Social and Behavioral Sciences

Description and Learning Outcomes

Courses approved for the Social and Behavioral Sciences category must meet the following three outcomes.

1. **Contextual Factors.** Explain how individuals, groups or institutions are influenced by contextual factors.

2. **Social and Cultural Constructs.** Demonstrate awareness of changes in social and cultural constructs.

3. **Theories, Methods, Concepts.** Use appropriate methods and resources to apply social and behavioral science concepts, terminology, principles and theories in the analysis of significant human issues, past or present.

Approved Courses and Enrollment

Students are required to pass one course approved for Social and Behavioral Sciences or transfer in an appropriate course. During the assessment period, 52 courses were approved to meet the Social and Behavioral Sciences requirement (see page 120).

Social and Behavioral Sciences courses enroll nearly 13,000 students each year with an average class size that ranges from eight students in Education courses to 128 in Criminology, Law, & Society courses (see Table 25). Course section sizes are relatively large overall, with the largest courses enrolling an average of more than 70 students per section: PSYC 100 (ave = 130); CRIM 100 (ave = 128); ECON 103 (ave = 101); ECON 104 (ave = 97); GOVT 103 (ave = 89); and GOVT 101 (ave =73). The Economics department teaches the most students, with ECON 103 and 104 as the highest enrolled courses. PSYC 100 has the next highest enrollment, followed by SOCI 101 AND BUS 100. Figure 61 shows enrollment trends over the past five years.

Students in the Honors College take HNRS 131: Contemporary Social Issues to fulfill their learning outcomes in this category. Although not formally a part of the Mason Core, HNRS 131 is also included in this assessment.

Courses Included in Assessment

The assessment period included 126 sections of Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences courses taught in fall 2018 and eight sections of Honors 131. Of the 134 course sections included in the assessment period, 71% submitted materials.

Enrollment and Grades Distribution

A total of 7,057 students enrolled in Social and Behavioral Sciences courses including HNRS 131 in the assessment period. Of these students, 82.6% passed their courses with a C or above (see Figure 57).

Figure 57. Grades Distribution for Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences Courses, Fall 2018
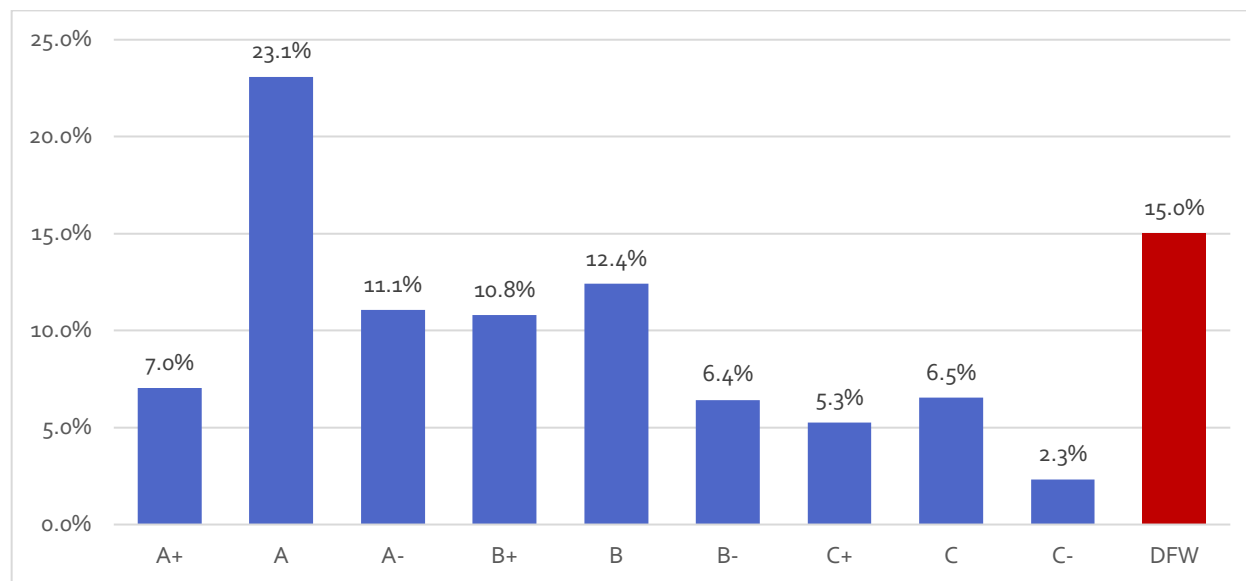
Assessment Methods

Student written work samples were requested from all course sections taught in the assessment period. Faculty were asked to submit samples completed in the final third part of the semester and that allowed students to demonstrate their learning on one or more of the expected course learning outcomes. Samples were selected using randomized course enrollment lists to insure the best possible representative sample.

