

*Liberal Arts Core
Social Science Category
Student Outcomes Assessment Report*

A Report Submitted to

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Background

The University of Northern Iowa mandates regular review of its Liberal Arts Core (LAC). The Social Science Category of the LAC was reviewed during the AY 02-03. The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences' (CSBS) work on the mandated review of the Social Science Category began in the summer of 2002 at the CSBS May Institute. The purpose of the CSBS May Institute was faculty development in the area of teaching in the LAC and data collection for the social science category LAC review. The overall theme for the institute was the exploration of the "big ideas" in social science introductory courses with a focus on active learning strategies and the role of technology. The general objectives for the institute included examining the purpose of liberal arts education; enhancing faculty's instructional design, development, and evaluation abilities; establishing and/or renewing connections among those who teach in social science core as part of a learning community; and sharing technological components that could be used to enhance the social science category. The 'big ideas' discussed were the foundation of the social science outcomes and competencies that were subsequently developed during the social science category review. Some of the faculty who participated in the May Institute were members of the category review team.

Early in the 2002 fall semester, the social science category review team charged a subcommittee of its members to review and, if necessary, update the existing statement of outcomes and competencies for the social science category. The subcommittee was also charged with creating a student outcomes assessment (SOA) plan for the category. The subcommittee met a number of times during the 2002 fall semester. During these meetings, the committee reviewed the existing statement of outcomes and competencies

for the social science category, proposed for adoption a new statement of outcomes and competencies; discussed a variety of outcomes assessment plans; held an open forum in December with CSBS faculty to discuss outcomes, competencies, and assessment options; and proposed suggestions for SOA for the social science category, for implementation in the 2003 fall semester.

The social science category SOA subcommittee continued to meet during the spring and fall 03 semesters. At the same time, the LAC committee was proposing changes in the LAC to the university faculty senate. One of their proposed changes involved the social science category. The SOA subcommittee decided that it would be best to wait and see if any changes in the category were made before it proceeded with the SOA. Once the university faculty senate decided not to change the social science category, the CSBS SOA subcommittee continued with their work by finalizing the Social Science Category SOA plan and implementing the SOA fall semester 04. See Appendix A for the social science category SOA plan.

Method

Growing out of the May Institute, the social science category review, and deliberations of the CSBS SOA subcommittee were the CSBS Social Science SOA Plan (Appendix A), the assessment instrument (Appendix B1 & Appendix B2), a student assessment process, the pilot test, and the scoring sheet (Appendix C) and scoring procedures.

Instrument

The instrument for the social science SOA was essay. Each student was given one of two problem scenarios. One scenario was about the 9/11 tragedy, and the other

was about family and work conflicts. In this way, the assessment was more thorough than if only one scenario were used. The students were instructed to read the scenario, choose a social scientific discipline from a list, identify an appropriate question for that discipline that could be asked about the scenario, identify the facts or data that would need to be collected to answer the question, identify a methodology to collect those facts or data, and identify one benefit and one limitation of that methodology. The students were then asked to repeat the procedure after selecting another discipline.

Student Assessment Process

There were a total of 137 students in the category 5 liberal arts core courses in the fall of 2004 who took the assessment. We randomly sampled 51 students for inclusion in this assessment. Twenty-three were completing their first course in the category, and 28 were completing their third and final course. Information Technology Services gave the subcommittee data indicating which Fall 04 category 5 courses had the highest percentage of students who had completed two and were now enrolled in their third course in the social science category. Each student indicated on their response sheet which social science category courses they were taking or had taken. Of these the committee chose one class from each of the three groups (A,B,C) in the social science category and approached the professors of those classes for permission to distribute the SOA instrument. Each professor contacted agreed to participate. The SOA was given to students in a Culture, Nature, and Society (Group A) class, a Human Identity and Relationships (Group B) class, and a Women, Men, and Society class (Group C).

All students in the three classes received a packet of materials consisting of one of the two problem scenarios and two identical sets of questions. The number of students responding to each scenario by discipline is reported in Table 1.

