

What is Happening in Your Department?

A Comparison of Findings from the 2001 and the 2007 Department Surveys

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ASA RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Department chairs need comparative information whether they are requesting additional faculty lines, reduced teaching loads, new programs, or revamped curricula. They depend upon data from “peer” departments and programs for compelling arguments for deans and other administrators about the magnitude of their concerns. This research brief provides data to sociology chairs and other stakeholders to help make peer comparisons.

The information is based on two American Sociological Association surveys of U.S. sociology departments and programs that awarded Bachelor’s degrees. The first of these surveys was conducted in Academic Year (AY) 2000/2001 and the second in (AY) 2006/2007. Departments are classified by their type of institution using 1994 Carnegie Codes. Institution types are collapsed into four larger categories—Research Universities, Doctoral Universities, Master’s Comprehensive Universities and Baccalaureate-only Colleges. For peer comparisons, departments at each type of school are compared to departments at like schools.

This research brief provides data on issues commonly raised by department chairs at sociology meetings as well as in responses to an open-ended survey question about their concerns. They include hiring freezes despite growth in majors; lack of classroom space; competition with criminal justice departments; non-competitive stipends for graduate students; and what one chair describes as “the obsession with assessment.”

Direct quotations from chairs about their concerns include:

“Maintaining high levels of enrollment in the major.”

“Too many students, too few resources.”

“We have nearly doubled in size with the influx of education majors choosing sociology as their second major. We have not had an increase in faculty...”

“Our Social Sciences Department includes majors and has approximately 900-1000 students. It should be restructured as a college with five stand-alone departments including sociology.”

“We are being asked to seriously consider and likely develop a Criminal Justice major.”

“A decrease in sociology majors when a criminal justice major began.”

“We face increasing demand to offer more courses with fewer faculty.”

“Too high a ratio of majors to FTE faculty.”

“Looming retirements and uncertainty about position replacement.”

“Financial Aid for graduate students remaining competitive”

“Qualified graduate students

“Developing workable and effective assessment procedures.”

“We are concerned about how assessment information will be used both within the institution and by the state.”

Chairs’ concerns seem warranted based on survey data showing that:

- The percentage of stand-alone departments has increased slightly, possible as much a result of criminal justice concentrations becoming independent departments as with the building of new stand-alone sociology departments;
- The number of departments offering concentrations has increased, especially criminal justice concentrations, although the majority of departments report offering sociology only.
- The median number of sociology majors and the number of Bachelor’s graduates have per department both increased, but the number of faculty has remained the same;
- The median number of Master’s degrees awarded per department has grown somewhat, while the median number of PhDs awarded has remained stable.
- The percentage of students accepted to graduate school declined compared to the number who applied.
- The percentage of departments hiring new tenured faculty compared to the faculty lost has declined.
- The percentage of departments using assessments to evaluate undergraduate students has increased, despite chairs reporting dissatisfaction with this practice.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In March 2008, the universe of chairs of stand-alone sociology departments and joint departments or divisions that awarded at least one sociology undergraduate degree received an online ASA Department Survey. It requested AY 2006/2007 information about department size and structure, numbers of undergraduate majors and graduates, graduate enrollments, faculty hires, student evaluations, and other relevant information. Despite the questionnaire length, 60 percent of chairs and their staff took the time to answer, higher than the 55 percent response rate for the previous ASA department survey for AY 2000/2001.

The ASA department survey is important to the discipline because the sociology department is the unit of analysis. The survey focuses on questions that specifically address chairs’ need for information on topics of concern to them for departmental research, policy-making, and planning. Many questions in the AY 2006/2007 survey were similar to those asked in the previous survey to provide trend data.

To control for uneven response rates by type of school, responses are weighted to reflect their proportion in the total universe. Appendix Tables 1 and 2 provide the distribution of responses by type of department both weighted and unweighted. The Appendix also contains additional information on the survey methods.

FINDINGS

DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE

Figure 1 shows an increase in stand-alone sociology departments between AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007, especially at Research and Doctoral universities, (88 percent and 75 percent, respectively). The percentage of stand-alone sociology programs at Master's comprehensive universities remained stable at 53 percent, while the percentage at Baccalaureate-only schools increased but remained at less than half of all departments and programs. Some of this growth is the result of stand-alone departments splitting off from "administrative marriages" with other fields such as anthropology or social work or by pulling out of social science divisions. Some may be due to the gain in students and resources of criminal justice programs compared to parent sociology departments encouraging them to start separate departments. This "administrative divorce" can force smaller sociology departments into competition with their former colleagues, according to some chairs. One consequence may be a push to restructure some stand-alone sociology departments to train students for applied careers that can compete with the careers available to criminal justice and social work majors.

While most sociology departments and programs do not offer specialties or concentrations, according to the survey, the proportion offering them has increased from 39 percent in AY 2000/2001 to 43 percent in AY 2006/2007 (see Figure 2). This small increase suggests that there is no rush to specialize within sociology departments, especially in those with few faculty and majors.

