Conducting Effective Program Reviews:
A Training Manual for ASA Program Reviewers and Consultants

Abridged Version
For Program Review Partners
July 2019
CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE PROGRAM REVIEWS
An Abridged Version for Program Review Partners
2019

This training manual is the product of many people’s efforts and has evolved over time. Much of its original outline and content emerged from a workshop at a 1985 Wingspread Conference. Edward L. Kain and Charles S. Green, III originally compiled this manual in 1994. It sought to codify the operating principles for ASA consultants, then called the Teaching Resources Group (TRG), members who undertook program reviews. A second edition [2005] aimed to include information pertinent to reviews including graduate programs. By this time, the group had been named the Department Resources Group (DRG). For this work, we thank Jeanne Ballantine, Tom Van Valey, Maxine Atkinson, and Denzel Benson. Overall, the manual had been updated, using new resources and insights from veteran DRG program reviewers. The DRG Advisory Board also did significant reviewing and revising, particularly Kathleen McKinney, Ed Kain, Jay Howard, Jeanne Ballantine, and Gregory Weiss.

The third edition in 2019 was again updated. It includes material from the new national guidelines for the undergraduate Sociology major found in *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning* (Pike et al. 2017), as well as information about the Sociological Literacy Framework (Ferguson 2016; Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016). Ed Kain coordinated the revisions and additions in this edition, and edited multiple drafts, along with Teresa Ciabattari Tom Van Valey, and Margaret Vitullo. This edition also includes a number of new sections suggested by ASA Program Reviewers and Consultants (PRC), as well as sample e-mails, letters, and documents that can be used throughout the process of doing a department/program review. Contributors of new material include Maxine Atkinson, Michelle Camacho, Susan Ferguson, Jan Fritz, Laura Kramer, Diane Pike, Lissa Yogan, and John Zipp.

This abridged version of the manual, edited by Thomas Van Valey and Thomas Calhoun, is available for use by non-PRC program reviewers working in teams with members of the PRC group.

The full manual as well as this abridged version are “living documents” that will continuously be updated as we learn more about the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and how it shapes our skills as program reviewers. A survey of DRG members during the half-day training at the 2017 ASA annual meetings in Montreal found a relatively balanced split between having this new edition of the manual in electronic format only (7) or both electronic and print (10). Because a hard copy can easily be produced on demand, this edition is available in both formats. The Appendices from the full manual (which include samples of e-mails, letters, written reports, etc.) are also available as separate downloads on the PRC Members Only portal on the ASA website.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Background .................................................................................................................. 1
Introduction .................................................................................................................... 3

Part I: Assumptions and Principles of Program Evaluation ........................................... 4
   The AAC&U and Program Review ............................................................................ 4
   ASA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major ......................................................... 5
   Elements of Strong Graduate Programs .................................................................. 6
   Some Assumptions and Principles of Evaluation ...................................................... 7
   Asset-Based Evaluation ............................................................................................ 9
   Principles of Graduate Program Reviews .............................................................. 10
   Accreditation and Certification ................................................................................ 11

Part II: The Process of Program Review ....................................................................... 11
   Pre-Visit Activities .................................................................................................. 11
   Visit Activities ........................................................................................................ 16
   Post-Visit Activities ............................................................................................... 20

Part III: Appendices .................................................................................................... 23
   Appendix A: Suggestions for Conducting Team Reviews ....................................... 23
   Appendix B: The Sociological Literacy Framework .................................................. 28

*THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ("ASA") PROVIDES THE LIST OF REVIEWERS/CONSULTANTS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. APPEARANCE ON THE LIST DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN ENDORSEMENT OF ANY REVIEWER/CONSULTANT BY ASA. DETERMINATION OF WHETHER AND/OR HOW TO USE ALL OR ANY PORTION OF THIS LIST OR ANY REVIEWER/CONSULTANT THEREON IS TO BE MADE IN THE USERS' SOLE AND絕對 QR ABLE DISCRETION. ASA DOES NOT MAKE ANY REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THIS LIST OR THE SERVICES OF ANY REVIEWER/CONSULTANT THEREON. THESE REVIEWERS/CONSULTANTS ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVES, AGENTS OR CONTRACTORS OF ASA AND ASA IS NOT LIABLE OR RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PERFORMANCE, ACTS OR OMISSIONS.*
INTRODUCTION

This version of the Program Review Training Manual is designed to provide guidance for sociologists and others who are not members of the ASA Program Reviewers and Consultants who are doing departmental evaluations. This is not an exhaustive training manual, and there are points about which various evaluators may reasonably disagree. We have tried to build discussion of some of these points into the manual.

This manual is only one of many resources for ASA Program Reviewers and Consultants. Reviewers of departments should be fully conversant with the literature on program evaluation. In particular, they should be familiar with The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning (2017), the report from the ASA Task Force on Assessment (Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major [2005]), and How Does Your Department Compare? (2007). These reports can be very useful in evaluating departments and shaping the recommendations that are made.

Another useful document is the brief and informative Program Review and Educational Quality of the Major, published in 1992 by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). Although it is over 25 years old, this document remains relevant and is discussed more fully later in this manual.

Finally, reviewers must have substantial knowledge about teaching, learning, and curricula, both in sociology and in higher education more generally. This includes work published in Teaching Sociology, and work by authors writing on these topics across disciplines. These resources may be read and used by program reviewers, but could also be suggested as readings to members of the department under review.

Most visits that have been coordinated through the ASA are to undergraduate programs, but graduate program reviews are equally important. Sometimes a department/program chooses to have its undergraduate and graduate programs reviewed at separate times. Alternatively, some programs bring in a team of reviewers simultaneously. It is not unusual for some of the reviewers to focus upon the graduate program, and others to concentrate on the undergraduate program. A new section of this Manual focuses specifically on issues that are important to consider when part of a team of reviewers. Sections of this manual specific to graduate programs are in italics. In particular, material specifically related to graduate programs is found on pp. 6-7.

This manual is divided into three sections. Part I reviews some basic assumptions and principles of program review, both as originally developed by the group at the Wingspread Conference (1985) and as outlined in the aforementioned program review document from the AAC&U. The guidelines serve as best practices, always tempered by the complexities and realities that exist in any department. Part II goes through the process of program review from beginning to end, outlining issues and guidelines, and clarifying the role of the department evaluator(s). Part III of this abridged manual includes two appendices that provides further resources for the department reviewer, including strategies for working on a review team and details on the sociological literacy framework.

---

1 At the time, the AAC&U was called the Association of American Colleges (AAC).
PART I. ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES OF PROGRAM EVALUATION: A SET OF BEST PRACTICES

The AAC&U and Program Review

A key assumption of the AAC&U (1992) guide to program evaluation is that we must focus on key elements of strong programs. If we can identify the key elements of strong programs, then through systematic program review we can help build strong programs in a variety of settings.

The Program Review and Educational Quality in the Major (1992) report identifies thirteen elements of strong programs and suggests that evaluations be built around these elements. Strong undergraduate degree programs must have:

1. Statements of clear and explicit goals, which can be understood by students in the program (p. 3).
2. Methods for helping students focus upon inquiry and analysis (p. 4).
3. A critical approach enabling students to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different perspectives (p. 4).
4. A connection with students’ needs (p. 5).
5. Links with scholarly inquiry, which reflect the current state of the field (p. 6).
6. A major which reflects a coherent plan and not just a collection of unrelated courses (p. 6).
7. Linkages with other fields and disciplines and departments on campus (p. 7).
8. Connections with issues of liberal learning, including ethics and social and political concerns (p. 7).
9. A supportive community which encourages students to grow and develop (p. 8).
10. A commitment to inclusiveness on a range of issues, including race, class, gender, and age (p. 8).
11. A clear commitment of the faculty to careful advising of students (p. 10).
12. Systematic and careful evaluation and assessment of students (p. 10).
13. Rewards, recognition, and support from the administration for the whole range of faculty activities—advising, teaching, research, curriculum development, and evaluation and assessment (p. 11).