Pilot Test

Before all student essays were rated, a pilot test was conducted to establish the adequacy of the rating procedure. Three raters read the responses from three students and rated them on the response scales described below. A total of 24 questions were rated for the pilot (i.e., 4 components to the answers (see above) x 2 scenarios (see above) x 3 students). The difference between ratings among the three raters equaled three scale points (the maximum) only twice and equaled two scale points only once. The three raters were in perfect agreement six times. Based on these results, it was agreed that the rating procedure was adequate and that the remaining essays could be evaluated.

Rating Procedure

The four components of each answer (question, facts, methodology, benefit and limitation) were rated on a four-point scale, from *unacceptable* (1), *adequate* (2), *good*, (3), to *outstanding* (4). Estimates of inter-rater reliability are presented in Table 2. In general, inter-rater reliability was less than commonly accepted levels (i.e., > .70). Nevertheless, the ratings presented in this report were averaged across the three raters with one exception (see Table 2).

Results

The average rating for each question by discipline is presented in Table 3 for the 9/11 scenario and Table 4 for the work-family scenario. Overall, student responses hovered around the “adequate” range. The midpoint of the response scale was 2.5, and

students in their third course had ratings for all four questions that were above the scale midpoint for both scenarios when averaged across disciplines. Students in their first course, however, tended to have ratings below the scale midpoint for the 9/11 scenario. Students in their first course had lower average ratings for every question compared to students in their third course. Overall, ratings were generally higher for the work-family scenario than the 9/11 scenario. Students were also generally rated higher when it came to generating a discipline-appropriate question to the scenario; they did less well with determining the facts/data needed, methodology, and benefits and limitations of how to address the question they generated.

Discussion

In general the students who were completing their third social science course for LAC credit did an adequate job answering the questions. The scores reflect a basic understanding of social science but not any depth of understanding. The students who were in their first social science course in their LAC seemed to do less well at answering the questions and knew less about basic social science. It is important to keep in mind that respondents answered with no warning or preparation for this assessment.

Although students in their first course were rated lower than students in their third course, we cannot confidently conclude that the difference between the two groups is due to their different experiences in the category. It is important that future assessments pretest and post-test the same group of students in order to better understand the learning changes associated with completion of the category.

The lower ratings for the 9/11 scenario may reflect a lack of global understanding. In the social science category review report, it was suggested that the groups of courses in

the social science category be realigned to increase the depth of knowledge gained in the core. The review team suggested that the groups be titled Group A: Individual and Cultural Perspectives, Group B: Institutional Perspectives, and Group C: International Perspectives. Such a reorganization could help students better understand global issues, and future assessments should look to see if global understanding improves after the change. To quote the social science category review report, “This realignment accomplishes three things. First, it places courses together that are seemingly related and that faculty indicate offer similar content emphases. Second, it better ensures that students will complete the category with a breadth of knowledge about social issues. Third, it requires students to take a course with an international perspective at a time when global understanding is arguably more important than it ever has been.” This SOA highlights the significance of implementing the suggested changes in the categorization of the LAC social science category.

Additionally, it maybe useful if social science faculty meet periodically as a friendly reminder to consider the purposes, goals, and objectives of the category. If faculty became aware of the goals and objectives of the category, they may alter their courses, helping students to achieve the stated category objectives.

Using expert raters within each discipline might improve reliability. It may be advisable for future SOAs to include faculty from each discipline.

