

The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning

*A Report of the ASA Task Force on Liberal Learning
and the Sociology Major*

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Preface

This report outlines recommended practices for sustaining high quality and comprehensive sociology programs for undergraduates. These recommendations were developed over a two year period by the members of the American Sociological Association (ASA) Task Force on Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major. Departments and programs can use this report to inform curriculum review, assessment, and program development.

The work here benefits from and builds upon the efforts of two previous task forces and the valuable volumes they produced. The 1990 edition set out to establish recommendations for sociology program format and assessment. The 2004 revision focused on study in depth and examined how a comprehensive understanding of sociology prepares students to use empirical inquiry to shape their lives and the world around them. This third edition updates the recommendations and contextualizes them within today's complex higher education landscape, a landscape characterized by pressures to define consistent learning outcomes in the discipline, to attend to the employment outcomes of graduates, and to offer high quality education online. Within this new environment, effective sociology programs must clarify their disciplinary goals and implement them with an informed understanding of the students whom they serve. How these goals are accomplished will depend on institutional mission, funding sources, and the demographic profile of college students. This report is a guide both to decision-making processes and to the critical reflection that supports the collaborative work of building successful and responsive sociology programs in the 21st century.

Using the Report

Students are well-served by a sociology major that nurtures “the development of a coherent and mature conception of sociology as a scholarly endeavor that involves the interplay of empirical and theoretical analysis of a wide range of topics” (McKinney et al. 2004a:2). This study in depth can be achieved through a variety of pathways, taking into account the particular features of specific programs and institutions. All types of institutions—public and private, large and small, four-year and two-year—can use the recommendations in this report to support their work. In all cases, inclusivity and shared governance should guide both review of this report and subsequent decision-making. Faculty are encouraged to think creatively while striking a balance between an ideal program and a realistic appraisal of resources and possibilities. In the end, the focus on student learning is pivotal.

Faculty will have to consider many factors in deciding how to use this report in terms of both process and content. We recommend that programs begin by establishing initial agreements among colleagues regarding the goals and time frame. Some programs and departments may choose to engage in an in-depth review of the recommendations and strategies and compare them with their current practices. What level of programmatic response is called for—minor adjustments to a curriculum that is basically solid, or more fundamental revisions? Which strategies are most appropriate to a specific institutional context and program culture? This kind of review might take place over several months of periodic meetings, or perhaps as the focus of a retreat. Where issues are identified, faculty can work together on defining changes suitable for their setting. At a minimum, such reviews are an opportunity

to rethink and rearticulate the rationales for the way a program currently operates.

This report also can provide a basis for self-study in cyclical program reviews or for intensive curriculum revision. Programs may choose to seek the assistance of respected campus colleagues or may consider bringing in an outside expert, such as an ASA Department Resource Group¹ (DRG) member as a consultant. Whatever the need, these recommendations, strategies, and resources offer ideas for improving program efficacy and student success.

¹ <http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/department-leaders/department-resource-group>

Acknowledgments

As Co-Chairs, Susan and Jeff want to acknowledge that a document like this is the product of many minds and hands. First and foremost, we are indebted to the many individuals who contributed directly to the American Sociological Association's Task Force on Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major, which came to be known as LL3. The original task force comprised 23 sociologists divided into three working subcommittees. Members of these three subcommittees met biweekly or triweekly for almost three years to produce this report.

Besides the appointed members of the Task Force, we want to acknowledge the time and thoughtful comments provided by the individuals who attended planning sessions at ASA meetings or submitted feedback at various points along the way. We also thank the faculty who volunteered to be interviewed by the Subcommittee on Employment and the Subcommittee on Online Learning.

Our highest praise is given to Margaret Weigers Vitullo who served as liaison with the ASA Executive Office and as chair of the Online Subcommittee. Margaret's vision, leadership, and organizational skills were particularly critical in proposing the task force and its structure and ensuring it stayed on track given its size and complexity. Also at the ASA Office, Jaime Hecht set up dozens of GoToMeetings for the various subcommittees and often was recruited to take notes.

Finally, we want to recognize the following individuals who served as "bead weavers" and spent hours revising and rewriting the manuscript: Teresa Ciabattari, Melinda Jo Messineo, Renee Monson, Diane Pike, Rifat Salam, and

Theodore Wagenaar. If there ever was a Dream Team of sociologists to bring together to do this work, it would be all of you. Diane Pike's determined leadership of this team was instrumental in seeing the document through the abundant discussions, debates, and revisions that come with curricular work.

Last, but not least, we want to express much gratitude to Ed Kain, our colleague and dear friend, who read the final version of the manuscript and did an intensive review and copy edit of the document.

The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning is dedicated to sociology teachers everywhere who care about the content and structure of their academic programs.

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Part One: Introduction

Rising educational costs, larger and more diverse student bodies, reductions in public funding, changing instructional technologies, and questions about the relevance of higher education shape the context in which today's sociology programs offer their curricula. In the 13 years since the previous edition of *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* was published, the needs, goals, pressures, and resources of sociology programs have shifted. In this third edition, an updated set of recommendations reflects this new higher education landscape.

Academic programs today face significant challenges. First, nationwide, college enrollments are growing in absolute numbers and in the diversity of the students who attend (Kena et al. 2016); at the same time, resources at many colleges and universities have been inadequate to meet the diverse and complex needs of this growing number of students (Hainline et al. 2010). Institutions search for new ways to balance budgets in response to rising costs and decreased public funding. In addition, external bodies, including the federal government, are pressuring institutions to be accountable for the employment and salary outcomes of their graduates, leading to a proliferation of publications and organizations that rank institutions on these metrics (Stewart 2016). The traditional structures of higher education are being challenged by the increasing use of contingent faculty (American Association of University Professors 2016) and the expansion of online educational offerings (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). Administrators, faculty, students, and other stakeholders share deep concerns about these challenges and how to respond.

Second, the value of a college degree for employment continues to be an important, though not sole, motivation for enrollment (Eagen et al. 2015). Students and families see college as an investment in the future, and, given significant tuition increases (College Board 2015), they are asking tough questions about whether higher education in general and certain majors in particular are worth that investment (Blumenstyk 2015a). The introduction of metrics that focus on employment and tangible skills for the labor market, including the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard,² has resulted in an atmosphere of tension between traditional liberal arts disciplines and applied or pre-professional fields. Academic programs are often charged with defending the value of their programs through these new metrics.

