

MEMO

To: Anthropology, Sociology, & Criminology Faculty
From: Scott Vollum
Re: Spring 2017 Assessment of Theory
Date: August 21, 2017

In the course of the 2006-2007 academic year, the department's assessment committee worked to develop learning objectives for three key areas of the disciplines of Sociology and Criminology: methods, theory and inequality. The committee also initiated a plan to assess, on an ongoing basis, one of these three areas every academic year, beginning with methods.

This prior year (2016-2017), the theory sequence was assessed. In the Spring 2017 semester, one section of Criminological Theory (CRIM 2311) was assessed using a pre- and post-test design with a multiple choice instrument. The pre-test was given on the first day of class, before any instruction or content had been engaged. The post-test was given during the last week of class. The multiple choice instrument measured the following 6 elements:

1. General Theory Knowledge
2. Knowledge of Specific Theories
3. Application of Theory (e.g. Policy/Practical)
4. Assessing/Evaluating Theories
5. Concept Definition (Definition of Crime; Social Construction of Crime)
6. Theoretical Assumptions

There were a total of 35 items in the instrument. The number of items used to assess each element varied and some items were used to measure multiple elements. 22 students completed both the pre- and post-test. There were 24 students in the course, making the response rate 91.7%.

As can be seen in the table, there was a statistically significant increase in correct answers, both overall and for all but one element. The greatest increase was for "Application of Theory" but the others had double-digit increases. The exception was for the element "Concept Definition" which saw no significant increase. This makes sense as a high proportion of students already got these items correct on the pre-test (ostensibly due to learning about the definition of crime in Introduction to Criminology).

Criminology & Sociology Assessment Results - 2017 (N = 22)

Topic Area	# of Items	Mean % Correct		Difference
		<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	
1. General Theory Knowledge	15	53.3	75.0	21.7**
2. Knowledge of Specific Theories	26	49.1	76.2	27.1**
3. Application of Theory	4	49.3	80.7	31.4**
4. Assessing/Evaluating Theories	2	64.0	75.0	11.0*
5. Concept Definition	2	82.0	88.6	6.6
6. Assumptions	5	44.0	73.6	29.6**
7. Overall Score (All Items)	35	52.2	76.7	24.5**

*Significant at $p < .10$

**Significant at $p < .05$

One of the key takeaways and tasks for the coming years in "closing the loop" on the theory component of our assessment is to re-examine the method for assessing theory across classes in both Sociology and Criminology. We need to have those teaching the theory classes work together to identify key aspects of theoretical knowledge important to assess and the core learning outcomes desired across all theory classes. This may not be possible via an "objective" test style as used this year. Those tasked with teaching Sociological Theory and Criminological Theory should meet and discuss these matters and devise an adequate process for assessing theory sometime prior to the next cycle (2020) and ensure that the process/approach is in line with current assessment requirements.