The Program Review document goes on to outline an exhaustive series of questions to be asked in any program review based upon these assumptions. As noted above, it is a very useful document for external evaluators of sociology programs.

---

2 These points are drawn directly from the Program Review document, as noted in the page numbers cited.
ASA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major

The ASA’s *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning* is the most recent iteration of ASA’s long history of providing guidance to departments in terms of structuring and strengthening the undergraduate major. First written in 1990, and revised and updated in 2004, *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* applied the recommendations of the AAC&U report to the Sociology major. The first report contained 13 recommendations, the second report had 16, and the most recent report reduced that to 12. These recommendations serve as a primary guide for reviewers when they visit departments.

While there is no accrediting mechanism in Sociology and these recommendations are advisory, they have been written by an ASA Task Force and vetted and approved by the ASA Council. Therefore, they provide a useful place to start a conversation with a department. Even when a department intentionally rejects, or more likely, modifies, one of these goals, they are working as a collectivity to make intentional decisions about their program.

**Recommendations from The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education (2017)**

**Recommendation 1:** Develop distinct mission statements, specific program goals, and measurable learning outcomes that are made public, especially to students.

**Recommendation 2:** Within the sociology major, include required and elective courses that incorporate essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the Sociological Literacy Framework.

**Recommendation 3:** Include required courses in: introductory-level sociology, sociological theory, research methods, statistical analysis, substantive topic areas, and a capstone experience within the sociology major.

**Recommendation 4:** Integrate progressive learning structures within the curriculum via course prerequisites that systematically guide students to engage with increasingly advanced content and activities.

**Recommendation 5:** Provide multiple opportunities within the curriculum for students to engage in empirical inquiry that includes research design, data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

**Recommendation 6:** Underscore, at all levels of the curriculum, inequality and difference in local, national, and global contexts.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide curricular and co-curricular structures to help students gain knowledge and apply skills that support them in their post-baccalaureate careers.

**Recommendation 8:** Structure the curriculum to recognize explicitly the points of intellectual convergence and divergence between sociology and other fields of inquiry.

**Recommendation 9:** Incorporate multiple pedagogies across the curriculum, including those that support active learning within and beyond the classroom.
Recommendation 10: Develop and maintain advising and mentoring processes that support students' decision making in achieving their educational goals, engage students in career planning, and offer guidance on further study in sociology and related fields.

Recommendation 11: Support faculty engagement in disciplinary research, the scholarship of teaching and learning, pedagogical innovation, and relevant service.

Recommendation 12: Systematically assess program goals and student learning outcomes, choosing assessment tools that respond to institutional context and specific programmatic needs.

Elements of Strong Graduate Programs

Almost all departments with graduate programs also offer undergraduate degrees. Moreover, many graduate programs recruit new students both internally and externally. Therefore, the above recommendations for undergraduate programs also apply to departments with graduate programs. Some additional elements on which graduate programs can be reviewed are as follows:

1. Articulation with the department’s undergraduate program should be clear and should establish consistent expectations for students from other institutions.

2. The curriculum should be explicit and clearly laid out, with expectations for each level of graduate work, including course requirements and recommendations, research and teaching expectations, and criteria for an acceptable thesis or dissertation topic and end product.

3. A graduate manual should be accessible to students and prospective students, preferably online. This should cover the institution’s requirements as well as the department’s expectations for graduate education, plus other information necessary to both entering and continuing graduate students.

4. Research and teaching should be part of the program and expectations laid out for students. A teaching program patterned after Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) or one developed by the institution should be a part of the curriculum of PhD students. Time commitments for departmental research and teaching assistants should be explicit and monitored.

5. Time to degree expected should be reasonable and laid out clearly, and candidates’ progress monitored.

6. Goals for the percentage of students to be funded should be laid out, along with possible sources for funding.

7. The percentage of students funded and sources of funding should be on record.

8. Truth in advertising should guide what prospective students are told about funding, program requirements, time to graduation, and job prospects. In addition, only specialty areas for which the department has adequate staff should be advertised.

9. Regular advising should be a required part of each student’s experience. Early and continual feedback on student progress from student advisor or the graduate advisor should be
required. It is strongly recommended that the department do an annual review of progress of all students and communicate those assessments, in writing, to each student and adviser. Departments should also consider developing systematic mentoring programs, including clear guidance for students as they reach the job market.

10. **Expected skills to graduate** should be explicitly stated and typically include data analysis skills and teaching skills.

11. **Job placement of graduates** should be monitored and data maintained for assessment; this information should be made available to incoming and prospective students.

12. **Diversity in the graduate student population** should be a goal, including diversity among those students who are accepted, funded, retained, and graduated.

### Some Assumptions and Principles of Evaluation

The working group at the Wingspread Conference (1985) outlined a number of basic assumptions and principles to guide department evaluation. These build upon what the AAC&U report talks about and can be helpful in guiding the department reviewer.

#### Some Basic Assumptions of Evaluation

1. The task of any departmental review is to advance the discipline, including student learning. As noted above, the basic questions are: Do departments have clear goals? Are departments meeting their goals? Are they effective? Do departments have a clear sense of their strengths and how best to use them? If the answer to each of these questions is yes, then departments will inherently advance the discipline of sociology.

2. The department or program is the key unit in advancing the mission of both disciplines and colleges or universities. Consequently, evaluation of this unit is of enormous significance.

#### Some Principles of Evaluation

1. It is important to know **who the client is**—and we need to make clear for whom the report is primarily written. This is an issue about which ASA program reviewers reasonably disagree. Some feel that in all cases the department is the client. Others say that this is not always the case. If a report is for the dean, it is good policy to ask that it be sent to the department as well. If the dean says no, the reviewer needs to evaluate if he/she wants to do the department evaluation. Some members of the PRC feel that all concerned parties must have full and open access to all written reports of the reviewer. If/when the client is a dean, this may not be possible.

2. The role of reviewers is to evaluate the sociology program and to contribute in every possible way to the improvement of the department/program. **However, program reviewers do not make promotion and tenure recommendations, nor do we evaluate individual faculty members.** Nonetheless, particularly in small departments, writing the report can sometimes be difficult. For example, in a three-person department where Professor X always teaches theory, and students complain about theory and assessments show poor results in theory, it is hard not to speak about Professor X. We do routinely make recommendations about what specializations to look for in future hires. We also note overall faculty strengths. However,
the foregoing is not meant to imply that the reviewer must ignore troublesome personnel issues such as negligence or incompetence in the performance of duties. Rather the visitor’s obligation is to find and suggest constructive solutions for such problems. PRC consultants use an assets-based approach to identify existing resources and areas of strength in programs and help department leaders, faculty, and administrators find ways to creatively leverage those strengths to sustain and support programs and their further development.

3. While we are sociologists and are trying to assist the sociology program or department, external reviewers are not solely advocates. Reviewers are independent evaluators, not the mouthpiece of the department. Every department has strengths and weaknesses. Some have many weaknesses, but carefully worded, feasible, recommendations can go a long way in helping a department. What a department feels it needs, especially in terms of resources, may or may not be what we recommend. That said, the program review is an important occasion for getting the department some attention, and hopefully favorable attention to its strengths and needs.

4. Departments are not isolated units. Departments operate in a turbulent and complicated context which includes the number of students, students’ needs and aspirations, alumni/ae, and the goals and resources of other departments and of the entire institution, professional associations and unions, accrediting agencies, government, foundations, other colleges and universities, and citizen interest groups. The impact of this context on a department must be taken fully into account by the reviewer.

5. Site visitors must pay attention not only to the obvious features of departments and what people tell them but also to hidden agendas that people might have and to covert phenomena such as factions and coalitions, personal animosities and professional jealousies, empire building, and battles over academic “turf.” In addition, a department must be understood as the product of a history of events in which causes were won or lost, ambitions realized or frustrated, resentments harbored or alleviated. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that such issues will not necessarily trip up the visitor if he/she knows what he/she is doing. This manual is designed to help plan and prepare for a thorough and professional review of a department and its program.