Third, the technological capabilities of online education have advanced beyond our knowledge about the pedagogical effectiveness of these new methods and modes of instruction. The struggle to manage increasing demand for online courses (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Kisielewski 2013; Online Learning Consortium 2015) while maintaining the quality of the learning experiences for students (Benson et al. 2002; Bergstrand and Savage 2013; Nguyen 2015) is significant.

Sociology is well-positioned to analyze and respond to these tensions in higher education in the United States. Sociologists have been at the forefront of research and analysis on a variety of related issues, from what students actually learn in college (Arum and Roksa 2011; Chambliss and Takacs 2014) to the pressures created by the so-called corporatization of the university (Aronowitz 2000; Côté

² <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

and Allahaar 2011). Sociology programs are able to draw on disciplinary strengths to forge successful paths through this complex terrain. In addition, as a discipline rooted in both science and the liberal arts, sociology teaches students essential skills that consistently appear among national policy priorities and employer surveys, including the ability to make empirically based arguments, to collect and analyze data, and to communicate effectively (Hart Research Associates 2015).

The 12 recommendations listed below, which are explored in detail in Part Two, provide guidance for creating curricular depth and breadth and identify strategies that help programs navigate challenges while maintaining integrity and quality. A solid foundation in conceptual and methodological knowledge and the explicit preparation for advanced study, meaningful employment, and civic engagement are requisite elements for thriving in today's dynamic environment.

List of Recommendations

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.

The remaining pages in Part One of this report offer a brief discussion of four features of contemporary higher education that have shaped the development of these 12 recommendations: recent work to build consensus on the foundational learning goals of a sociology curriculum; the increasing focus on student employment outcomes; the growth of online education; and the complexity of institutional contexts in which sociology curricula are offered. Part Two provides an expanded discussion of each of the 12 recommendations. Part Three offers strategies for implementing the Sociological Literacy Framework, supporting student career readiness, and offering effective online education in sociology. Part Four concludes the report and is followed by appendices and references.

Defining Learning Goals for the Discipline

Sociologists have been engaging in conversations to define the foundational features of the discipline for decades (Ballantine et al. 2016; Ferguson 2016). Although some argue that doing so is an impossible task, features of the current political and economic climate suggest that it has become a necessity. As Ballantine et al. argue, “Organizationally, if we do not establish a foundation, others will—and in fact are—doing so for us. Leaving discussions about the core to external forces is at best unwise and potentially quite damaging to our discipline requirements” (2016:160). The ASA has made continual progress in supporting efforts to define foundational learning goals for the discipline, culminating in documents such as *Sociology and General Education* (Keith et al. 2007), *National Standards for High School Sociology* (American Sociological Association 2015), and previous editions of *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* (Eberts et al. 1990; McKinney et al. 2004a).

These steps to define foundational learning goals and outcomes of a sociology curriculum are taking place amidst public concerns about what skills and knowledge students actually acquire in a given course of study. To remain relevant, sociology programs need to respond to these concerns. One important contribution is the Measuring College Learning Project (MCL),³ an initiative of the Social Science Research Council’s Education Research

³ The principal investigators of this research project are Richard Arum, Senior Academic Advisor, Social Science Research Council, and Dean of the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine, and Josipa Roksa, Associate Professor of Sociology and Education at the University of Virginia. Arum and Roksa are co-authors of *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (2011), and the MCL project builds on this earlier work.

Program (2016) that was supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Teagle Foundation. This project brought together faculty from six different disciplines, including sociology, to discuss learning outcomes and assessments in their respective disciplines.

The MCL Sociology Faculty Panel was composed of sociologists with a demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning.⁴ A variety of institutions, including liberal arts colleges, research universities, community colleges, and the ASA, were represented. Among the MCL panel's main goals was an evaluation of previous and ongoing efforts to develop common learning outcomes for sociology undergraduate majors. They were successful in identifying "essential representative learning outcomes" for both the introductory course and the sociology major (Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016). These outcomes are articulated in the Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF), which is based on an extensive literature review and summary of the recent work on student learning outcomes in the discipline. The SLF, discussed in detail in Recommendation 2 and in

⁴ The MCL Sociology Faculty Panel included twelve faculty members, one post-doc and one project coordinator at the Social Science Research Council, and two officers from the American Sociological Association. Participants were Richard Arum, New York University; Jeanne Ballantine, Wright State University; William Carbonaro, University of Notre Dame; Amanda Cook, Social Science Research Council; Paula England, New York University; Susan Ferguson, Grinnell College; Sally Hillsman, American Sociological Association; Abby Larson, Social Science Research Council; Katherine McClelland, Franklin and Marshall College; Matt McKeever, Mount Holyoke College; Aaron Pallas, Teachers College, Columbia University; Richard Pitt, Vanderbilt University; Josipa Roksa, University of Virginia; Margaret Weigers Vitullo, American Sociological Association; Theodore Wagenaar, Miami University; and Sarah Willie-LeBreton, Swarthmore College.

Part Three, provides curricular guidance but also allows flexibility; it is an important resource for creating effective sociology programs across a variety of contexts, including both two-year and four-year institutions.

Attending to Employment Outcomes

As sociologists build consensus on the foundational learning goals in the discipline, we are being asked to articulate how this learning prepares students for the labor market. Students and their families are considering the employment implications of their college choices from the start of college. In 2015, 85 percent of first-year college students said the ability to get a better job was “very important” in their decision to go to college, and 70 percent reported that being able to make more money was important to their decision to attend (Eagan et al. 2015). Also, 60 percent noted that “this college’s graduates get good jobs” is a very important consideration in selecting a college (Eagan et al. 2015). In addition, today’s college students are carrying large loan burdens. Both the proportion of graduating students who have student debt and the amounts they owe have risen steadily in recent years. Between 1990 and 2012, the percentage of college seniors aged 18 to 24 with debt grew from 51 to 68 percent, and the average cumulative debt for these students is over \$26,000 (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). Estimates for the 2015 graduating cohort put average debt at over \$30,000 (Cochrane and Cheng 2016).

As a result, institutions of higher learning are being asked to document employment outcomes for their graduates,

often by major and degree. This demand for data is coming from the federal government, state legislatures, accrediting bodies, higher education administrators, and our students and their families. For example, the U.S. Department of Education released the College Scorecard, a website that reports metrics on college costs, graduation rates, and the salaries of graduates in a format easily searched by institution (Blumenstyk 2015b). In addition, several states, such as California, Minnesota, and Virginia, have created websites that report employment and earnings data by program of study.

