

Cover page: Conducting portfolio reviews for first-year Ph.D. students, UC Davis Sociology

This document includes the following information:

- Rationale for moving from a comprehensive examination-based model of evaluation to a portfolio-based model (p. 2)
- Timeline for all groups involved: first-year graduate students, faculty who teach first-year students, faculty who serve on the Portfolio Review Committee (PRC), Department Chair, and Graduate Program Coordinator. The Faculty Director of the Graduate Program monitors all these activities (pp. 3-5)
- Guidelines to students for assembling their portfolios (pp. 5-6)
- Guidelines to faculty who serve on the Portfolio Review Committee (PRC) (pp. 7-8)
- Language that can be used to write customized review letters to each student after the end-of-year review (p. 9)
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- Generic advice that will be given to each student after the end-of-year review (p. 15)
- Sign-off form that each student must sign and submit to the Graduate Program Coordinator (p. 16)
- Instructions for creating project sites where portfolios will be uploaded (p. 17). This will be modified later when we decide whether students will post portfolios on Canvas, Box, or another site

For the record: The new Handbook rules requiring sociology graduate students to prepare portfolios apply to cohorts entering fall 2017 and later. However, per Graduate Studies regulations other students were given the option to submit a portfolio because they were caught in the middle of the transition: between the requirement for a preliminary exam and the time at which the portfolio model was approved by the Graduate Council. Following this, four students from the 2015 cohort chose to submit portfolios in late fall 2016. A Portfolio Review Committee reviewed them in December 2016. All members of the 2016 cohort are opting to abide by the 2017 Handbook rules and will submit portfolios.

These materials were prepared by Department Chair Vicki Smith, March 13, 2017.

Rationale for adoption of a portfolio-based method of assessment

The adoption of a new model for assessing first-year graduate students was the product of two years of deliberation among the sociology faculty (at a retreat in September 2014, at the spring 2015 annual graduate program meeting, and sub-committee discussions in approximately six separate meetings in 2014-15 and 2015-16). Faculty voted to adopt it in spring 2016. It was approved by Graduate Council in October 2016.

Previously our students were required to take a two-day, timed comprehensive examination immediately prior to the beginning of their second year. They were tested in three areas: statistics, research design, and classical sociology theory (SOC 106, 201, 265A). Students could receive a High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, or No Pass. Anyone who received a No Pass on part or all of the exam were required to retake it the following January. If they did not pass the exam on the second sitting they received a Fail. This would lead to a process of recommending to faculty that they vote to disqualify the student.

The new model requires students to collect all their written assignments from the first-year and compile them into a portfolio, along with a copy of their transcript and a personal statement. The goals of the new requirement are multiple.

- Faculty will be able to provide a holistic, rather than narrow and artificially constrained review of students' work.
- The portfolio review will allow us to assess students' sociological competency (in theory, statistics and quantitative analysis, classical and contemporary theory, and substantive areas), using a broader set of data points than our time-limited preliminary exam, which tested only three areas. It will also give us a broader basis on which to provide constructive feedback to students and point out areas of strength and weakness to which students should attend, and give clear and detailed advice about succeeding in the program.
- This new practice gives students the credit they deserve for their work in the first year and discontinues our practice of requiring students to repeat what they learned on a timed exam, an assessment tool that has no relevance to future professional work or success.
- Using this new model should enable students to meet normative time expectations more effectively. The elimination of the exam at the beginning of the second year frees up students to begin working on their advanced methods project/QP the summer after their first year. Currently, students must spend time in the summer between Year 1 and Year 2 studying for the exam, impeding students' ability to make progress on their QP over the summer.
- Knowing they will be reviewed on all their work in the first year will encourage students to take their core required classes (106, 201, 206, 265A/B) right away and discourage them from taking Incompletes.

Timeline for 1) first-year graduate students, 2) faculty who teach first-year students, 3) faculty who serve on Portfolio Review Committee, 4) staff Graduate Program Coordinator and 5) Department Chair. *All timelines are pertinent to the Faculty Director of the Sociology Graduate Program*

Students:

September: the first-year cohort will be introduced to the concept and mechanics of the portfolio at the very beginning of the academic year; SOC 293 would be a good venue for dissemination of information. The Faculty Director of the Graduate Program needs to work with the facilitator of SOC 293 to arrange for a presentation on the portfolio. Students should be referred to the document, “Portfolio review: guidelines for students.” They should be informed that their portfolio will receive either a “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory.” Criteria used for making this determination are outlined in the review guidelines for students.