The **Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Social and Behavioral Sciences Courses** was used for this assessment. The rubric was developed by Mason faculty as a tool to assess individual student work on three learning tasks or outcomes. The rubric was modeled after the AAC&U VALUE rubrics and uses four performance descriptors: Benchmark, Emerging Milestone, Advanced Milestone, and Capstone, as well as an option for "no evidence." The performance descriptors are developmental, identifying student performance levels in a context of learning and growth. The rubric is intended to be used across all of the years of a student's college experience, and is not limited to a single course, assignment, or student class level.

Using a process modeled after the VALUE Institute reviewer calibration, faculty reviewers were trained to use the rubric to assess student work. Reviews were normed to produce consistent

ratings across reviewers. Reviewers met for an in-person, one-day training and review session and completed the reviews of student work by the end of the day. Reviewers were faculty members who have taught Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences. Reviewers earned a small stipend for their efforts. Each student work sample was assessed twice. Results were analyzed for interrater reliability; discrepant reviews were resolved using a third review.

Learning Outcomes Assessment Results

Figures 58 and 59 display results from 558 ratings on the rubric. Figure 58 includes "no evidence" ratings; a rating of "no evidence" was used when the learning outcome could not be seen in the sample; this could mean that either the assignment did not require application of the outcome, or that the student did not demonstrate it. A "no evidence" rating provides important information in aggregate but is given no value for an individual sample.

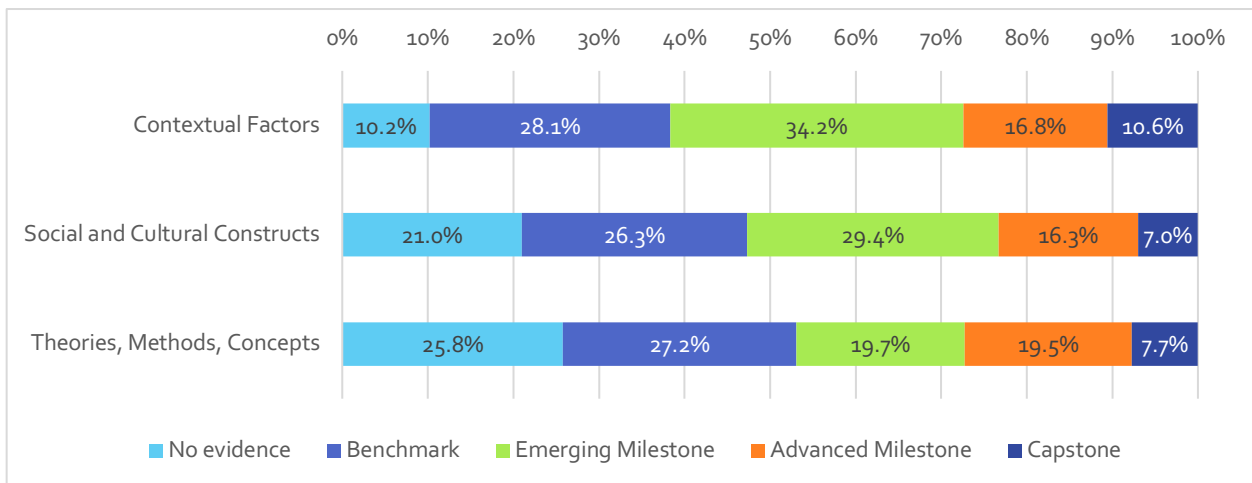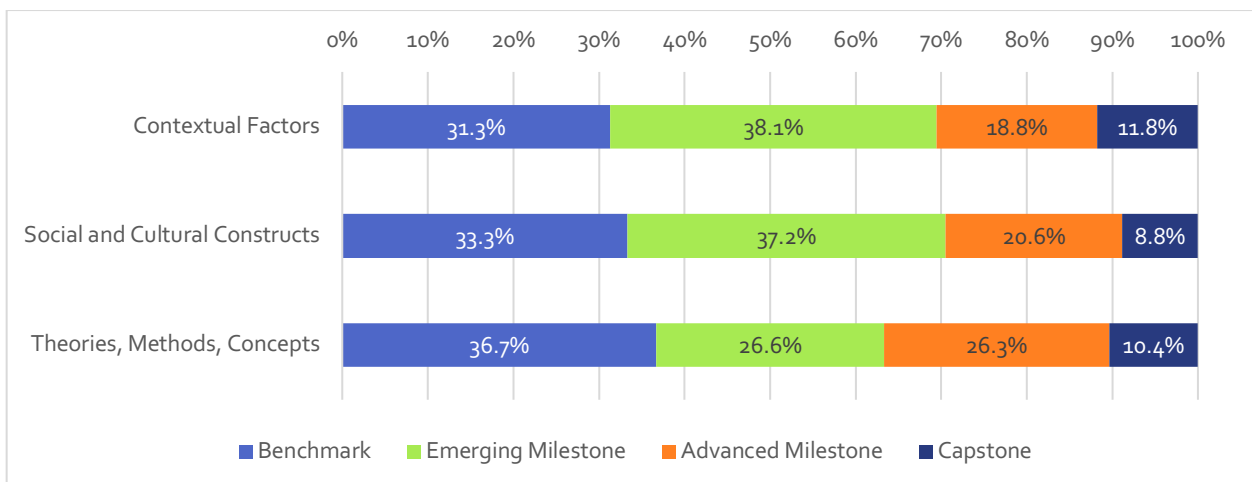*Figure 58. Assessment Results, Aggregated, including "No Evidence" Ratings*