6. In addition to attending to past and present internal department politics, reviewers must be sensitive to the consequences for the department of the evaluation visit and the evaluation report. It is particularly important to be aware of key events in the past (e.g., a joint department that split), major changes in administration, the priorities of the administration, or patterns of change in the department (such as the number of faculty or majors that has gone up or down markedly).
Asset-Based Evaluation

Asset-based evaluation is predicated on the belief that all groups have both strengths and weaknesses. John McKnight and John P. Kretzmann (1993) were among the first to advocate for the use of asset-based inquiry. Years later, Flora, Flora, and Fey (2012) expanded their basic types of assets to seven kinds, which include assets related to people and to place. Organizations and systems that utilize all seven kinds of assets are more likely to have sustained success and social well-being (Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006).

A brief list of the seven types of assets appears on the University of Memphis website: http://www.memphis.edu/ess/module4/page4.php.

Their asset framework includes:

**People**
1. Human assets are the skills and abilities of each individual within a community.
2. Social assets are the networks, organizations, and institutions, including norms of reciprocity and the mutual trust, that exist among and within groups and communities.
3. Political assets refer to the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources, financial and otherwise.
4. Financial assets refer to money or other investments that can be used for wealth accumulation rather than consumption.

**Place**
1. Cultural assets are the values and approaches to life that have both economic and non-economic benefits.
2. Built assets refer to anything physically made by humans, including housing, factories, schools, roads, community centers, power systems, water and sewer systems, telecommunications, infrastructure, recreation facilities, transportation systems, etc.
3. Natural assets include the landscape, air, water, wind, soil, and biodiversity of plants and animals.

If departments or organizations have a *weakness-based culture*, they tend to focus on eliminating their biggest problems. They may take pride in ‘tough love’ or penalizing people who do not perform well. This is often hard on the employees. While the punitive system is often seen by the department or organization as helping people develop their weaknesses, it frequently results in people trying hard to avoid mistakes rather than emphasizing what they do well and working for growth (Dvorak and Pendell 2018).
Principles of Graduate Program Reviews

Although many of the guidelines for undergraduate reviews are applicable to graduate reviews, some specific areas are of particular importance in graduate reviews. [And, areas like assessment are very pertinent to undergraduate program reviews].

1. **Assessment**: This should be an ongoing activity of graduate programs and should include some or all of the following:
   - Does the program have clearly laid out goals? Are they well publicized?
   - Does the department pay attention to the curriculum, and how it is related to changes in the field?
   - Has it adjusted its program over time to include new trends in the field, or faculty turnover?
   - Does the program do periodic but regular reviews of its program and procedures?
   - Does the program collect data for the purpose of assessment (re: student recruitment, performance of students, placement after graduation)?
   - Does the department use data collected to evaluate and revise the program? What is the process or procedure for doing this?

2. **Resource Allocation** refers to infrastructure – space, facilities, equipment, staff and budget. Are computing facilities and software up to date and updated regularly? Are library holdings in each graduate specialization updated regularly and is there adequate budget for it? Are there adequate staff to offer courses and advise graduate students? Are graduate students supported both normatively and financially in professional development such as attending conferences?

3. **Faculty-student relationships** are crucial to graduate program success. Do faculty members spend time advising and mentoring graduate students? Are students regarded as professionals in training, apprentices, employees, or are they ignored to fend for themselves? Are students represented on appropriate departmental committees? Is the advising load distributed across appropriate faculty? Are faculty members providing the necessary training for all students in teaching and research skill development?

4. **Articulation with undergraduate programs** in the institution needs to be clearly laid out. Are courses dual listed as graduate and undergraduate? If so, are graduate students getting enough graduate level education? Is credit given for courses taken elsewhere at the undergraduate or graduate level? Is this policy clearly articulated?

5. **Recruitment of new graduate students**: are the procedures for accepting and rejecting students laid out clearly? How does the program promote itself? Does the program actually offer all that it promises so that students can complete the program as advertised?

6. **Accreditation or certification**: Are there guidelines for the graduate program and is the program following these?

7. **Teacher preparation**: Is this part of the curriculum and experience provided by the program? How is this done and what are the expectations for students? Is it developmental, evaluated and documented?
Accreditation and Certification

The ASA does not accredit sociology programs or certify sociology practitioners. Rather, ASA program reviewers provide guidance and strategies for strengthening sociology programs within the context of regularly scheduled self-studies and external program reviews. We do this in a variety of ways, many of which include materials produced by Task Forces and Working Groups of the ASA. This includes guidance on assessment (Lowry et al. 2005), focusing upon the linkages between sociology and general education (Keith et al. 2007), sociology located within joint departments/programs (Kain, Wagenaar, and Howery 2006; MacDonald et al. 2010), and implementing the national guidelines for the undergraduate major in sociology (Pike et al. 2017). These materials all reflect professional consensus on best practices in teaching and learning in sociology.

Many sociology programs are located within joint departments with other disciplines, some of which do involve accreditation. The most common of these is social work. Social work programs, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, may be accredited by The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). As of October 2018, 541 baccalaureate programs and 287 Masters programs were accredited in the U.S. The accreditation applies only to the social work program, even in a joint department. A small number of sociology programs have a clinical or applied track accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation of Programs in Applied and Clinical Sociology (CAPACS). As of October 2018, four undergraduate programs and two graduate programs have been accredited by CAPACS. In addition, the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology offers certification for sociology practitioners.

PART II: THE PROCESS OF SERVING AS AN EXTERNAL DEPARTMENT REVIEWER

The guidelines provided in this section of the manual are organized in terms of a typical temporal sequence which reflects the various phases of evaluation activities: the pre-visit phase, the visit phase, and the post-visit phase. Within each phase, major issues are identified first, then specific guidelines for the reviewer’s role are presented.

Pre-Visit Activities

1. Major Issues

1.1. Who is the client?

Identify the client. This may be obvious depending on whether you are contacted by a department chair or the office of the dean. Either way, let the ASA Research, Professional Development, and Academic Affairs Department know if you receive an inquiry about a possible review. The ASA keeps a record of all PRC visits and can provide up-to-date information about materials which may be of use.

1.2. What is the purpose of the review? How will it be used?
Determine the purpose of the review. Is the visit for an evaluation, internal or external, for a workshop, or for some combination of the two? If is for an evaluation, why was the evaluation request made? Is it part of a routine, on-going process? Does it represent the first time the department has ever been reviewed? The client may need help in clarifying the goals of the visit.

1.3. What should be the scope of the evaluation activity?

Identify the major aspects of the program to be evaluated. For example, will you be expected to evaluate only the undergraduate major program or both graduate and undergraduate? Most PRC members focus on undergraduate programs. While this is not a “rule,” it reflects the majority of the requests and the strengths of most of our members. Also identify the specific areas for evaluation. They typically include some or all of the following:

1) Curriculum and major(s) (undergraduate and/or graduate)
2) Facilities and resources: faculty, offices, classrooms, computer labs and computer support, telephone and copying, library holdings, support staff, etc.
3) Departmental governance and collegiality
4) Role and effectiveness of the department in relation to other departments and programs and to the institution’s mission
5) Adequacy of administrative support (i.e. budget) essential to departmental productivity and quality
6) Faculty effectiveness—teaching, research, service
7) The department assessment plan addressing student learning, development, career or other outcomes and achievements.

1.4. What are and should be the conditions of the review?

It is important to know as much as possible about the situation into which you will be immersed. This includes the timing, arrangements for transportation and housing, the logistics of the review (and what level of input you have), remuneration, and expectations (including the report). If it is available, obtain a copy of the institutional policy on program review. This varies considerably from institution to institution. Some campuses have no written policy whatsoever, although this is becoming less common. At the other end of the spectrum are campuses with explicit policies about everything involved in the review, including the structure and content of the department self-study, required participants in the on-campus visit, remuneration, time allowed before the final report is to be delivered, and length and structure of the external report.