Sociology programs are not immune to these pressures. A recent survey of department chairs by the ASA found that 41 percent conduct alumni/ae surveys, and another seven percent conduct employer surveys (Spalter-Roth, Kisielewski, and Van Vooren 2013), in part to respond to these requests for data on graduates' post-baccalaureate lives. Sociology faculty are being asked to consider how to help students prepare for meaningful employment upon completion of their undergraduate degree, and programs are encouraged to take these requests seriously. Because the majority of undergraduate sociology students do not go on to graduate training in sociology, and because most join the workforce directly after graduation (Senter, Spalter-Roth, and Van Vooren 2015), preparing graduates to lead fulfilling lives includes equipping them for employment. Moreover, the discipline attracts disproportionate numbers of women, first-generation college students, and students of color. These are precisely the demographic groups more likely to take on higher levels of student debt in order to finance their college education and who are most concerned about their ability to translate their degree into employment success.

Some sociologists have, for good reasons, argued against what they see as pressures to vocationalize higher education and to view higher education as yet another business. There is validity to these concerns, but the dichotomy between sociology as a social science rooted in liberal education and sociology as a gateway to desired employment is a false one. Sociology programs can respond to the increased emphasis on employment in higher education by emphasizing what a sociology curriculum already does and does well. Sociology can at one and the same time emphasize critical thinking and advocacy for a more just society, while equipping students with knowledge and skills that are valued by employers. Programs that consciously and effectively do both will help students meet their goals and better position the discipline of sociology to meet these changing expectations.

The Expansion of Online Education

Online instruction can no longer be viewed as an “add on” or a supplement that students passively experience and that faculty reluctantly provide. Online and hybrid offerings are now an integral means by which sociological literacy is gained and a potential point of student and faculty empowerment. According to the 2012 ASA Department Survey, 50 percent of departments reported offering at least one online course and another 12 percent were in the process of developing one. More than 10 percent of responding departments said they had a fully online sociology degree (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Kisielewski 2013). In addition, slightly more than one-fourth of college students in all fields are taking at least one course online (Online Learning Consortium 2015). When college students

are asked about their future plans, about one-third expect to study online, one-third on campus, and one-third will combine the two (Clinefelter and Aslanian 2015). This increase in online offerings also has implications for the way faculty experience their work lives.

In order to thrive in the current higher education landscape, programs must intentionally apply sociologically and pedagogically informed recommended practices to their online curricula. For example, Bork and Rucks-Ahidiana (2013) use a qualitative study grounded in role and socialization theory to study the role expectations of online students and instructors at two community colleges. They conclude that misalignment of student and instructor expectations of actions and behaviors leads to role ambiguity in the online environment. To address this issue, they recommend institutional interventions such as student readiness and faculty development activities.

Given the integration of online instruction into the everyday efforts of many institutions, users of this report will recognize that the curricular recommendations offered here apply to online education as well. Online courses and programs need explicit goals that cogently address core concepts and skills. Online courses should not be isolated; they should be part of a progressive learning structure that stresses empirical inquiry, addresses inequalities, and employs multiple pedagogies.

In order to establish concise and actionable sociology-specific recommendations, it is essential to understand the range of current practices in the discipline regarding online education and to recognize how those practices relate to the broader literature regarding effective pedagogy and practices in online instruction. As with face-to-face

instruction, what matters is what and how students learn. Prineas and Cini (2011) outline how technology can help improve student outcomes in the online environment, focusing on using the vast amounts of data collected in learning management systems. The recommendations of this report coupled with the strategies suggested in Part Three will help programs meet the challenges and opportunities introduced when they offer online curricula.

Navigating Institutional Context

The success of quality sociology programs depends upon careful consideration of institutional context. To help programs think through the implications of the 12 recommendations, this section briefly examines key issues around the topics of diverse institutional settings, joint departments, transfer students, and staffing realities.

Diverse Institutional Settings of Sociology

Institutional mission, as determined by tradition, government, religious affiliation, institutional type or governing bodies, sets the stage for the types of students with whom academic institutions work, the resources available, and the alternative demands placed on faculty time and energies. Articulating how the mission of a sociology program supports and engages the mission of the institution in which the program is housed is crucial for program success.

An important contextual element is whether graduate degrees in sociology are offered in addition to the undergraduate major. For example, in graduate programs,

to what extent do institutional structures and reward systems support quality teacher preparation as well as faculty research careers? Is the appropriate role of graduate students as teaching assistants and solo instructors well-defined? Are qualifications and training for graduate instructors in place? Is oversight provided?

Another significant element is the two-year/four-year distinction at the undergraduate level. How do course offerings differ and overlap? What should the requirements be for a sociology associate degree versus a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree? Other contextual factors include whether the institution is public or private, the importance of an applied focus within the mission, institution and program size and location, the degree to which sociology courses are included in general education requirements or interdisciplinary programs (such as Gender Studies or Environmental Studies), the ratio of majors to full time faculty, the proportion of courses offered by part-time faculty, unique assessment strategies (such as the use of narrative evaluations), the proportion of students who attend full-time or part-time, and the number of premedical students who need to take sociology to prepare for the Medical College Admission Test ® (MCAT).⁵

The physical setting and availability of technology also matter. Classrooms that support small group discussion and other forms of interactive learning are desirable, as are informal discussion areas to support student collaboration. Reliable access to high speed internet, classrooms with projectors and computers, and computer

⁵ Resources about the sociology section of the MCAT are available at <http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/departments-leaders/mcat-and-sociology>.

labs with appropriate data analysis software are necessary for effective delivery of high quality sociology programs. In addition, online course offerings require institutional investment in computing infrastructure and in the training and support of faculty who use online teaching modalities.

Multidisciplinary Divisions and Joint Departments

It is not uncommon for sociology programs to be located within a department or academic unit that includes other disciplines. Where traditional scholarly disciplines are housed together, resource scarcity and relative power may present challenges. Where sociology joins with more vocationally oriented programs, such as criminal justice or social work, agreement on fundamental curricula may be even more complicated. Sociology's traditional emphases on theory, methods, and critical awareness may be perceived to be in conflict with emphases on application and professional training, leading to potential disagreements over faculty positions, budgets, and promotion and tenure decisions.

