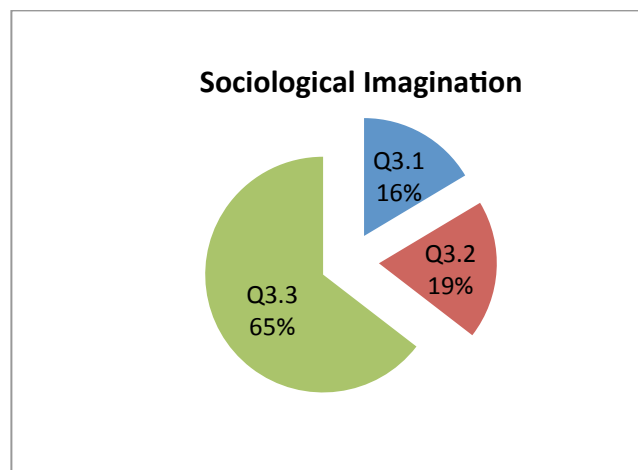


Figure 3

SUGGESTIONS

These data suggest that there is certainly room for improvement for establishing a greater level of proficiency on the basic ideas and Course Goals in the Introduction to Sociology course at the College. It is also clear that in certain professor's classes a higher level of proficiency was achieved than in other. We may want to further observe the lower performing professors' classes to coach them on ways to improve their teaching outcomes. It may be useful to have more frequent quizzes that employ these concepts as they relate to latter chapters. Particularly where the three major theories are concerned, we may want to more thoroughly explore them in subsequent chapters so that students develop a better grasp of the theories.

Further testing of these Course Goals will provide us with better data for assessing student performance in Sociology program and in the Social Sciences Division in general. This analysis gives us a usable baseline, although not a perfect one, to begin looking towards long-term goals in the program.

Appendix

Rubric for Questions ALL SOC 101 Courses – Fall 2010

1. Explain the three major sociological theories and identify the major theorists behind each.
2. State three major contributions to the field of sociology by W.E.B. Du Bois.
3. Who coined the term “Sociological Imagination;” and what does it mean?

List Section Number _____

	Possible Points	Adjusted number of Students receiving this grade
Question 1 (3 Points possible for each section & a total 9 points possible)		
If the student says Conflict Theory	1	118
If the student says Conflict Theory and Karl Marx or C. Wright Mills	2	129
If the student says Conflict Theory and Karl Marx or C. Wright Mills; and states that this theory assumes that society is based on a series of conflicting relationships ideas.	3	243
If the students mentions Structural Functional Theory	1	117
If the students mentions Structural Functional Theory and Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim or Herbert Spencer	2	113
If the students mentions Structural Functional Theory and Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim or Herbert Spencer; and states that this theory sees society as an organism with certain structures and related functions.	3	201

If the students mentions Symbolic Interaction Theory	1	106
If the students mentions Symbolic Interaction Theory and George Herbert Mead, W.I. Thomas or Charles Cooley	2	83
If the students mentions Symbolic Interaction Theory , George Herbert Mead, W.I. Thomas or Charles Cooley, and state that this is a micro level theory that examines the relationships between individuals, and individuals and society.	3	219
Question 2 (3 Points possible) [There are 4 possible answers, but credit is only given for up to 3.]		
If the student mentions Method and/or Theory Triangulation	1	148
If the student says Du Bois was the founding father of American sociology	1	160
If the student says Du Bois began ethnographic study of race in the U.S.	1	224
If the student says Du Bois developed the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory or sociology at Atlanta University	1	205
Question 3 (3 Points possible)		
If the student mentions C. Wright Mills	1	80
If the student mentions C. Wright Mills and mention that the Sociological Imagination has to do with history and biography	2	74
If the student mentions C. Wright Mills and explains how the Sociological Imagination has to do with history and biography and/or explain that it helps us understand the use of perspective when examining the world and social phenomena.	3	191

Grand total

Number of
classes

Error in the tabulation of the assessment tool	5
Missing data	2
3 unusable classes because of missing or erroneous data	3