Figure 59. Assessment Results, Aggregated, excluding "No Evidence" Ratings

Highlights from Analysis of Results

Data were analyzed to ascertain differences among courses in achieving the three learning outcomes. Comparison tests were conducted using nonparametric statistics because rubric data are ordinal; Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U, (p <.05) was used when analyzing differences between two groups, and Independent-Samples Kruskal–Wallis H test was used to analyze differences across three or more groups or courses. "No evidence" was treated as missing. Significant findings (p <.05) are noted below.

- Work samples were least likely to show evidence of Outcome #3, **Theories, Methods, Concepts** (74.2% demonstrated this outcome).

- At least two-thirds of the samples were rated Benchmark or Emerging on all three outcomes.

- Samples were rated highest on **Theories, Methods, Concepts** when that outcome was in evidence.

- Samples from juniors and seniors were rated higher than first and second year students on **Contextual Factors** and **Social and Cultural Constructs**, regardless of whether they were taking an upper- or lower-division course.

- There were no differences between students who started at Mason as freshmen and transfer students.

- When comparing three courses for which reviewers rated the most samples (BUS 100, n=43; PSYC 211, n=20; PSYC 231, n=18), samples from PSYC 231 were rated significantly higher than the other courses on **Social and Cultural Constructs** and **Theories, Methods, and Concepts**.

Student Self-Assessment

All students who were enrolled in a Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences course during the assessment period received an online self-assessment survey at the end of the semester. The retrospective pre-post self-assessment asked students to rate their knowledge and skills on four learning outcomes at the beginning of the semester (pre), and then again at the end of the semester (post). In total, 420 students completed both the pre and post items, resulting in a 6% response rate. A t-test pairwise comparison showed significant perceived learning gains on all four outcomes (see Figure 60).

Figure 60. Mean Scores on Student Learning Self-Assessment
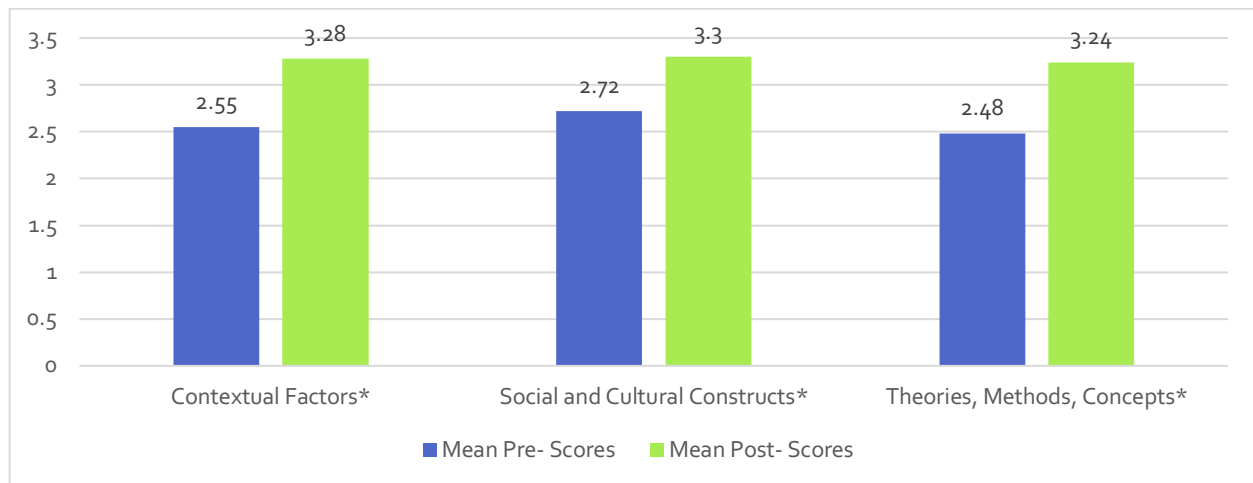
Mean scores, self-reported on a scale of 1-4, n=420, * *p* < .05