Every quarter: students need to maintain all their work and records from all their courses. They need to keep their work from all first-year classes, preferably electronic copies. Students need to keep all their assignments from 106 and 206 and upload them, as well. Any student who tests out of SOC 106 (thus doesn’t have to take the course) will submit their grade on the final exam for that class. Instructors will provide 106 and 206 exams. Faculty should provide their feedback on written work directly onto electronically submitted course assignments, using tracking, and students should get in the habit of saving all their work in separate folders, to minimize the work required at the end of the first year to assemble the portfolios.

Mid-to-late spring quarter of their first year students should start to create their portfolio site, whether on Smartsite or Canvas or Box. Specific instructions are provided for creating sites on Smartsite and will be provided for creating sites on other systems. Each site will include one folder for each and every course taken in the first year, one folder for the Personal Statement, and one folder for the transcript (which the staff Graduate Staff Coordinator will provide to students). In this timeframe students can upload materials from earlier in the year to their portfolio site.

In roughly the same window of time, students should plan their Personal Statements. They should endeavor to submit a well-written, thoughtful, and thorough one-to-two page self-assessment in which they reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in the first year, articulate their ideas for their QP’s, and discuss their plan for Year 2. The Personal Statement is an important part of the portfolio.

Immediately following the end of spring quarter first-year students must complete the assembly of their portfolios. The Graduate Program Handbook (effective Fall 2017) states that the portfolios must be completed the day after spring quarter final grades are due, including giving access to PRC members. Each portfolio will contain a folder for all first-year classes, a transcript, and a personal statement.

Faculty who teach first-year students:

Substantive and meaningful feedback helps students understand their strengths and weaknesses, as well as how they can improve the quality of their work. It is essential to the intellectual and professional development of all students. It is especially critical for first-year students. The PRC uses (and depends on) instructors’ written feedback as one indicator of how well each student did in Year 1. (Faculty who teach 106 and 206 won’t be expected to do this; students will upload their quizzes and other assignments to the portfolio.)

Faculty should require graduate students in their seminars to submit written course work (of any length) electronically. Faculty should write comments on the electronic versions, using tracking. Faculty are strongly encouraged to write specific comments on the content of the paper and to write a concluding paragraph that summarizes the overall quality of the assignment and of the quality of students' performance in the seminar or class. Students will then be able to upload their written work into their portfolio sites at the end of the year.

The day after spring quarter grades are due, instructors who had first-year students need to submit spring seminar grades to the PRC Chair, so the Committee has all the grades for the entire year. (Grades for spring quarter don't appear on official transcripts until about July 1; thus, spring quarter instructors need to personally provide them to the Committee.)

Faculty who serve on the Portfolio Review Committee:

Mid-to-late spring quarter the PRC Chair should confer with the Faculty Director of the Graduate Program and the Staff Graduate Program Coordinator to prepare to conduct the review. The Chair of this Committee needs to remind all Committee members of the mission of the committee (holistic review; everyone should review the document, "Portfolio review: guidelines for members of the PRC"), discuss how the work of reviewing portfolios will be divided, and set a date for the two-to-three hour meeting at which portfolios will be reviewed (as noted above, students are required to complete their first-year portfolios no later than the day right after spring quarter grades are due; the Review Committee meeting must take place soon after that because reviews of all graduate students are due to Graduate Studies by July 1).

Mid-to-late spring quarter the PRC Chair will contact all the first-year students, remind them of the deadline for production of the portfolio, inform them of the Committee members' names and email addresses, and remind them that students need to add each committee member as a participant to the portfolio sites. The Chair also needs to contact all spring quarter faculty instructors and remind them to submit the grades of first-year students the day they submit their final grades to the Registrar's office.

As soon after spring quarter as possible, the Committee will meet for two-to-three hours. In preparation for this meeting Committee members should review "Portfolio review: language for review letters," "Portfolio review: Samples of redacted letters," "Portfolio review: sign-off form," and "Advice to first-year students after they submit their portfolios." Each portfolio will be rated either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. Members of the Committee also will engage in determining the student's rating in the program, assigning either a Satisfactory or a Marginal. (This is the rating that is required by and reported to Graduate Studies no later than July 1.)¹ Then, the customized review letters must be produced and a Committee member or members must work to ensure that the language, tone, and standards deployed are consistent across the reviews.

Once the reviews are completed (which must occur in a timely way such that ratings can be submitted to Grad Studies by July 1 at the latest), the Committee Chair ensures that three items are sent to each student: a customized review letter, the "Advice to first-year students," and the sign-off form, along with a message reminding them that they need to submit the signed form to the staff Graduate Program Coordinator within one week.