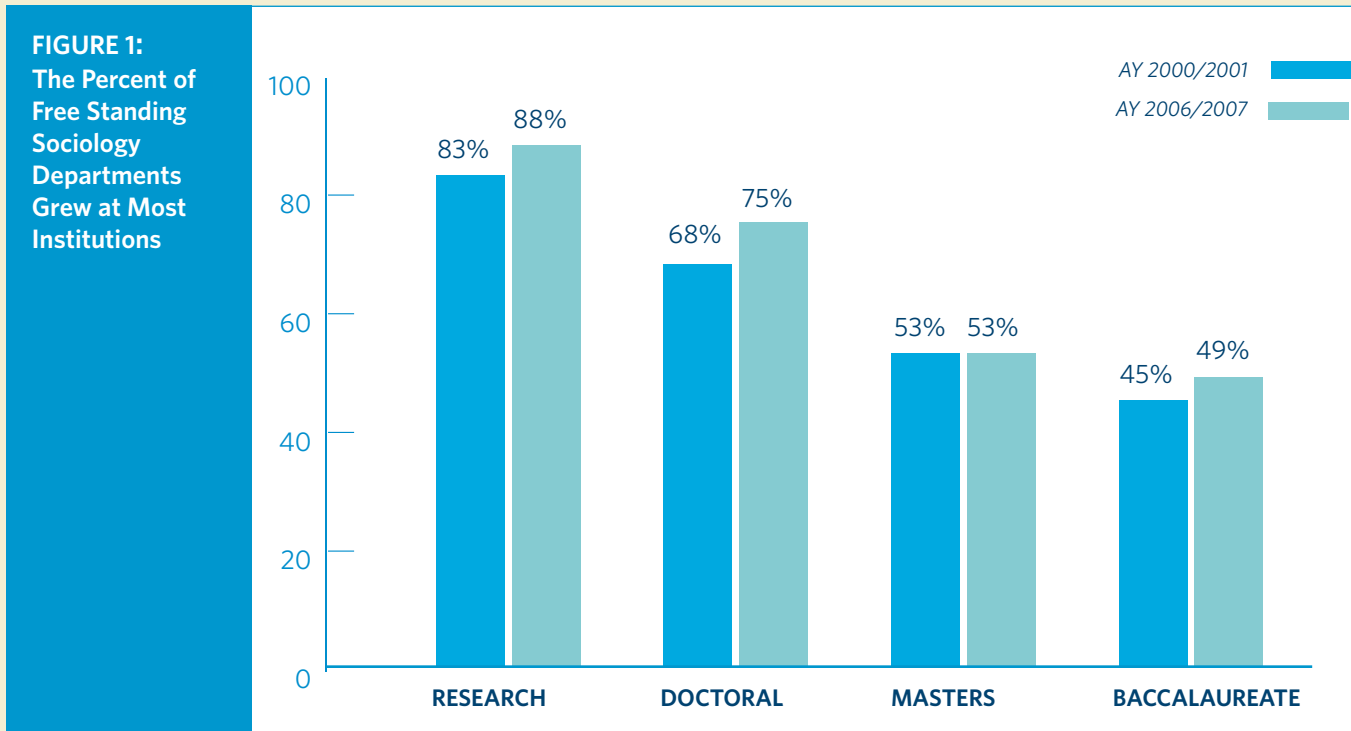
Table 1 shows the importance of crime, law, and society concentrations in sociology departments. Among the 43 percent of sociology departments or

programs that reported offering concentrations in AY 2006/2007, crime, law, and society concentrations are widespread compared to others. Although there was a decline in the percentage of units offering this concentration since AY 2000/2001, it is still decidedly the most frequent concentration offered to undergraduate students, with almost 22 percent of departments with concentrations offering it. The decline in departments offering this concentration could be a result of the splitting off of criminology programs into separate programs or departments, or the growth of other specialties, since departments can offer more than one concentration. If "social justice, inequality, and social institutions" are added to the crime, law, and society concentration, the percentage of departments and programs offering a concentration in this general area appears to have remained relatively stable.

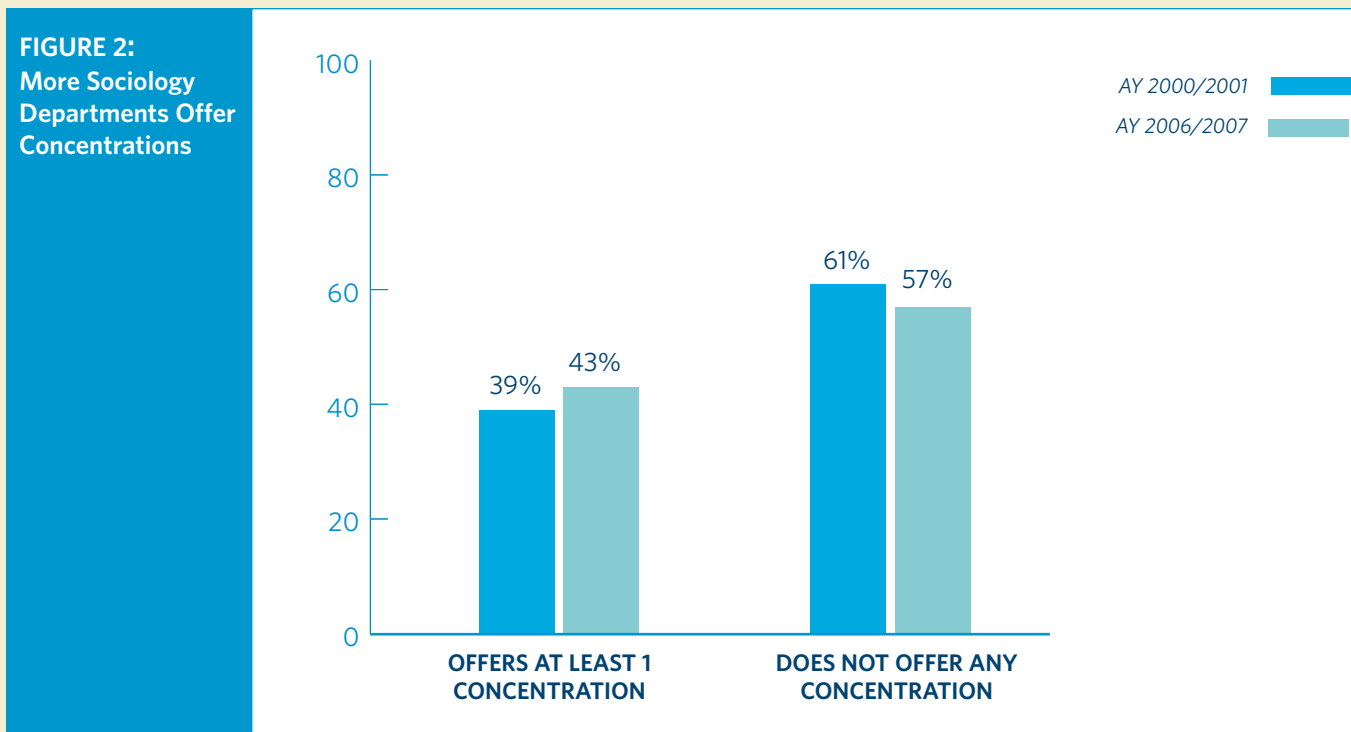
The second highest concentration is social services, which has remained stable since 2001 at about 14 percent. It is the only specialty area found in at least 10 percent of all departments. During the six years since the previous department survey, some of the other concentrations listed have increased slightly, while others have decreased. There are no dramatic changes on the Table.

STUDENTS

Indicators of student growth in sociology departments between 2001 and 2007 include the number of majors, Bachelor's degree recipients, Master's degree recipients, PhD degree recipients, and the percentage of new students accepted to graduate school compared to those that applied.



