Sociology 303 – Junior Writing Seminar – Research Design and Writing

I. Articulation of Goals and Objectives Most Relevant to this Course

Departmental Learning Goal 2:
Graduating sociology majors should think sociologically. Specifically she should be able to:

Departmental Learning Objectives for Goal 2:
1. Distinguish between responsible and irresponsible generalization, and engage in the former.
2. Pursue a research question through systematic sociological analysis, including theorizing, conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, and data-gathering.

Departmental Learning Goal 3:
Graduating sociology majors should be able to follow and contribute to the ongoing sociological conversation. Specifically she should be able to:

Departmental Learning Objectives for Goal 3:
3. Read and comprehend the various methods used by sociologists to conduct research (statistical, content analysis, ethnography, textual analysis, socio-historical analysis) and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each.
4. Organize ideas and research into presentations (both written and oral) that are well-argued, clear, and insightful.

II. Learning Strategy

The purpose of the Junior Writing Seminar is threefold:

- To expose students to the basic mechanics involved with a variety of non-statistical research methods used by contemporary sociologists
- For each student to identify their own sociological research question and propose a research methodology designed to
III. Learning Assessments

Direct assessments of specific objectives:

Assignments in this class are cumulative - from the development of a research question to the writing of a research design. Thus, a rating-scale rubric will be developed to directly assess students’ learning as exhibited by their performance on the assignments in this course. The rating-scale will include categories from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and will be applied to learning objectives 1-4 as indicated below. (Other learning objectives more specifically related to the quality of students’ writing, such as grammar and paragraph organization may be added to the rubric):

1. Distinguish between responsible and irresponsible generalization, and engage in the former.
   - Students will write a response paper to each of the specific readings that explicitly address the issue of responsible generalization
   - Students will state clearly and explicitly in their research proposal what they believe to be generalizable from the data they propose to collect

2. Pursue a research question through systematic sociological analysis, including theorizing, conceptualization, operationalization, measurement, and data-gathering.
   - Students will do a series of assignments to identify a question and progressively narrow it, beginning with a brainstorming assignment that takes a general topic area...
and breaks it down into 3 subtopics – each with 2 different potential research questions, and ending with the final research proposal that explicitly outlines a strategy for gathering and analyzing data that answers a sufficiently narrow question that is situated in a relevant sociological literature.

3. Read and comprehend the various methods used by sociologists to conduct research (statistical, content analysis, ethnography, textual analysis, socio-historical analysis) and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each.

  o Students will write a response paper to a set of readings devoted to each methodology – at least one reading on how to conduct the methodology and at least one example of a journal article employing the methodology.

  o Students will practice at least two of the methodologies via mini research projects over the course of the semester and write up their reflections on their experience.

  o Students will select the best methodology to use to answer their research question and justify their selection in the written proposal.

4. Organize ideas and research into presentations (both written and oral) that are well-argued, clear, and insightful.

  o Students will orally present their ideas to their peers and to the instructor on a weekly basis, culminating in a final oral presentation of their research proposal.

  o Students will peer-review multiple drafts of their initial literature review and final research proposal.

  o Students will submit a final research proposal.

*Indirect Assessments of All Objectives:*

  o We will analyze data from sociology majors who participated in the senior survey and the senior exit interviews with respect to their learning of these goals (to the extent possible).

  o We will create and distribute a survey to seniors to ascertain if they achieved these specific learning goals during this course.
At the end of the spring semester of their senior year, we will have a departmental conversation with our graduating seniors about their experiences in the major, the successes and challenges they faced and their suggestions for future improvements in the department. In this conversation, we will specifically ask about their perceived mastery of the goals outlined for Junior Seminar.

After we have completed these assessments of student learning, we will have departmental discussions about these findings to ascertain if any major changes are necessary in our curriculum with respect to Junior Seminar to enhance students’ achievement in this area. We will attempt to implement any changes as warranted to the extent that staffing and funding permit.