How do the Results Meet Expectations?

Because this was the first time that Mason used this rubric to assess student work, these data provide baseline information. More than 76% of samples were from lower-division courses, which suggests that the majority of samples should be rated at the Benchmark and Emerging levels. The higher performance by juniors and seniors could be due to maturation or concepts learned in previous courses.

How are Results Being Used to Improve Students' Educational Experience?

A series of open meetings (including an online option) were held in fall 2019 to share results. Faculty were encouraged to use the assessment rubric in their course and assignment design.

Limitations of this Assessment

Overall, this assessment was well-designed for the student written work. However, the highest enrolled courses are so large that the course-based work is typically limited to multiple-choice exams; these exams were not appropriate for assessing student achievement on the rubric. Thus, this assessment was not a valid representation of student learning across the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Additionally, while the rubric was designed to align directly to the category's learning outcomes, it is recommended that the rubric delineate the complex outcomes that are grouped in the learning outcomes. For instance, **Theories, Methods, Concepts** are the stuff of entire disciplines. Thus, it is not clear what the assessment is capturing in this one outcome; are student proficient in understanding and applying theories, or can they discuss methods used in a research study? Reviewers were instructed to interpret this outcome liberally in their assessment. Should the rubric should be revised, a model could be the **Mason Core Rubric for Western Civilization/World History**.

Assessment Rubric(s)

The **Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Social and Behavioral Sciences** was developed by a team of Mason Social and Behavioral Sciences faculty to evaluate student work for the Mason Core learning outcomes in Social and Behavioral Sciences. The rubric was modeled after the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, and was informed by the Measuring College Learning Project (Calder & Steffes, 2016) and the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) General Education Assessment Rubric for Social Phenomena (2012). The rubric was designed to evaluate student performance on three learning outcomes, with four increasingly sophisticated performance descriptors for each outcome. The rubric can be used with many types of written work. Most student work will not show evidence of all three outcomes; in this case, an additional category for "no evidence" should be made available.

## Courses Approved for Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences in Fall 2018

AFAM 200 Introduction to African American Studies
ANTH 114 Introduction to Cultural Anthropology
ANTH 120 Unearthing the Past: Prehistory, Culture and Evolution
ANTH 135 Introduction to Biological Anthropology
ANTH 363 Humans, Disease, and Death
ANTH 372 Cultures of Disaster, Risk, and Hope
ANTH 396 Issues in Anthropology: Social Sciences
BUS 100 Business and Society
CONF 101 Conflict and Our World
CONS 410 Human Dimensions in Conservation
CRIM 100 Introduction to Criminal Justice
ECON 100 Economics for the Citizen
ECON 103 Contemporary Microeconomic Principles
ECON 104 Contemporary Macroeconomic Principles
ECON 105 Environmental Economics for the Citizen
ECON 367 Money, Markets, and Economic Policy
EDUC 203 Disability in American Culture
EDUC 372 Human Development, Learning, and Teaching
GCH 325 Stress and Well-Being
GGS 103 Human Geography
GOVT 101 Democratic Theory and Practice
GOVT 103 Introduction to American Government
GOVT 367 Money, Markets and Economic Policy
HEAL 230 Introduction to Health Behavior
HIST 121 Formation of the American Republic
HIST 122 Development of Modern America