Sociologists should build intellectual bridges in both their teaching and their research to other disciplines, especially those housed in the same department, while also honoring the intellectual differences among those disciplines. While reasonable coordination with kindred programs can be a benefit to students and to programs as a whole, it is important that the discipline maintain its integrity. Thus, the practices outlined in the recommendations apply to sociology programs in multidisciplinary and joint departments, as well as to stand-alone programs.⁶

⁶ Faculty are urged to consult the resources published by the ASA and other higher education associations on the organization of multidisciplinary departments. See the "Department Leaders Toolbox" on

In joint departments, sociology programs need to consider their particular institutional arrangement when designing curriculum, yet should be wary of letting the presence of these partners determine what sociology courses are offered or how they are structured. In order to preserve disciplinary integrity, courses from other departments or programs should not be allowed to replace any fundamental courses in the sociology major and having non-sociology courses count towards the major should be approached with caution. Likewise, only appropriately trained sociologists should teach these fundamental courses.

Sociology programs that have vocationally oriented offerings (such as clinical or applied concentrations, criminal justice emphases, and secondary education commitments) may find new opportunities for collaboration and program enrichment in light of the employment-related recommendations in this report. Special caution is appropriate, however, when considering combining sociology with social work programs. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has stringent requirements that programs must meet before they can offer an accredited Bachelor of Social Work degree.

Transfer Students

The long-standing pattern of transferring from a community college to a four-year institution and the more recent “swirl” of students in and out of multiple four-year colleges and universities means that the single institution may no longer be the appropriate unit of

analysis for examining the sociology major. Data suggest that more than 40 percent of first time first-year students taking Introduction to Sociology are likely to do so at a community college (Rowell 2010). Moreover, in a recent survey conducted by the ASA Task Force on Community College Faculty, 57 percent of the faculty respondents said that there is a blanket articulation agreement in their state mandating that sociology courses taught at the community college level be accepted for transfer into their state's four-year institutions.

Thus, coherence in the major not only requires thoughtful discussions within programs, it also requires inter-institutional cooperation and coordination, especially in programs that receive significant numbers of transfer students. Discussion of program goals, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment across institutions at professional meetings, in publications, and especially in articulation agreements, is essential. Sociology faculty at two- and four-year schools should familiarize themselves with the transfer protocols (core-to-core, program-to-program, and course-to-course) at their respective institutions. They also should work cooperatively to reduce credit loss among majors who begin their undergraduate education at a two-year college. Because most two-year schools are community colleges and most community college students transfer to nearby institutions, ongoing collaboration between sociology faculty at sending and receiving institutions is often very feasible.

The effectiveness of inter-institutional coordination depends upon both the sending and receiving programs having accurate information on students. Institutions, therefore, should collect data on student characteristics, needs and interests, patterns of transfer, major choice,

course success, and retention. Both two-year and four-year schools can then take these data into account as they consider articulation agreements and other transfer concerns, with appropriate attention to both the diversity of goals and contexts and the structure of the sociology curricula.

Staffing Realities

Colleges and universities have continued to decrease the ratio of full-time faculty to students while increasing that of part-time and contingent instructors. This change has consequences for the major as it relates to who is in charge of the curriculum, the continuity in essential learning outcomes across courses, and the opportunity for students to develop the kinds of meaningful connections with faculty that have been shown to improve learning outcomes (Chambliss and Takacs 2014; Curtis, Mahabir, and Vitullo 2016). The increasing use of contingent faculty is an ongoing concern in higher education, raising critical questions around compensation and ethics. Individual programs should keep these concerns in mind in their staffing efforts. Every effort should be made to limit the use of contingent instructors, especially for staffing introductory courses, since experienced full time faculty can be critical for recruiting students to the major (Curtis and Jacobe 2006); in addition, Senter, Van Vooren, and Spalter-Roth (2013) found that 90 percent of sociology majors chose this major because they enjoyed their first sociology course.

Nevertheless, given the current dependence on contingent positions, it is important to welcome these colleagues and encourage their engagement. Multi-year contracts are preferable, and chairs responsible for hiring should

avoid last minute changes in staffing and course loads when possible. Chairs should invite contingent faculty to participate in relevant meetings and activities, but take care not to create expectations for unpaid labor. This practice is consistent with recommendations that contingent faculty be compensated for time spent in required activities such as campus orientation and professional development events (Kezar and Maxey 2014; Curtis, Mahabir, and Vitullo 2016). Contingent faculty, especially instructors new to teaching, should have the resources necessary to support best practices in teaching sociology. Finally, opportunities for these colleagues to be mentored by administrators and full-time faculty can strengthen the program overall.

A second challenge in staffing is the continued lack of diversity among faculty. While the student body at post-secondary institutions has become significantly more diverse, particularly in terms of race, the composition of the faculty has not changed as dramatically. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015), 72.7 percent of full-time faculty at post-secondary institutions are White, compared to 58.3 percent of students. Analysis of data specific to sociology conducted by the ASA show similar disparities.⁷ Sociology majors are becoming a more diverse group as evidenced by the fact that 73 percent of bachelor's degrees in sociology in 1995 were awarded to Whites but that number had declined to 55 percent by 2014. Although national data on the racial-ethnic composition of faculty in sociology are not available, 72.6 percent of ASA regular members who report their race identify as White and two-thirds of doctoral degrees

⁷ Data on sociology degrees awarded can be found at <http://www.asanet.org/research-publications/research-sociology/trends-sociology/degrees-awarded>. ASA membership data can be found at <http://www.asanet.org/research-publications/research-sociology/trends-sociology/asa-membership>.

awarded in sociology in 2012 went to Whites, suggesting that the racial-ethnic diversity of the sociology faculty is lagging behind that of the students we serve.

Third, in all aspects of working with staff, programs should be guided in their ethical responsibilities and duties by the ASA Code of Ethics,⁸ noting the substantial attention to the ethical responsibilities of our teaching roles.

Finally, to effectively navigate the challenges of teaching and learning in times of pressure, to respond to expectations for career outcomes, and to accommodate new technologies, programs should continue to engage with the empirical and theoretical knowledge that has arisen from the scholarship of teaching and learning. This rich literature functions to inform discussions about, and choices made for, the sociology major and curricular and pedagogical reforms. Efforts should focus on learning-centered instruction, deep learning, and best practices. Fortunately, the international and national work on the scholarship of teaching and learning, as well as the important research done within the discipline of sociology itself, provides a wealth of ideas and evidence upon which to base such work.