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007



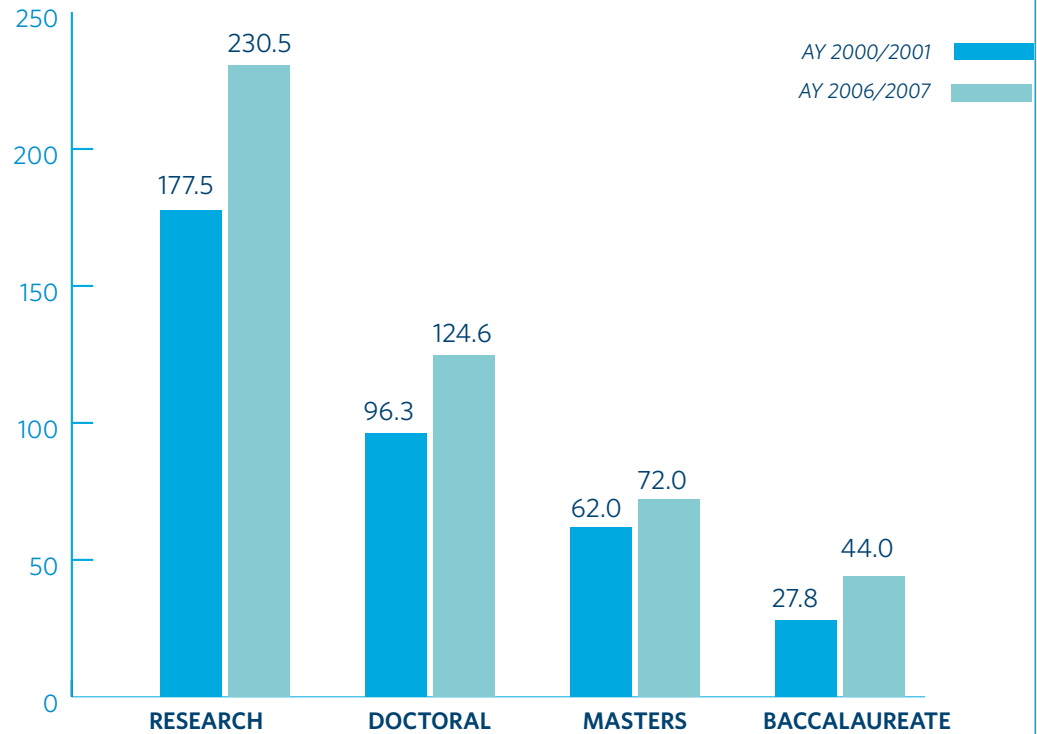
Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

TABLE 1. Concentrations Available in Sociology Departments

CONCENTRATION	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS BY AY			
	2000/2001		2006/2007	
	N	%	N	%
Crime, Law & Society	189	30.6%	128	21.8%
Social Service	84	13.6%	83	14.1%
Gerontology	46	7.4%	30	5.1%
Family and Demography	42	6.8%	39	6.6%
Applied Sociology/Research	34	5.5%	28	4.8%
Medical or Healthcare	26	4.2%	21	3.6%
Anthropology	25	4.0%	13	2.2%
International, Global Development	23	3.7%	24	4.1%
Rural, Urban, Environment	20	3.2%	38	6.5%
Organizations, Business, Work, Occupations	19	3.1%	13	2.2%
Social Justice, Inequality, and Social Institutions	18	2.9%	42	7.1%
Race, Ethnicity, Diversity	18	2.9%	31	5.3%
Gender/Women's Studies	15	2.4%	23	3.9%
Social Policy	14	2.3%	13	2.2%
Other	45	7.3%	62	10.5%
TOTAL WITH CONCENTRATIONS	618	100.0%	588	100.0%

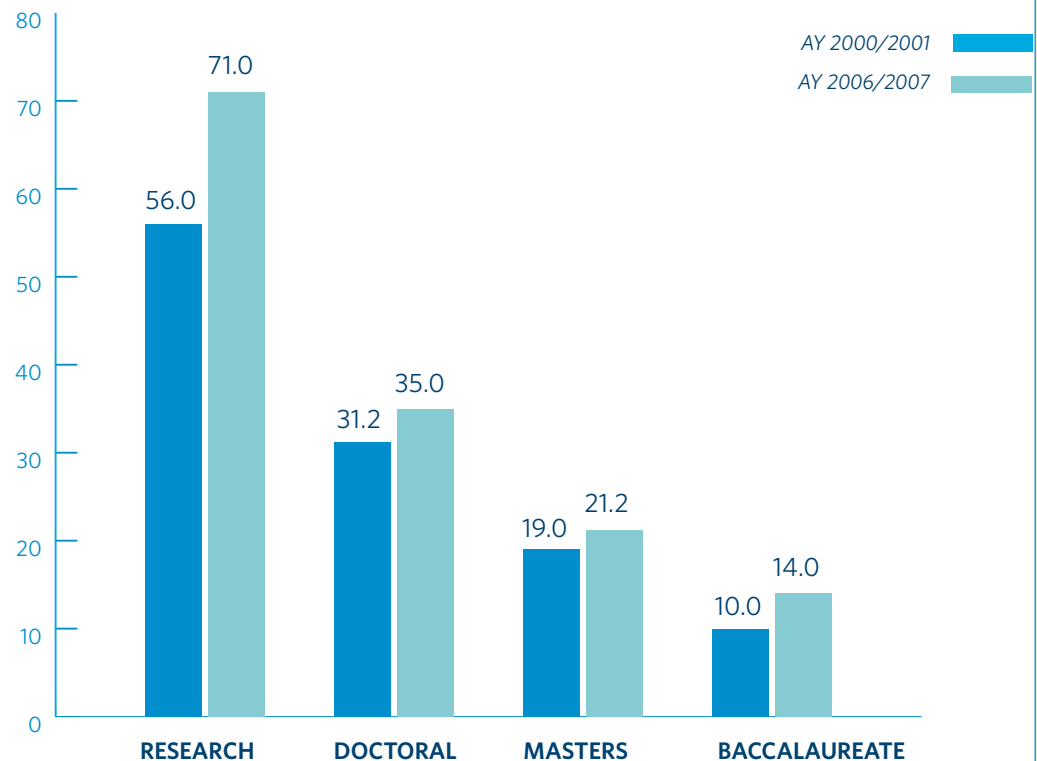
Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

FIGURE 3:
The Median
Number of
Sociology
Majors Grew



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

FIGURE 4:
The Median
Number of
Bachelor's
Degree in
Sociology
Awarded by
Departments
Increased