1.5. What materials or information are available or can be requested before the visit?

Review the department’s mission statement, learning goals and objectives for students, and annual assessment process. The clarity of these materials, the department’s commitment to achieving them, and the adequacy of organizational skills and resources needed to realize them represent a major focus of each review.

Learn as much as possible about the department, the institution, and in the broader sense the context or environment in which the department operates. Much can be learned about the
department and institution in advance of your visit by going to the institutional website. The
department homepage and individual faculty homepages should also provide useful
information. Request information in advance, and review it for clues and concerns about the
following:

1) Copies of any current or past self-study. In most cases, departments have this, as well
as most other materials, available in electronic format. Be explicit with your contact
person about how you prefer to receive materials—in electronic or hard-copy format.

2) A copy of the department’s assessment plan, including its mission statement and
learning goals and objectives for students, and any reports addressing the plan’s
goals. Ideally you should receive multiple years of this plan to see how well it has
been implemented and if the department/program has used data from the assessment
plan to strengthen the program.

3) A copy of the college catalog (Catalogs for virtually all institutions are available
online.)

4) Copies of syllabi from the department [at least for core courses].

5) Copies of all faculty vitae.

6) Course enrollments and number of majors (past 3 to 5 years).

7) Courses offered in the past 3 to 5 years.

8) Department budgets for at least the past two years.

9) Library journal holdings and evaluation of the book collection (Most institutions have
a library liaison for each department/program on campus. This person is typically
responsible for preparing a document on journal holdings and the book collection
when an external program review is taking place.) It is not unusual for a department
chair to be unaware of this resource which they can use during the self-study and
program review, particularly on campuses where the written policy about program
reviews is minimal. Note that tools for assessing the quality of library collections are
available in the Department Leaders Toolbox on the ASA website.

10) Written statements of strengths and concerns from the department as a whole and
from individual faculty. You may find it useful to send an e-mail to department
members in advance of the visit.

11) Other documents may or may not be relevant and/or available, such as:
- handbooks about the program(s).
- minutes of department meetings of significance.
- results of any studies (such as surveys or focus groups) on faculty, student, and
  alumni/ae
- satisfaction with the program.
- institution and/or college mission statements.
- newsletters.
- collective bargaining agreements.
- information on student clubs.
• department bylaws information on committee structure.

The relevant documents from the lists above should also be requested for graduate department reviews. Note any self-study inclusion with graduate program foci or comments on support for graduate students. Graduate catalogs are also available online at most institution’s websites. Other documents for graduate program reviews include:

- documents that contain goals for the program (statement of purpose);
- who is training for what;
- program requirements;
- number of students;
- funding patterns;
- teaching assignments of graduate students and relevant evaluation information;
- placement/alumni data and other key contents.

2. Guidelines for Pre-Visit Activities

2.1 Review all materials well before the visit so you have time to request any missing materials or seek clarification of issues not addressed by the materials received. In addition, read the materials carefully, noting such things as:

- inconsistencies or contradictions,
- the proportion of attention given to various topics or subjects,
- whether the language used in some sections is overly cautious or opaque,
- how well documented are self-evaluations of the program and the level of resources and support given to it.

Based on the sorts of materials provided and your reading of them, formulate some initial questions to ask and very tentative hypotheses about the program to be explored during the visit.

2.2 Determine the conditions of the visit. These include:

1) Your itinerary:
   i) Schedule an opening session with all parties involved in the review.
   ii) Ask to interview:
      (1) each department member individually (including part-time and adjunct faculty if possible)
      (2) relevant members of the administration (division head, dean, provost if relevant, graduate dean)
      (3) students (preferably with food but not with faculty present) Hold separate meetings with undergraduate and graduate students.
      (4) chairs of departments with important relationships with Sociology
      (5) Graduate Advisor or Director of Graduate Studies
      (6) someone from the Computer Center
      (7) someone from the library, ideally the department liaison
      (8) department staff—secretaries, professional advisor, etc.
iii) Schedule exit interviews with the department and with the administration

Be sure to allow free time within the visit schedule to collect thoughts, for other team members (if any) to consult with one another, to tour the department facilities, to explore the campus unaccompanied, and to deal with unexpected contingencies. It is useful to have a room on campus where you can keep materials and go during breaks. Reviewers should be assertive in requesting some free time periodically throughout the visit in order to accomplish these activities.

2) Lodging and transportation:
   i) It is important to have lodging at a hotel or motel and not in a faculty member’s home. This allows privacy and time to work on reading additional materials, organizing your observations, and thinking about a draft of your notes/report. Try to bring a laptop computer and get started with writing the report while details are still fresh!

   ii) It is useful to have your own transportation to allow flexibility and time away from people at the institution you are reviewing, but this is not always possible (or housing may be walking distance).

3) Compensation:
   i) When program reviewers make site visits their travel expenses are covered by the college or university they visit, and they also receive an honorarium to compensate for pre-visit preparation, the actual site visit, as well as time spent writing the final report (if required). Thus, a program review might require 2.5 to 3.5 days of a consultant’s time, including a half day of preparation and document review, at least one full day for the site visit, and at least one day for report development.

   ii) Individual consultants negotiate their own fees with each institution.

In a formal letter following negotiations over such matters, establish the conditions of the visit. These conditions will include: goals of the visit (whether a summative or formative evaluation, etc.); travel itinerary; lodging; who is to be seen during the visit; consultation fees; contents and dissemination of the report(s) to be written. Be certain that this letter gives a confirmation list of what the department is paying for—curriculum evaluation, workshop, written report, etc.

Ask the contact person (typically the chair of the department) to distribute a memo to the department (faculty, staff, and students) with the agenda and a brief written statement covering the purpose and expectations of the visit. This may help minimize the number of people who do not understand the purpose of the visit or do not trust what is taking place. Send some biographical information about yourself, your professional interests and experiences, and your involvement in program review.
Visit Activities

1. Major Issues:

1.1 How should the visit activities be organized?

It is ideal if you can have an opening/orienting session. One suggestion is to have a noon opening session over lunch. The client (chair or dean) could make a public statement about what the visitor is doing and why. The reviewer should do the same. This helps set the tone for the visit and orients the people who will be interviewed later during the process.

Some of the people you meet may have only the vaguest idea of why you are there and what your role is—and accordingly will be suspicious (if not actually frightened) of you. While it is ideal to have the opening/orienting session, sometimes such meetings cannot be arranged—and even when they are, not everyone may attend. Therefore, it is imperative to explain your purpose for being there and what your role is to everyone with whom you meet.

1.2 What types of data should be collected? What are reasonable information gathering goals?

Gather a diverse array of data from multiple sources. For example:

1) Interview department faculty, administrators, faculty from outside the department (especially the chairs of other departments related to Sociology through cross-listed courses, service courses, interdisciplinary majors, or minors), and students to determine the “insider” view of the department’s strengths and weaknesses and its role and status within the institution. Be sure to interview secretaries and other support staff—they are too often overlooked in evaluation visits, yet they are often the most knowledgeable about a department’s budget, its history, where some of its skeletons are buried, and how it really functions.

2) Be sure to find out how adjunct or part-time faculty and teaching assistants are used. Determine how many are either current or former graduate students, are they part of faculty meetings, do they have individual offices, etc. Interview as many of them as possible.

3) Graduate departments should have clear responsibilities concerning who is training for what, requirements for graduate students regarding teaching assignments (both as an assistant to a faculty member or as the instructor of record), comprehensive examinations, support for students, and other expectations.