⁸ <http://www.asanet.org/membership/code-ethics>

Part Two: Recommendations and Rationales

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

Most programs recognize the importance of linking program-specific goals to the institution's mission and strategic plans. As internal and external expectations change, it is imperative that sociology faculty clearly identify their shared understandings of their programs' mission and goals within the institution's mission. These collaboratively-generated understandings must then be supported by a clear set of rationales.

Whether housed in a single or joint department, the sociology program is the locus of curricular integrity. A strong curriculum offers a range of substantive courses, varied experiential opportunities for students, and quality learning environments. Curriculum goals, measurable learning outcomes, and programmatic experiences should reflect both high disciplinary standards and the strengths of a program at a given point in time.

Not all goals need to be translated into learning outcomes. Some goals are related to program inputs (e.g., number and quality of faculty and students), others to processes (required community experiences, research projects, or internships), and some to measurable student learning outcomes (e.g., students can effectively compare and contrast sociological theories in the analysis of a given social problem). In setting and implementing these goals and outcomes, faculty are urged to consider the current strengths of their institution, any new initiatives

in preparing students for careers, and the appropriate responses to demands for online, blended, and traditional course delivery options.

The relevance of the curriculum to postgraduate outcomes in professional, personal, and civic realms should be embedded throughout, beginning in the introductory courses. Majors need to be able to see themselves as achieving these outcomes, be they related to specific careers, graduate school, or a fulfilling and civically engaged life. Both students and faculty should be able to articulate connections between program and course learning experiences and what students can accomplish as a result of majoring in sociology. In the case of two-year colleges specifically, sociology programs should take into account the outcomes relevant to the preparation of students interested in majoring in sociology upon transfer. In the case of contingent faculty, it is important that program and course goals as well as learning outcomes be conveyed at the time of hire, so that they can be built into course syllabi and content to ensure consistent quality education for our students.

In programs offering online and hybrid courses, the most critical task lies in ensuring that online courses are as central to the curriculum as face-to-face courses, contributing in similar ways to meeting program goals and outcomes. This challenge means that structural difficulties must be addressed successfully. Online instructors may not be local but should still be engaged in curriculum and teaching discussions. Faculty may want to explore the “online is the same” vs “online presents unique challenges” debate in order to frame a response that meets the needs of students in their departments and programs (Driscoll et al. 2012; Bergstrand and Savage 2013; Auster 2016).

Overall, students are more likely to thrive when they know what they can expect to gain from a curriculum and why it is important. In quality programs, faculty are able to articulate how their courses contribute to specific goals and outcomes, and other stakeholders—administrators, parents, external reviewers, employers—understand the goals and outcomes promised. The value of sociological learning across the realms of professional life and employment, private life and public agency, and individual development as whole persons should be explicit. Such value should be evident in the mission of the program, the goals of the curriculum, and the lived experiences of students of sociology.


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.*

Defining a set of shared learning outcomes within a program is a crucial step in establishing an integrated curriculum that supports successful student learning. Programs are encouraged to use a well-considered framework as the basis for their own programmatic learning outcomes. Many models exist, including one offered in the previous edition of this volume (McKinney et al. 2004a), as well as models from individual programs (Lowry et al. 2005). Other useful frameworks include the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) benchmark statement for sociology (2007) and The Australian Sociological Association's (TASA) "Sociology: Threshold Learning Outcomes" (2012).

After a careful review of these models, the members of the Task Force who completed this review concluded

that the Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF) (Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016) was a particularly useful model for today's sociology programs, and an extended discussion of the SLF is found in this report. The SLF is a distillation of 100 years of research and discussion about a core curriculum in sociology and is summarized in Table 1. Detailed explication of the SLF is provided in Part Three. The framework asserts what is fundamental to the discipline and provides outcomes worth emphasizing given limited time and resources. It can guide institutions with four-year majors, as well as programs at two-year institutions. Comparability and continuity of offerings across face-to-face and online venues is also informed by the framework.

Table 1: SLF

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<p style="color: #000080; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">SOCIOLOGY</p> <p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; margin: 5px 0;">Essential Concepts</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Students of sociology should understand...</p> <p>The Sociological Eye: Sociology is a distinctive discipline. Students will recognize the following key theoretical frameworks and assumptions upon which the discipline is founded and differentiated from other social sciences: the founding theoretical traditions (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mead); a critique of rationality to explain human behavior; and how social forces affect individuals.</p> <p>Social Structure: Social structure affects human action and social life at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Students will articulate the processes through which groups, formal organizations, and social networks influence human thought and action, and how hierarchy, power, and authority operate across these different contexts.</p> <p>Socialization: Students will explain the relationship between the self and society, and how the self is socially constructed and maintained at multiple levels.</p> <p>Stratification: Students will identify how social structures create and reproduce different forms of social inequality in human society through specific processes, and interpret empirical patterns and effects of social inequality.</p> <p>Social Reproduction and Social Change: Students will comprehend how social structures reproduce themselves across generations, but also can change in cultural, social, political, and economic terms.</p>	<p style="background-color: #FFD700; padding: 2px; margin: 5px 0;">Essential Competencies</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Students of sociology should be able to...</p> <p>Identify and apply sociological theories to understand social phenomena: Move beyond "folk" explanations of social phenomena and invoke evidence-based theories of sociological phenomena. Employ the sociological imagination to analyze social problems in context, and to generate and evaluate solutions.</p> <p>Critically evaluate explanations of human behavior and social phenomena: Identify and appraise basic assumptions underlying multiple theoretical perspectives; deductively derive theories from assumptions; inductively reason from evidence to theoretical conclusions; and effectively use sociological theories and evidence to suggest real-world solutions to social problems.</p> <p>Apply scientific principles to understand the social world: Articulate the effective use of evidence; generate research questions and/or hypotheses from sociological theories and concepts; and identify the limits of the scientific method in understanding social behavior.</p> <p>Evaluate the quality of social scientific data: Identify the characteristics of high quality data in sociological research, and evaluate multiple representations of data in public discourse.</p> <p>Rigorously analyze social scientific data: Articulate and apply disciplinary standards for both the qualitative and quantitative analyses of data.</p> <p>Use sociological knowledge to inform policy debates and promote public understanding: Use sociological knowledge and skills to engage with and change the world around them. This includes expressing sociological ideas in a clear and coherent manner in written and oral communication; demonstrating informational, technological, and quantitative literacy; and understanding the value that sociological knowledge and skills have for life, work, and citizenship.</p>
	

The SLF includes two parts: The Sociological Perspective and The Sociological Toolbox. The Sociological Perspective is an umbrella term for five organizing concepts or themes central to the discipline of sociology. These concepts are introduced in introductory-level sociology courses and then explored in greater depth as the student proceeds through the major. The Sociological Toolbox contains six skills that sociology majors should become increasingly competent in applying as they move from the introductory level through completion of the major. Note that the list of concepts and competencies in the framework is purposely short and focused. The SLF does not, and is not intended to, represent all of the learning outcomes that might be included in the full range of high quality curricula that are offered by sociology programs. Many programs and institutions will add additional concepts or skills as appropriate to meet their institutional needs and particular program goals (Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016).