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

Department chairs' comments suggest that the number of sociology majors is growing in many departments, despite a lack of growth in resources. Only a few chairs worry about decreasing numbers of students and its negative impact on their ability to sustain the sociology major. Figure 3 shows an overall increase in the median number of majors per department between 2001 and 2007. The largest percentage increase (58 percent) in sociology majors occurred at Baccalaureate-only institutions, increasing from a median of 28 to 44 majors over the six-year period. Research universities experienced a 30 percent increase from a median of 178 majors to 231 majors per department. The number of majors in sociology departments at Doctoral universities increased at approximately the same rate (29 percent) as Research universities, although research universities had almost twice the number of majors as did Doctoral universities. Departments at Master's Comprehensive schools experienced the smallest percentage increase in the number of majors, but even at these schools the median number increased from 62 to 72 per department. The growth in majors should be good news for sociology departments, yet the lack of corresponding growth in full-time faculty (see below), suggests that as one chair put it, "classrooms are bulging." Another chair described the situation as follows:

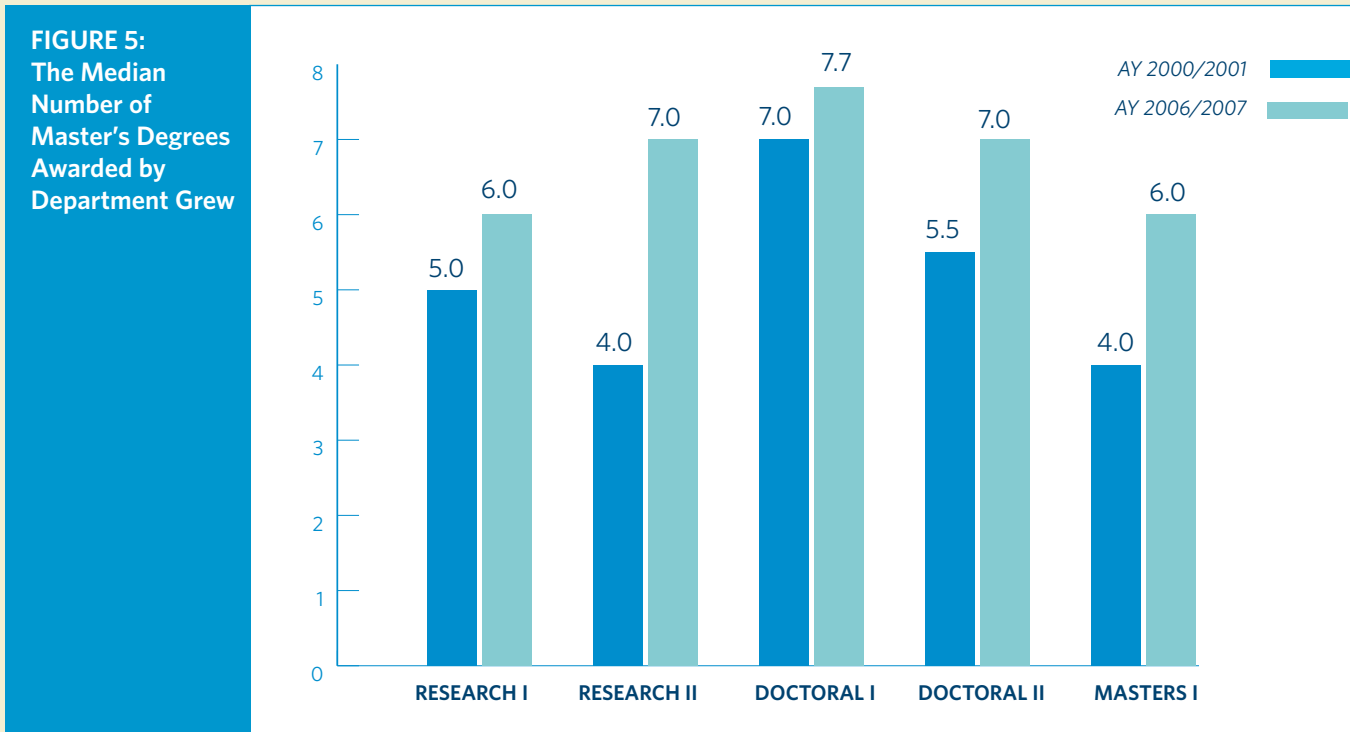
We have nearly doubled in size with the influx of education majors choosing sociology as their second major. We have not had an increase in faculty, classroom space, or other space.

Overall, the median number of sociology Baccalaureates more than doubled since 1986 with a low of 12,397 graduates to a high of 28,541 in 2006. See this trend table on the ASA Research and Statistics web page at http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/leftnav/research_and_stats/profession_trend_data/sociology_degrees_since_1966. Between 2001 and 2007, the number of students awarded a

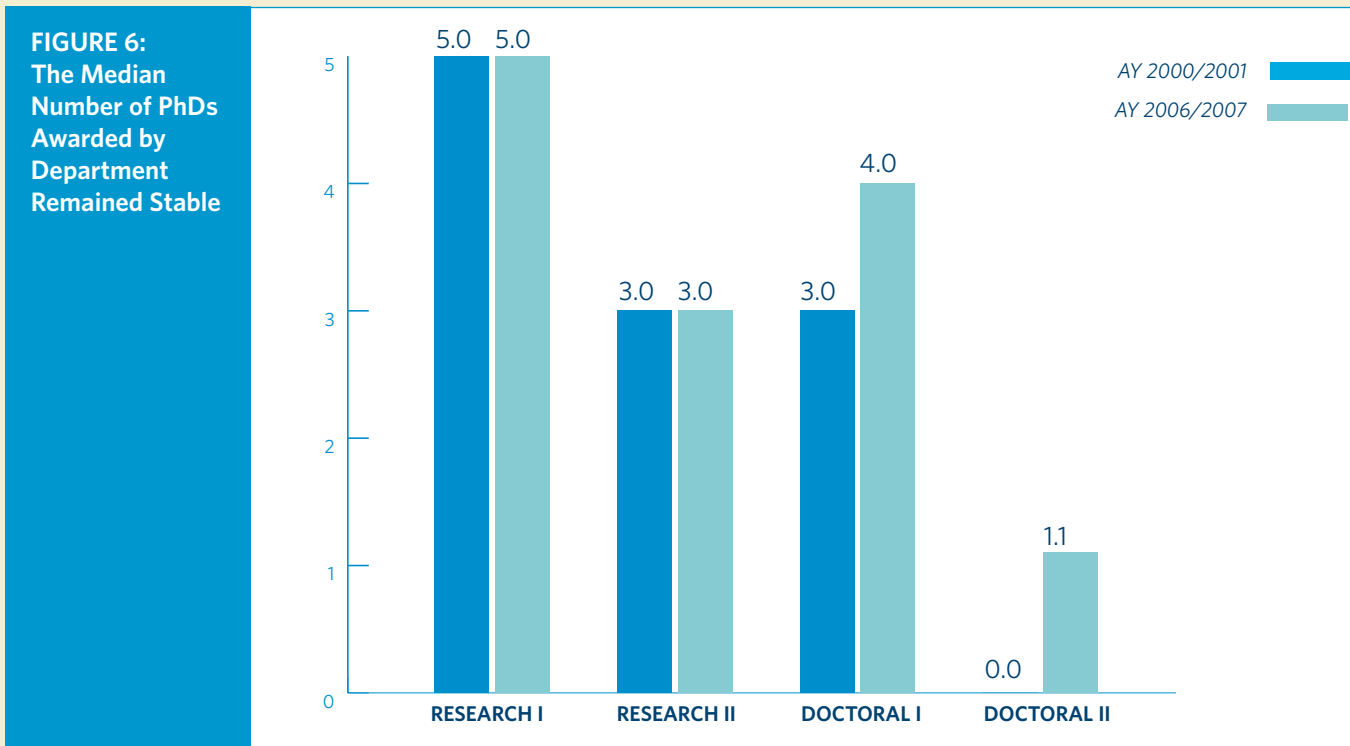
Baccalaureate degree in sociology increased at all types of schools (see Figure 4). The largest percent increase (41 percent) was at Baccalaureate-only schools, although the median number of degree recipients increased only from a low of 10 to 14 graduates. The second largest increase (almost 27 percent) and the largest absolute increase was reported at Research universities, from a median of 56 graduates to a median of 71 graduates. The increases at Doctoral and Master's comprehensive schools were more modest.