INTS 300 Law and Justice
INTS 304 Social Movements and Community Activism
INTS 316 Introduction to Childhood Studies
INTS 317 Issues in Family Relationships
INTS 319 Contemporary Youth Studies
INTS 320 Construction of Differences: Race, Class, and Gender
INTS 321 Parent-Child Relations
INTS 331 The Nonprofit Sector
INTS 334 Environmental Justice
INTS 336 Poverty, Wealth and Inequality in the US
INTS 347 Gender Representation in Popular Culture
INTS 361 Neighborhood, Community, and Identity
INTS 362 Social Justice and Human Rights
INTS 371 Food Systems and Policy
INTS 436 Social Justice Education
INTS 437 Critical Race Studies
INTS 438 Representations of Race
LING 306 General Linguistics
PSYC 100 Basic Concepts in Psychology
PSYC 211 Developmental Psychology
PSYC 231 Social Psychology
SOCI 101 Introductory Sociology
SOCI 352 Social Problems and Solutions
SOCI 355 Social Inequality
TOUR 311 Women and Tourism
WMST 200 Introduction to Women and Gender Studies

Table 25. Enrollment in Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences Courses by Subject, AY2015-19

Subject	AY2015 #Sections	AY2015 Enroll	AY2016 #Sections	AY2016 Enroll	AY2017 #Sections	AY2017 Enroll	AY2018 #Sections	AY2018 Enroll	AY2019 #Sections	AY2019 Enroll
Conflict Analysis & Resolution	8	226	12	316	13	298	12	312	11	296
Criminology, Law and Society	6	696	5	602	5	699	5	724	7	851
Economics	30	2,882	32	3,089	36	3,366	34	3,229	42	3,468
English	2	74	2	69	2	75	2	69	2	76
Geography/Geoinformation Sci	5	127	4	129	4	173	4	136	4	204
Global and Community Health					2	79	5	189	5	188
Graduate School of Education	3	11	3	6	4	32	3	41	4	41
History & Art History	9	234	8	227	8	260	9	259	10	221
Humanities & Social Sciences	2	69	2	79	2	79	2	78	2	71
Policy, Govt, and Intl Affairs	9	711	12	889	2	35				
Provost's Office	1	14	1	17	2	17	2	15	2	19
Psychology	39	2,832	37	2,672	38	2,518	37	2,673	45	2,597
Public & International Affairs	2	33								
Recreation, Health & Tourism	8	192	10	181	15	243	13	197	12	175
Schar School of Policy & Govt					9	861	11	849	11	878
School of Business	7	154	29	726	36	973	39	990	43	1,045
School of Integrative Studies/ New Century College	6	139	6	122	1	17	1	25	36	920
Sociology & Anthropology	35	1,794	35	1,620	40	1,723	42	1,855	39	1,796
Women & Gender Studies	2	66	3	75	2	64	2	74	2	75
TOTAL	174	10,254	201	10,819	221	11,512	223	11,715	277	12,921