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.*

Students learn a major most effectively when it is presented as an integrated way of viewing and studying the world and when they experience a gradual expansion in knowledge and skills as they progress through the major (Malnarich and Lardner 2003). In any field rooted in liberal education, majors must learn to use the tools of the discipline, that is, how people in the discipline do their work. Students should be given opportunities to practice using those tools to sharpen appreciation for the discipline and to enhance success in upper-level courses. Students thus discover sociology across a clearly articulated curriculum—something particularly important in the

context of the transferability of student learning from two- to four-year institutions.

Introductory-level sociology courses, such as Introduction to Sociology, Contemporary Social Issues, and Social Problems, serve important functions by contributing to general education programs, attracting students to the major, and providing a foundation for later sociology coursework. Introductory courses expose students to the discipline; show them how sociology differs from, and partners with, other disciplines; outline career options; offer an analytical lens for students who take only the introductory course; and are a platform for students who will move forward in the major.

The goals and content for introductory courses should take into account the particular institutional environment in which they are offered. However, introductory courses tend to share common content objectives, which generally include presentation of the history of sociology as a discipline; questions that drive sociological inquiry; central concepts, perspectives, methods, theories, and skills; appraisals of inequalities; analyses of institutional arrangements; and consideration of social policies. Rather than developing a depth of knowledge in any one of these areas, the overarching objective is to help students develop a “sociological imagination,” also referred to as the “sociological eye” or “sociological perspective.”

Sociological theory courses provide foundations in both classical and contemporary theory across the breadth of theoretical contributions, from the classical canon to feminist, postmodern, and critical theory. When students take these courses at an intermediate level, they are able to apply theory work in advanced courses and capstone experiences.

Research methods courses provide foundational understandings of the demands of empirical inquiry. Methods courses should engage students with hands-on activities that can include conceptualization and operationalization, sampling, content analysis, experimentation, survey design, participant observation, and a variety of other approaches to collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. As with theory courses, research methods courses should be offered relatively early in the curriculum so that students can apply these skills in more advanced courses. Furthermore, advancing methodological and statistical skills can be integrated across the curriculum (see Recommendation 5).

Statistical analysis courses advance students' quantitative literacy and develop quantitative data analysis skills. As with courses on theory and methods, statistics courses should be taken before more advanced courses so that students may apply their quantitative skills throughout the curriculum. Some sociology programs allow their majors to take statistics courses taught by instructors in other disciplines, most commonly mathematics or another social science. Programs should carefully consider the implications of this option, as it can have an impact on the types of statistical activities in which students engage and the relative emphasis placed on the generation of statistics as opposed to the interpretation of statistical information. Statistical analysis taught by sociologists is preferred, as sociologists can more effectively integrate skills within sociological questions and problems.

Substantive topic courses show students how sociologists apply basic sociological theories, methods, concepts, and skills to various substantive areas. Such courses offer practice in doing sociology while simultaneously

introducing major areas of research. In the process, students learn how sociology matters in various arenas of social life and may find their own compelling topics for further study.

Capstone experience courses help majors bring together what they have learned about sociology. As students are further engaged in study in depth as they progress through the major, they become immersed in the inner workings of the discipline and become more skilled and knowledgeable student sociologists. In their capstone experience, students connect theory and methods with content knowledge. They demonstrate the implications of what they have learned. Without a capstone experience, students may leave a major dissatisfied, having studied sociological tools and topics but not having had an opportunity for disciplinary closure or a more concrete understanding of the utility of their major for employment and civic engagement.

Capstone courses typically take one of the following forms: a senior seminar in which previous learning is consolidated into a piece of scholarship resulting in a thesis, project, or research paper for presentation or publication; an internship or service learning seminar in which methods, theory, and substantive course knowledge are integrated with an applied experience; an overview seminar reviewing the field; or a seminar in which students integrate their coursework in studying a topical area designated by the faculty member (McKinney et al. 2004b; Hauhart and Grahe 2015). Some capstone experiences may be integrated into other courses, especially in very small programs; capstone experiences can integrate writing and preparation for job and graduate school applications. In addition, some evidence suggests

that online capstone courses can be as effective as face-to-face courses (Carmichael, Carmichael, and Leber-Gottberg 2014).

These required courses form the structure of a strong sociological curriculum. In their analysis of university catalogs and department websites for 77 institutions, Sweet, McElrath, and Kain (2014) find that most sociology programs offer these courses. Table 2 below reports the proportion of programs that currently require these elements of a sociology curriculum and where those courses are recommended to be placed in curricular progression.

Table 2: Percentage of Programs that Require Select Courses and Recommended Curricular Placement

Course	Percentage of Programs Requiring This Course a	Recommended Curricular Placement
Introduction to Sociology	94%	Early
Sociological Theory	100% (17% have 2 separate courses in classical & contemporary)	Intermediate
Research Methods	100% (46% require students to take a second course)	Intermediate
Statistics	78%	Intermediate
Capstone	78%	Late/Final Course
a. Percentages are from Sweet, McElrath, and Kain (2014).		

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

A substantial contribution of the second edition of *Liberal Learning and The Sociology Major* was the identification of the limitations of a “Ferris wheel” model for the sociology major, in which students can “hop on” and “hop off” with no defined starting or exit points. In its stead, the prior task force advocated for a sequenced curricula that increased in depth, complexity, and sophistication as students progressed through the major (Kain 2002; Roberts 2011).