¹ Note: first-year students receive two ratings. One is given for the portfolio and is a departmental rating; one is given for status in the program, a rating required by and reported to Graduate Studies.

Graduate Program Coordinator:

Is available to confer with the PRC Committee Chair and the Faculty Director of the Graduate Program about the review process. Provides first-year students' transcripts (showing fall and winter quarter courses) to the PRC Chair before the end of spring quarter. Receives and records students' sign-off forms. Keeps record of portfolio ratings (Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory) in Student Progress spreadsheets. Submits student ratings to Graduate Studies.

Department Chair:

May: appoint the members of the Portfolio Review Committee for the following academic year. This Committee is now a standing committee. The Handbook (effective Fall 2017) states that: The Committee that reviews the portfolios will consist of four faculty members and one Committee chair (a faculty member). The Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Coordinator will serve *ex officio*. Members will serve one-year terms. There are no graduate student representatives on this committee. The Department Chair does not vote but is available for consultation. As noted, the Department Chair will be available for consultation.

Guidelines for graduate students

The portfolio is used as a basis for evaluating work carried out in your first year and to give candid, constructive, and holistic feedback on your record. Each portfolio will be rated Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. In the rare case that a student receives an Unsatisfactory it is possible that she or he will be placed on Marginal status in the department. In a letter you will receive, feedback will be provided about the quality of your work and about your progress. The ultimate letter will be approved by the entire Portfolio Review Committee (PRC). You must sign off on the review letter. Committee members do not read all your work in detail. The role of the Committee is to assess your overall record, as evidenced in the following criteria. You also will receive a copy of "Advice to first-year students after they finish their portfolio."

The portfolio: format and materials to be included.

- ***Creating the portfolio.*** You will create a "Project site" on Smartsite. Step-by-step instructions on creating a project site will be sent to you in spring quarter. Each site will include one folder for every seminar you took in your first year as well as a separate folder for your Personal Statement and transcript. You will upload all required course materials into the relevant folder. You need to add the names of all the members of the Portfolio Review Committee as participants (as well as the names of the Faculty Director of the Graduate Program and the Graduate Program Coordinator), thus enabling the Committee members to access your portfolio. Committee members will review all the portfolios on Smartsite (and later, Canvas). The final review letter (tailored to each case) and "Advice to first-year students after they submit their portfolios" (a generic letter) will be posted to each Smartsite when the Committee's work is completed. A form will also be posted; you'll be asked to sign the form and return it to the staff Graduate Program Coordinator.
- ***Portfolio contents.***
 - For 106 and 206: you need to upload copies of all complete homework assignments. Grades on exams in these classes will be provided by the instructors.

- For all other seminars need to upload seminar papers, required drafts (201), and all other written seminar requirements.
- Instructors' written comments on seminar papers. Ideally, instructors' comments will appear on your written assignments (using tracking) or as a separate typed document (which would be uploaded to the relevant folder).
- 1-2 page personal statement. We would like you to discuss your first-year performance, including explaining any factors that impeded your progress and/or performance. We expect you to outline plans for Year 2, and specify a topic and general plan for your Qualifying Paper (undertaken in Year 2).
- Copy of first-year transcript. The Graduate Program Coordinator will provide this to you and you will upload it to your portfolio site.

The portfolio: criteria for reviewing.

- ***Grades.*** Broad parameters for interpreting seminar grades might look like this: A student receiving all A grades will be considered to have had a successful first year. Note might be made of a case where a student's grades were all in the A range except for one B. A student receiving two B or more grades would be warned about the need to be attentive to their performance in the second year. A student whose grades were on the low side and had other problems in the record (see below) may receive and Unsatisfactory on the portfolio and may be rated Marginal in the program.
- ***Comments from instructors.*** This involves assessing the tone and the type of comments instructors write on papers. If reviewers see a pattern (positive or negative) in instructor's reviews about anything—the depth of the analysis in the paper, comprehension of course materials, ability to think sociologically, theoretical strength or weakness, clarity or lack thereof, ability to organize arguments clearly and effectively; ability to write a paper that connects to the course themes, the quality of writing, and so forth—reviewers would highlight such comments. If instructors wrote uniformly positive comments on students' papers, this can be taken as an indicator that the student has performed fairly well in his or her first year. Conversely, a pattern of criticism about any feature in students' work would be taken as a red flag that the review might note.
- ***Content of personal statement.*** Students should endeavor to satisfactorily explain any problems (such as an Incomplete or a low grade). They outline a realistic plan for the second year. The statement could discuss specific feedback students received on their course work and how they plan to improve or otherwise address it. Finally, students should indicate the topic and a plan for pursuing the QP in the second year in the program.
- ***Progress.*** Reviewers will check to see whether students fulfilled as many requirements as possible or whether they took only a few sociology requirements. We expect that typically, students will fulfill as many requirements as possible in their first year. Core requirements that typically are completed in the first year include SOC 106, 201, 206, and 265 A/B. They should also check for Incompletes. Obviously, having more than one Incomplete is a problem; even one Incomplete might warrant a word of caution about the need to get rid of it and to avoid more in the future.
- ***Writing.*** The committee may recommend that the student be advised that they need to resolve writing problems before reaching big hurdles like writing a QP and a dissertation. The University Writing Program provides one-on-one consultations with graduate students.

