

Social Sciences Across the Curriculum

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Observations of Data

There appear to be various approaches to answering the question, “Did your program include Social Sciences?” and “If yes, how were Social Sciences included in your program?” One framework for understanding the responses to the latter question is to acknowledge four distinct ways that faculty responded to this question (acknowledging that some responses blended these approaches.) One way to view these different responses is a typology such as:

- 1) Faculty responded by listing **disciplines and subdisciplines** covered in the program.

Examples of this type of response are:

- a. Anthropology, cultural anthropology, ethnobotany
- b. Business
- c. Cultural Studies
- d. Economics, microeconomics
- e. Education, educational philosophy, child development and learning
- f. Environmental Studies
- g. Epidemiology
- h. Ethics, bioethics
- i. Ethnic Studies
- j. Gender Studies
- k. Geography
- l. History, social history, labor history , historiography, history of agriculture, maritime history, Native American history
- m. Law
- n. Linguistics
- o. Policy Studies
- p. Political economy
- q. Politics, political science
- r. Psychology, Child development, Western Psychotherapy, Abnormal Psychology
- s. Public health, health care
- t. Public policy
- u. Sociology, Criminology
- v. Sustainable Development
- w. Urban and regional planning/community studies/community development
- x. Social justice
- y. Foreign Policy
- z. Social work/social services
- aa. Leadership
- bb. Cross-cultural communications
- cc. Social Movements
- dd. Social Justice
- ee. Women’s Studies
- ff. Communication
- gg. Gender and sexuality theory

- 2) Faculty responded by listing **classroom activities** that included social sciences. Examples of these activities include:
 - a. Reading texts
 - b. Discussions, Seminar
 - c. Community services/volunteer projects
 - d. Lectures
 - e. Workshops
 - f. Creating interpretive displays, online exhibits
 - g. Writing personal journals
 - h. Writing research papers
 - i. Conducting team research/presentations
 - j. Museum visits
 - k. Listening to guest lecturers
 - l. Going on field trips
 - m. Presentations
 - n. Community organizing
 - o. Legal research
 - p. Research methods/empirical methods in psychology
 - q. Viewing films
 - r. “[Students] did oral history interviewing with participants in the institution and ethnographic study of its ongoing social life. They also did historical research to identify key issues about the institution in relation to American society. The project culminated in a major paper integrating these strands of research: a documentary account of life within the institution.” (This is also related to the skills section below, but the comment reflects a pedagogical approach by including these activities.)

- 3) Faculty responded by describing the **theme or issues** presented in a program that relates to social sciences. Examples of those responses include:
 - a. “...The study of equality in American democratic society includes the way that individuals and groups are extended the equal protection guaranteed by the 14th Amendment. In this program, students studied the history of equality in the US and analyzed landmark cases that claimed 14th Amendment violations...”
 - b. “Looked at working class organization, management strategies, changes in law, race, and gender discrimination to find links between the current era of globalization and previous ‘revolutions at work’ in the Progressive Era and 1930s. Explored political construction of think tanks and their role in the press.”
 - c. “Issues of collective identity and politics.”

- 4) Faculty responded by discussing **skill sets that were taught** in programs that relate to the practice of Social Sciences. Examples include:
 - a. Ethnographic/fieldwork research methods: “We taught our students how to conduct fieldwork based on a Folklore model, which grew out of Ethnography.”
 - b. Qualitative research design
 - c. Documentary research
 - d. Economic research
 - e. Legislative research
 - f. Interviewing/oral history methods
 - g. Archival research/public document search
 - h. Survey research
 - i. Content analysis of media
 - j. Business practices, human resource management skills

Another type of response included mention of **theories**. The following some of the theories mentioned in the responses:

- “The students learned basic microeconomics, including what factors affect supply and demand, the theory of the firm, types of costs, and the role of government intervention. These concepts were incorporated into an explanation of the economics of fisheries, including the idea of ‘the tragedy of the commons’ and economic rent.”
- Piaget’s theory of child development.
- Theories of audience reception.
- “We read and used a variety of social and economic theorists as a source of ideas about organizational values.”
- “Readings, instruction, and discussion on sociology of health and healthcare (health disparities) and critical theory.”
- “We discussed the social construction of gender roles and concepts of patriarchy as a system, as well as feminist critiques of patriarchy and men’s contradictory experiences of power. We compared the concepts of gender roles and family structure in diverse cultures around the world. We read about and discussed concepts of sexuality and gender in a historical context as well as in our own culture, and considered challenges to various cultural paradigms... We examined concepts of ‘Social Darwinism’ and ‘Scientific’ Racism in a historical context and in light of more recent information on human diversity, genetics, and evolution.”

Other observations of the data included:

- Some programs appear to be exclusively psychology. This is reflected in some of the responses to the social sciences questions.
- There was a considerable amount of anthropology mentioned, although there are no trained anthropologists among the current teaching faculty.
- There were only a small number of Scientific Inquiry programs that included a major emphasis on Social Sciences. No SI programs 2005-06 included Social Sciences as a major emphasis.
- Among the programs that mentioned a “minor emphasis” in social sciences, many of the programs used social sciences in a subordinate sense, as a way to contextualize the “main point” of the program. Examples of this:
 - “Art history tied to social context.”
 - “A minor emphasis but discussions about land use and public policy regarding ground and surface water...”
 - “Learning about the lives of Renaissance artists.”
 - Transpersonal theories of psychology.
- From reading faculty responses, it was not clear how deep the theories of social science disciplines were taught. Also, it was not clear how well-integrated the tools of the trade (research tools) that were taught were with the underlying theory of the disciplines.
- There appeared to be some confusion among faculty about what should be considered a social science. One example is “ethics.” (Although one should also acknowledge that ethics in particular instances can be very much related to social sciences, e.g. land ethics in theories of urban planning.) Additionally, history is probably split between humanities and social sciences among responses, although many faculty did explain that their program included social history or history that was closer to the social sciences than it is to the humanities.

Asking questions/assessment methodology

The main critique of the assessment tool is the wording of the question, “If yes, how were Social Sciences included in your program?” The question lacks clarity and is subject to a variety of interpretations that results in responses that fit within and among the various typologies described above. The question does not elicit enough specifically about teaching strategies and there are a few informative responses on faculty strategies. Examples of “useful” responses include: Natural and Natural Histories (p. 2), Environment, Health, and Community (p. 7), Justice at Work (p. 10), Suburban National (p. 12).

Future case studies, interviews, focus groups, or other documented faculty discussions might get at more depth as to successful teaching strategies or the other uses of this assessment tool. In some cases, I (Jenni) would have liked to have asked, “From what you taught, what were students expected to learn?” While this is a question about learning outcomes, it would be interesting to have from the input perspective what faculty expected students to learn (outside or parallel to the Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate and within each discipline.)

Reviewing responses to the social sciences questions opened up the question, “How do we find out which programs are truly interdisciplinary?” Of course, this would take at least agreement on the different understandings of the term “interdisciplinary.”