Programs can vary in how progressive learning structures are integrated into the major. The volume and frequency of classes that can be offered may constrain the design of the major, as can the volume and patterns of student entry into the major. A three-tiered “beginning, middle, and end” approach moves students from initial exposure to knowledge, synthesis, and application. For example, “beginning” courses could include Introduction to Sociology and lower-level courses in substantive areas such as Criminology or Family. The “middle” tier might include courses in sociological theory, statistics and research methods, as well as more advanced topics courses. The final tier could include a capstone course and other application experiences such as an internship or community-based project. Tiers can be created through prerequisites (e.g., a student must complete Introduction to Sociology before enrolling in Research Methods, but can take these courses in any term), a cohort model (e.g., students take courses in a prescribed term and year, such as having all sociology majors take research methods in

fall of their junior year), or a combination of these models. What is essential is that the curriculum be structured to allow student learning to develop from gaining basic knowledge and skills to more advanced synthesis and application.

The structure of a sociology major can influence the learning structures in place at two-year colleges and guide four-year institutions in preparing to receive transfer students who can succeed in a timely way, whether they are arriving with an associate's degree or transferring from another four-year institution. Progressive learning structures also are helpful in preparing students for graduate school and careers. Introductory level courses can begin articulating for students how sociological knowledge can be applied in a variety of settings; intermediate courses can ask students to begin to apply their sociological skills; and advanced courses can require students to articulate for themselves how their skills and knowledge can be used after graduation. In addition, scaffolded concentrations or tracks within the sociology program, such as in diversity and inequality, social psychology, community development, or criminology, can foster students' intellectual development and provide them with the tools to successfully apply their skills and knowledge after they finish their baccalaureate degree.

Programs that offer online courses must consider how to effectively incorporate these courses into this progressive structure. Research seldom considers whether some sociology courses are better suited to the online classroom than others. The question of suitability is especially pertinent with respect to upper-level courses that are required for the major. When making decisions about offering upper-level courses online, programs should

consider several factors. First, programs should take into account student skills, which encompass technological expertise and capacities that tie directly to content. A reasonable question for programs is whether students have, or how they will acquire, the skills necessary for success in upper-level online courses, such as computer skills, writing skills, library research skills, and the ability to synthesize complex material. Second, programs should consider student preparation. For example, are students in upper-level online courses adequately prepared to conduct independent research projects? How will this preparation be assessed? Affective concerns are included here, too. Are students aware of the challenges and advantages of online courses and are they prepared to navigate them? Finally, programs should consider student access to technology, which is defined most notably by its absence. For less privileged students, access shrinks when devices and internet connections are less available and reliable. For students with disabilities, access is problematic if instructors do not implement the principles of universal design.⁹ This differential access to technology makes the increasing demands of upper-level courses more difficult for some students than others.

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.*

Upon completion of a sociology major, students should be able to identify and apply the tools necessary to conduct

⁹ For more information about social models of disability and assistive technology, see Burgstahler (2007), Brault (2012), and the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative (<https://www.w3.org/WAI/>).

ethical empirical sociological research. Such tools are typically learned by engaging in original research, and when feasible, doing so in multiple courses or in other student research programs. Research methods courses may require the production of a research proposal, and some methods courses may also require data collection and quantitative and qualitative analysis. Statistics courses ideally provide students with the opportunity to analyze secondary data sets and to produce univariate and bivariate analyses (e.g., cross-tabulation tables, chi-square tests, and difference of means tests). Some statistics courses may also introduce students to multivariate analyses.

Undergraduate research training that includes active learning is a high-impact educational practice that deepens students' engagement in their learning and their understanding of the discipline of sociology. In addition, research skills are highly valued in the job market. Surveys of employers show that they value college graduates' ability to research questions and develop evidence-based analyses, their capacity to conduct research collaboratively, and their first-hand understanding of how scientific knowledge is developed (Hart Research Associates 2015).

Research training for undergraduate sociology majors should not be consigned only to research methods and statistics courses, but rather embedded throughout the curriculum. Capstone courses, service learning courses, mid-level topics courses, introductory courses, and internships can incorporate opportunities for students to design and conduct original research, including field studies, program evaluation, observation, and multiple method studies or analysis of existing datasets. The ASA Integrating Data Analysis¹⁰ project demonstrated how

¹⁰ For more information, see the ASA TRAILS Resource Collection on "Integrating Data Analysis into the Undergraduate Curriculum" (<http://trails.asanet.org/>).

programs can infuse quantitative literacy across the curriculum (Howery and Rodriguez 2006).

Research training need not be limited to face-to-face courses. Instead, programs should ensure that courses across all modes of delivery offer comparable opportunities for students to engage in research experiences that develop skills for specifying questions as well as collecting and evaluating data. However, elements of the online environment can create additional challenges for research training. If students are engaged in primary data collection through observations, surveys, or interviews, their research topics and planned questions need to be reviewed carefully in light of the wide variety of contexts in which students and respondents may be located. As in face-to-face courses, instructors must ensure that students are engaging in ethical research practices, including approval by institutional review boards where required. Reliable access to the necessary technology and software must also be assured when asking students to download and analyze secondary data. In all cases, class size must be carefully considered in that students often require considerable one-on-one support when engaged in research activities.

Extensive collections of assignments and activities designed to teach research methods and engage students with empirical data—both qualitative and quantitative—are available online.¹¹ As a result, it may be easier to infuse web-based empirical studies into online course content. Because students within online courses are already asked to share information virtually through discussion board posts and assignment submissions, instructors can adapt

¹¹ For example, see activities compiled by Nathan Grawe at Carleton College, including those of a number of sociologists (e.g., Jill Bouma, Tim Kubal, Lynn Ritchie, Kathy Rowell, Jim Yih-Jin Young) teaching a range of courses (e.g., Introduction to Sociology, Sex and Gender, Problems of American Institutions, Sociology of Health and Illness) (http://serc.carleton.edu/sp/library/qr/across_curric.html).

these tools for the sharing and analysis of data within teams. In turn, these web-based tools enable instructors and student peers to assess the relative engagement and leadership of each research team member. Institutionally-supported training and support services related to online best practices for conducting scientific research in courses should be provided to all faculty members.

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

Questions about inequality and difference are central to our discipline's historical origins and to its contemporary practice, and they are of perennial concern to undergraduates. Stratification is closely connected with social structure and social change. Differentiation is a key process by which structural inequalities of race, social class, and gender are produced and maintained. Requiring sociology majors to engage with scholarship on the causes and consequences of inequality in local, national and global contexts will prepare them to be well informed citizens. In addition, surveys of employers consistently show that one of the qualities they seek in college graduates is the ability to work well in diverse teams. Former majors in sociology report using interpersonal skills even more often than research skills on the job, and the most frequently used interpersonal skill was the ability to work with people from other ethnic groups or cultures (Spalter-Roth, Senter, and Van Vooren 2010). These skills are fostered by sociology curricula that foreground critical analysis of differences and inequalities of race, social class, gender, and other axes of privilege.

