

Assessment of Theory Learning Outcome, University of Oregon, Department of Sociology

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Introduction

This document outlines the UO sociology department's efforts to assess learning outcome #2 for our undergraduate students. This learning outcomes focuses on an understanding of sociological theory and specifically declares:

Students will be familiar with major theoretical traditions and be able to use sociological theories to critically analyze systems of social power, institutions, human difference, or behavior.

The sociology major requires students to complete Sociology 310: Social Theory which focuses specifically on these theoretical traditions. However, it is widely understood among faculty in our program that this learning outcome should be a component of all of our upper division courses. A review of syllabi by the Chair of the Joint Curriculum Committee and the Director of Undergraduate Studies confirmed that all of our upper division courses contribute to this learning outcome. Therefore, we expect that the primary predictor of whether students are proficient with this learning outcome will be the number of upper-division courses taken.

In order to assess the learning outcome, the department's Joint Curriculum Committee developed a Canvas quiz that was taken by undergraduates in three separate 300-level courses during the Winter 2021 term. The quiz included thirteen multiple choice questions that asked students to identify the theoretical tradition associated with a certain statement. Students were given participation and/or extra credit in each course for completing the quiz. The full text of the question is provided at the bottom of this report. Students were also asked for their year in school, whether they were a sociology major or minor, how many 300 and 400 level courses they had taken, and whether they had taken Sociology 310.

We chose three upper-division courses that would lead to a large sample size. Table 1 shows the enrollment and participation rates for each of these courses. Response rates were very high in Sociology 310 and 345. The response rate was somewhat lower in Sociology 355, but the majority of students still completed the quiz. The final sample of students was 270.

Table 1: Winter 2021 Courses used for the assessment

Course	Enrollment	Participation
Sociology 310: Social Theory	99	89 (90%)
Sociology 345: Race and Ethnicity	145	123 (85%)
Sociology 355: Gender	110	58 (53%)

Results

To assess the learning outcome, we focus on differences in quiz scores between sociology majors/minors and non-majors, the relationship between quiz scores and number of courses taken, and the effect of taking Sociology 310 on quiz scores.

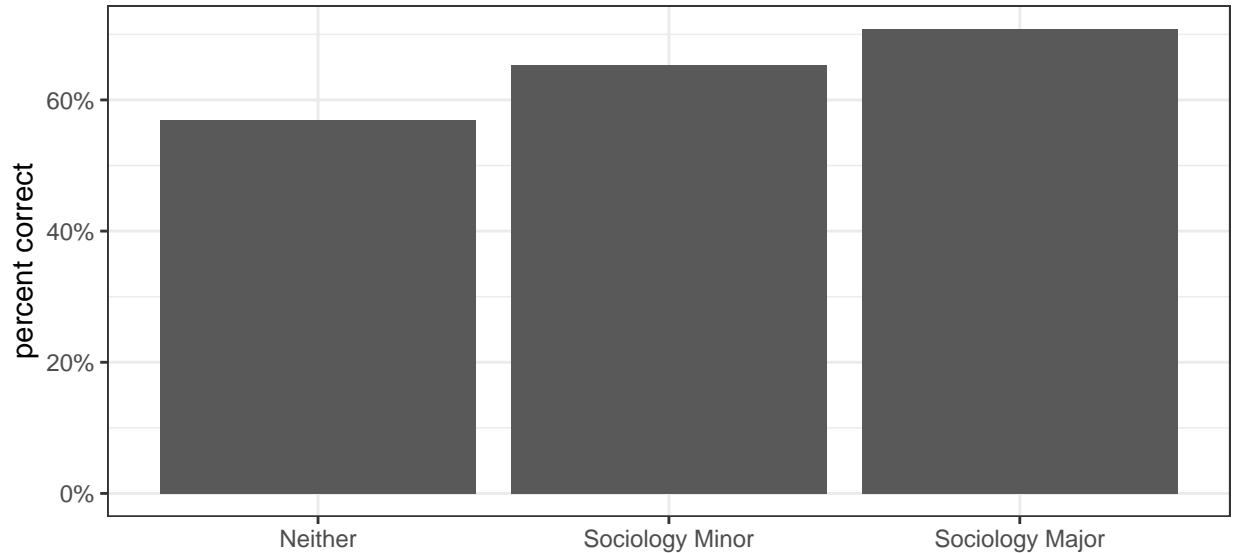


Figure 1: Percent of answers correct by major

Figure 1 shows the average percent correct separately by major. The results clearly show a difference between sociology major and non-majors. Sociology majors had a mean percent correct of 71% while non-majors had a mean percent correct of 57%. Sociology minors were midway between majors and non-majors with a percent correct of 65%. These results suggest that our major is accomplishing its objective of making students proficient in this learning outcome.