Changes in the median number of students per department obtaining graduate sociology degrees was relatively small, compared to the increase in sociology majors and Bachelor's degree recipients. As one department chair commented, "A major priority for the discipline is to encourage talented students to enter graduate school in sociology." Although the median number of students per department in the Master's I institutions obtaining Master's degrees increased by 50 percent between 2001 and 2007, the base number was small, from 4 to 6 students (see Figure 5).

While Doctoral I schools graduated the highest median number of Master's students in 2007, the largest increase was in departments at Research II schools. In spite of larger department size, Research I schools graduated the same median number of Master's students than departments at Master's comprehensive schools. Research I schools tend to emphasize going straight to a PhD, and not all departments award Master's degrees except as a "consolation prize" for those who are not considered successful PhD candidates which may account for the relatively small number of Master's degrees awarded. While there has been an increased interest in developing Master's programs that are vocational in orientation over the last 6 years, many chairs suggest their departments do not have the faculty and resources necessary to develop such programs.



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

Although the labor market for sociology PhDs appears strong (see “Too Many or Too Few PhDs? at [http://www.asanet.org/galleries/default-file/PhDs%20Employment%20Brief%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://www.asanet.org/galleries/default-file/PhDs%20Employment%20Brief%20(FINAL).pdf)) the median number of new PhDs also remained stable over the 6-year period (see Figure 6). This stability in the number of PhD recipients in sociology parallels figures provided by the National Science Foundation that show 572 PhDs awarded in 2000 and 578 degrees awarded in 2006 (http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/leftnav/research_and_stats/profession_trend_data/sociology_degrees_since_1966). Research I schools graduated the highest number of PhDs in both years, a median of 5 per year, and Doctoral II schools awarded the fewest degrees, 0 in 2001 and 1 in 2007.

Does the recruitment of new graduate students in AY 2006/2007 suggest a change in the Master’s and PhD pipelines compared to the earlier academic year? There are several stages in the recruitment process. First, potential students are encouraged to apply. Figure 7 shows a declining percentage of those who applied to graduate departments admitted in AY 2000/2001 compared to AY 2006/2007 in all types of departments. Research I departments admitted the smallest percentage of applicants in both years, although there was a decline from an admittance rate of about 1 in 4 to under 1 in 5. Doctoral II schools also went from admitting about 67 percent of all applicants to admitting fewer than half. Sociology departments at Master’s comprehensive schools admitted the highest percentage of graduate students (77 percent in AY 2000/2001 and 66 percent in AY 2006/2007). This high acceptance rate may be explained by the fact that these schools admit students with fewer qualifications who are not necessarily expected to obtain PhD degrees. Even here, there was an 11 percent decline in admissions.

Chairs identified two primary reasons for these drops in rates of admittance. First is the lack of

resources, especially stipends, for graduate students. The second is the perceived lessening of the quality of applicants, especially in the ability to understand quantitative analysis.

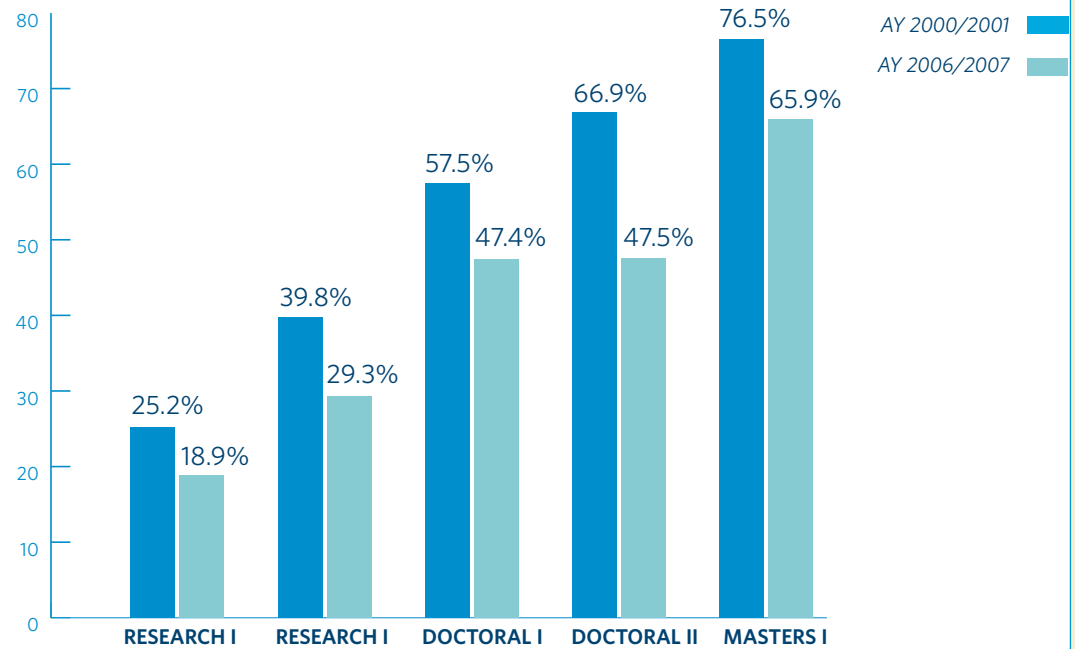
FACULTY

Indicators of change in the size of the faculty in sociology departments include the median number of full-time faculty and new assistant professors, as well as department size.