Figure 61. Five-Year Enrollment Trends in Mason Core Social and Behavioral Sciences Courses, AY2015-19
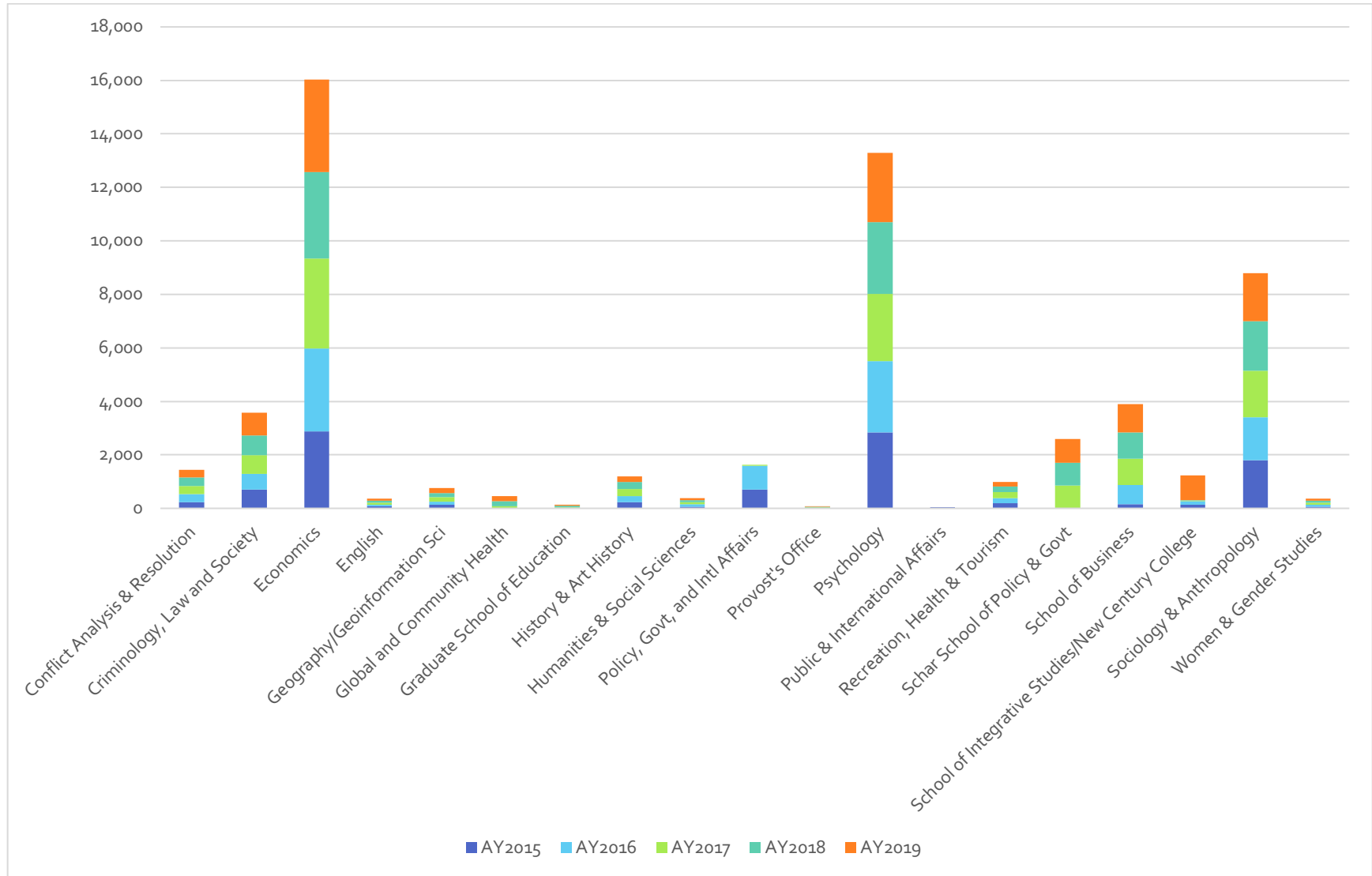
Legend: AY2015, AY2016, AY2017, AY2018, AY2019

Mason Core Rubric for Evaluating Student Work in Social and Behavioral Sciences Courses

This rubric was developed by a team of faculty experts to evaluate student work for the Mason Core learning outcomes in Social and Behavioral Sciences. For more information about the learning outcomes and approved courses, https://masoncore.gmu.edu/social-and-behavioral-sciences/

How to use this rubric: This rubric is designed to evaluate student performance on three learning outcomes, with four increasingly sophisticated performance descriptors for each outcome. This rubric can be used with many types of written work. Most student work will not show evidence of all outcomes; in this case, an additional category for "no evidence" should be made available.

Glossary:

Context/Contextual Factors—Context refers to the immediate physical and *social* setting in which people live or in which something happens or develops. Context can influence how an individual perceives a phenomenon. Contextual factors influence human attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Contextual factors might include social, organizational, political, economic, historical, cultural, or environmental conditions.

Social and Cultural Constructs—A construct is an idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society, and informs values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices. A construct is not inherently "natural" but is created by society and may be considered as natural by that society. Constructs are different across societies; what is the norm in one society may not be the norm elsewhere. Examples: gender, class distinctions, government.

Student Learning Outcomes	Level of Performance			
	Capstone	**Advanced Milestone**	**Emerging Milestone**	**Benchmark**
Contextual Factors	Analyze the connections between contextual factors and their combined influence on individuals, groups, or institutions	Draw connections between contextual factors and their influence on individuals, groups, or institutions	Explain contextual factors that influence individuals, groups, or institutions	Recognize/identify contextual factors that influence individuals, groups, or institutions
Social and Cultural constructs	Analyze changes/variations in social or cultural constructs and how those changes inform values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices using disciplinary theory, concepts, and/or evidence	Describe changes/variations in social or cultural constructs and how those changes inform values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices	Identify ways in which social or cultural constructs inform values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices	Identify cultural or social constructs within social sciences
Theories, Methods, Concepts	Apply social science theories, methods or concepts to provide a complex, sophisticated analysis of human issues	Apply relevant theories, methods, or concepts to explain human issues	Define and describe theories, methods or concepts in the social & behavioral sciences	Recognize/identify theories, methods or concepts in the social & behavioral sciences

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