Guidelines for faculty members of Portfolio Review Committee

The Committee will evaluate each portfolio and give candid, constructive, and holistic feedback to each student (possible wording for these letters is provided separately; “Language for Review Letters,” p. 9). The Committee will decide how to divide the work of reviewing all the portfolios. Possible models include having every Committee member read every portfolio or dividing the portfolios among the members. The Committee needs to develop a clear plan for assigning portfolios and needs to create a mechanism so that one person is responsible for ensuring consistency of letters, across all cases. Depending on the number of portfolios that must be reviewed it might be desirable to appoint one Committee member whose sole responsibility would be to ensure that there is consistency across all letters: to harmonize them. The Committee will meet in person to conduct the review process. Each student’s portfolio will be rated Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. In a letter to each student, feedback will be provided about their first-year performance and their progress. Again, refer to “Language for Review Letters”. The entire Committee must approve each student’s final letter. Students must sign off on the review letter.

Keep in mind: Committee members do not read all the work in every portfolio. The role of the Committee is to assess the overall record, as evidenced in the criteria discussed below.

The portfolio: format and materials to be included.

- ***Creating the portfolio.*** Each student will create a “Project site” on Smartsite or Canvas. They will be provided step-by-step instructions for how to do this. Each site will include one folder for every seminar taken in the first year as well as separate folders for their Personal Statement and their transcript. Students will upload all required course materials into the relevant folder. Each student will add all the members of the Portfolio Review Committee (PRC) as participants (as well as the Faculty Director of the Graduate Program and the staff Graduate Program Coordinator), thus enabling the Committee members to access each portfolio. Committee members will review all the portfolios on Smartsite (and later, Canvas). The final review letter (tailored to each case) and “Advice to first-year students after they submit their portfolios” (a generic letter) will be posted to each individual student’s Smartsite. A form that includes the rating they received and which they must sign and return to the Graduate Program Coordinator will also be provided.
- ***Portfolio contents.***
 - For 106 and 206: students will upload copies of all complete homework assignments. Grades on exams in these classes will be provided by the instructors.
 - For all other seminars students will upload seminar papers, required drafts (201), and all other written seminar requirements.
 - Instructors’ written comments on seminar papers. Ideally, instructors’ comments will appear on papers (using tracking) or as a separate typed document (which would be uploaded to the relevant folder).
 - 1-2 page personal statement. The student can discuss their first-year performance, including explaining any factors that impeded their progress and/or performance. They must outline plans for Year 2, and specify a topic and a general plan for the Qualifying Paper (undertaken in Year 2).
 - Copy of first-year transcript. The Graduate Program Coordinator will provide these to students and they will upload them to their portfolio site.

The portfolio: criteria for reviewing. In this holistic review, all pieces listed below should be considered in relation to each other.

