

SOCIAL INQUIRY (SI)
September 1, 2015

I. Short Description

Social Inquiry encourages students to explore complex questions of human behavior, relationships, and institutions by using rigorous methodologies that connect our ideas and theories of human behavior at all levels – from individuals to societies – to data derived from observation. Courses in this area will introduce concepts, theories, and methods for the study of human behavior in social context. Social Inquiry courses will include an examination of the influences upon and interactions among individual levels of human behavior, social relationships, cultural systems, or social institutions. Social Inquiry courses will equip students to articulate how knowledge gained from social inquiry shapes and is shaped by Christian faith and practice.

II. Thematic Core Learning Outcomes and Interpretation

A. Students will be able to....

1. demonstrate understanding of the concepts, theories, and methods employed by one or more disciplines to document and interpret patterns of social phenomena and human behavior
2. analyze social phenomena and human behavior using relevant concepts, theories, and methods of empirical and/or theoretical analysis
3. articulate how analyses of social phenomena and human behavior can shape and be shaped by Christian faith and practice

B. Expansion and interpretation of the outcome statements

1. Learning Outcome #1: Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of the concepts, theories, and methods employed by one or more disciplines to document and interpret patterns of social phenomena and human behavior.

“Interpret Patterns of Social Phenomena” refers to looking for patterns common or different across people/groups/networks/societies. While the basic unit of analysis can be individuals or groups (including nations, ethnic/linguistic groups, communities, etc.), the student should demonstrate the ability to connect understandings of human behavior to social, cultural, or institutional context.

“Patterns” are understood to be psychological, historical, cultural, social, economic, political, or a combination thereof. “Patterns” refers to shared social behaviors and expectations among individuals and structures. These patterns have an empirical basis (they can be observed through systemic and rigorous data collection) and exert social influence on individuals and groups.

“Theories and methods”: Theories may be discipline specific, and methods can draw upon a wide range of qualitative to quantitative options. Students will learn multiple concepts, theories, and methods.

2. Learning Outcome #2: Students will be able to analyze relevant concepts, theories, and methods in the empirical and/or theoretical analysis of social phenomena and human behavior.

“Theories and methods”: Theories may be discipline specific, and methods can draw upon a

wide range of qualitative to quantitative options. This does not require students to be practiced in every theory or method but rather understand the means by which scholars within a discipline make claims and show the ability to utilize appropriate explanatory concepts.

“Empirical and/or theoretical analysis”: Social Inquiry courses include analysis that may be empirical, theoretical, or both. “Empirical” analysis may be understood broadly as relying on observation of social phenomena as opposed to theory alone. While students need not conduct empirical research or generate data, courses will emphasize the empirical approach to social inquiry. Types of evidence include but are not limited to ethnographic, survey, interview, case study, and experimental data. It may be derived from contemporary or historical sources. Empirical analysis may be qualitative or quantitative. For Learning Outcome #2, it is acceptable that students would apply theory and method to the analysis of data collected by others. However, one aspect of a student’s ability to “apply . . . methods” would be the ability to evaluate the proper choice and use of methods in the collection of empirical data.

“Theoretical analysis”: “Theoretical” analysis can be understood broadly as conceptualizing, modeling, and/or interpreting social phenomena. It will typically be abstract as opposed to observational in nature. Theoretical approaches include but are not limited to formal or mathematical modeling, formulation of testable hypotheses, positing and testing explicit relationships, and conceptual analysis.

3. Learning Outcome #3: Students will be able to articulate how analyses of social phenomena and human behavior can shape and be shaped by Christian faith and practice.

An assignment or portion of the course should include an explicit integration of faith and social inquiry. This does not assume a time requirement or percentage of the course, but some explicit practice of this. It is not enough to simply tackle social concerns relevant to Christian faith; rather, students should demonstrate thoughtful articulation of the implication of social analysis for Christian life and/or how Christian commitments and practices shape the work of social analysis.

III. Guidelines

A. Expanded Description

Social Inquiry courses teach students to employ concepts, theories, and methods of one or more disciplines to draw conclusions from observations of social phenomena. Courses in this category enhance student capabilities to engage in interpretation of social phenomena, to interact constructively and critically with other accounts of social phenomena, and to present conclusions clearly. As they employ theories and methods of social inquiry, students will develop a posture of humility and discernment toward social behavior that may or may not match their experiences and preconceived notions. Disciplines will focus on different types of content and levels of

analysis ranging from individual to social institutions, with all Social Inquiry courses addressing social context.

B. Connection between area outcomes (Part II above) and the 12 overall program goals of Christ at the Core (see p. 8-9 of the Proposal).

