

Using Assessment as a Tool for Program Design

SOCIOLOGY

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Agenda

- We will review two examples of how the UC Merced Sociology Program has used assessment in shaping...
- 1) undergraduate course content, and
- 2) improving the overall program.

Program Learning Outcomes

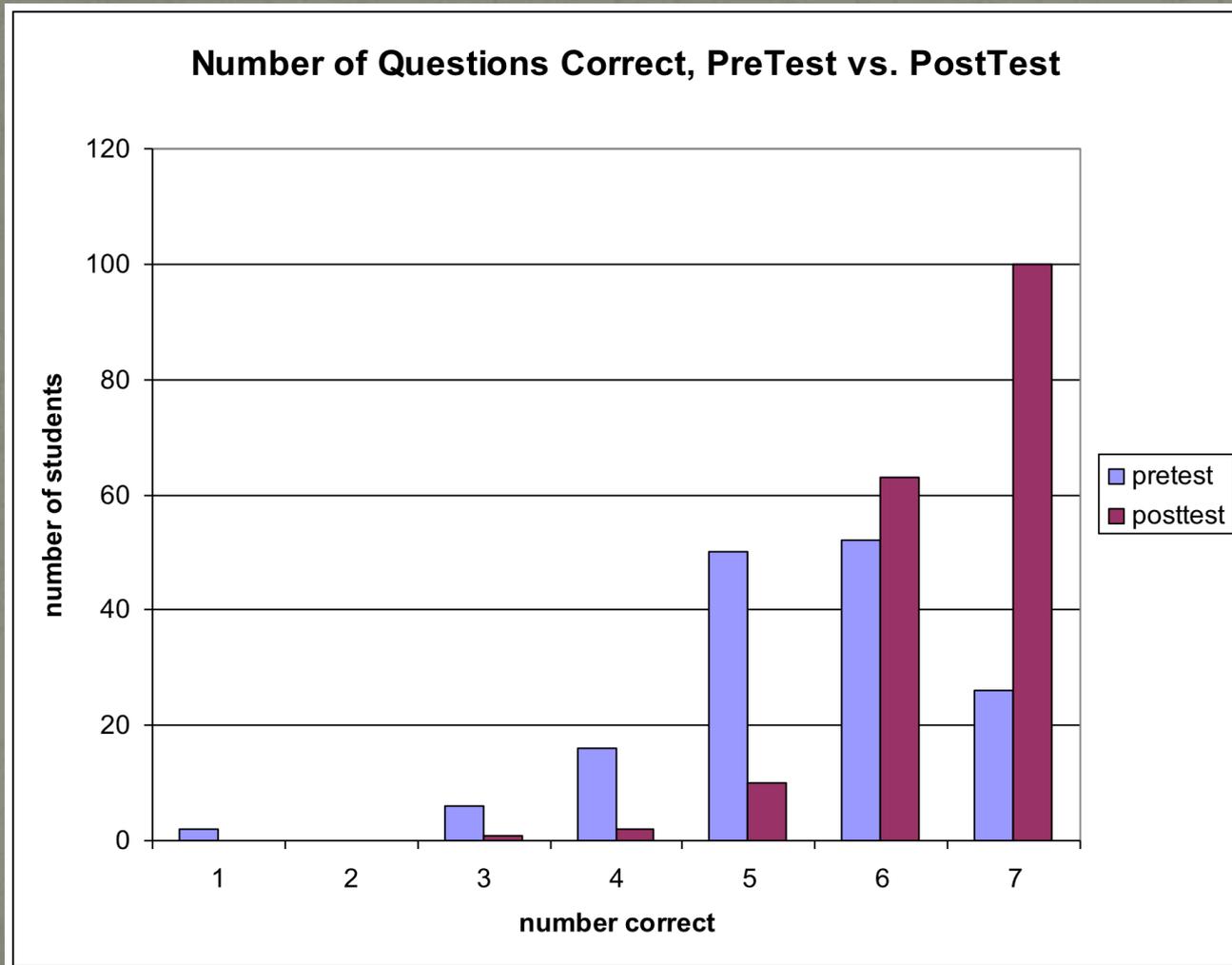
- The Sociology program (B.A. and minor) has five PLOs.
Students will:
 - 1) Think critically about the causes and consequences of social inequality.
 - 2) Design and evaluate empirical sociological research.
 - 3) Explain and apply the major theoretical perspectives in sociology.
 - 4) Communicate orally and in writing about sociological concepts.
 - 5) Use their sociological education outside the undergraduate classroom, particularly in their careers or future study.

First Example ~ 2009/10

Methods:

- We utilized a pre-test/post-test survey design to assess students' ability to think critically about PLO#1 – the causes and consequences of social inequality – in our Introduction to Sociology (Soc 001) class.
- Ex: “In the United States, social inequality is a matter of only people’s talents and abilities.” (True/False)

Results ~ 2009/10



Results ~ 2009/10

- We found that students did much better on the pre-test questions than we had anticipated.
- We realized that UC Merced's undergraduates arrive with a greater knowledge of inequality than we anticipated.

Implications ~ 2009/10

- We suggested to course instructors that they revise course content to reflect the more advanced-than- expected entry knowledge level of our undergraduates.

Second Example ~ 2012/13

Methods:

- Assessment of students' ability to communicate orally about sociological concepts (PLO#4).
- We viewed and scored student research presentations in our Advanced Sociological Research Methods (Soc 175) course.

Rubric ~ 2012/13

Rubric Component	PLO	Unacceptable (0)	Satisfactory (1)	Exemplary (2)
1) Explain a synthesis of the research literature to formulate a research question.	Communicate verbally about sociological concepts.	The research questions and related literature are not synthesized. Connection of research literature to research question is not clear. Explanation may be too superficial or off topic.	The research questions and related literature are synthesized, but some of these elements need clarification. Could improve on explaining connections between research studies.	The research questions and related literature are well synthesized. Explanation effectively points out critiques of prior literature and/or brings together disparate research studies to build a strong argument.

Results ~ 2012/13

- Students performed very well on this assessment, and confirmed the value of providing opportunities for students to work on their research presentation and public speaking skills.

Implications ~ 2012/13

- Provide more instruction on oral presentations in our current classes.
- Expand access to courses which provide training and opportunities for individual presentations

Big Picture Conclusions

- Assessment can help us understand entering students' level of knowledge.
- Assessment can suggest changes that can be made...
 - within the specific course – across instructors.
 - to the entire program – prioritizing which courses to add as program expands.

Questions?

Thank you.

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