

Degree/Certificate: Sociology

Major/Option: Sociology

Submitted by: Sean K. Taudin Chabot

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Part I – Program SLO Assessment Report for 2013-14

Part I – for the 2013-14 academic year: Because Deans have been asked to create College-Level Summary Reports annually, the template has been slightly modified for a) clarity for Chairs and Directors, and b) a closer fit with what the Deans and Associate Deans are being asked to report.

- 1. Student Learning Outcome:** The student performance or learning objective as published either in the catalog or elsewhere in your department literature.

Students will “demonstrate an understanding of core concepts such as social structure, socialization, culture, identity, institutions power, inequality and social justice.”

The Capstone in Sociology course seeks to synthesize student learning and consider the practical relevance of sociology for each student’s everyday life. Students have to show understanding of key sociological concepts in reading notes and conversations, and apply these concepts in their essays. The main focus of this assessment report is the concept of *social structure*, which sets the field of Sociology apart from other social science fields. Leading sociologist Charles Lemert, in his book *Social Things* (2012) argues that social structures of two basic defining characteristics: They make *order* out of some set of things (e.g. classroom, family, or university) and they *endure* over some period of time.

I will assess understanding of this key concept based on an assignment that asked students to write an essay on four questions related to social structures in Lemert’s book: How do structures produce everyday realities? How do people live with the effects? How do people measure their own life chances? What methods do they use to make do? This report will primarily focus on the first question. I will do a qualitative and interpretive analysis of student learning, because I believe that quantitative measures cannot adequately reflect whether students genuinely comprehend a complex concept like social structure and apply it to concrete examples. Only such deep knowledge will allow students to use sociological ideas and theories constructively in their everyday life.

- 2. Overall evaluation of progress on outcome:** Indicate whether or not the SLO has been met, and if met, to what level.

____ SLO is met after changes resulting from ongoing assessments, referencing assessment results from the previous year to highlight revisions;

____ SLO is met, but with changes forthcoming;

X SLO met without change required

- 3. Strategies and methods:** Description of assessment method and choices, why they were used and how they were implemented.

As described under “Student Learning Outcome,” I opted to do a qualitative assessment of essays on Charles Lemert’s *Social Things*, which focuses explicitly on the key concept of social structure. I collected 9 completed essays (by Alyssa, Adam, Jenny, Kelli, Andrew, Kendall, Austin, Annika, and Audreyanna), and examined them carefully to evaluate student learning.

4. Observations gathered from data: Include findings and analyses based on the strategies and methods identified in item #3.

For the qualitative assessment, I focused on key passages in each student’s essay that show understanding of social structure and discuss a specific example of it. In other words, I focused not only whether students grasp the definitional meaning of the concept but also its relevance in everyday life. (The assignment encourages students to highlight examples related to their course projects.) The findings below include a quote on each student’s understanding and a quote on the student’s example.

a. Findings:

1) Alyssa

“It is to build relationships that keep our lives going and it is what makes society and organizes it. With this structure, it is something we do not realize but we do it anyway which... makes us normalize this type of structure and power we have.... It will always be a mystery but these simple everyday practices, like relationships, are what make our everyday realities.”

Example of how social structures influence children participating in Special Olympics: “What kind of world are we making when we act so poorly to this part of society? How can it be fixed? Again: All questions have a mystery behind them. It all comes back to structures and the way structures are performed and carried out. We tend to normalize the standards of our movements and this is how structures are created and normalized by everyone in society.”

2) Adam

“Charles Lemert refers to social structures as the force that so often determine the ways and means of individuals, also organized by permanent things. Meaning a tangible item or an abstract idea, this varies from society to society and person to person, but all share common terms and themes.”

“An example of this in my project would be social class, and how class shapes one’s personal experiences by the types of resources one has access to. Social class also shapes one’s behavior and interactions with other people. In a classroom setting the environment is shaped by a teacher or instructor but the students also play a huge role in setting the atmosphere in the space... For example if an individual went to a private urban school filled with others that were high on the socioeconomic ladder, the individual is more likely to be exposed to different types of social and cultural capital than someone who went to a public school in an area that has an extremely low income.”

3) Jenny

“In the book, Lemert talks about an unspeakable structure of the modern world, which was founded by the structures of the world colonial systems. Lemert explains this by

saying that we change our social structures by looking into the past.”

“A good example of that is slavery... Once people started looking at them as human beings and not as slaves, they realized they needed to change the social structure. The change took many years but it also took people looking at socialization and realizing that change starts with everyday activities. Lemert also looks at social structures as everyday life... For example, when I decide to change myself for the better, like eating healthier, I am choosing to change my social structure. By making the choice to eat healthier, I am going to change my habitus to something else. No more fast food... and going to the gym more, which changes whom I interact with... If I choose to make that change for a long enough time, it is going to change the way I interact with my social structure.”