Table 1

Number of Responses by Students in the First and Third Category 5 Course to Each Scenario From a Particular Disciplinary Perspective

Discipline	9-11		Work-Family		TOTAL
	First course	Third course	First course	Third course	
Anthropologist	3	3	0	2	8
Economist	3	4	4	2	13
Geographer	1	3	0	2	6
Historian	6	4	5	0	15
Political Scientist	0	3	0	0	3
Psychologist	4	5	6	8	23
Sociologist	2	5	3	8	18
Social Worker	1	5	6	2	14
TOTAL	20	32	24	24	100

Table 2

Interrater Reliability Estimates

Rated Item	ICC
Question 1	.68
Question 2	.72
Facts or Data 1	.68
Facts or Data 2	.67
Methodology 1	.61
Methodology 2	.64
Benefits and Limitations 1	.59
Benefits and Limitations 2	.57

Note. Three raters and 28 respondents. ICC = Intraclass consistency coefficient, using two-way random effects model.

Table 3

Average Ratings for 9-11 Scenario by Discipline for Students in their First and Third Category 5 Course

Discipline	Question		Facts		Method		Benefit/Limit	
	First course	Third course	First course	Third course	First course	Third course	First course	Third course
Anthropologist	1.67 (.58)	2.67 (.33)	1.78 (.69)	2.56 (1.17)	1.89 (.51)	2.56 (.84)	1.78 (.69)	3.00 (.50)
Economist	2.78 (.19)	2.58 (.74)	2.44 (.51)	2.42 (.17)	2.00 (.57)	2.08 (.32)	2.00 (1.00)	2.29 (.21)
Geographer	1.67	2.67 (.00)	2.33	2.67 (.58)	2.00	2.33 (.33)	1.33	2.22 (1.07)
Historian	1.89 (.62)	2.50 (.43)	1.67 (.70)	1.67 (.47)	1.67 (.67)	2.17 (.79)	1.83 (.55)	1.96 (.67)
Political Scientist		3.11 (.69)		2.56 (1.01)		2.56 (.84)		2.33 (.76)
Psychologist	2.08 (.88)	2.87 (.38)	2.08 (.83)	2.40 (.64)	2.00 (.72)	2.13 (.69)	1.92 (.63)	2.50 (.50)
Sociologist	2.33 (.47)	2.60 (.37)	1.83 (.24)	2.13 (.56)	2.00 (1.41)	2.27 (.43)	1.67 (.94)	2.77 (.69)
Social Worker	1.00	2.60 (.89)	1.00	2.13 (.77)	1.00	2.20 (.56)	1.00	1.90 (.88)
TOTAL	2.02 (.68)	2.69 (.53)	1.90 (.67)	2.28 (.68)	1.83 (.65)	2.26 (.57)	1.78 (.63)	2.36 (.70)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Ratings were on a 4-point scale from (1) *unacceptable*, (2) *adequate*, (3) *good*, to (4) *outstanding*.

Table 4

Average Ratings for Work-Family Scenario by Discipline for Students in their First and Third Category 5 Course

Discipline	Question		Facts		Method		Benefit/Limit	
	First course	Third course	First course	Third course	First course	Third course	First course	Third course
Anthropologist		2.33 (1.14)		1.67 (.47)		2.50 (.24)		2.75 (1.06)
Economist	2.75 (.57)	3.17 (.24)	2.75 (.50)	2.00 (.94)	2.17 (.33)	1.67 (.47)	2.50 (.57)	2.33 (1.41)
Geographer		3.33 (.47)		2.67 (.47)		2.33 (.00)		2.33 (.47)
Historian	2.80 (.44)		2.45 (.51)		1.93 (.89)		2.33 (.58)	
Political Scientist								
Psychologist	2.33 (.56)	3.08 (.53)	1.72 (.25)	2.50 (1.02)	2.33 (.52)	2.71 (.60)	2.12 (.18)	2.31 (.48)
Sociologist	2.67 (1.20)	3.17 (.59)	2.67 (.88)	2.92 (.53)	2.67 (.33)	2.75 (.35)	2.78 (.69)	2.73 (.55)
Social Worker	2.67 (.52)	3.17 (.24)	2.56 (.62)	2.17 (1.18)	2.67 (.30)	2.17 (.71)	2.61 (.68)	2.08 (.59)
TOTAL	2.63 (.60)	3.08 (.59)	2.37 (.63)	2.51 (.82)	2.34 (.57)	2.54 (.54)	2.44 (.54)	2.47 (.61)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Ratings were on a 4-point scale from (1) *unacceptable*, (2) *adequate*, (3) *good*, (4) to *outstanding*.