- ***Grades.*** Broad parameters for interpreting seminar grades might look like this: A student has had a solid-to very-successful first year with strong grades (almost all A's and A-'s or maybe a B+). Note might be made of a case where a student's grades were all in the A range except for one B. A student receiving two B or more grades would be warned about the need to be attentive to their performance in the second year. A student whose grades were on the low side (and/or has incompletes or other problems; see below) may receive an "Unsatisfactory" and be placed on "Marginal Status" in the program.
- ***Comments from instructors.*** This involves assessing the tone and the type of comments instructors write on papers. If we see a pattern (positive and encouraging, or negative) in instructor's reviews about anything—the depth of the analysis in the paper, comprehension of course materials, ability to think sociologically, theoretical strength or weakness, clarity or lack thereof, ability to organize arguments clearly and effectively; ability to write a paper that connects to the course themes, the quality of writing, and so forth—reviewers would highlight such comments. If instructors wrote uniformly positive comments on students' papers, this can be taken as an indicator that the student has performed fairly well in his or her first year. Conversely, a pattern of criticism about any feature in students' work would be taken as a red flag that the review might note. Committee members can draw on instructors' comments to help them write the review and give students summarizing feedback.
- ***A caveat:*** students should not be penalized for cases where they don't receive a lot of feedback on their papers. Undoubtedly, we'll see a lot of useful feedback from some faculty and less helpful or extensive feedback from others. Faculty need regularly to be reminded of their responsibility to give feedback to students.
- ***Content of personal statement.*** Is the student able to satisfactorily explain any problems (such as an Incomplete or a low grade)? Does the student realistically outline their plan for the second year? Does the student have a QP topic and plan for executing the QP? Does the student show awareness of any criticisms received in courses, if relevant? The statement could discuss specific feedback students received on their course work and how they plan to improve or otherwise address it.
- ***Progress.*** Reviewers should check to see whether students fulfilled as many requirements as possible or whether they took only a few sociology requirements. We expect that typically, students will fulfill as many requirements as possible in their first year. Core requirements that typically are completed in the first year include SOC 106, 201, 206, and 265 A/B. Reviewers should also check for Incompletes. Obviously, having more than one Incomplete is a problem; even one Incomplete might warrant a word of caution about the need to get rid of it and to avoid more in the future. If a student has one or more incompletes they should outline their plan to eliminate them.
- ***Writing.*** The committee may recommend that the student be advised that they need to resolve writing problems before approaching the QP and dissertation. The University Writing Program provides one-on-one consultations with graduate students.

It is expected that most if not all members of each cohort will be rated Satisfactory after their first year. The atypical instances where a student is rated Unsatisfactory might look like this:

Unsatisfactory. A student's first year has been notably mixed. The student has a couple of Bs or more; they might have an incomplete for which the student doesn't have a plan to resolve; some information has entered into the record about problematic performance as a TA; they've gone missing in action; they've received a lot of negative feedback on their written work; and so forth. It is likely that many cohorts will have zero Unsatisfactory cases.

Language for customized review letters

The review letters are narrative statements about the overall quality and record from the first year. They are intended to provide holistic feedback that students can use to move forward in the program. Letters will typically be one or two paragraphs, noting strengths, and weaknesses where relevant.

Satisfactory. A student has had a solid-to very-successful first year. They have no incompletes (or if they have one, the student provides a plausible explanation as well as a plan for removing it), strong grades (almost all A's and A minuses), and received positive and encouraging feedback from faculty whose seminars they were enrolled in. The review letter would provide overarching summary comments about strengths and weaknesses. Here are some sample topics that could be addressed (this is really like a check list of things that can be mentioned in the review letter):

- You finished your first year with a very strong GPA [note GPA].
- You have finished your first year having completed all the courses in which you were enrolled.
- You uniformly received very positive comments from your instructors. (They especially noted that your analysis is sophisticated; or your project is original; or your writing is outstanding; etc. etc.).
- You made considerable headway in fulfilling your requirements.
- Your personal statement is excellent. It helps us understand X problem. OR your plan for your second year looks manageable and should enable you to make progress. OR your plan for your QP sound promising and we encourage you to decide who will chair your QP committee.
- (If relevant) It appears that you used your fellowship well (if the student had Cota Robles, Provost's, or other first-year fellowship).
- It was great that you: gave a paper at a conference, published a paper, etc. etc. (These things are unlikely although not impossible for first-year students.)
- The Portfolio Review Committee is impressed with your first-year record and is pleased to give you a rating of "Satisfactory." We strongly urge you now to read "Advice to first-year students". It outlines what you need to think about now that your first-year portfolio review is concluded. It also outlines a course of action that should enable you to complete your Qualifying Paper at the end of year 3 (at the latest) and proceed into and succeed in later phases of the Sociology Ph.D. program.
- We note that you received a (B, B+) in (SOC X) and we encourage you to do what is possible to avoid B range grades in your second year. OR
- The letter might include advice, such as "the committee believes that if you (receive assistance from the writing program; take fewer classes each quarter; clear up the incomplete, etc. etc.) you should be able to improve your performance in Year 2."

Unsatisfactory. A student's first year has been notably mixed. The student might have two or more Bs; they might have an incomplete for which the student doesn't have a plan to resolve; some information has entered into the record about problematic performance as a TA; they've received a lot of negative feedback on their written work; and so forth. The overarching comments from the committee would reflect concern and note areas for improvement. The review letter would make recommendations for improvement (e.g., try to improve grades, seek help with writing, finish incompletes, talk to your major professor, and other suggestions).

The review would end with this: "Without considerable improvement in year 2, GPC may recommend that the faculty vote to disqualify the student at the end of year 2."

Table used for the first-ever portfolio review. This is optional but useful for a comparative sense of students' performance on core parts of first-year work. It could be constructed by the chair of the committee.