4) Kelli

“According to Lemert, structures can be anywhere from a marriage, a work organization, a television network or even a family. I would like to add social norms and expectations to that list. I feel that this can be added because he gives 2 characteristics: (1) they make order out of some set of things and (2) they do this work because they endure for a time, even if a very short time. I feel that social norms define trends and in turn the expectations of what everyone expects from themselves and what they feel others expect from them, in turn changing their personal ideal opinions...”

“I feel that this especially molds and influences the younger generations nowadays. It is showing young teens that celebrities are more important than the rest of society, but what do they truly bring to society other than entertainment?... Nowadays it is more important what you have, how you look, who you know rather than what you really bring to the table.... We no longer ask... deeper questions to truly get to know someone. I feel that we do this because we as a society are more focused on what we drive, wear, what phone we have and if we are friends of Facebook rather than friends in real life.”

5) Andrew

“Structures produce everyday realities for us. Every interaction within society is a form of a structure, everything from human interaction to how we drive a car on a highway. There are a large number of social structures that affect people on a daily basis. Social structure affect all of us on a global world scale and on a local level.”

“There were three recurring social structures that came up in the interview for my project: family dynamics, education, and social class... Family in a small town means something different than in a larger area... You’re judged by your family names because in a small town everybody knows everybody, so an individual’s action represents the whole family... Social class can limit your life opportunities because depending on what social class you belong to, you either have access to the resources needed to get a job or to go to college or you lack the necessary means to access the resources needed.”

6) Kendall

“Social structures are not physical structures, but can be just as restricting as the strongest concrete and steel. They can limit or bar people based on any number of factors: sex, race, sexual orientation, religion, country of origin, etc. This is a reality the world over... The people who ‘just go with it’ are exhibiting a form of false consciousness. They are complacent and live passively and move about in their lives without any sort of drive to

better their conditions. It is like they don't want to see it or are fine with it.”

“Sometimes social structures can be broken or at least the lines blurred by certain activities. People from different background meet and interact and learn from one-another. Skills on the dance floor can also translate to other real-life situations. To learn how to lead and follow is to learn social cues and how to treat the opposite or differing sex... There is always a place for learning how to treat other people with respect. You move with the other. You act with the other. You agree with the other and you can accomplish good things. Dancing is not easy, either. It is like any sport; it requires lots of practice.”

7) Austin

“Social structures, specifically, emerge out of the action of individuals, due to which they can connect and construct meaningful relationships with social institutions (e.g. church, mosque, synagogue) or more personal networking relationships (e.g. priests, imams, rabbis). The social structures that encompass the daily lives of various people are often invisible but very prominent at the same time.”

“For example, organized religion is socially structured around a particular and exclusive dominant ideology and belief system in which its belonging members all conform to a set of similar teachings that are prominent in their daily life; nonetheless, religious influences are difficult to see and often go unnoticed by those affected by their power... For example, Muslim women wear a hijab every day, which is automatic for them to do. It does not require much thought from Muslim women as to why they wear a hijab, because they incorporate it into their daily life. So in essence, it becomes ‘natural.’”

8) Annika

“No matter what comes out of the officer's mouth they buy into it, they accept it as gospel and they nod in affirmation. These people, most of whom are older, are either desperate to prove their “good citizen” status and differentiate themselves from the “bad” people, or they have fully and completely bought into the myth that we are raised to believe and it comes quite naturally to us because it deals with authority, power, social institutions, hierarchy, and order, better known to sociologists as social structures... According to Lemert, ‘it is power that accounts for the most important difference between social and other kinds of structures,’ it is power that allows some to exploit others, power that hoards resources for a few while others starve.”

“According to Lemert, ‘we know social structures more often by their consequences than by seeing them as such.’ In this case the consequence has not just been crime, it has been an increased separation between people identified as ‘good’ and ‘bad’... the fact is that we can't be bothered by the actual causes of crime or the reality of the everyday life of most criminals. We don't want to see the poverty, the issues related to race and class, the extremely limited educational opportunities and the subculture that they grow up in. If social structures do actually exist to ‘make order out of some set of things,’ then they have done their job phenomenally.”

9) Audreyanna

“Social structures are what help produce our everyday realities. Structures make order

and endure for a period of time. Structures are social things we stay concerned with, because without structure, there would be chaos. When we think of the hierarchy that very much exists in our society today, we could all agree that social structures are what created such a system. Power turns out to be just another layer of structures. ‘Power may simply, if incompletely, be defined as the social energy of structures.’”

“Similar to my capstone project, higher-education and the AVID program only feed in to structure... You graduate high school, go off to a 4-year college, and receive your degree, graduate and work. Another form of structure.”

b. Analysis of findings:

Alyssa shows basic understanding of social structure, highlighting how it builds relationships, keeps life going, and organizes society in ways that are often invisible yet very powerful. Her example of Special Olympics kids is very original and insightful, indicating that she is passionate about what social structures can do for and to people.