Appendix A

Student Outcomes Assessment Plan Category V, Social Science Liberal Arts Core University of Northern Iowa June 2004

The Student Outcomes Assessment Policy of the University of Northern Iowa (April 1, 1991) stipulates that the implementation of student outcomes assessment will consist of three parts. CSBS has followed those stipulations for the implementation of the student outcomes assessment for Category V. First, CSBS established a college committee to develop the assessment plan for Category V and the CSBS Dean's office supervises the process of collecting and analyzing outcomes data. Second, the committee has established the assessment plan and that plan contains five parts as detailed in the Student Outcomes Assessment Policy of the University of Northern Iowa (i.e., assessment philosophy and program goals, student outcomes and competencies, frequency of assessments, assessment methods, and methods of evaluating and interpreting results). Third, the results of the assessment process will be published and distributed to faculty who teach in Category V and to other appropriate university groups as well as be used to further refine the process and make program adjustments. Below is a description of the five parts of the assessment plan.

Assessment Philosophy and Program Goals

Taken from the Student Outcomes Assessment Policy of the University of Northern Iowa, our assessment philosophy and program goals follow the principles established for UNI

- ❖ Although teaching is a major element of assessment, student learning remains the primary responsibility of the student
- ❖ Campus climate is critical to effective teaching and learning.
- ❖ There are two sets of skills and competencies that students must learn, a minimum set and an additional set of desired skills which enable the student to strive for excellence. Assessment must accumulate data not only on these minimum basic outcomes, but must also measure the degree to which programs impart the skills required for excellence.
- ❖ For assessment to succeed students must: see the value of the process, participate sincerely, and believe that the process will result in improvements.
- ❖ Data collected through assessment should be governed by recognized codes of ethics relating to human subjects research.

- ❖ Outcomes assessment requires resources, especially when faculty time and effort are required.
- ❖ Faculty will not participate effectively and outcomes assessment is unlikely to be successful if faculty suspect that assessment results will be incorporated in the faculty reward structure. However, faculty must be rewarded for their [service] work on the assessment process.
- ❖ A major purpose of outcomes assessment is to build habits of inquiry and a culture of evidence about student learning.
- ❖ Successful assessment requires leadership and support throughout the university, as well as integrity and accountability from those administering the program.
- ❖ The assessment program itself must be evaluated periodically.
- ❖ Outcomes assessment may be based on either a census or a sample of students.
- ❖ Interdisciplinary programs such as general education, the business core, and the professional sequence in education will be assessed by committees involving faculty from the affected departments.

Student Outcomes and Competencies

The Liberal Arts Core should encourage students to develop skills in inquiry, critical analysis, and logical thinking. The social science component of the liberal arts core should contribute to students' knowledge and understanding of

1. the economic, environmental, geographical, historical, political, psychological, and socio-cultural influences on human behavior, relationships, and institutions; and
2. how human behavior can be analyzed from social scientific and historical perspectives.

Outcomes are demonstrable general consequences of the process of attempting to reach the goals of the category. As such, after completing Category V of the Liberal Arts Core, students should be able to:

1. Identify the kinds of questions social scientists and historians ask.
2. Know and clearly and succinctly summarize some of the major concepts, models, and issues within the social sciences and history.
3. Comprehend and identify ways in which human behavior, relationships, and institutions are influenced by economic, environmental, geographical, historical, political, psychological, and socio-cultural structures and processes.

4. Describe and critique two methods social scientists use to explore social and behavioral phenomena, including but not limited to observation, hypothesis development, experimentation, mathematical analysis, and interpretive analysis.

Frequency of Assessments

The assessment of Category V will take place during the fall semester of every other year, starting Fall 2004.

