QEP Pre-Activity Report

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Course/Section to be Assessed: SOC 1010

Semester Implemented: Fall 2014  
Control Course/Section (if applicable): POS

1. What is the desired learning outcome? *What do you want the students to be able to do better at the end of the lesson and to what degree?*

To help students gain a deeper understanding of the steps involved in 1) gathering information about the social world, 2) summarizing and presenting data gathered using visual aids such as tables, graphs, and charts, and 3) applying sociological theories of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality to explain class stratification and social mobility. The pilot activity I would like to use for the fall incorporates previous group activities from unit two (locating and retrieving racial, ethnic, gender, and class data from the census bureau) and introduces concepts from unit three (sociological theories explaining class stratification and social mobility.)

2. What activity/lesson will be implemented to increase mastery of the desired learning outcome?

Students will in groups of three download tables of relevant demographic data (age, sex, race, education level, income level) and household data (home ownership, access to telephone service, and transportation type) on a Tennessee county from the census bureau in MExcel. Students will analyze and compare/contrast data for lack of access to telephone service and transportation. Students will use one of three sociological perspectives to explain the differences in access based on race, ethnicity, and gender. Students will summarize the data using graphs and charts. Using MExcel PowerPoint, students will present findings to their fellow classmates in a 5-7 minute presentation at the end of the semester.

3. How will you measure whether the activity improved mastery of the targeted outcome?

I will use the QEP InClass Activity Survey to measure the student’s level of engagement and learning. I will assess the success of the activity’s objectives when the students present their presentations on county data and access to telephone and transportation by race, ethnicity, and gender. I will assess the student’s ability to explain racial, ethnic, and gender inequality using theories of social stratification and social mobility.
RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS
QEP LEARNING ACTIVITY FOR SOC 1010 P05-FALL 2014

Learning Activity Objectives: To help students gain a deeper understanding of the steps involved in 1) gathering information about the social world, 2) summarizing and presenting data gathered using visual aids such as tables, graphs, and charts, and 3) applying sociological theories to explain disparities in health and access to healthcare.

Students will in groups of three and four download tables of relevant health data on residents of Tennessee counties from online databases such as www.data.gov/health and www.kff.org/statedata. Students will analyze data for patterns and trends, compare/contrast data across counties, and apply sociological theories to explain disparities in health. Students will summarize findings in a 5-7 minute PowerPoint presentation with graphs and charts.

Engagement measure:

I will use the QEP InClass Activity Survey to measure the student’s level of engagement and learning.

Assessment Measure:

I will assess the success of the activity’s objectives when each group presents the summary of findings to the class.
QEP Learning Activity for SOC 1010-Fall 2014

Results and Conclusions

Goals and Activity Description:

This activity was designed to help students gain a deeper understanding of how sociology can be applied in everyday life. Students had to link key concepts from Units 1-4, chapters 13-16, to complete the group activities. Specifically, students had to link key concepts such as group dynamics, globalization, demography, political economy, stratification, and healthcare disparity. In addition, students had to develop basic skills in the use of modern sociological tools for research linking theory and application. Tools used were word processing, data entry, spreadsheet maintenance, datamining, econometrics, statistical analysis, and geo-spatial mapping software. Students had to locate and retrieve electronic information from primary and secondary sources, construct sociological observations, ask research questions, and apply sociological theories to real world problems. Students linked global and national issues of healthcare disparity to their local communities and investigated causes and possible solutions.

Activity:

To begin, the class was divided into five groups of three and four. The student groups were charged with locating and retrieving county tables of health data collected on Tennessee residents. After importing tables into MSExcel workbooks, groups analyzed the data for mean, median, mode, and standard deviations. I expected students to discover that infant mortality rates in some Tennessee counties were three times higher than the national average; however, students discovered that Shelby and Scott County reflected higher than normal rates of sterility among male youths, average age < 18. Acting as a facilitator only, I allowed groups to discuss the next step in the sociological process, which resulted in a plan to investigate the unexplained social phenomena further. The larger group assigned activities, tasks, and sub-tasks to each smaller group. For example, one group was assigned to complete a literature review of American Medical Association Journals for current research on sterility; a second group was assigned to collect historical information on Scott County; still another group collected data on business and industry of the region. Other groups collected longitudinal data on population demographics of Scott County and EPA reports on the Appalachian Mountain Region. At the next class meeting, groups discussed the research they had collected which included the following: 1) Infertility is the current terminology used to describe both sterility in males and infertility in females today; 2) Infertility in America has been increasing since mid-20th century and has resulted in the creation of private-for-profit Assisted Reproductive Centers (ARC) across the nation but primarily in the southern region; 3) Infertility is most often caused by ageing, drug and/or alcohol use, and toxins; 4) toxins present are most often found in manufacturing waste; 5) ongoing research is being conducted on Shelby County infertility rates linked to industrial waste but to date, no known research is being conducted on Scott County.
health, health disparity, or waste contamination; 6) Scott County was historically a coal-mining town that recently lost manufacturing jobs to outsourcing and just recently lost access to a local hospital that shut down due to projected long-term costs; 7) Scott County is a rural, impoverished community of older, white residents with low-educational attainment and low-income. Many residents are working-class poor lacking healthcare insurance. Students participating in the QEP wanted to continue working on this project, though I explained that the scope (time and money) of the research would go beyond the scope of the QEP at PSCC. All workgroups agreed to invest personal time outside of class to the project as “concerned citizens”. Analyzing the raw health data on subjects experiencing sterility in Scott County using a free, online beta copy of SAS, students found that toxins were present in 86% of cases while less than 1% of cases involved ageing and/or drug and alcohol use. Specifically, toxins cited were chlorophenols, chlorophenoxy, mercury, TCDD, and solvents. The class then assigned new tasks to each work group. One group used TOXNET geo-spatial mapping software to locate businesses in the region reporting production of each of the toxins. Another work group used online mapping software (beta version) from the Census Bureau to compare population and demographic clusters in relation to Tennessee counties and TOXNET maps. Still another group collected maps from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the Tennessee Valley Water (TVA) to investigate possible transmission methods such as groundwater contamination. By the end of the semester, the class concluded that Scott County’s high infertility rates may be correlated with the production of chlorophenols by three local businesses located on a watershed. In addition, students linked the production of waste and waste contamination in rural Appalachia to health disparities experienced by low-income communities lacking access to quality healthcare.

Activity Engagement and Assessment:

Overall, students went well beyond my expectations for an introductory course in sociology. Students demonstrated the ability to apply sociological perspectives and research methods to locate and retrieve relevant data from sociological and demographic databases online, to critically analyze that data and then link to current events in their local communities. By applying key constructs of political science, economics, health, and stratification theories, students attempted to explain disparities where found. Students become aware, engaged, empowered, and actively participated in community affairs. Some students will continue to work on a technical report to be shared with the Minority Health Department and the Governor’s Office. According to the QEP Assessment, all of the students who participated share my impressions of the QEP experience.
Results-Outcome:

All student groups successfully worked in productive teams and were able to print workbooks with the correct data. No group failed to locate, retrieve, or summarize data in the appropriate charts. All groups presented their findings correctly and applied theories from relevant chapters. Although this QEP was exceptional in participation and outcomes, multiple problems were encountered along the way. The scope of the project was too large for a single semester at the introductory level. The computer lab set up for this QEP was lost when my hours as an adjunct were cut two days before the semester began (I had arranged to use the math tutoring lab for supplemental software and group work on Fridays) and student groups were forced to use the “open labs” instead. Most students were computer literate and learned to use online beta software quickly while others had to be brought up to speed. Three students did not participate in the project given that no credit would be given in the course. Finally, some students will be able to continue working on the technical report while others may not, given their educational pursuits.
Results for QEP Activity Evaluation Fall 2014

Assessment totals out of 26 student responses.

Evaluation of Classroom Activity 12/04/2014

Instructions: Make your ratings by checking the appropriate space.

Engaging  _23_: _3_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_ boring

Useless  _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _26_: _0_ beneficial

Easy  _0_: _0_: _0_: _3_: _6_: _1_: _0_: _16_: _0_ challenging

Dull  _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _9_: _0_: _17_: _0_ exciting

Valuable  _26_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_ worthless

Complex  _6_: _3_: _9_: _0_: _8_: _0_: _0_: _0_: _0_ simple

Written Responses:

"It was exciting."

"I feel like I know how to “do sociology” now.

"Why can’t we do something like this in every class?”

“I think we did something important for a change.”

“It was more interesting than just learning definitions.”

“It was a lot of work, I think, probably too much for one class”.

“I want to be a sociologist.”

“Can I be a research assistant on this project?”

The qualitative comments suggest that some students enjoy applying sociology as much as, perhaps even more than, studying theory. My goal is to ensure both theory and application are valued equally.