

## **Comment to the Florida Board of Governors on Proposal to Remove Sociology from the General Education Core Course Options**

November 2023

Several months ago, the Florida Board of Governors started requiring a review of the state college and university systems' general education core courses in five subject areas every four years. That review is currently underway. Faculty committees were appointed in the various subject areas to make recommendations to the Board. Principles of Sociology is one of six current courses offered under the social sciences designation. The faculty committee for social sciences recommended adding a seventh course to the list, a history course called Introductory Survey to 1877.

This week the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee met to review the faculty committees' recommendations. They were poised to vote on them as presented when, at the last minute, the state education commissioner, Manny Diaz, proposed removing sociology from the list. While there was some pushback to this last-minute amendment, it ultimately passed through the Board's committee. The next step is for the full Florida Board of Governors to vote on the changes to the general education core course options in January.

Public comment was invited in advance of the January vote, and ASA has submitted the following comment.

*Comment submitted on November 13, 2023*

This comment is being submitted to the Florida Board of Governors regarding BOG 8.005 General Education Core Course Options by the American Sociological Association, the national professional society representing approximately 10,000 sociologists around the world, including 245 in Florida. Our mission is to serve sociologists in their work, advance sociology as a science and profession, and promote the contributions and use of sociology to society.

**We strongly object to the removal of the Principles of Sociology course from the social sciences list of general education core course options.**

As you know, the removal of Principles of Sociology was the result of a last-minute amendment put on the floor by Manny Diaz which did not follow the recommendation of the faculty committee you appointed to provide advice based on subject matter expertise. That group recommended adding one course to the social sciences list and did not recommend removing any existing courses. Presumably the Board would expect a compelling reason to ignore the expert advice of a group you appointed to advise you. But no such compelling reason was provided. Upon making his proposal, Diaz said: "The reason I'm suggesting to reduce the number of social science courses to six [is] with three of those potentially being options to meet the requirement for civic literacy."

There is no reason the list has to be limited to six courses. In fact, the proposed list for the natural sciences has 14 options.

There is also no reason every course on the list has to be tied to the requirement for civic literacy, as recognized by the fact that Diaz proposed retaining three other courses he does not consider as improving civic literacy.

But Diaz is also uninformed in his belief that Principles of Sociology does not contribute to meeting the requirement for civic literacy. The website for Florida's Department of Education says that "Florida is committed to preparing students to become civically engaged and knowledgeable adults who make positive contributions to their communities. Florida students will graduate with sufficient knowledge of America's civics, particularly the principles reflected in the United States Constitution, so as to be capable of discharging their responsibilities as American citizens."

While we do not contest the fact that studying the Constitution and other foundational governmental documents is of critical importance, we argue that such knowledge is insufficient for someone to be fully civically engaged. Sociological knowledge and understanding is a crucial component of civic literacy.

What is sociology? It is the scientific study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists investigate the structure of groups, organizations, and societies and how people interact within these contexts. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges broadly. Our association has 53 interest groups for sociologists studying topics including, for example, aging and the lifecycle; communication and information technologies; consumers and consumption; crime; international migration; organizations, occupations and work; politics; science, knowledge and technology; social dimensions of the law; and social dimensions of medicine.

Clearly the topics sociologists study are among those of current public debate. Failure to expose students to the scientific study of the range of issues faced by American citizens would be a failure of civics education. How can we expect students to make positive contributions to their communities if they do not have scientific understanding of the issues facing those communities? As your requirements indicate, we want to ensure that Florida's students have "broad foundational knowledge." Principles of Sociology provides such knowledge.

Principles of Sociology contributes substantially to improving the civic literacy of Florida's college students and provides broad foundational knowledge. Your expert faculty advisory committee recommends that Principles of Sociology be included on the list of general education core course options for social science. And the proposed additional history course can be added without removing Principles of Sociology; this is not a zero-sum game. **When you vote on the final list of general education core course options, please reinstate Principles of Sociology on the social science list.**

If we can be of any assistance as you contemplate this issue, please do not hesitate to reach out to our executive director whose contact information has been provided on the comment submission form.