Name	First-year transcript	106	201	206	265A
█	+GPA = 3.69 +Units completed = 41 +Had one incomplete but has since cleared it	Course grade = B- Materials included: +1 Exam +2 exercises +4 lab assignments +Midterm grade = 73 +Final exam grade = 71	Course grade = A Materials included: +Research question for proposal +Final Proposal +Instructor comments on prop. +Summary of Livne's talk	Course grade = S Materials included: +2 exams +2 homeworks +Midterm grade = 89 +Final exam grade = 92	Course grade = A Materials included: +Conceptualization papers (original & revised versions) +Comparative theorist paper +Instructor comments +8 sets of responses to readings +2 memos
█	+GPA = 3.69 +Units completed = 42 +No incompletes	Course grade = B Materials included: +5 exercises +Midterm grade = 83 +Final exam grade = 77	Course grade = A Materials included: +Research question for proposal +Final proposal +Instructor comments on prop. +Summary of Livne's talk	Course grade = S Materials included: +1 exam +3 homeworks +Midterm grade = 74 +Final exam grade = 90	Course grade = B+ Materials included: +Conceptualization papers (2) +Comparative theorist paper +Instructor comments +7 sets of responses to readings +2 memos
█	+GPA = 3.92 +Units completed = 38 +No incompletes	Course grade = A- Materials included: +Exam +4 exercises +Midterm grade = 89 +Final exam grade = 85	Course grade = A Materials included: +28 page proposal +Instructor comments	Course grade = S Materials included: +1 exam +2 homeworks +Midterm grade = 86 +Final exam grade = 92	Course grade = A+ Materials included: +Conceptualization paper +Comparative theorist paper +Instructor comments
█	+GPA = 3.92 +Units completed = 41 +No incompletes	Course grade = A- Materials included: Exam +5 exercises +3 lab assignments +Midterm grade = 93 +Final exam grade = 85	Course grade = A Materials included: +Research question for proposal +Final proposal +Instructor comments on prop. +Summary of Desmond's talk	Course grade = S Materials included: +2 problem sets +Midterm grade = 87 +Final exam grade = 94	Course grade = A Materials included: +Conceptualization paper +Comparative theorist paper +Instructor comments +6 sets of responses to readings

Sample A: redacted review written for a portfolio. This review was written for a student who had a fairly strong first year but also some problems worth noting.

TO: [REDACTED]

FROM: UC Davis Sociology Portfolio Review Committee

RE: Review of your first-year portfolio

DATE:

Dear [REDACTED], the portfolio review committee has reviewed all the materials you submitted from your first-year courses. The committee commends you for completing all the five core first-year courses (SOC 106, 201, 206, 265A & B) and for receiving all A and A- grades (with the exception of the grade for SOC 106) in all the seminars in which you enrolled. Publishing articles and having an article with a Revise and Resubmit at an ASA journal is terrific, a rare accomplishment for any graduate student, not to mention a first-year student. Having taken 41 units, having a plan for your QP, and having identified the faculty with whom you plan to work puts you in good standing to move forward in the program. Your Personal Statement does a nice job of outlining challenges you experienced in your first year; at the same time it nicely conveys what worked for you.

One thing the committee noted, from reading comments from your instructors, is that in your future research you will want to pay close attention to carefully connecting your data and your theory, to not making assumptions about your research findings, and to being open to what you learn from your data. You may have been alluding to this when you said, in your Personal Statement, that you learned to “push myself to really reframe and rework ideas to arrive at conclusions you cannot get to easily and neatly.” It appears that comments from Professor [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] played a role in helping you think about this. Professor [REDACTED], in particular, noted (about your proposal for SOC 201) that it would help to use your literature and theory to help focus your specific research to a greater extent.

We are glad to learn that you have been engaging with [REDACTED] for critical discussions about your research: it sounds very positive and will greatly enrich your work.

The Committee encourages you to keep up the good work. Your QP topic sounds important and fascinating and holds great promise. We encourage you to continue to take advantage of your mentors and maintain the strong record you’ve accumulated thus far. Best of luck in Year 2.

Portfolio rating = Satisfactory

UCD Sociology Portfolio Committee

Sample B: redacted review written for a portfolio. This review was written for a student who had an acceptable first year but also some problems worth noting.

TO: [REDACTED]

FROM: UC Davis Sociology Portfolio Review Committee

RE: Review of your first-year portfolio

DATE:

Dear [REDACTED], the portfolio review committee has reviewed all the materials you submitted from your first-year courses. The committee commends you for completing all the five core first-year courses (SOC 106, 201, 206, 265A & B). We note that you received a B and a B+ in two of the courses. In your 2016-17 courses you will want to do everything possible to improve the record. Professors [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], in particular, have given you some excellent feedback, which we encourage you to take seriously and use to help you strengthen future seminar and other papers.