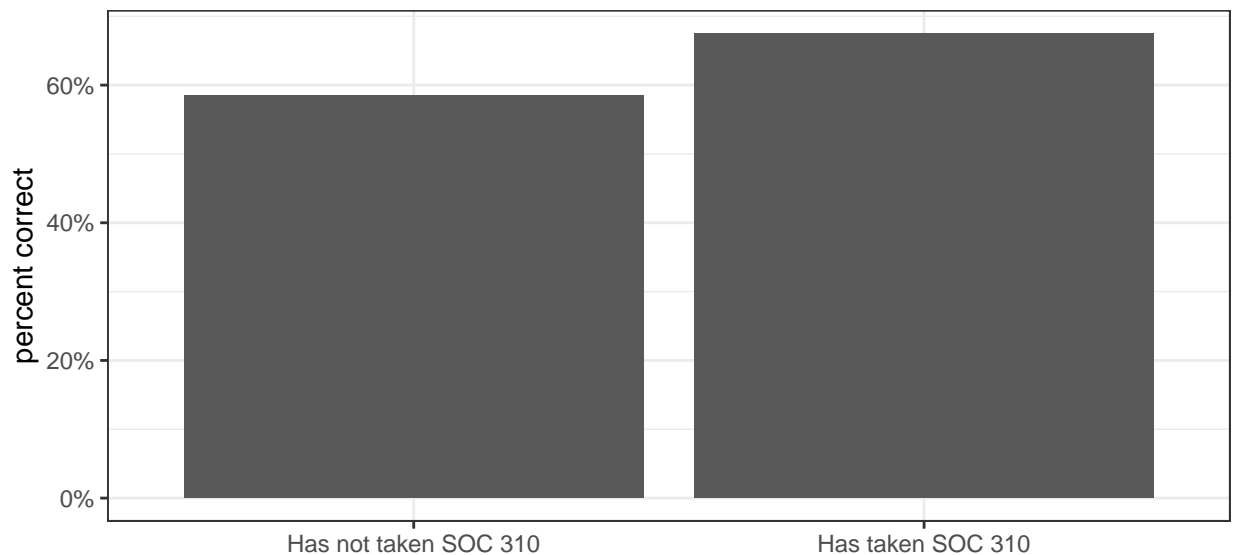


Figure 2: Percent of answers correct by whether student has taken Sociology 310: Social Theory

Figure 2 shows the effect of having taken Sociology 310 on scores. The results clearly show that students who have taken our core course focusing on theory have higher scores. Students who have not taken Sociology

310 had average scores of 59% while those who have taken Sociology 310 have average scores of 68%.

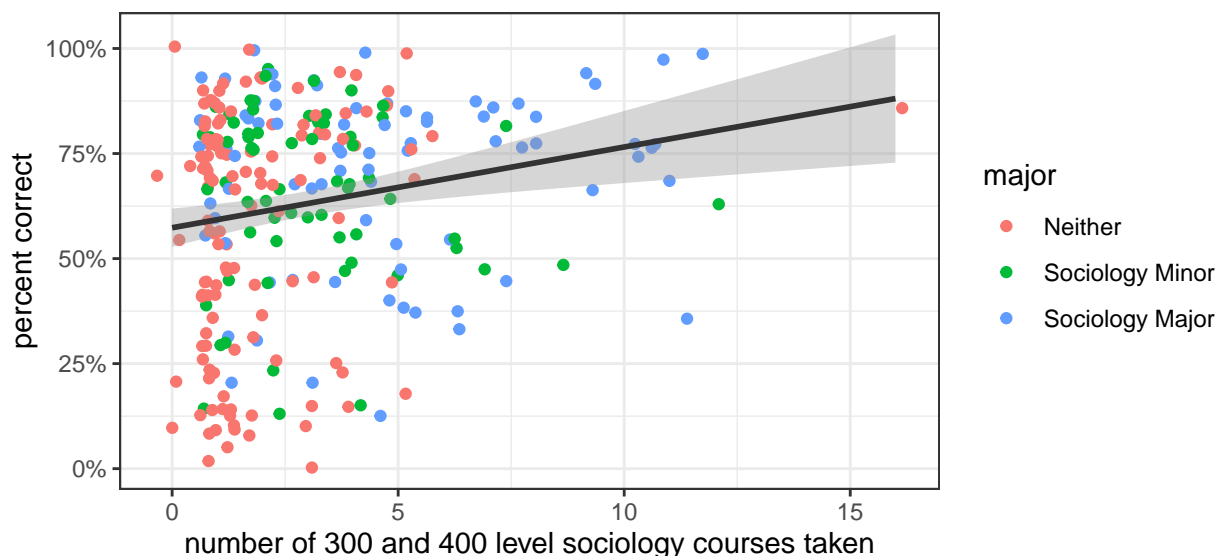


Figure 3: Relationship between percent correct and the number of upper level sociology courses taken. Points are jittered slightly to adjust for overplotting. The black line shows the best fitting line by ordinary least squares. Grey band shows 95% confidence interval.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the number of upper division courses taken in sociology and a student's score. The figure shows a very clear and strong positive relationship between the number of courses taken and a student's score. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is 0.2.