4) Conduct qualitative interviews through open-ended questions. Probe for the good features, the strengths of the department, as well as its faults and weaknesses. LISTEN CAREFULLY. Don’t hesitate to make notes during the interviews. In your interviews with faculty, several questions which might prove useful are:

   “What are your most important contributions to the department?”
“What are your personal goals for professional growth and development? How do they link to department goals?” “Do you receive support to pursue your goals?” “From where?” “How easy is it to get support?”

“What do you see as some strengths of your department?”

“What do you see as some places which could be strengthened in your department?”

“Where do you think the department should be heading in the next 3-years?”

5) Obtain spontaneous observations. To do this you might:

i. Wander around the department and campus to inquire about the department’s use of library and computer facilities and its reputation; note the physical location and the condition of the department (is it in the basement of the oldest building or in a prime location in the newest building?) Do department members have adequate computer facilities, software, and support? Does the library have recent Sociology books and e-books and easy access to the most important journals? Does the library provide access to basic research engines and databases such as JSTOR, Academic Search Premier, SocINDEX with full text and others? Do department courses have adequate access to electronic classrooms with full computer projection and web capabilities? What are the physical conditions of classrooms? Are they crowded? Can chairs be arranged for work other than lecture? Do students and faculty have easy access to SPSS or STATA? What about space for informal interactions among students or students and faculty such as lounges?

b. Notice such things as: What is on department and faculty bulletin boards? Are there student clubs or associations? What materials are available for prospective majors? Do faculty members talk about the department, institutional politics, or disciplinary issues such as teaching and research? Do they have brown bag or regular presentations/discussions on topics in research and/or teaching? Is there a formal speaker series? How many faculty and students attend?

1.3 What are some ways to maintain your perspective and objectivity during the visit?

a. Be skeptical as a validity check on any information you have been given (especially verbally): check information with several sources; notice when information you have asked for has not been given or has been answered evasively.

b. If you are part of a team of reviewers, compare notes, observations, hypotheses, and hunches with each other during this visit. Be sure that the schedule includes some BREAKS not only for the obvious reasons, but so you can check your impressions with one another.

1.4 How can the reviewer handle unexpected requests, conflicts, etc.?
Unexpected requests need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. That said, flexibility balanced with firmness about what you are able to accommodate are key. If a reasonable rationale for changes (last minute or *in situ*) is made by the administration or faculty, the changes are worth consideration. When this happens, there are questions you should ask yourself: Will the change advance your understanding of how you can be helpful, or is it more likely tertiary to the goals of the visit? Who is requesting the unexpected change - the Dean or a junior faculty member? Feel free to say “not possible at this time” to all status levels.

If you can identify alternatives to the requested change, propose them. It may be best to deflect the request during the campus visit, offering to follow-up at a later time (and then do so). We should only rarely ask for changes that are substantive, and of course, barring family emergencies, we should honor our commitments to the clients (many people at the site have arranged schedules, done major preparatory work, and set aside the time). If your hosts are requesting significant, unexpected changes, that request itself might be a data point as well.

Conflicts come up with some regularity during site visits. Genuine differences, grudges (petty and justified), attitudes, histories, and behaviors all play a significant role in department or program dynamics. One approach is to help identify or reframe conflicts within groups and individuals, but to be clear that our role is not to resolve them. Often, when these conflicts arise during the site visit, the best strategy is to listen with affirmation (not agreement) and to remember that each narrative is only one version. Active listening, taking good notes, asking for “evidence” or support for the individual’s concerns, and being cautious about how you share (or do not share) the information learned is critical.

The most critical aspect of departmental conflict is the potential for impact on students. Finally, if strained situations or problems rooted in conflict are indeed having an impact on the functioning of the department, or even worse, the student experience, try as much as possible to refer to issues rather than persons.

1.5 *How can the reviewer make sure the feedback to the department is consistent with the original evaluation contract, especially with respect to such matters as the scope and objectives of the evaluation and to whom the report is to be submitted?*

At the outset it is useful to have a succinct list of the goals and scope of the report. Developing this list should be based upon: 1) the campus guidelines and requirements for an external review and written report, 2) ASA guidelines found in *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education*, and 3) written communications between you and the Dean, Provost, and Department/Program Chair.

One way to help minimize distractions from issues not directly related to the original understanding is to organize your site visit notes and observations by the goals. It may not be the way the final written report is organized, but it will help ensure that the original goals are not lost.

Staying on track depends on how clearly the original contract is specified, and this can vary wildly. Before you ever visit campus, you can minimize these problems by
tightening and clarifying the understanding about who your client is and the purpose and scope of the evaluation, including what should be covered in the final report (1.2 and 1.3 in Pre-Visit Activities). Make certain that it is absolutely clear to whom the final report goes.

A loose contract can make a helpful and valid report less likely. To the extent possible, attend to the institutional requirements fully, but also negotiate the agreement based on your own expertise and review experience. Make sure you understand what the scope and objectives are and ask for clarification as needed. For example, a Dean may not ask you to look at student satisfaction or experience, but most reviewers know that an evaluation that does not include student input is likely incomplete. Keep in mind that the readers are in different roles and think through how your report will read to the Dean, the Chair, individuals in the faculty. It is not just about what you want to say, but about what users need to know.

1.6 How does the reviewer handle a de-briefing and exit interview?

1. Having a debriefing/exit interview is important for “closure” on the visit (since your report won’t be coming for a few weeks), to check some facts and get initial reactions, and to “seize the moment” where you have the attention of the department and administration. Try to take notes for the debriefing as you go along, such as a separate piece of paper where you record “big ideas” and “tentative conclusions” so you do not have to flip through your entire set of notes from every conversation to find some of the main points you plan to make in the report. It is hard to prepare for a debriefing when you have a very full schedule and little time to assemble a cogent “presentation.” If possible, keep a block of time open immediately prior to the debriefing/exit interview.

2. Debrief before the close of the visit with the dean, the department chair, and if possible, with the whole Sociology faculty, each in separate sessions.

3. Debriefing serves to check and refine your perceptions and conclusions. If there is something you can’t make sense of, or if the members of a visitation team disagree on interpretations, use the debriefing to obtain clarification. You can also provide a final opportunity here for any additional comments department members or administrators wish to tell you.

4. The debriefing should include your sense of what the outline of the final report will be like and should provide a preview of major conclusions and recommendations. Some ideas follow:

   a. Departments typically need reassurance that they really are doing some things effectively—and that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Moreover, departments may need to be sensitized to strengths they may not have perceived and to the ways those strengths might be capitalized on to make their program even stronger. (These statements need to be included in the written report as well.)

   b. Administrators may need to be informed of the effectiveness of a program which has been taken for granted and possibly not adequately rewarded. (Again, this applies to the written report as well.)
c. You may offer suggestions or alternatives that have been used by other departments, but don’t dictate solutions. Ideally, you should restrict your role to that of a catalyst or facilitator rather than that of an expert. For example, try to get the faculty themselves to diagnose their problems and come up with solutions best suited to the context in which they find themselves. That way they will have ownership over these solutions and thereby the commitment to follow through in implementing them. Yet, you can help in this process via both facilitation and offering resources or information from the national or international levels.

d. One important part you can play as an outsider, especially if the departmental faculty have not been involved at the national level in the discipline, is to help them search for a focus and identity. Often, you can accomplish this by sensitizing them as to where they fit into national trends in the discipline. You can also help build morale by noting how they look compared with other departments in similar institutions. You may want to recommend particular areas or foci within the department that can serve as a foundation for growth in the near future. Similarly, you may need to point out possible misallocations of resources (inconsistency between department goals and the resources available to achieve them) that need to be addressed. This latter point is more often the case in graduate departments. Indeed, it may be a point of conflict over undergraduate versus graduate programs.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. Major Issues

1.1 What should be included in the report? How and when should the report be developed, written and submitted?

The report should be submitted **one to four weeks after your visit.**
A timely report is a key part of a reviewer’s responsibility!

