**An Alternative to the Sociology 498 Capstone Course**

**A suggestion from Jerald Schutte**

Historically, the 498 course has been taught as a field work seminar in which students spend between 50 and 100 hours working in an applied setting. The result is a graded paper and more implicitly, experience “working” as a sociologist. We require this of all students in the various options and typically recommend this be scheduled upon completion of the 364, 497, 368 and 468 courses (stat, methods and theory). This requirement does not work for three reasons: 1) as an S-factor course, we do not have the faculty to teach such low enrollment courses and still provide for the wealth of requirements in the four options; 2) it is intuitively obvious that “putting in the time” in the field is not synonymous with experiencing working as a sociologist, nor does it guarantee any continuing employment beyond graduation; and 3) we have been ineffective in requiring students to have completed the core courses as pre-requisites which, in turn, diminishes the student’s ability to produce the desired work product.

That said, rather than defeating the goal of the 498 course, let’s examine alternatives. I have experimented in the past with a different approach. It is programmed learning, scheduled as seven discrete class sessions, with the alternative weeks spent working on mini-projects. These seven projects are done in a portfolio format, and labeled as follows: 1) Assessing the Field of Sociology; 2) Cataloguing Personal and Sociological Skills; 3) Investigating the Job Market; 4) Preparing a Resume; 5) Applying for a Professional level Position; 6) Surviving the Interview; 7) Following up. Each successive class meeting vets the mini-assignments with class discussion of the students’ findings. Each written mini-assignment comprises 10% of the student’s grade, for a total of 70% attributable to the project assignments. The other 30% is based upon participation both in the in class and the virtual discussion groups.

To some extent these are generic and transferable skills for anyone coming out of an undergraduate major. They are particularly germane to sociology students, however, whose number one question as undergraduates is “what can I do with the sociology degree?” Feedback from more than one hundred students taught in this format, over two years was universally constant: “This course should be required for all students in the major” (or a variation on that theme). Accordingly, I believe this would provide a healthy alternative to the current field work requirement, for at least many of our students needing to take 498. Rather than change the 498 course “factor”, simply provide this format as an alternative (much as we are doing with the substitution/waiver program, currently). Your suggestion to use S494 to house this format is a good one, with the caveat that there should be no more than 30 students in this class (it is immensely grading intensive). Hope you agree with this suggestion.