Because being major, having taken Sociology 310, and the number of upper division courses are all correlated with one another, as a final step, we use a linear model to determine how these variables collectively predict a student's score. Specifically, we use a poisson model to predict the number of correct responses for each student by a variety of variables.

The results of the models are shown in Table 2. The most important and robust effect is the number of upper division sociology courses taken. Controlling for whether students have taken Sociology 310 and major status, each additional course is associated with about a 3% ($e^{.029}$) increase in a student's score, on average.

There is some evidence that differences by major status persist even after controlling for the number of courses taken, although the differences are not statistically significant. Controlling for whether students having taken Sociology 310 and the number of upper-level sociology courses taken, sociology majors score about 10% ($e^{.093}$) higher than non-majors and sociology minors score about 8% ($e^{.081}$) higher than non-majors.

Students who have taken Sociology 310 initially appear to score much better (19%) than students who have not, but this difference almost entirely reflects underlying differences in major status and the number of courses taken between these students. Once we control for these variables, students who have taken Sociology 310 only score 2% better than students who have not and this result is not statistically significant.

Conclusions

The results here indicate that our courses are broadly efficacious in achieving the desired learning outcome. Importantly, the most important factor in a high score on assessment is the number of upper division sociology courses taken. This speaks to the fact that we integrate this learning objective broadly in all of our 300 and 400 level courses rather than concentrate it within a single course.

Table 2: Estimates from poisson models predicting number of correct responses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	1.933*** (0.107)	1.892*** (0.108)	1.965*** (0.111)
Has taken Sociology 310	0.174** (0.057)	0.075 (0.067)	0.023 (0.070)
Sociology minor		0.114 (0.058)	0.081 (0.060)
Sociology major		0.174** (0.062)	0.093 (0.069)
Number of upper division sociology courses			0.029** (0.011)
AIC	1464.477	1460.137	1455.537
BIC	1493.264	1496.121	1495.120
Log Likelihood	-724.238	-720.068	-716.769
Deviance	415.938	407.598	400.999
Num. obs.	270	270	270

All models include controls for which course students were surveyed in and year in school.

Quiz Instrument

As a discipline, sociology uses a variety of theories to critically analyze systems of social power, institutions, human difference, or behavior. Listed below are the central theoretical traditions in sociology, and examples of scholars who wrote in that theoretical tradition. Please read the following questions and select which theoretical tradition best fits the description of the perspective.

Theoretical Traditions

- DuBoisian Tradition (WEB DuBois)
- Durkheimian Tradition (Emile Durkheim)
- Intersectional Theory (Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins)
- Marxist Tradition (Karl Marx)
- Symbolic Interactionism (Irving Goffman)
- Weberian Tradition (Max Weber)

Table 3 below lists each question as well as the corresponding percent of students who answered the question correctly. The results suggest a somewhat lower response rate for questions relating to the Weberian tradition. It also suggests somewhat lower responses for questions in which students were asked to apply theory to an applied case.

Table 3: Questions asked in assessment, sorted from highest to lowest scores

Question	Percent responding correctly
In which theoretical tradition would we find the argument that unions are critical organizations in the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie?	80.7
Which theoretical tradition addresses social solidarity, suggesting that there are two kinds of solidarity - mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity?	73.7
What theoretical tradition argues that blacks in the US experience a “double consciousness?”	71.1
Which theoretical tradition describes how we constantly engage in “impression management” to communicate ideas about our identities and who we are?	66.7
Which theoretical tradition suggests that inequality can’t be understood by a single measure, like race, gender or class?	66.3
Which theoretical tradition uses theater metaphors to suggest that social life is made up of actors and audiences in which people perform a variety of roles?	60.7
Which theoretical tradition focuses on relations of production and argues that at the core of human societies is the relationship between those who produce what we need to live and those who own the means of production?	60.4
Which theoretical tradition suggests that in times of rapid social change the rules guiding behavior become less clear and that this period of rapid development of a new area of social life without defined rules for moral behavior is called anomie?	57.8
Which theoretical tradition makes the connection between religious practices and economic behavior in a treatise famously titled The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism?	54.1
Which theoretical tradition can help explain that it is only by examining the race, class and gender simultaneously that we can understand the disproportionate amount of black men in prison in the United States?	51.1
Which theoretical tradition might suggest that cult members follow the instructions of a cult leader because the leader has “charismatic authority?”	50.4
Which theoretical tradition might suggest that “gig economy” companies such as Lyft, Uber, TaskRabbit, Fiverr, and Freelancer where people work as independent contractors who get paid for each job rather than receiving a set wage or salary as an employee are a new way for capitalists to try to accumulate more wealth for themselves?	37.0
Which theoretical tradition expanded a theory of class conflict to argue that societies are stratified by status groups, based on many different attributes or identities, including religion, ethnicity, and race, that seek to close off opportunities to other groups?	17.4