As a general guideline, pull out all the sociological stops: analyze the institutional constraints; look at the political/social context; incorporate the positions and statuses of individuals in your analyses; examine the taken-for-granted assumptions of actors at each level; examine structural impediments to change; assess the department as a group.
Encourage department members to assist you in doing this as well.

Try to ascertain, from the information you have been given and from what you have observed, what the power structure is like, where the lines of cleavage lie: Who is doing the teaching—just junior faculty or TA’s or all faculty? Who serves on important committees? Who has the department chairperson’s ear? Is the chair really powerful? Who doesn’t speak with whom? Who lunches with whom? The information may help you make recommendations that are more likely to work in that context.

Over time, campus policies have become much more likely to give specific guidelines about how quickly a report is to be received. We repeat: The report should be submitted in a timely
fashion (between one and four weeks after your visit), not only as a matter of courtesy and professional obligation but to assure that your recollections are still fresh. However:

1) Allow enough time to digest fully the information you have gathered, to “cool down” or “decompress” and to consult with other team members (if any), and to refer to relevant scholarly literature (if helpful).

2) Don’t be surprised if additional feedback from the department or others comes after you have left. Indeed, they may be precipitated by the debriefing at the end of the visit. These tidbits of information may provide invaluable insights.

3) Although the structure of the report may be relatively constant from one place to another, customize the content of the report to each individual institution. Avoid jargon and clichés!

4) Recommendations should be:
   i. Geared to local goals.
   ii. Supported by relevant data.
   iii. Succinct, yet detailed enough to be constructive.
   iv. Phrased positively and supportively; avoid words and phrases such as “faults” and “weaknesses” in favor of such terms as “areas for improvement,” “opportunities,” “challenges,” and “concerns.”

5) When possible, try to indicate helpful ideas and leads that give people a few concrete steps if they accept the recommendations. For example, you might recommend a specific article in *Teaching Sociology* which talks about setting department goals, or a successful strategy that has been used in another department.

6) Some concerns or issues not anticipated in the original agreement may need to be addressed informally by telephone or email with the department and/or concerned parties rather than in the final written report.

7) The length of the report should be congruent with the length and scope of the visit. Several pages should be enough if the visit was a day or less in length, especially if the evaluation is summative rather than formative, and if you are not being compensated for a full-fledged report. For longer visits, for formative evaluations, and where you have contracted for a comprehensive and detailed report, ten to twenty-five pages (including appendices, charts, bibliography, etc.) is the norm. However, there is considerable variation in length among different program reviewers. Clarify the department’s and institution’s (client’s) expectations about this early on.

8) Remember that the final report is also a vehicle for communication between the department and relevant administrators. The report must therefore be prepared with the differing, perhaps even conflicting, goals of these parties in mind. As mentioned previously, the ideal is that all written reports are to be fully shared with all concerned parties.

9) Issues which the department may not wish to share with administrators may have to be addressed by the site visitor in informal debriefing sessions during the visit or by e-mail, letter or telephone after the visit.
10) Reviewers must be cautious about buying into a department’s paranoia about administrators. Such paranoia is often misplaced. Moreover, perceptions of a lack of administrative support can constitute a “comfortable illusion”—a belief which legitimates inaction.

11) If the members of a team of evaluators cannot agree on interpretations or recommendations, present the various alternatives in a draft report to the department acknowledging any uncertainties or disagreements.

12) Send a draft of the report to the department and ask them to identify any errors or areas of concern. Revise the report as appropriate based on their comments. Then submit the final version to the administration and department as agreed. Frankly, if the report has a lot of (constructive) critical suggestions, it might be wise to address “accuracy” by a phone call to the chair. Reviewers cannot get boxed in with faculty/chair comments about the substance of the report, so make it clear that sending an advance report is for matters of factual accuracy only.

13) Be sure to append a thank you letter to the final report. Remember that a lot of overload work went into preparing for your visit, hosting you, talking with you, and responding to your draft report!

### 1.2 What precisely should be the advocacy role of evaluation visitor?

Evaluators must always strive to be advocates of the discipline and of the department (within the limits of the problems/issues you observe). However, when there are personnel or other problems clearly evident to everyone, the evaluator can only lose credibility by glossing over these. Such problems must be addressed forthrightly, with constructive recommendations provided for solving them.

1) It is perfectly appropriate to suggest—not dictate—possible solutions (i.e. float trial balloons) in informal oral debriefing sessions during the visit and/or afterwards by telephone or e-mail.

2) It is important to remember that even sociologists can overlook the possibility that problems may have their origins in group processes rather than individual characteristics or predispositions. As an outsider, you may be better situated than department faculty to see the structural sources of problems. Of course, it is your obligation as a reviewer to suggest such a possibility to them.

* * * * *
PART III: APPENDICES

Appendix A:
SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING TEAM REVIEWS

American Sociological Association Program Reviewers and Consultants (PRC) are highly accomplished teachers, scholars, and department leaders who are trained in best practices for program reviews. When serving as an external reviewer, they offer empirically-grounded support for sociology departments regarding pedagogy, curriculum, and organizational structures.

Program reviews are often conducted in teams. Sometimes, the team is made up of reviewers who are all trained PRC members. At other times, it includes both PRC members and non-members. In either case, being asked to conduct a department review or to work as a member of a review team is a role to be taken seriously. Team members typically have some shared perspectives and some differences that they bring to their collaboration. Therefore, members need to be attentive to political and procedural dynamics in order to enhance the review experience and the credibility of the report. Below are some recommendations to ensure productive team collaborations that will be of highest benefit to the departments and programs we serve.

Note: Some institutions invite multiple reviewers for a site visit, but ask the reviewers to work independently, not as a team. In that case, a detailed template is typically provided to each reviewer. The suggestions below are for cases where multiple reviewers are collaborating on a team, not acting as independent reviewers.

The Importance of Developing a Shared Agreement by Communicating Ahead of Time with Team Members

Team members may not know why they or other members of the team were selected to be reviewers. It is essential to develop an open and productive team working style before the review begins and to continue being intentional about teamwork throughout the review and writing process. Acting in a professionally respectful manner with each other, even when there are disagreements, is essential at all times.

Symbolically, it is important to act like a team from the beginning, with each other and with the client. Reviewers may need to deal with unexpected contingencies, both on-site issues and with dynamics of the reviewer team. For example, interdisciplinary teams may have to tackle differences in members’ perspectives. Gender dynamics may affect assumptions about the division of labor, invisible labor, and “emotional labor.” To proactively minimize team disagreements, address beforehand how you would deal with critical/divergent perspectives between reviewers (especially in reviews of multi-disciplinary departments, or departments that lack national guidelines). Consider assigning a head reviewer in such a case or consider assigning the writing of particular sections of the report to the most appropriate team member.

Have a conversation with your review partner(s) about the division of labor for the preparation, the site visit, and the writing of the final report. An abridged version of a Manual for department
reviews is available for use by non-PRC program reviewers working in teams with members of the PRC.

Below are some tips to foster positive team dynamics:

- When you learn who your team members are, send each reviewer a note of introduction if you have not worked together or a note of “glad to be with you” if you know each other.
- Describe your expectations and previous work as a reviewer. Some people have done many reviews, some are less experienced. It can also be useful to exchange CVs to understand one another’s academic background.
- If you have a template that you like to use in reviews, say so. Seasoned reviewers often follow the same template with each review and this can be helpful for not re-inventing the wheel. When two seasoned reviewers are working together, come to an agreement prior to the review on how the two approaches will be integrated.
- Many campuses have a required set of questions that must be answered in the review and/or an outline that needs to be followed for the written report. One member of the team (typically the team leader) can volunteer to integrate those questions and/or outline with the template(s) used by review team members.
- Determine if the team will have a head reviewer. Some new reviewers may appreciate learning from seasoned reviewers. Experienced reviewers may decide others have more or less time to be the lead. There are times professionally when we are swamped with projects, publications, and grants deadlines so we may not want to be the lead; other times we have reasons why we are an appropriate choice. This should not be left to chance. If there is no leader, then make sure to act with each other, and the participating department, so that everyone is equal in whatever transpires. Decide the division of labor for the entire review process. There are typically many documents to review, people to interview, data to analyze, meetings to attend, questions to ask, and writing to be done. While everyone on the team needs to be familiar with all the components, a fair and equal distribution of labor is important.
- One important part of deciding the division of labor is for each team member to communicate times when their schedule is more and less busy. While we all have many demands on our time, one member may know, for example, that s/he has a book manuscript due two weeks before the on-campus visit. S/he may then do less of the advance preparation, but take on a larger role in writing the report after the campus visit.
- If there is a significant difference in the level of work done by team members, you may consider different levels of compensation. This can often be a difficult issue to discuss. It should, however, be discussed in a transparent manner with the members of the review team as well as the Department/Program and College/University.