Adam also shows that he grasps the main elements of the concept, without going into much depth. He sees social structures as forces that determine the ways and means of individuals, while varying across societies. His example of how social class relates to school kids demonstrates a deeper level of understanding, when he relates the concept to concrete situations.

Jenny adds the interesting notion of “unspeakable structures,” but doesn’t explain it in much detail. Although she pays attention to the author’s words, she is more persuasive when she uses the concept to make sense of everyday issues such as eating healthier.

Kelli does a good job summarizing, in her own words, what Lemert says about social structures, emphasizing the significance of social norms. She goes on to relate social norms to the influence of celebrities on young teens and their focus on appearance (what we drive, wear, etc.), major subjects in her course project.

Andrew captures the main aspects of social structures and stresses the importance of the global and local scale. He shows in-depth understanding when he focuses more specifically on 3 kinds of social structures and relates them to whether people in his hometown stay or leave town to get a job or go to college (the subject of his course project).

Kendall describes social structures differently than his peers, writing that they “can be just as restricting as the strongest concrete and steel,” while also showing that people can respond to social structures by submitting to or resisting them. He does a great job of relating the concept to dancing (the subject of his course project) and its relevance for “real-life situations.”

Austin’s understanding of the concept is clearly superb. He takes the author’s statements on social structures seriously, yet adds his own nuances. He also shows how they relate to ideology and organized religion (his course project), both in general and in specific situations.

Annika’s discussion of the concept is also outstanding. She starts with her own example (coming from her own personal life) and uses social structures to analyze various aspects of it. Her writing balances deep theoretical comprehension and highly-developed

sociological imagination.

Audreyanna demonstrates that she understands the main characteristics of social structures, although her language remains somewhat vague. She also relates the concept to her course project on the AVID program (the help first-generation students get into college) and to everyday life.

Based on qualitative analysis, I argue that 2 students did “excellent” work (Austin, Annika) on the concept; 5 students did “very good” work (Alyssa, Adam, Kelli, Andrew, Kendall); and 2 students did “adequate” work (Audreyanna, Jenny). Overall, I am satisfied with the performance in my Capstone in Sociology course, which strongly reflects what Sociology majors have learned during their Sociology courses at EWU. Although there is always room for improvement, I see no reason for dramatic changes in the course.

5. What program changes will be made based on the assessment results?

a) Describe plans to improve student learning based on assessment findings (e.g., course content, course sequencing, curriculum revision, learning environment or student advising).

Although I don’t feel that much has to change, I can improve on paying more in-depth attention to key concepts like social structures during the course. By making some changes in lesson plans, I can try to indicate how significant and relevant sociological theorizing really is for shaping everyday life and responding to social situations. The Sociology major already pays more attention to theory than most majors, but we can always continue to improve our pedagogical approaches. As for course content, students indicated that they learned a great deal from Charles Lemert’s book, but not as much from our second book. So as teacher of the Capstone course, I will continue to use *Social Things*, but look for another book that does a better job of allowing students to think deeply about the relevance of social structures in personal and social life.

b) Provide a broad timeline of how and when identified changes will be addressed in the upcoming year.

I will make necessary changes to the Capstone course in Spring of 2015.

6. Description of revisions to the assessment process the results suggest are needed and an evaluation of the assessment plan/process itself.

Although not the conventional way of doing a program’s SLO assessment, I am satisfied that qualitative analysis allows for deeper and more useful insights into the student learning process and possibilities for improvement.

NEW: PART II – CLOSING THE LOOP

FOLLOW-UP FROM THE 2012-13 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT

****NOT APPLICABLE: SOCIOLOGY DID NOT COMPLETE THE 2012-2013 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT**

In response to the university's accrediting body, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, this section has been added. This should be viewed as a follow up to the previous year's findings. In other words, begin with findings from 2012-13, and then describe actions taken during 2013-14 to improve student learning along, provide a brief summary of findings, and describe possible next steps.

Working definition for closing the loop: Using assessment results to improve student learning as well as pedagogical practices. This is an essential step in the continuous cycle of assessing student learning. It is the collaborative process through which programs use evidence of student learning to gauge the efficacy of collective educational practices, and to identify and implement strategies for improving student learning." Adapted 8.21.13 from <http://www.hamline.edu/learning-outcomes/closing-loop.html>.

1. Student Learning Outcome(s) assessed for 2012-13
2. Strategies implemented during 2013-14 to improve student learning, based on findings of the 2012-13 assessment activities.
3. Summary of results (may include comparative data or narrative; description of changes made to curriculum, pedagogy, mode of delivery, etc.): Describe the effect of the changes towards improving student learning and/or the learning environment.
4. What further changes to curriculum, pedagogy, mode of delivery, etc. are projected based on closing-the-loop data, findings and analysis?