Having taken 42 units, having a plan for your QP, having identified the faculty with whom you plan to work, and having initiated the IRB approval process put you in good standing to move forward in the program. Your Personal Statement, although brief, outlines some of the challenges you experienced in your first year; it sounds as though you have a plan for avoiding some of those challenges this year.

We would have liked to see you elaborate on your project and goals to a greater degree. Specifically, the Committee advises that you strive to refine and focus your QP project, which seems general at this stage. Professor [REDACTED] poses a number of questions that could help you focus your project; these questions seem very helpful and we encourage you to review them.

Your QP topic sounds important and fascinating and holds great promise. We encourage you to continue to take advantage of your mentors and maintain the solid record you've accumulated thus far. Best of luck in Year 2.

Portfolio rating = Satisfactory

UCD Sociology Portfolio Committee

Sample C: redacted review written for a portfolio. This review was written for a student whose first year was excellent; Committee identified one issue of concern.

TO: [REDACTED]

FROM: UC Davis Sociology Portfolio Review Committee

RE: Review of your first-year portfolio

DATE

Dear [REDACTED], the portfolio review committee has reviewed all the materials you submitted from your first-year courses. The committee commends you for completing all the five core first-year courses (SOC 106, 201, 206, 265A & B). Your first-year record was outstanding, with A range grades in all your seminars, including an A+. Kudos on your strong writing (on which several instructors comment) and deep knowledge of the materials in your seminars. Your Personal Statement thoroughly outlines some of the challenges you experienced in your first year; it sounds as though you have a plan for avoiding some of those challenges in the future.

Having the detailed plan for your QP should put you in good standing to move forward in the program. In agreement with Professor [REDACTED], we encourage you to seek feedback from a range of faculty to discuss the research. Given the ambitious scope of the project it would be useful to expose it to a variety of critical perspectives. We encourage you to determine how to make it a focused and manageable project, to be attentive to its sociological dimensions, and think hard about its contribution to the discipline of sociology.

Your QP topic sounds important and fascinating and holds great promise. We encourage you to continue to take advantage of your mentors and maintain the strong record you've accumulated thus far. Best of luck in Year 2.

Portfolio rating = Satisfactory

UCD Sociology Portfolio Committee

Sample D: redacted review written for a portfolio. This review was written for a student whose first year was outstanding; Committee identified one issue of concern.

TO: [REDACTED]

FROM: UC Davis Sociology Portfolio Review Committee

RE: Review of your first-year portfolio

DATE:

Dear [REDACTED], the portfolio review committee has reviewed all the materials you submitted from your first-year courses. The committee commends you for completing all the five core first-year courses (SOC 106, 201, 206, 265A & B) and for completing 42 units. Your first-year record was outstanding, with A range grades in all your seminars. Kudos on your strong writing (on which several instructors comment—one instructor calls your paper “brilliant”) and deep knowledge of the materials in your seminars. Your Personal Statement thoroughly outlines some of the challenges you experienced in your first year; it sounds as though you have a plan for avoiding some of those challenges in the future. We appreciated your detailed discussion of the first year.

We are pleased that you’ve identified your QP chair ([REDACTED]). In your Statement you don’t identify your specific topic but we understand from [REDACTED] (with whom you are taking a seminar this quarter) that you do have a topic. Your plan to begin collecting data in Winter quarter is excellent.

We encourage you to continue to take advantage of your mentors and maintain the strong record you’ve accumulated thus far. Best of luck in Year 2.

Portfolio rating = Satisfactory

UCD Sociology Portfolio Committee

Generic advice which will be sent to every first-year student after they submit their portfolios.

Please read the following very closely. It outlines what you need to think about now that your first-year portfolio review is concluded. It also outlines a course of action that should enable you to complete your Qualifying Paper at the end of Year 3 (at the latest) and proceed into and succeed in later phases of the Sociology Ph.D. program.