Communicating with the Department/University

- Some institutions invite multiple reviewers, but ask that the reviewers act independently, not as a team. It is important to understand what the institution is expecting and to act accordingly.
• When collaboration is expected, include all team members and university contacts on each email so that communication is clear and transparent.

• As noted in the Manual, from the earliest stages of your contact with a department, and long before the campus visit, find out what the department/program needs and wants. Having this in writing is useful to make sure everyone is on the same page.

• Decide as a team what materials you want the department/program to share ahead of time. Refer to the full list found in the Training Manual in the “pre-visit activities” section. These materials may include:

• Have a discussion about how to divide up the e-mail communications between review team members. Choosing one team member to communicate with the department regarding the requested materials can avoid duplicate requests, which can undermine the team dynamic (and may stretch the patience of department contacts). Alternatively, if one person is responsible for all of them, that may “flag” them as being the most important member of the team. It also may increase their workload compared to other team members. In most cases, all team members should be cc’ed on all email correspondence.

• It is very useful if the team member who communicates with the department/program first sends a draft of each e-mail to all team members for their feedback. This extra level of communication takes time; as a result, lead time needs to be built into the process. It is often useful to send the e-mail indicating that it is sent for feedback and editing, but if there is no reply by a certain date and time (5 p.m. on Sunday, for example), then the assumption will be that the e-mail is ready to send to the department/program.

• If there are questions about department dynamics or information, discuss these with your team members before sending them out to the department.

• Caucus together as a team ahead of time to come up with a plan for conducting the review and a timeline. Every team member should have the same information prior to the site visit and should be clear on the agenda, schedule of events, and timeline.

• One significant part of knowing what will happen during the on-campus visit is to develop interview questions for each interview or session. Team members can circulate the sample questions found in Appendix D of the Training Manual to decide which ones will be used, and if additional questions are necessary.

• If the campus guidelines for external reviews have a set of questions that must be addressed in the final report, one member of the team should take responsibility for going through the campus itinerary as well as the questions that will be used in on-campus interviews to make certain that data will be collected about all of the items that are to be addressed in the final report.

When Conducting the On-Site Visit

• Our shared goal as reviewers is advocacy for the program/department so it can be the best department it can be. Be sure to have a discussion about the department’s alignment with institutional mission and vision.
• As was done in the leadup to the visit, it is useful to again ask the department chair whether there are particular issues s/he would like addressed, to best understand her/his sense of the purpose of the external review.

• Decide what questions are to be asked of who. Have a clear agenda of what you wish to accomplish or obtain in each meeting. This should all be determined well in advance of the visit.

• During meetings, decide ahead of time who is going to be the lead questioner. While everyone can and should ask questions, team members can trade-off who is going to take the lead in which meeting or there can be agreement that one team member is going to take the lead in most situations. This will make the meetings flow more smoothly and avoid potentially awkward situations. One method that typically works is to alternate asking questions between reviewers. Meetings with the Dean, Provost, library representative, and department chairs from other departments are typically done with the full review team. Interviews with faculty members and administrative staff tend to be divided up and done by one reviewer. Gender and status should be kept in mind so that it is not always a male or a senior reviewer who asks the first question and/or the last question in an interview.

• Ensure enough free time (breaks) and a space within the visit schedule to consult with one another—sharing thoughts, comparing notes and observations. If there is a last-minute cancellation with someone the team considers essential to speak with, schedule a phone conversation with that person within a few days of the visit. Divide the labor of touring department facilities, reviewing visible markers of the unit’s identity (departmental website, departmental bulletin boards, etc.) and exploring the campus without hosts.

• Make certain you have scheduled exit meetings with department and with administration. Use the debriefing to pursue clarifications, particularly if members of a team disagree on interpretations, and to solicit additional comments from department members and/or administrators. Allow enough time to digest fully the information you have gathered, to “cool down” or “decompress” and to consult with other team members and to refer to relevant scholarly literature where appropriate.

Writing the Report

The importance of maintaining team work continues in the report-writing stage of the process as well as during communications with the department/program/campus after the visit.

Balance: Consider offering a balance between affirming assets and addressing problem areas. When identifying problems, offer direction. Use caution to avoid exacerbating intra-departmental tensions when addressing internal departmental climate.

Length of report: Ensure that the report is value-added, not simply a duplication of information that is included in the self-study. When a report has been authored by multiple people, review the full draft to avoid repetition and insure a consistent “voice.”
Disagreements among reviewers: If the members of a team cannot agree on interpretations or recommendations, present the various alternatives in a draft report to the department acknowledging any uncertainties or disagreements.

When writing a co-authored report:

- As noted in the first section of this discussion of team reviews, it is typically useful to have an agreed-upon template for the final report and then have each team member take responsibility for the first draft of specific sections. When the first drafts of all sections are completed, they can be compiled and shared internally and informally with everyone to make edits until a final version is agreed upon.
- It may be easier if one person is identified as the lead in constructing the final document, especially if there are multiple team members.
- It is recommended that unless there is a clearly identified team leader, the authorship of the report is in alphabetical order.
- Do not share the report with the department or university members until there is reviewer agreement on the content of the report.
- When the report is shared, make sure it is clearly identified as authored by all team members. In the email to the department, include and acknowledge all team members. This can strengthen the department’s confidence in the report’s recommendations. In the case of multi-disciplinary departments and reviews, it is appropriate to note in the opening section of the report that recommendations for each discipline were written by reviewers from that discipline, but that the full team reviewed all of the report. If there is divergence in opinion about recommendations, that should be clearly and respectfully noted.
- There may be follow-up emails and correspondence with the university, so make sure to continue the team approach so that everyone is kept in the loop.
Appendix B: THE SOCIOLOGICAL LITERACY FRAMEWORK

The Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF) developed out of an extensive literature review by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) and discussions with the Measuring College Learning sociology faculty panel (Arum, Roksa, and Cook 2016). Ferguson and Carbonaro found sufficient overlap in various frameworks to enumerate a reasonable number of broad learning outcomes for the introductory sociology course and for the sociology major. Their synthesis of this material led them to create the Sociological Literacy Framework, which summarizes and describes a set of essential concepts and competencies for the sociology major. The framework has two broad categories that organize learning outcomes for sociology. The first category, labeled the Sociological Perspective, contains five essential concepts that are central to the discipline of sociology. They should be introduced in the introductory sociology course and then explored in depth as the student proceeds through the major. In addition to having an understanding of these essential sociological concepts, students also need to develop and apply disciplinary competencies. Thus, the second category, labeled the Sociological Toolbox, contains six essential competencies that sociology majors should master.

In addition to intersecting well with the U.S. literature on learning outcomes in sociology, the Sociological Literacy Framework dialogues well with the United Kingdom’s benchmark statement for sociology (QAA 2007), and the Australian Sociological Association’s threshold learning outcomes (TASA 2012). Although the concepts and competencies of the framework are presented separately, undergraduates should nevertheless learn them in a fully integrated fashion, with each supporting and augmenting the other. In Ferguson’s and Carbonaro’s view, what makes sociology exceptional is its perspective (i.e., the essential concepts that students learn), but what makes it valuable is the knowledge and skills that students gain and can integrate together. Accordingly, what makes sociology distinctive is the sui generis of the major or the combination of the items in the Sociological Literacy Framework, not the individual items on their own. Sociologists understand the social world by using both theory and evidence to pose and answer important questions about society. Concepts and competencies are used together in sociological research, and students should recognize this integration in their courses and in their knowledge and application of sociology outside of the classroom.

