WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINE

SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT: INTRODUCTION TO WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINE

The Sociology Department offers two majors:
Sociology and Justice Studies.
(Many students complete both majors.)

The two majors share a common two semester research sequence: Sociology 302 and Sociology 404.

Two additional specific Sociology courses are required for Justice Studies majors. These are: Sociology 207 (Crime and Criminal Justice); and Sociology 309 (Sociology of Delinquency and Crime).

Nine 300-level Sociology courses also meet requirements for Justice Studies majors. These are: Sociology 318, 333, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346.

Below we specify separately for each major the required courses in which students are led to focus on Writing in the Discipline.

JUSTICE STUDIES MAJOR

Checklist for Writing in the Discipline – Minimum Requirements

Specific course(s) identified; Course(s) are at sophomore level or above:

- Sociology 302*, 404**, 309, Justice Studies 466
  *JS/POL double majors may substitute POL 300 for SOC 302.
  **JS/PSYCH double majors may substitute PSYCH 320 for SOC 404.

Writing in the Discipline is accomplished in SOC 309 and JS 466, plus either SOC 302 or SOC 404.

Written Communication Learning Outcome
The Justice Studies major seeks to fulfill the following goals for criminal justice education in a liberal arts context.

1. To provide a foundation for professional development of pre-service and in-service personnel.
2. To orient students toward a systematic perspective of the criminal justice system.
3. To develop a citizenry educated in the problems of crime and in the administration of justice.
4. To develop understanding of the causes of crime and societal responses to it.
5. To emphasize the ethical and moral standards involved in decision-making and criminal justice activities.
6. To prepare future leaders both in the academic and applied setting.
7. To study criminal justice in the context of larger justice issues and with attention to the total environment in which the system operates.
8. To advance knowledge about the design, evolution, operation, and maintenance of justice system.
9. To induce students to think about issues in criminal justice and to develop professional attitudes and patterns of behavior.
10. To establish academic credentials to be emphasized more in the future than experience.
11. To provide an up-to-date understanding of law, human behavior, and social institutions.
12. To develop awareness of the field as a recognized academic discipline.
13. To upgrade the quality of service provided by personnel and criminal justice agencies.
14. To sensitize students to national differences in criminal justice systems. To introduce students to comparative perspectives on justice systems.
15. To emphasize the relevance of literature and research to practice in the field.

To facilitate the goals of the Justice Studies Program, students are expected to access the evidence based scholarly literature relating to criminology and criminal justice and apply it to development of a mock grant proposal that responds to a current criminal justice related Request for Proposals offered by federal or other grant funding agencies. Sociology 302 and 404 enable students to understand the evidence based scholarly research that applies to criminology and criminal justice. Students in Sociology 302 and 404 meet the writing goals specified below (taken from the description above for the Sociology Major). Sociology 309 and Justice Studies 466 enable students to utilize the evidence based research provided in scholarly journals in their written evaluations and in their mock development of criminal justice policies and programs. The role of each course in Justice Studies majors’ writing skills improvement is described below.

**Writing instruction is explicitly included in course requirements:**

Course(s) required for major:

In Sociology 302, our first research methods course, students are given explicit instruction in the disciplinary requirements for research proposals and literature reviews. Students learn to properly document sources, to synthesize the findings of sources into a coherent literature review, and to describe research methods. They integrate a revised draft of their literature review into a research proposal that they work on throughout the semester. In addition, they complete a variety of informal writing exercises designed to give them practice writing about research methods and research findings.

In Sociology 404, students build on their experience in writing a research proposal as they learn to draft full research papers according to disciplinary standards. Students write two research papers, one drawing on qualitative data and one drawing on large-scale quantitative data. In each, they write abstracts, literature reviews, discussions of their methodology, and discussions of their findings. Students also complete informal writing assignments throughout the semester which require them to pose hypotheses, describe data, and summarize research findings.

