

Report on the Signature Assignment in Introduction to Sociology Courses
Core Objective: Critical Thinking
Sociology Program
Fall 2016

During the Fall 2016 semester, students in all Introduction to Sociology courses were required to complete the Signature Assignment for the Core Objective in Critical Thinking, as mandated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). This included 1193 undergraduates enrolled in eight courses (online and in-class) taught by one full-time faculty member and four adjuncts. On average, the grade distribution across all sections (lecture and online) for the Core Objective in Critical Thinking was as follows: A's=50%, B's=31%, C's=11%, D's=4%, and F's=4%.

The Sociology Program has been administering the Signature Assignment across all four Core Objectives since Fall 2014. Full-time faculty selected the "individual" rather than "communal" option—meaning that we were responsible for (1) developing measures that map onto the four Core Objectives, (2) making them available to all students in all Introduction to Sociology courses, and (3) tracking student academic performances. We followed THECB's recommendation to utilize digital technologies (i.e., BlackBoard) in creating, administering, and grading online tests for each Core Objective. Our measure for Critical Thinking is based on a handout that was provided to faculty during the Spring 2013 semester, which states that assessments in this area must "include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information." (Texas Core Curriculum 2014, Chapter 4 B§4.28-4.31). Consequently, demonstrating competence in "critical thinking" in Introduction to Sociology courses requires students to exhibit an understanding of complex social issues, as well as display knowledge on the role that various social forces play in shaping life experiences across individuals and groups.

Students were randomly presented with 8 of the 16 items comprising the test bank for Critical Thinking. To successfully complete the Signature Assignment, students had to correctly answer multiple choice questions related to newspaper articles, short films, graphs, and demonstrate an awareness of civic and cultural issues from a sociological perspective. They were required to complete the test in two hours, but were permitted to use their class notes and textbook. A copy of our measure for Social Responsibility is contained within the Appendix to this report.

The Sociology Program's threshold for student mastery is 70%. We arrived at this decision with input from Dr. Kim Van Noort, a former Associate Dean in the College of Liberal Arts, who initially led the implementation of Undergraduate Core Curriculum revisions. During the Fall 2016 semester, 93% of our students either met or surpassed this baseline for performance. Section numbers for courses comprising the total list of courses administered the Signature Assignment in Critical Thinking include 1311-001, 1311-002, 1311-003, 1311-004, 1311-005, 1311-006, 1311-700, and 1311-701.

Notes:

¹ The report, above, was furnished to the university by Dr. Jason Shelton, UTA Sociology and Anthropology Dept.

² A list of the 16 multiple-choice items used to assess Critical Thinking is available by permission; please contact the Sociology Department directly.

³ Course roster information provided general information to describe all the students enrolled in Fall 2016 Introduction to Sociology course sections ($N = 1193$). The UTA Institutional Effectiveness and Reporting Department prepared the tables and figures that follow. In addition, outcome data from one course section enabled comparisons related to trends in student attainment (e.g., means by classification and college major).

Student characteristics for fall 2016 UTA Introduction to Sociology course sections

A third of the undergraduates in this course were freshmen (see Figure 1). Over half of the enrolled students were classified as lower division (for example, having completed less than half of the credit hours required for a baccalaureate degree). Most attended class on campus (57%), nine percent received instruction online during the regular 16-week semester session, and 35% received instruction in dynamically-dated online sessions lasting 8 weeks.

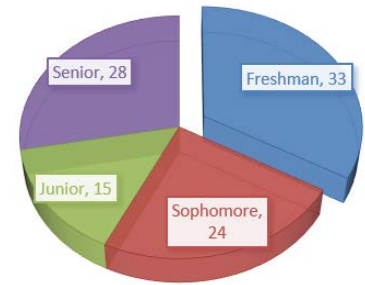


Figure 1. Percent of students by classification level

Introduction to Sociology student enrollment represented all nine Schools and Colleges at UT Arlington (see percentages in Figure 2). Together, the College of Science, College of Liberal Arts, and University College represented a quarter of the sample. Most students represented the College of Nursing, whose graduates number more than twice the total from any of the other nine. In addition, this college has pre-licensure and post-licensure programs, thus the number of nursing undergraduates completing their Texas Core Curriculum requirements is quite large.

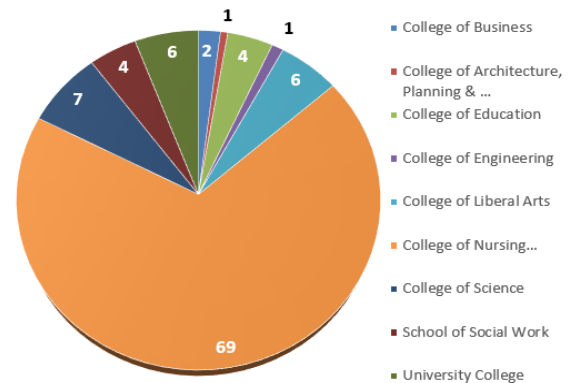


Figure 2. Percent of students by college or school

Tracking student characteristics by Critical Thinking score

For one course section, student characteristics were available to track trends in student attainment by their score on the Critical Thinking measure. This subsample of students attended class on campus ($n = 206$). As stated earlier, each student answered eight of 16 questions in the test bank, so Critical Thinking was measured on scale of 0 - 8 with higher scores indicating more attainment. The mean number of correct answers was 7.39 ($SD = 0.79$). As expected, upper classmen had higher average Critical Thinking scores; however, the difference was not significant (Table 1). Drilling down further to see if there were any significant relationships between level and Critical Thinking score, a positive trend of higher scores as levels increased ($r(206) = 0.24, p = 0.009$) was found in the College of Nursing. Colleges differed in the number of student scores in this subsample ($range = 1$ to 97), therefore the mean scores by college are included for the five colleges with the most students represented (see Table 2).

Table 1. Mean Critical Thinking score by level

| Level | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------|-----|------|----------------|
| Freshman | 111 | 7.41 | 0.78 |
| Sophomore | 57 | 7.28 | 0.80 |
| Junior | 24 | 7.50 | 0.89 |
| Senior | 14 | 7.50 | 0.86 |
| Total | 206 | 7.39 | 0.79 |

Table 2. Mean Critical Thinking score by college

| College or School | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|----|------|----------------|
| Education | 25 | 7.32 | 0.80 |
| Liberal Arts | 17 | 7.35 | 0.49 |
| Nursing | 97 | 7.33 | 0.79 |
| Science | 21 | 7.14 | 1.11 |
| University College | 30 | 7.80 | 0.41 |