Protocol for Phase I of Social Capital, Organizational Context, and the Job Market for Sociology Majors

This protocol is for a follow-up to the Western IRB approved study #1063549. It is for the first year of the survey. Subsequent applications will be sent to WIRB.

Background

Many sociology departments in schools of liberal arts and sciences are concerned about losing out in the competition for undergraduate majors, even though the American Sociological Association’s (ASA) longitudinal survey of the class of 2005 shows that students are excited by the sociological concepts that they learn in introductory courses (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2006 http://www.asanet.org/research/current_research_projects.cfm). A lack of understanding about how sociology majors search for and secure jobs, and the kind of social capital that helps them in this process, can result in sociology departments losing majors to more vocationally-oriented programs. Such loss is problematic at many institutions of higher education.

Although more than two-thirds of sociology majors are pleased with their ability to see faculty members outside of the classroom and with the quality of teaching, fewer than 20 percent are satisfied with the career or graduate school counseling that they receive from departmental faculty (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2006 http://www.asanet.org/research/current_research_projects.cfm). Given that today’s college students are entering a job market with the highest unemployment in a generation, and are saddled with increasing debt, it is reasonable that students and their parents will be concerned about job prospects.
**New Assessment Survey**

The Research and Development Department of ASA is conducting a new longitudinal study of the class of AY 2011/2012 senior sociology majors. A grant for this survey has been approved by the Sociology Program of the National Science Foundation, contingent on IRB approval. The first wave of the study is geared to senior sociology majors. They will be requested to answer a series of questions (see attached questionnaire). Many of these questions are the same as the ASA-conducted 2005 survey, approved by Western IRB. In addition, we have added a series of questions about job search, the resources provided by sociology department and the ties such as faculty members, capstone courses, classmates, friends, and family that seniors call upon to help in their job search. This study will compare the use of such ties among students with diverse demographic characteristics who are pursuing undergraduate degrees in sociology departments in diverse institutional settings. The survey results should provide practical guidance for sociology departments in order to assess aspects of their programs and to launch their students into jobs that reflect their sociological training. The ultimate beneficiaries of this proposed longitudinal study might be the approximately 17,000 sociology majors that graduate each year and go directly into the labor market and the society which might benefit from their sociological knowledge.

**Advisory Committee**
As with the previous 2005 survey, we will work with an advisory committee of former and current chairs from a variety of types of institutions who have experience in measuring networks ties, in survey design, in fielding comparable surveys, and in research methodology. The committee will help us design the survey, pre-test it, develop measures and indicators, and interpret and disseminate results. The members will be chosen right after the 2011 ASA Annual Meeting (see proposal for list of potential advisory committee members) and will meet twice during the 2011/2012 time period.

**Survey Design**

The survey will be on-line. It will begin with a consent form to sign as part of the on-line format with directions indicating that respondents can decide not to participate or to stop at any point in the survey. The on-line version will be designed by the Indiana University Center for Survey Research (who played a similar role in the 2005 survey). As in our previous survey, whenever possible, questions will be adapted from national surveys to ensure their validity and comparability. For example, the newly added questions about social ties used in job search are adapted from the NSF-supported General Social Survey.

The survey (see the attached form) provides no risks for individual respondents because questions are, for the most part, limited to their assessment of the programs that they majored in, what they expect to do in the near future and the networks they used to search for and attain jobs. The assessment information provided by senior majors will be used to improve department curricula, activities, and services. Although the aggregated data will provide useful for sociology departments and programs, the survey is entirely
voluntary and no individual should feel any pressure to complete it. The ASA is currently in the process of asking for human subjects’ approval to conduct this assessment survey from its Institutional Review Board (The Western Institution Review Board).

**Sampling Design**

In this study we propose to replicate the method for selecting sociology departments and their students that we used in the prior longitudinal study of a sample of majors from the 2005 graduating cohort. In 2004, the ASA Research Department, with the advice of its study Advisory Committee, decided to draw a stratified quota sample of departments that, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics’ 2003 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), graduated at least one baccalaureate in sociology. The Research Department randomly selected 20 PhD-granting departments, 20 master’s degree-granting departments, and 40 bachelor’s degree-granting departments for a total of 80 departments that would provide a sample of students to survey. We decided to sample departments to obtain lists of senior majors since no existing list of the universe of senior sociology majors exists. According to the 2003 NCES/IPEDS Completions survey, which includes data for 1,001 institutions granting a sociology baccalaureate degree, doctoral institutions granted about 51 percent of sociology baccalaureates, master’s comprehensive schools granted 36 percent, and baccalaureate-only schools granted only 13 percent of all baccalaureate degrees. We developed a stratified sample and oversampled bachelor’s only departments because, on average, they have the fewest students, and are the least likely to respond to ASA
surveys. We will use the 2008 IPEDS survey (the latest available) to produce a similar list of departments that have graduated at least one sociology major to create a stratified sample for the proposed study.