Assessment Methods

The assessment will take the form of *essay questions* and be given 1) in one course from each A,B, and C groups of Category V, 2) by professors who are willing to participate, and 3) to students to have completed at least two courses in Category V.

The students will be asked to write on the essay questions for 30 minutes. The questions will be determined the by CSBS assessment committee (sample questions attached). There will be at least one question for each of the stated outcomes for Category V. The essays will be collected and then a random sample determined. The sample can only contain essays by students who have completed two courses in Category V.

Methods of Evaluating and Interpreting Results

Each question from the sample will be graded. A scoring rubric will be developed by the assessment committee. There will be a committee of three persons who will grade the essays, based on the rubric. Those persons will come from instructors in the liberal arts core and those who have a basic knowledge of the material. They will be given some example answers in to understand what is expected. They each grade the essays, keeping their results separate and average them only after all essays have been graded by all readers.

Appendix B(1)
Category V Response Form 1

Name: _____

Date: _____

Put a check next to any social science courses you have taken in UNI's liberal arts core:

- A. Group A Sociocultural and Historical Perspectives
 - 900:023 American Civilization, 3 hours
 - 970:010 Human Geography, 3 hours
 - 970:040 World Geography, 3 hours
 - 980:001 Introduction to Sociology, 3 hours
 - 990:011 Culture, Nature, and Society, 3 hours
- B. Group B Individual and Institutional Perspectives
 - 31F:010 Human Identity and Relationships, 3 hours
 - 400:001 Introduction to Psychology, 3 hours
 - 920:024* Introduction to Economics, 3 hours
 - 942:014 Introduction to American Politics, 3 hours
 - 943:024 International Relations, 3 hours
- C. Group C Topical Perspectives
 - 450:041/900:041 Social Welfare: A World View, 3 hours
 - 450:045/900:045/980:045 American Racial & Ethnic Minorities, 3 hours
 - 900:020 Women, Men, and Society, 3 hours
 - 900:080 Conflict and Social Reconstruction, 3 hours
 - 900:085 The Nature of Social Issues, 3 hours
 - 900:090 Children and Youth: Issues and Controversies, 3 hours
 - 940:020 Contemporary Political Problems, 3 hours
 - 980:060 Social Problems, 3 hours

You will be asked to respond to the phenomenon described below from the perspective of two different social scientists. If you have taken two social science courses in the liberal arts core, it is recommended that you select perspectives based upon courses you took to fulfill the social sciences requirement in the liberal arts core.

9-11 and War

On September 11, 2001, hijacked airliners struck targets in New York and Washington. Another, bound for Washington, crashed in rural Pennsylvania, the result of a struggle between passengers and hijackers. All told, 265 passengers and crew members aboard the hijacked planes were killed. More than 100 others died at the Pentagon and more than 2,500 died in New York. The hijackers also died.

In the aftermath of these acts, the United States military invaded Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. By 2004, over 1,200 American and hundreds of allied troops had died, as had thousands of Afghan and Iraqi soldiers. Conservative estimates of civilian noncombatant deaths are over 1,000 in Afghanistan and between 5,000 and 10,000 in Iraq.

Americans continue to debate the justification for war in Iraq. Some argue that Iraq had “weapons of mass destruction,” a tyrannical government, and/or had collaborated in terrorist attacks on the United States. Others argue that evidence for such weapons and collaboration was questionable, and that bad governments exist in many countries.

Please answer the questions in the following order. Put the question number on the paper and then begin your answer.

Perspective 1

1. Identify which social scientific perspective you will take (*Choose from: Anthropologist, Economist, Geographer, Historian, Political Scientist, Psychologist, Sociologist, Social Worker*).
2. Identify a question that the social scientist you selected above (#1) might ask about the phenomenon.
3. What facts or data would the social scientist use to answer the question?
4. What methodology would the social scientist use to collect those facts or data?
5. Identify a benefit and a limitation of that methodology.

