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

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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.

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<td><strong>Social Structure:</strong> The impact of social structures on human action</td>
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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.

3) **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 prophesy; 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.

4) 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.

5) 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).