ON GRADING: To SOC 100A and SOC 478 Students, Freshman Seminar Leaders, et al.

My criteria for evaluating sociology essays and research papers (mini in SOC 100, projects in SOC 478, and even PhD and ASR submissions). As the professor, and as a fellow student:

Have I learned something about the (socially constructed) social world? Are there (a lot of) field notes that describe the experience of being present in a situation (and that establish validity)? Are those notes analyzed by (grounded, inductive) themes?

Are there connections made to our common (sociology class, major, professional disciplinary, and everyday life) efforts and concerns? Are there references made to sociological concepts (substantive literature, methods, and current journals), texts, and (in class, in the media) discussions?

Is there a sociological imagination, reflecting the author’s and the audience’s membership in the relevant social categories (especially various communities, society, and humanity)?

Is there some special clarity of honesty and reflexivity (that establishes reliability)? Is there humility (about ethnical dilemmas, methodology, and epistemology) and empathy (for the subjects and for the human condition)?

Is the presentation well-written and clearly outlined, reflecting pride and excellence for the effort, and respect for the dialogue (with the reader) and the common enterprise (of doing sociology)?

Can I recommend (to my colleagues and my university) a level of evaluation and accreditation (with a sense of my personal standards and institutional consensus), consistent with honest and helpful feedback to the writer and his or her fellows (reflecting fairness), evolving community standards, and an open discussion of the entire (educational, intellectual, social) enterprise?

See also my “short note on grading” in the syllabus: On a 1 to 10 (or more) scale, I am enthusiastic about technical proficiency, addressing course issues, indicators of whether you understand what’s happening. Is there basic competence in English and sociology?

See Kirshenbaum, et al., Wad-Ja-Get?: The Grading Game in American Education.

See the University 2006-2007 Catalog, on p. 14, grades for undergraduates: A+, A, A- (excellent), B+, B, B- (above average), C+, C (average), C-, D+, D, D- (minimal passing), F (failure).... But then, on p.31, grades for graduate students, the meanings are different:

A (high achievement), B (meets expectations), C (below expectations), D (inadequate performance), F (failure), S (satisfactory)....

Also note the DOE’s 2006 “New Grading Scale”: ME = Meets with Excellence, MP = Meets Proficiency, N = Approaches Proficiency, U = Well Below Proficiency....

This continues to be a rough draft, and I would like feedback.

–Michael Weinstein, 3-28-94, 10-19-99, 9-12-06, 1-11-07