1) For this cycle, we assessed the first exam to see how well this exam has fulfilled our overall learning outcomes. In particular, the first exam is designed to encourage critical thinking by learning classical and contemporary sociological theories and how to apply them. What our Program assessed was how well this exam is meeting this particular goal of critical thinking but also how much it integrates well with our overall learning outcome objectives.

2) In line with our Assessment Report submitted in 2017-2018, our learning outcomes for Sociology remain: a) critical thinking (as above, and as brought about and assessed through our first exam; b) professional ethics (as are learned through our research classes, in particular our methods classes); c) high levels of ability to articulate specialized learning and subfields (as is brought about through our second exam, known as our oral exam); and d) original research (as is brought about through the dissertation necessary to complete the Ph.D., but also more and increasingly through publications that we are encouraging students to develop through other courses and eventually through the first exam (see below).

3) To assess the first exam, our evidence was this year’s exam as well as the evidence of having graded the last five years of the exam (myself and Tom DeGloma). (See Attached Grading Sheet for the first exam from fall 2018.)

4) Our findings are that the first exam does meet the first learning outcome objective of developing critical thinking as well as knowledge and application of classical and contemporary theories. This is because the rate of Low Pass, Pass and High Pass (all passing grades) is consistently more than 80%. In other words, very few students fail this exam and based on our reading of the exam, it does develop and test the ability to apply theories to concrete sociological situations (thus requiring critical thinking to be done successfully).

5) Yet, further changes are important in this case because the Sociology Program is in the process of investigating -- even given this satisfactory outcome for our first learning outcome -- whether this first exam can be replaced with a new requirement of students having to do a publishable quality paper for the first exam. In other words, what we are contemplating is a change that could result *both* in meeting the Ph.D. Program’s first and fourth learning goals. We believe that substituting a publishable paper requirement for the (currently) four hour written exam – as
would newly constitute the *first exam requirement* -- will, when later assessed, 
be found to be an even better way of meeting the first learning outcome (critical 
thinking) while also allowing for the fourth (original research) to be simultaneously 
and additionally bolstered. This is because the new first exam as a written paper will 
also require critical thinking and knowledge of contemporary and classical sociological 
thought. Again, though, it will simultaneously assist students with the “original 
research” fourth learning outcome as well; in other words, not only the thesis 
requirement of the Ph.D. but this new ‘first exam’ written paper requirement 
will satisfy the Program’s goal of students learning to apply knowledge to 
research projects. This seems particularly important since 
the American Sociological Association has recently published data showing that 
at least one article is needed in most places to procure good academic teaching 
and research positions.

6) Next steps to move the first exam process further, as described above, are as follows: 
a) in September 2019, the Executive Committee will look into a report that is being 
written this summer recommending that the first exam, and skills it requires, be 
translated into a new paper requirement. Again, this new requirement will be at 
least as good as the old first exam at meeting the critical thinking learning 
outcome;
b) in fall 2019, seek approval from the Provost’s office of this new replacement first 
exam replacement requirement;
c) in September 2020, a committee will begin assessing submitted papers 
to fulfill the new first exam requirement; and, finally, 
d) in 2019-2020, we will assess the efficacy of this new requirement to meet both 
our first (critical thinking) and fourth (original research) learning outcomes.