Perspective 2

6. Identify which social scientific perspective you will take (*Choose from same list as above*).
7. Identify a question that the social scientist you selected above (#6) might ask about the phenomenon.
8. What facts or data would the social scientist use to answer the question?
9. What methodology would the social scientist use to collect those facts or data?
10. Identify a benefit and a limitation of that methodology.

Appendix B (2)
Category V Response Form 2

Name: _____

Date: _____

Put a check next to any social science courses you have taken in UNI's liberal arts core:

- A. Group A Sociocultural and Historical Perspectives
 - 900:023 American Civilization, 3 hours
 - 970:010 Human Geography, 3 hours
 - 970:040 World Geography, 3 hours
 - 980:001 Introduction to Sociology, 3 hours
 - 990:011 Culture, Nature, and Society, 3 hours
- B. Group B Individual and Institutional Perspectives
 - 31F:010 Human Identity and Relationships, 3 hours
 - 400:001 Introduction to Psychology, 3 hours
 - 920:024* Introduction to Economics, 3 hours
 - 942:014 Introduction to American Politics, 3 hours
 - 943:024 International Relations, 3 hours
- C. Group C Topical Perspectives
 - 450:041/900:041 Social Welfare: A World View, 3 hours
 - 450:045/900:045/980:045 American Racial & Ethnic Minorities, 3 hours
 - 900:020 Women, Men, and Society, 3 hours
 - 900:080 Conflict and Social Reconstruction, 3 hours
 - 900:085 The Nature of Social Issues, 3 hours
 - 900:090 Children and Youth: Issues and Controversies, 3 hours
 - 940:020 Contemporary Political Problems, 3 hours
 - 980:060 Social Problems, 3 hours

You will be asked to respond to the phenomenon described below from the perspective of two different social scientists. If you have taken two social science courses in the liberal arts core, it is recommended that you select perspectives based upon courses you took to fulfill the social sciences requirement in the liberal arts core.

Work and Family

Today, women make up about 47% of the U.S. labor force, up from 38% in 1970. Approximately 40% of all workers come from dual-earner households (i.e., both spouses work) and 23% of all workers are single parents. People work more hours now than they have historically, and one in five works evenings, nights, or rotating shifts. A result of these changes is that people have less time to spend with their family. Three out of five children are in childcare, including 19 million infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In addition, many workers experience stress as a result of conflict between work and family demands. It may not be surprising that both men and women report that they would like to work less. However, women who work have better mental and physical health than those who do not, and the standard of living in the U.S. has been increasing.

Please answer the questions in the following order. Put the question number on the paper and then begin your answer.

Perspective 1

1. Identify which social scientific perspective you will take (*Choose from: Anthropologist, Economist, Geographer, Historian, Political Scientist, Psychologist, Sociologist, Social Worker*).
2. Identify a question that the social scientist you selected above (#1) might ask about the phenomenon.
3. What facts or data would the social scientist use to answer the question?
4. What methodology would the social scientist use to collect those facts or data?
5. Identify a benefit and a limitation of that methodology.

Perspective 2

6. Identify which social scientific perspective you will take (*Choose from same list as above*).
7. Identify a question that the social scientist you selected above (#6) might ask about the phenomenon.
8. What facts or data would the social scientist use to answer the question?
9. What methodology would the social scientist use to collect those facts or data?
10. Identify a benefit and a limitation of that methodology.

Appendix C
Scoring Sheet

Student
Name/Number _____

Semester _____

Scenario: 9/11 Work/Family Conflict

	Unacceptable	Adequate	Good
Discipline chosen: <i>Anthropologist, Economist, Geographer, Historian, Political Scientist, Psychologist, Sociologist, Social Worker</i>			
Question identified			
Facts and or data identified			
Methodology identified			
One benefit and one limitation identified			
Discipline chosen: <i>Anthropologist, Economist, Geographer, Historian, Political Scientist, Psychologist, Sociologist, Social Worker</i>			
Question identified			
Facts and or data identified			
Methodology identified			
One benefit and one limitation identified			