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# MEMORANDUM

**Date**: February 12, 2025

**To**: Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee

**From**: Kammi Schmeer

Director of Graduate Studies

Department of Sociology

**Subject**: Changes to goals and outcomes for the doctoral program in sociology

The purpose of this memorandum is to document recent changes to the learning goals and outcomes for the doctoral program in the Department of Sociology.

### Procedures for Establishing Changes

The adjustment to previous goals and outcomes (listed below) arose from the adoption of a new method for assessing dissertations. This new method entailed the development of a multi-dimensional rubric wherein specific criteria were articulated for measurement underneath the existing program goals. These criteria served as the bases for articulating general program outcomes that could be applied to other student work, besides the dissertation.

The rubric and new outcomes were approved by the Graduate Studies Committee, Director of Graduate Studies, and the Department Chair in the Department of Sociology beginning Autumn 2023 and have been accounted for in the program’s revised assessment plan, starting with outcomes assessments for the 2023-2024 academic year, which have already been reported in Nuventive.

### Rationale for Changes

Prior to the development of the new dissertation rubric, the doctoral program’s goals referred to three broad categories: Core Knowledge, Research Skills, and Professionalism. To allow for a fuller and more concrete account of the dimensions of achievement demonstrated by doctoral students in their dissertations and associated defenses, more specific and measurable learning outcomes were added underneath the existing program goals. These new learning outcomes were, however, articulated broadly enough that they could readily be used for assessments of other student work in the program, presuming that criteria associated with each outcome were adapted to the alternate assignment (e.g., an area exam, a seminar paper, a research portfolio, etc.).

Besides the addition of outcomes under each goal, the third goal, labeled, “Professionalism”, was rephrased to accommodate the professionalism involved in completing *required* elements of the program, including the dissertation and the defense. The previous articulation of this goal referred to achievements like publications or conference presentations, that, while laudable demonstrations of professional activities, are not required for completion of the program, nor are they primarily reflective of professionalism by itself.

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### New Goals and Outcomes

1. **Core Knowledge**: Students will learn sociological knowledge in substantive areas of the discipline related to core areas of sociology and their own research interests.
   1. **Field Knowledge**: Demonstrate substantive comprehension of the theoretical trends, core questions, and relevant subfields within the field.
   2. **Focus Area**: Demonstrate advanced comprehension of core concepts, concerns, and questions related to the focus area of a research *project*.
2. **Research Skills**: Students will acquire advanced skills associated with a range of research methods used in sociology.
   1. **Scholarly research**: Account for strengths, shortcomings, and gaps in existing scholarship related to a research topic.
   2. **Empirical methods**: Justify a research method for advancing knowledge on a specific problem or question.
   3. **Analyzing results**: Discuss findings discovered through applied research methodologies.
   4. **Extrapolating from results**: Explain the implications of research findings for a particular problem or question in the field.
3. **Professionalism**: Students will engage in professional activities associated with the field of sociology, including presenting original work in professional settings according to current scholarly conventions and explaining sociological concepts to a range of audiences.
   1. **Scholarly Engagement**: Recognize and engage purposefully with the contributions of other scholars, using current conventions for citation and acknowledgement.
   2. **Discursive conventions**: Use appropriate discursive conventions to convey field-specific knowledge to various academic and professional audiences.
   3. **Representing the field**: Convey the overarching aims and ethos of the field to varied audiences in a manner accounting for each one’s special relationship to the field.

### Old Goals/Outcomes

Previously, higher level goals have been used as both broader program goals and measurable outcomes. The most recent set of “outcomes” listed in Nuventive has been promoted to Goals, under which more focused and measurable outcomes have been added, as explained above.

#### “Outcomes” listed in Nuventive.Improve prior to changes described above:

1. **Core Knowledge**: Students will learn sociological knowledge in substantive areas of the discipline related to core areas of sociology and their own research interests.
2. **Research Skills**: Students will acquire advanced skills associated with a range of research methods used in sociology.
3. **Professionalism**: Students will engage in professional activities such as attending and presenting work at research conferences, publication of research, and preparation of dissertation research grants.