Courses in the Social Inquiry category will advance the following program outcomes specifically:

1. Learning Outcomes #1 and #2 require students learn and utilize social inquiry concepts, theories, and methods. Students will likely learn multiple concepts, theories, and methods and will practice evaluating and applying these tools. These outcomes promote “Christ at the Core” Holistic Learning Goal #1: “developing strong abilities to discover and evaluate information they need to draw conclusions, practicing analytical and scientific reasoning, presenting their thoughts clearly in oral and written forms, and developing skills in aesthetic engagement.”
2. Learning Outcome #3 identifies the goal of students developing a Christian posture toward the analysis of social phenomena. In Social Inquiry courses, students will likely be asked to examine their own social settings as well as different social settings. This connects with “Christ at the Core” Holistic Learning Goal #2: “pursuing varied approaches to knowledge with discernment and humility as they map both the rich connections and the conflicts among the disciplines.”
3. All three Social Inquiry learning outcomes ask that students wrestle with past, contemporary, and future social concerns and questions. This promotes “Christ at the Core” Wisdom Goal #3: “growing in intellectual virtue and critical self-awareness through engagement with the complex questions of history, human values, and contemporary life.”
4. Learning Outcome #2 addresses analyzing social phenomena as students, either independently or collaboratively, while utilizing social inquiry tools in creative ways. This connects with “Christ at the Core” Wisdom Goal #4: “cultivating their collaborative abilities, their capacities for independent thought and action, and their imaginative and creative faculties.”

C. Examples of Assessment

A range of rigorous assignments could provide evidence that students have successfully achieved the three Student Outcomes given in section II.A. Depending on the structure of the course, one significant assignment might be relevant for assessing more than one outcome; in other cases a series of assignments will be more appropriate. A few examples and suggested approaches are offered here as *possible inspiration* of disciplinary appropriate and rigorous options, but use of these exact assignments is not required. Faculty are encouraged to go beyond these or substitute other creative assignments as they develop individual courses.

1. Assessment of Outcome #1: Students identify key concepts or theories in essays or on exams. Alternately, students give oral presentations explaining and/or applying particular concepts, theories or methods to social phenomena.
2. Assessment of Outcome #2: As an end of the semester project, students are asked to collect and analyze data regarding social phenomena. Alternately, students may be asked in an essay question on an exam to show how empirical analysis of social phenomena differs from other types of analysis. Or, students keep a journal or log throughout the semester where they demonstrate

empirical analysis of events they see around them or articles they read within the particular discipline.

3. Assessment of Outcome #3: In an essay or paper students are asked to reflect on how Christian commitments interact with the analysis and interpretation (involving concepts, theories, or methods) of social phenomena.

We could also envision rubrics used within or across disciplines that can help effectively assess the three learning outcomes. Such rubrics could be applied to a variety of student work and could give individual or groups of faculty a common starting point. Here is an example of a rubric that could be adapted:

	Not acceptable	Deficient	Acceptable	Exceptional
1. Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of the concepts, theories, and methods employed by one or more disciplines to document and interpret patterns of social phenomena and human behavior.	Students show a complete lack of understanding of concepts, theories, and methods. These tools are absent in analysis or are completely incorrect. No patterns are identified.	Attempts to demonstrate understanding of tools or patterns are insufficient or incorrect.	Students are able to demonstrate understanding of concepts, theories, and methods as well as document and interpret patterns.	Students display exceptional ability to document and interpret patterns with an advanced understanding of concepts, theories, and methods.
2. Students will be able to use relevant concepts, theories, and methods in the empirical and/or theoretical analysis of social phenomena and human behavior.	Students are unable to apply relevant concepts, theories, and methods in analysis. No mention or use of relevant social inquiry tools and how they connect to data and analysis.	Insufficient use of relevant social inquiry tools in analysis. Student mentions relevant tools and/or begins using them but does not have a robust analysis. Evidence is lacking of a depth of knowledge of the concepts, theories, and methods and/or the tools are not used appropriately.	Students are able to analyze social phenomena and human behavior using relevant concepts, methods, and theories.	Students show exceptional ability in using relevant concepts, theories, and methods in analysis. Students demonstrate experience and knowledge of available tools and wisdom in selecting the appropriate ones.
3. Students will be able to articulate how the analysis of social phenomena and human behavior can shape and be shaped by Christian faith and practice.	No attempt is made to connect Christian faith and practice and social analysis.	Student's articulation is weak and not well developed. Attempts to articulate faith and learning integration are incomplete. For example, a student may quote several Bible verses but not fully develop a discussion of their connection with the social analysis at hand.	Students are able to effectively articulate how Christian faith and social analysis shape each other.	Students display exceptional ability to articulate the connections between Christian faith and social analysis. Students demonstrate a deeper knowledge of Christian faith and its implications for social analysis.

D. General Advice

While courses that meet the Social Inquiry theme must familiarize students with concepts, theories, and methods used in one or more disciplines to document and interpret patterns of social

phenomena, these courses need not be heavily tilted toward methodological training or lead to mastery of research methods. Rather, students must understand the ways in which human behavior is being included in the conceptual framework of the course, as well as some of the attendant methodological possibilities and limitations.