Chairs’ reports that the number of students has increased while the number of faculty per department has remained flat are borne out by the data in Figure 8. The only notable increase in the median number of full-time faculty members occurred at Research II universities, increasing from a median of 13 to 16 faculty members per department between 2001 and 2007. The data show a small decline in full-time faculty at Research I schools from a median of 18 to a median of 17. This suggests that over the 6 year period Research I and Research II departments, on average, were becoming approximately the same size. The median number of full-time faculty in all other types of departments remained stable, except for Baccalaureate II schools which, on average, gained an additional slot.

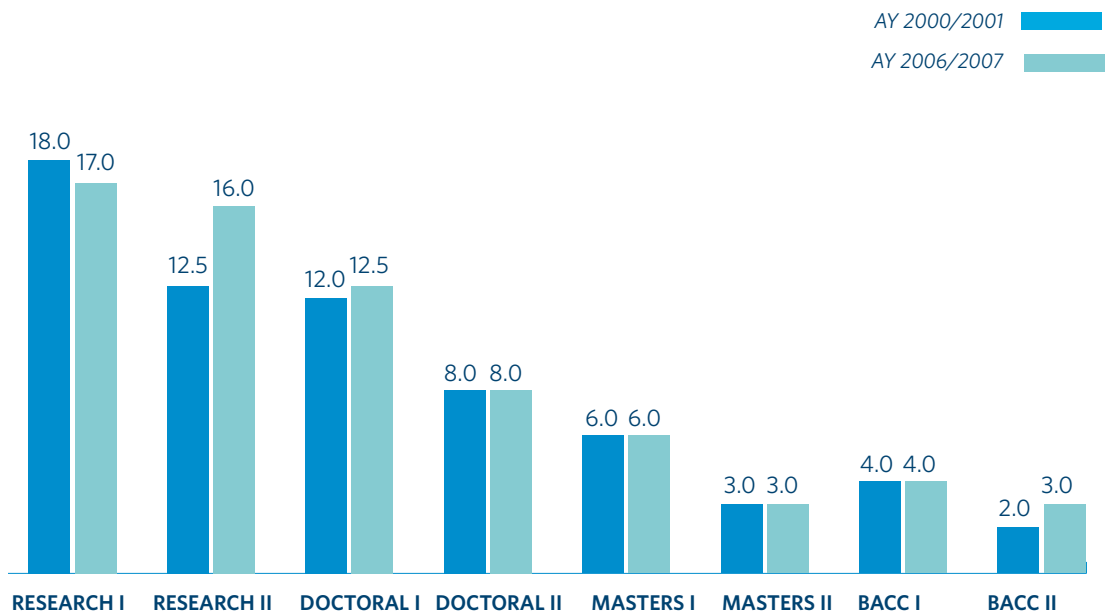
The largest category of positions advertised in ASA’s Job Bank is in the category of assistant professor. Figure 9 suggests that the median number of new tenure-track faculty hired at all types of departments has remained flat over the 6-year period. Each type of department hired a median of 1 new assistant professor in both survey years. In 2001 55 percent of research departments reported hiring a new assistant professor during the year; it declined to 40 percent by 2007. The next largest decline was among Baccalaureate-only schools, with a drop from 23

FIGURE 7:
The Percentage of Applicants Who are Admitted to Graduate Sociology Programs has Declined



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

FIGURE 8:
The Median Number of Full-time Faculty in Departments Has Remained Stable



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

percent to 16 percent. The percentage of Master's schools hiring new assistant professors remained relatively stable. By contrast, in Doctoral universities 29 percent of departments hired in 2001 and 35 percent hired in 2007. Overall, these figures support chairs' claims that they are facing very limited capacity to hire.

Chairs were asked whether there were more, the same, or fewer full-time tenure track or tenured faculty in their departments compared to one year earlier. This number is calculated by subtracting the number of faculty that left the department, as a result of retirement, failure to receive tenure, or other causes, from the number of new hires. The majority of departments reported either the same number of faculty or fewer faculty (Figure 10). While more than one-third of Research I schools (37 percent) report having more faculty in AY 2006/2007 than in the prior year, the proportion was much lower for other types of departments. The situation declined over the 6 year period for the Doctoral I and II, Master's I and II, and Baccalaureate I departments. There was a small increase among Research II schools and Baccalaureate II schools. This relative lack of department growth leads chairs to be concerned about looming retirements and uncertain position replacement. Figure 10 suggests that overall their fears may be well-founded.

ASSESSMENT

Chairs report that the time and resources needed to conduct assessments that evaluate undergraduate student learning are major concerns. Figure 11 shows that almost all departments are conducting some

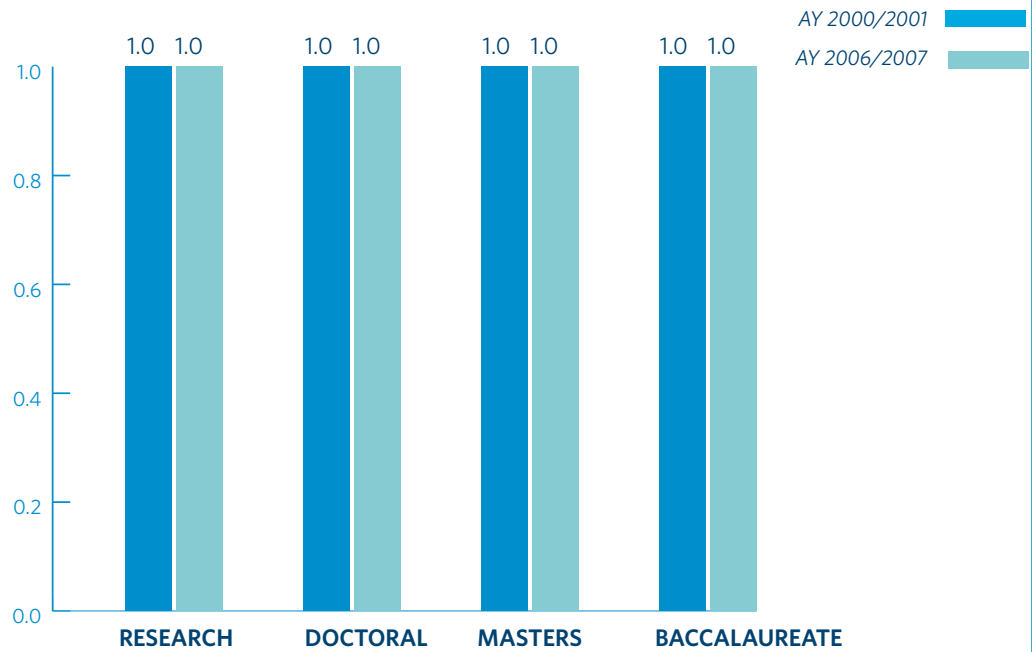
form of assessment, and the percentage engaged in this activity has generally increased over the six years between department surveys. Research departments were the least likely to conduct assessments, but the percent doing so increased from two-thirds to three-quarters of all departments. By 2007 more than 9 out of 10 departments in Master's comprehensive schools were conducting assessments, as were more than 80 percent of other departments. Chairs appear to be overwhelmed by the amount of work required to conduct assessments, on the one hand, and discouraged by the lack of resources to implement curriculum changes suggested by the assessment results. One chair responded to the open-ended question about major department concerns:

I believe the most important issue is assessment. We spend far too much time assessing students... Now we have double the regular work plus all this assessment stuff.

Some are concerned that negative findings from an assessment will reflect poorly upon their departments and try to resist the process. Other chairs look at assessments as an opportunity to restructure the undergraduate major, but they are concerned about the lack of resources to implement curricular changes that assessments indicate will lead to improved student learning, such as capstone courses, internships, and writing portfolios. For example:

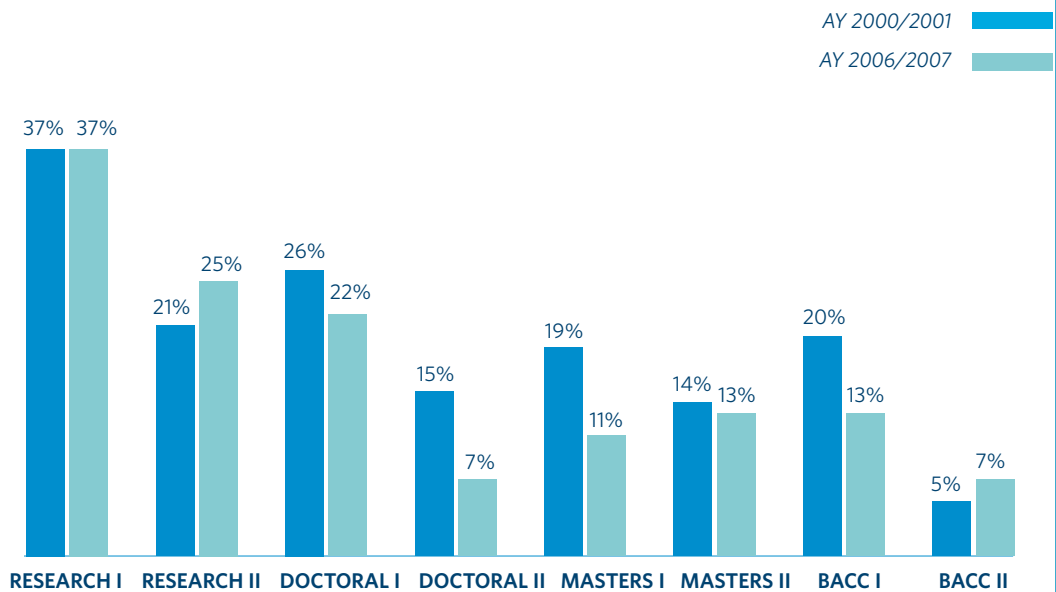
Strengthening our department by doing a general curriculum review and planning new ways to serve our students in the future is currently underway. We are presently under something very close to a hiring freeze, so we must work within our existing pool of resources while we strategize.

FIGURE 9:
The Median Number of New Tenure Track Assistant Professors Hired Has Remained Stable Among Those Departments that Hired



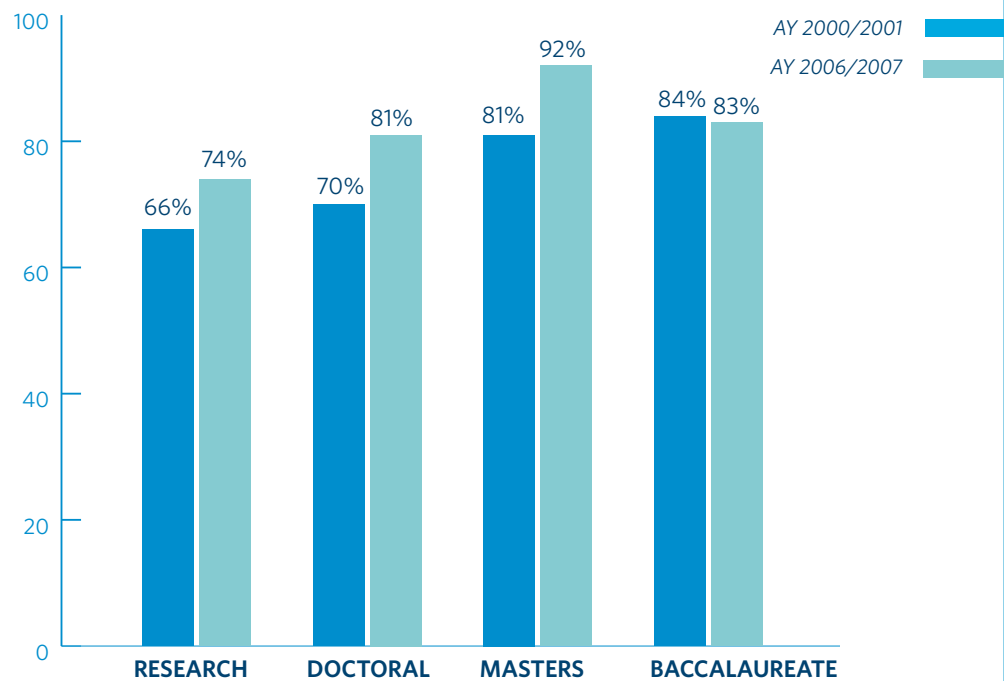
Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

FIGURE 10:
The Percentage of Departments Reporting More Tenure Track Faculty has Declined Compared to the Previous Year



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

FIGURE 11:
Percentage of
Departments
Using Assessments
to Evaluate
Undergraduate
Student Learning
by Institution
Type



Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

CONCLUSIONS

These 11 Figures and Tables comparing sociology departments in different institutional settings provide peer data that can be used to inform chairs, deans, and other administrators about the absolute and relative conditions in sociology departments. The key indicators of department well-being show that many sociology departments have been successful in increasing the number of majors and Baccalaureate degree recipients. Yet chairs have other concerns. They are concerned with too many or too few majors. They are concerned about graduate student enrollments. There has been less success in increasing the number of qualified Master's students than the number of Bachelor's degrees. There are continuing concerns in some departments about how to handle criminal justice departments organizationally. All these issues are occurring in a context of few new hires, limited space, few resources (such as computer laboratories, travel monies, and clerical staff), and rising administration-driven mandates. There is concern that state higher education

budgets will decrease while state demands for faculty accountability will increase. Both in spite of and because of the increase in majors and Bachelor's degree recipients, AY 2006/2007 appears to have been a more difficult year for many chairs than AY 2000/2001.