In Sociology 309, students are expected to write a 15-page research paper in which they describe the key points of one of the major theories of delinquency and crime and use their discussion to analyze an approved current peer reviewed scholarly article that uses the same theory. Students choose the article in consultation with the instructor. In their analysis students are required to demonstrate the ways in which one or more theories of delinquency and crime shaped the hypotheses and research strategies that led to the empirical evidence on which the article is based. Students must also explain the implications of the empirical results for the theory, indicating whether the findings provide support for the theory, or suggest that it should be revised. Students are referred to the department’s Term Paper Guide (see attached) and are required to submit papers using the ASA citation style. In a subsequent assignment, students are required to write a second research page paper (15-20 pages) in which they analyze four peer reviewed scholarly articles chosen by the instructor utilizing the criteria and format described above. In this second assignment students are led to focus primarily on the researchers’ application of theory to the development of the research, and the implications of the research in providing support for or suggesting the need for revision of the theory. Students are also led to discuss the implications of the
findings for criminal justice policies and programs.

In Justice Studies 466, the capstone course in this major, students have two major writing assignments. In the first, a 20-page research paper, students are led to apply key concepts to analysis of the links among major assigned readings and news analyses of current criminal justice problems and issues. This assignment leads students to explain in detail the theoretical concept under consideration and the empirical problem described. Students must demonstrate how the concept utilized by several authors can be seen empirically in the data provided in their texts and in assigned news discussions of a similar problem or issue. In the second writing assignment for this course, students are expected to find a request for proposals (RFP) in criminal justice issued by a granting agency and respond to it with a proposal for a plausible program of service provision. The program or proposal must be designed for a specific location and time period. It must include: a title page specifying the RFP and funding agency as well as the student’s name and date of submission, an abstract, a problem statement, a review of the relevant evidence based research literature, a description of the program, a statement of the specific policy relevant aim to be achieved, a plan for evaluating the program’s success, a plan for the sustainability of the program, a justification of the proposal’s urgency, a budget and budget justification page. The proposal is 10-15 pages and must include both citations and a bibliography (prepared carefully and consistently using the style required by the American Sociological Association or other major professional association and the RFP). This assignment is the culmination of students’ development of Writing in the Discipline and is also central to program assessment in Justice Studies as it reflects student achievement in goals 9, 8, 13 and 15 above.

Statement of the role of writing in the discipline for students
The above courses are required as part of the major and, as such, we focus on writing in the field of justice studies as well as the specific substantive topical areas that it includes. As noted above we also introduce students to scholarly literature and writing in our 300 level courses as well. We see these as a good place to introduce the writing conventions in the discipline. Students are referred to our Term Paper Guide (see attached) and are required to submit papers using the ASA citation style. Often our 300 level classes use a combination of “low stakes” and “high stakes” writing assignments daily. In sociology 345, for example, students submit journal writing and discussion board comments (“low stakes”), which they are to do daily. They also submit five formal (4-6 pages) papers due every two weeks. These formal writing assignments are theory driven and use a variety of books on victimization. Students are expected to use citations and references to document their work (“High stakes”). The low stakes assignments are often graded pass/fail, while the formal papers are graded on rubrics that increase with more requirements as the semester progresses.

Desired writing outcomes and Statement about the progressive nature of learning to write in this discipline
Students progress in learning to write in the Justice Program by developing their ability to explain the use of theory in shaping empirical research and the importance of empirical research in evaluating theory. These understandings are developed in Sociology 309, Sociology 302 and Sociology 404 simultaneously and are applied to development of the mock grant proposal in Justice Studies 466. Students also develop similar understandings in the 300 level substantive Sociology courses required in the Justice Studies major, as described above in relation to Sociology 345: Victimology. Throughout their experiences in 300 level Sociology courses and in the capstone course, Justice Studies majors learn that good writing comes from revisions, willingness to be open to constructive criticism, suggestions and feedback. They also become aware of the importance of clear, effective and appropriate writing for work in the fields relating to Justice
Studies.

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