As in the previous survey, chairs of these departments will be asked if they are interested in participating in the study, if they need to seek additional IRB approval, beyond that of the study PI (Spalter-Roth), and if they are able to provide a list of senior majors and their e-mail contacts. It has been our experience that most departments will receive an expedited IRB approval from their home institution because they are not the study PI, who has obtained IRB approval. We will work with those departments that want to participate but are having trouble receiving IRB approval. As the first step we will direct them to the project’s web page which will have the survey protocol posted. We will send several reminders to encourage participation. If a department chair says no, we will go back to the sample and replace this department. If after several invitations, departments say no or do not respond we will use members of a stratified sample of volunteer departments. A pool of volunteer departments will be built by advertising in Footnotes (ASA’s newsletter) and in the on-line monthly, Member News and Notes, which is sent to all ASA members. Members of the previous Advisory Committee found negligible design effects by using this method for the earlier longitudinal study.

**Student Participation and Protection**

Once the lists of student names and e-mails are provided to ASA, these students will be invited to participate in the online survey hosted by Indiana University’s Center
for Survey Research (CSR). They will receive four reminders to encourage their participation.

The CSR is responsible for the student survey administration and data collection. To protect student responses, the CSR computing environment requires a high level of computer and data security. Indiana University provides an initial level of security, and the CSR computing staff use industry standard best practices as our security procedures. Each workstation is updated daily with virus protection software. The CSR network is scanned daily for needed security packs and patches. The security server deploys all needed Microsoft security patches each night. Once each week, all workstations receive a complete scan for possible security problems. We have experienced minimal disruption due to viruses or worms. The computing staff has designed a number of processes for preventing intrusions or data loss on the various servers. User IDs and passwords tightly control access to the servers. Access to directories on the file servers is restricted to only those employees who need to use them. Security processes similar to those run on the workstations are used to prevent, detect, and repair security problems on the servers. Firewalls are used to detect and prevent unauthorized intrusions. The files on the servers are backed up each night, and complete system backups are done weekly. The file and Web servers use RAID 5 technology to insure that a disk failure will not cause any loss of data. The servers have uninterruptible power supplies. The server room is on a separate lock from other doors in the building, and there is a motion alarm in the room. The CSR uses 128 bit public key encryption and digital certificates to ensure the security of survey and other sensitive data that are transmitted across the Internet. The digital certificate was issued by VeriSign and is used by the survey respondent's browser to authenticate the
CSR's website before transmitting data. The data are encrypted using public key encryption before they are sent over the Internet. Through the use of these protocols, the data are transmitted using the SSL. The security procedures used by the CSR are equal or surpass the requirements for transmitting confidential information.

Once the confidential information provided by respondents is transmitted to ASA, it will be transferred to a freestanding computer (not attached to the internet) in a locked room for the purposes of data analysis. Access to this data will be limited to the PI, on-site Co-PI, and the Research Associates analyzing the data via SPSS software. Although ASA also provides a high level of data and computer security, with many of the same best practices as used by CSR, a stand-alone computer in a locked office will provide even more security from hackers or potential thieves. The SPSS data file will be transferred to a computer disk at the end of each workday, which will be stored in a locked drawer to which the PI and the Research Associate have the key.

No individual-level data will be shared with departments or the schools from which respondents graduate. Rather, department-level, aggregated findings for each of the study variables will be sent to participating department chairs so that they may compare their department’s results with those of the entire sample. If a department has fewer than 5 senior majors, no aggregate data will be provided. The ASA Research Department will provide aggregated “peer group” comparisons of chair’s choosing for a minimal cost.

Roberta Spalter-Roth, PhD, Research Director of the American Sociological Association (ASA)—the professional membership organization of 14,000 sociologists—is the Principal Investigator of the study. She will be responsible for managing all
aspects of the project. Mary Senter, PhD, Central Michigan University and Olga Mayorova, PhD, ASA are Co-PIs of the project and will be responsible for specific aspects of the project such as questionnaire refinement, data analysis, and report writing. Nicole Van Vooren, MA, ASA will be a Senior Research Associate for the project and will assist with working with departments, working with CSR, data analysis, and report editing. ASA will sub-contracted to the Indiana University Center for Survey Research (CSR) to conduct the survey proper and provide ASA with the results for analysis. The National Science Foundation (NSF) has provided funding to the ASA for this purpose.