Table 1 offers a brief overview of the Sociological Literacy Framework. A longer description of each of the eleven SLF competencies follows.

The Sociological Perspective: Five Essential Concepts

The Sociological Perspective consists of five essential concepts that reflect larger organizing themes that lay the foundation of critical undergraduate knowledge in sociology. Each concept is a shorthand label or starting point for the overarching principles that underlie both the introductory sociology course and the sociology major. Taken together, these essential concepts and related themes provide an organizational model for what knowledge is expected in the

---

college-level sociology curriculum. These essential concepts illustrate how sociologists view the social world and how sociology contributes to our understanding of the human experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Brief Overview of the Sociological Literacy Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Sociological Perspective (Essential Concepts)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Sociological Toolbox (Essential Competencies)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sociological Eye: Sociology as a distinctive discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Structure: The impact of social structures on human action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization: The relationship between the self and society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratification: The patterns and effects of social inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Change and Social Reproduction: How social phenomena replicate and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Sociological Knowledge to Inform Policy Debates and Promote Public Understanding (Public Skills and Citizenship)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) **The Sociological Eye:**

The first essential concept in the sociological perspective is the sociological eye, a term adopted from Randall Collins (1998). Sociology students should be able to delineate the major theoretical frameworks and distinctive concepts and assumptions upon which our discipline is founded and that differentiates it from other social sciences. Topics related to this concept include: the founding theoretical traditions (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Mead); a critique of rational choice theory as the primary explanation of human behavior; and an introduction to the sociological imagination and to the social construction of everyday life, two constructs that facilitate understanding of how social forces affect individuals and how actions of individuals both constitute and are shaped by daily life.

2) **Social Structure:**

Students of sociology also should be able to describe social structure and how structural forces affect human action and social life at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society. More specifically, sociology students should be able to distinguish important social institutions in society that make up the social structure, and how they affect individuals and each other. In addition, students should be able to differentiate the processes through which social roles and statuses, relationships, social groups, formal organizations, and social networks influence human thought and action. Students should recognize how hierarchy, power, and authority operate across these structural contexts. Finally, students should be able to provide examples of these concepts related to social structure in multiple historical and cultural settings.
4) Socialization:

Students of sociology should be able to explicate the relationship between the self and society, particularly how the self is socially constructed and maintained at multiple levels of society. Relevant topics include processes and agents of socialization; the role of culture in shaping human thought and action; the operation of social norms, including the study of social control, anomie, and deviance; the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy; and the role of human agency in altering behavior. Finally, students should be able to explain concepts and theories that illustrate how the self and social interaction influence society and social structure.

5) Stratification:

The essential concept of stratification comprises the different forms of social inequality in human societies and the processes through which they are established and operate. Related critical topics include the theories of social stratification; the structures of inequalities of power, status, income, and wealth; the distinction between social and economic mobility and how ascriptive and meritocratic traits are related to each; and the impact of changes in the opportunity structure on inequality and social mobility. Additionally, students should be able to identify structural patterns of social inequality and their effects on groups and individuals, and explain the intersections of race, social class, gender, and other social factors at both the macro-level and micro-level of society.

6) Social Change and Social Reproduction:

Sociology students also should be able to identify the social processes underpinning social change and to describe how demographic and other types of social change affect individuals and social structures. More specifically, students should be able to explain how social structures change as a result of social forces including: the actions of social groups through social movements and collective action; the impact of macro-level economic and social changes such as industrialization, secularization, and globalization; and struggles over social institutions that are linked to social and economic development and mobility. A critical component of social change is **social reproduction**, which focuses on the basic processes of how social structures reproduce themselves from generation to generation in cultural, social, political, and economic terms.

**The Sociological Toolbox: Six Essential Competencies**

The six essential competencies in the Sociological Toolbox are the skills that we think sociology students should be able to demonstrate at different points in the sociology curriculum. For example, in introductory courses these skills should be introduced, in intermediate courses these skills are developed and applied, and in advanced courses they are particularly emphasized. By the time sociology majors graduate, they should have developed mastery of these skills.

1) **Apply Sociological Theories to Understand Social Phenomena**

Sociology students should be able to move beyond folk explanations of social phenomena and instead invoke evidence-based theories of sociological phenomena. Sociology students should be able to demonstrate how to apply sociological theories and concepts to the social world around them by doing the following: using the sociological imagination to analyze social problems in context and to generate and evaluate solutions; and by applying other sociological theories and concepts to social phenomena, both locally and globally.
2) Critically Evaluate Explanations of Human Behavior and Social Phenomena

Sociology students should be able to describe the role of theory in building sociological knowledge and evaluate the limitations of different theoretical frameworks. This essential competency provides students with the tools to critically evaluate claims about the social world by identifying and appraising assumptions underlying theory construction and social policy, deductively deriving theories from assumptions, inductively reasoning from evidence to theoretical conclusions, and effectively using sociological theories and evidence to suggest solutions to social problems.

3) Apply Scientific Principles to Understand the Social World

Sociology students should not only be able to describe the role of social research methods in building sociological knowledge, but be able to identify major methodological approaches and the design of doing research including sampling, measurement, and data collection. Students should learn to conduct and critique empirical research through the articulation of the effective use of evidence, the generation of research questions or hypotheses from sociological theories and concepts, and the recognition of the limits of the scientific method in understanding social behavior.

4) Evaluate the Quality of Social Scientific Methods and Data

Students should be able to critically assess the empirical sociological research of others and be able to identify the assumptions and limitations underlying particular research methodologies in sociology. The particular characteristics that sociologists use to evaluate the quality of research methods and data sources include: operationalizing concepts into measurable variables; learning the importance of precision, reliability, and validity of data sources; and understanding the distinctions between probability and non-probability samples.

5) Rigorously Analyze Social Scientific Data

Students should be able to articulate and apply disciplinary standards for data analysis and also delineate the differing goals, strengths, and limitations of different modes of analysis. These methodological skills should include an ability to fathom basic descriptive and inferential statistics and the importance of statistical and experimental controls for making causal claims when analyzing data. Students also should be able to evaluate multiple representations of data in public discourse. The ability to evaluate statistical information and analyses is central to the quantitative literacy of sociology students.

6) Use Sociological Knowledge to Inform Policy Debates and Promote Public Understanding

We want sociology students to be able to use all of these essential concepts and competencies of the Sociological Literacy Framework to engage with and have an impact upon the world in which they live and work. This last competency is not solely the ideal of using sociological education to develop better citizens, but in addition, it covers a broad range of abilities and potential applications for sociology students, including being able to express sociological ideas in a clear and coherent manner, in both written and oral communication, to the general public.

Sociology students also should be able to demonstrate informational, technological, and quantitative literacy. This essential competency suggests that sociology students should understand the kinds of work sociologists do, including an awareness of how sociology is used in
clinical and applied settings, and the value of sociological knowledge and skills in the workplace. Additionally, students should be aware of public sociology and be able to use and understand the value of sociological theories and knowledge when participating in public discourse and civic life. This essential competency effectively parallels one of the goals of LEAP, Liberal Education and America’s Promise, which argues that learning outcomes are essential for success in life, civil society, and work in the 21st century.4

4 LEAP promotes essential learning outcomes that include: “1) broad knowledge of culture, science and society, as well as competence in specific fields; 2) intellectual and practical skills, such as inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; teamwork and problem solving; 3) studies and experiences related to democratic and global citizenship and intercultural competence; and 4) integrative, applied and adaptive learning” (LEAP 2015).