ASA hopes that the data presented here and data that we will present in future research briefs and reports from the department survey can be used by chairs and others to persuade deans and administrators to invest in those sociology departments and programs that want to restructure curriculum, improve student learning, conduct more research, and recruit new faculty and graduate students. At a time when the growth of sociological research findings is contributing to enriching the well-being of societies, here and abroad, solving problems and improving our social infrastructure, these investments are vital to developing the next generation of productive scholars and informed citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research brief is the product of a collaborative effort between the staff of the ASA Department of Research and Development including Roberta Spalter-Roth, Director, and Janene Scelza and Nicole Van Vooren, Research Associates. The on-line survey was designed and fielded by the staff of the Indiana University's Center for Survey Research, especially John Kennedy and Heather Terhune. We are especially indebted to many sociology department chairs, department administrative assistants, and directors of graduate programs, who helped during the development and testing of the survey instrument. Anne Quito is responsible for the layout and graphics design. We hope that it helps strengthen sociology departments and programs across the country as they prepare for the demands of the future.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

METHODS

THE SURVEY UNIVERSE. To implement a survey that responded to chairs' and other users' data needs, we used a continuously updated list of the universe of sociology programs and departments that award a Baccalaureate degree in sociology. This list was originally created from the National Center for Educational Statistics 1997–98 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Completions Survey. The universe selected from IPEDS consisted of all institutions that had granted at least one BA degree in sociology during AY 1997–1998. This data file was merged with the ASA department file and then all the mismatches were verified and either included or excluded. This method produced a universe of 1,010 programs that granted a minimum of a Bachelors-level degree in sociology. This compared to the 1,093 programs in AY 2000–2001. Of these 1010 programs we could not find any contact information for 95 departments, despite a series of efforts. As a result, the survey universe contained 915 departments or programs that offered a Baccalaureate degree in sociology.

THE SURVEY. The Survey was designed by the ASA Research and Development Department to be comparable to the earlier department survey and to reflect chairs' and committees' concerns. Indiana University's Center for Survey Research (CSR) designed the on-line survey and conducted much of the fieldwork. The final survey was mailed in March 2008 to department chairs. The data requested were for the previous completed academic year (AY 2006–2007), and for fall semester 2008, when a full year's data was not appropriate.

RESPONSE RATES. As with most on-line surveys, initial respondents answered quickly, and we received the bulk of responses during the first week. After that, responses came slowly, and between April 2008 and June 2008, Arne Kalleberg, the 2007–2008 President of the ASA, and Sally T. Hillsman, Executive Officer of the ASA, sent three reminder letters. The final response rate of nearly 60 percent (549 departments or programs), overall, was higher than department surveys sent by other disciplinary societies and was higher than the response rate for the AY 2000–2001 survey (with a response rate of 56 percent). The response rate varied by type of institution, with the lowest rate among Baccalaureate II and Master's II schools. As a result, responses were weighted.

REPORTED DATA. Despite weighting, the results do not represent the full universe of sociology departments and programs. Therefore, the total counts of students and faculty are undercounts and cannot be used to answer questions, such as the total number of sociology faculty or the total number of sociology majors. Rather we present the median number per department by type of department (peer departments).

PEER DEPARTMENTS. The 1994 version of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education was used to group departments into peer groups, while ensuring the promised confidentiality to individual departments. This classification method was selected over others, such as department size, because a convenience sample of chairs preferred this approach. Thus, in this report, all departments in a particular type of institution are considered "peer departments." These department types were then grouped into a broader set of categories, Research, Doctoral, Master's, and Baccalaureate, to avoid small cell sizes.

APPENDIX TABLES

APPENDIX TABLE 1.

Unweighted Institutional Characteristics of Programs Offering Baccalaureate Degrees in Sociology

INSTITUTION TYPE	2000-2001		2006-2007	
	<i>Number of Programs</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of Programs</i>	<i>%</i>
Research I	70	11.3%	62	12.6%
Research II	31	5.0%	23	4.7%
Doctoral I	26	4.2%	27	5.5%
Doctoral II	41	6.6%	23	4.7%
Masters I	213	34.5%	183	37.0%
Masters II	42	6.8%	31	6.3%
Baccalaureate I	88	14.3%	71	14.4%
Baccalaureate II	106	17.2%	74	15.0%
ALL PROGRAMS	617	100.0%	494	100.0%

Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

APPENDIX TABLE 2.

Weighted Institutional Characteristics of Programs Offering Baccalaureate Degrees in Sociology

INSTITUTION TYPE	2000-2001		2006-2007	
	<i>Number of Programs</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of Programs</i>	<i>%</i>
Research I	70	8.6%	79	9.7%
Research II	31	3.8%	29	3.6%
Doctoral I	31	3.8%	39	4.8%
Doctoral II	41	5.0%	37	4.5%
Masters I	288	35.3%	307	37.6%
Masters II	51	6.3%	57	7.0%
Baccalaureate I	103	12.6%	121	14.8%
Baccalaureate II	201	24.6%	147	18.0%
ALL PROGRAMS	816	100.0%	816	100.0%

Source: ASA Departmental Survey, AY 2000/2001 and AY 2006/2007

AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

As the national organization for sociologists, the American Sociological Association, through its Executive Office, is well positioned to provide a unique set of services to its members and to promote the vitality, visibility, and diversity of the discipline. Working at the national and international levels, the Association aims to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.

ASA RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The ASA Research and Development Department is responsible for developing and disseminating knowledge on sociology both as a discipline and a profession by collecting primary and secondary data, by building and maintaining databases, and disseminating findings in a variety of formats so that members of the profession to benefit can use them for research, policy, and planning purposes.

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