- You are strongly advised to choose a faculty member (ASAP) who will advise your advanced methods paper before Year 2. You must make this decision in the fall, Year 2, when you take your advanced methods course.
- Share your research question and idea with at least one faculty to ascertain its significance in the field, soundness and feasibility.
- You should begin working on your advanced methods project (which probably will culminate in your QP) during the summer after Year 1. See below.
- You are strongly advised to take four units of 299 in winter quarter, Year 2, with your faculty advisor, during which you would conduct research for your advanced methods paper. It is in your best interest to gain momentum on this project in the fall and continue it into the winter and spring.
- By the end of Year 2 you will have taken your advanced methods seminar, collected, analyze, and coded the data for your methods paper, written up your analysis (which, ideally will be a draft of your QP), and completed your capstone seminar, SOC 288.
- You're expected to complete your QP by the end of Year 3, and other, subsequent requirements (QE, dissertation prospectus, dissertation) according to the timeline that is outlined in the Graduate Handbook. We believe that this plan will enable many students to finish their QP before the end of Year 3.

What can you do to work on your advanced methods paper during the summer between Year 1 and Year 2? Multiple, interrelated tasks that are essential to getting a good project off the ground

- Decide what you want to study, determine the focus of your research project. What subfield in sociology are you most interested in and compelled by? In other words, pin down the empirical focus of your research project.
- Read, read, and read in your area of research. Reading the relevant literature is one of the most helpful and important things any of us can do. It helps us become experts in our subfields. It helps us decide what's missing from the literature and what needs to be answered (which we then attempt to answer in our own projects). It helps us better understand how good researchers formulate a sociological question, the methods they choose to answer it (and it gives you a sense of how to determine the appropriate methods for answering specific questions), and what the answers are. In the long-run, it helps you start working to prepare for your oral examinations. You will already have begun to familiarize yourself with articles and books that you'll need to discuss in orals.
- Identify and evaluate different data sources (identifying, approaching and accessing field sites, in the case of qualitative field researchers; searching for, selecting and preparing data sets, in the case of quantitative researchers; visiting or researching (online) appropriate archives in the case of historical comparativists). Ideally, you will have chosen your data set or archives, or field sites by the time you begin your advanced methods class in fall, Year 2—or at least, you are very close to having worked this out.
- If possible, draft a proposal, an outline of your plans for fall, winter, and spring of Year 2.
- Investigate the IRB process if your project needs to be evaluated by the board.

Sociology: Portfolio sign-off form

Date: _____

Student's name _____

Assessment of portfolio:

Satisfactory

Unsatisfactory

Overall review comments are provided in a separate letter.

Committee Chair's signature: _____

Student's signature: _____

"I have read the review of my first-year portfolio." Student signature

Instructions for creating portfolio sites

Step-by-step instructions for creating portfolios on smartsite. These instructions should be useful for other sites such as Canvas or Box; while the technical instructions would differ, the steps below show you what you need to include in your portfolio sites.

- 1) Log in to Smartsite (smartsite.ucdavis.edu).
- 2) On the "My Workspace: Message of the Day" page click "Site Setup" in the column on the left.
- 3) Click "New" which takes you to "Site type".
- 4) Under "Build your own site" click "Project site" (from the drop down menu) then click "Continue"--that takes you to "Project site information".
- 5) In the "Site title" bar write "your name portfolio" (ie, for me it would be "Vicki Smith Portfolio"). You can ignore the large "Description" box. In the "Short Description" bar you can say something like "This site contains all X's portfolio materials: coursework, transcript, and personal statement"), then click continue (If you're able to provide a site contact name and site contact email on that page or the next, provide yours).
- 6) On "Project site tools" check Resources, mailtool, and assignments--then click "Continue".
- 7) On "Project site access", under "Site status" click "Leave as draft: accessible only to site maintainers" (when you're finally done you can publish it to all the participants). Under "Site visibility" click "Site is available to site participants". Under "Global access" click "Limited to whom I add manually." Then click continue.
- 8) On "Confirm your project site setup" you'll see a complete outline of your site. Assuming it looks right to you, then click "Create site." You will see "My workspace: site setup." Go to "View" and from the drop down menu click "project sites." It is possible you'll have to find your site by clicking on "More sites" on the top bar. (I find that smartsite gets a little glitchy on this.) You should see your site. Click on it.
- 9) From there on in you can add your materials. First, click "Resources", then, click "Add" (the "Add" that is next to the title of your site) and click "Create a Folder."
- 10) Create a single folder for each seminar (titled by the seminar number, such as SOC 265A), for your transcript, for your personal statement. Each of you should end up with 6 or more seminar folders, by my count.
- 11) You'll also need to add all the participants. The names and email addresses of the following should be added: Faculty Director of the Graduate Program, Graduate Program Coordinator, and all members of the Portfolio Review Committee. To do this, click on "Site editor" in the column on the left. Add the following individuals as participants. Their "Role Description" should be "Participant." Assign all participants the same role. Their status is Active. All participants should be able to read your materials and add materials to the site.
- 12) Finally, in the left column, you should see "Publish Now." Click on that and there you go.