Inclusive materials—work that considers race, social class, gender, age, sexuality, disability, nationality, and religion—can give voice to the experiences of all students in a class (Chin, Berheide, and Rome 2002). Where classroom demographics are homogenous, such readings open students' eyes to new realities (e.g., Pence and Fields 1999). Furthermore, course content pertaining to globalization and multiculturalism, with attention paid to cross-cultural, cross-national and comparative research, provides students with opportunities to become more aware of the world they may take for granted and the consequences of ethnocentrism.

Sociology programs can infuse global approaches as well as promote connections to other cultures in a variety of ways. Programs can offer courses with a cross-cultural approach or focus on particular geographic areas; courses can include readings about and by authors from other nations; and, invitations can be extended to international lecturers. In addition, programs can encourage students to take advantage of relevant co-curricular activities offered by international students or community groups such as festivals or multicultural food fairs; to take elective courses in other departments with a global or cross-cultural focus; to learn a another language; and to study abroad.

Joint programs with anthropology might accentuate shared themes, such as culture, the environment, immigration, and globalization. Connections with biology, psychology, and social work departments can also facilitate learning about difference from multiple perspectives.

The digital divide is another important dimension of difference that programs with online offerings can benefit from considering, including how stratification in the

digital environment has an impact on students and their learning experiences. As stratification is simultaneously the subject matter of sociology and also a factor having an impact on course delivery and student learning, teaching about stratification online presents both challenges and opportunities.

Asynchronous discussions of inequalities, which can be among the most sensitive and identity-relevant issues discussed, constitute an example of the way content and technology can interact. Compared to face-to-face interactions, the relative anonymity of online interactions may influence discussion content. The greater social distance between instructors and students can make it more difficult to moderate such discussions effectively. Because online students are free to post their ideas on a discussion board at any time, it may not be possible for instructors to detect inappropriate comments right away. Proactive strategies for mitigating this challenge include establishing clear “netiquette” guidelines focusing on identity-related issues. At the same time, the ease, safety, and relative anonymity of online interaction can contribute to student engagement and positive learning outcomes (Clark-Ibanez and Scott 2008).

Online courses also offer educational access to underserved groups, including members of the military, single parents, working adults, rural populations, students with transportation limitations or medical issues, and the 11 percent of undergraduates who report having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). For students with disabilities in particular, the learning process is likely to be affected by the extent to which they are able to access online content (e.g., making sure accurate closed captioning is available for any videos,

including alt-text for all images, and only posting PDFs that support optical character recognition).

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

A majority of sociology majors are attracted to sociology not only because of intellectual interest, but also for employment preparation (Spalter-Roth et al. 2012). Longitudinal data from the ASA's *Bachelor's and Beyond* surveys of recent sociology graduates show that they are more likely to be working in self-defined "career-type" jobs and more likely to be satisfied with their work when they have had opportunities to articulate and apply the sociological skills they learned as undergraduates. However, sociology graduates also report that they would have liked to have had more applied experiences, more opportunities for internships, and more help in finding a job after graduation (Senter, Spalter-Roth, and VanVooren 2015).

Recent surveys of employers provide data on the kinds of skills and experiences employers are looking for in college graduates (*Chronicle of Higher Education* 2012; Hart Research Associates 2015; National Association of Colleges and Employers 2015). The results of these surveys coalesce around two major conclusions: (1) employers value skills and knowledge that cut across majors, and (2) employers would like to see recent college graduates have more experience applying those skills. The skills that are most valued by employers include effective oral and written communication; effective teamwork; leadership; critical thinking and analytical reasoning, including quantitative skills; problem-solving; initiative and work-ethic; and

ethical judgment and decision-making. This list closely parallels the seven competencies identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2016) as necessary to prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace.

Fortunately, the potential for undergraduates with a sociology major to demonstrate these valued skills is high. The assignments and activities that many faculty already craft as part of the sociology major and its constituent courses teach the knowledge and skills that are critical to employment success. While faculty need not necessarily change the substance or rigor of what they teach, they should help students better understand and articulate the ways in which their sociology education is relevant for gratifying employment and a meaningful life.

There are numerous moments in the sociology curriculum to reinforce how sociological knowledge and skills are relevant to future careers, without detracting from the sociological content. Sociology programs can build into the curriculum and their program goals explicit efforts to help their students think about ways in which sociology can be useful in their career plans. Explicit connections between sociological content and careers can appear in the introductory course, the capstone, or throughout the curriculum and can be integrated in both face-to-face and online contexts. Some programs have one or two-credit courses devoted exclusively to career development. Many programs incorporate service learning in their courses or require internships to illustrate the applicability of course materials to a non-academic setting and to help students gain relevant work experience.

Co-curricular structures can also support students in preparing for meaningful post-baccalaureate employment. The ASA's *Bachelor's and Beyond* surveys found that students especially benefit from applied experiences and networking opportunities (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Senter 2013). For example, programs can partner with career services professionals on their campus to organize alumni/ae panels and networking events; events like these help students see the possibilities for how to use their sociological skills and to begin making professional connections that can be useful on the job market. Similarly, programs can host résumé writing, networking, and job search workshops that focus specifically on the experiences and skills most relevant for sociology students. Programs can create a collective résumé that models what a successful graduate should be able to claim in seeking employment. The creation of this template also provides the opportunity for the program to assess the extent to which its offerings deliver on the promises of the résumé.

Whether curricular or co-curricular, strong programs identify specific goals related to student career readiness and build structures to support students in meeting those goals. The specific goals and the relevant structures depend on institutional context, student demographics, and student needs. For example, a recent graduate with 20 years of full-time work experience will have a résumé that looks quite different than that of a traditionally-aged student who has worked only part-time summer jobs. But both of these students would benefit from a program that supports them in articulating and applying their sociology knowledge and skills in order to them prepare for the job market. Part Three of this document offer specific strategies to provide such support.

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

A successful sociology graduate is able to problem-solve and think creatively when dealing with personal, professional, and civic responsibilities. Therefore, connecting students' sociological education to knowledge and skills gained in other disciplines and the larger arena of liberal education enables them to more successfully negotiate our global society.

Since the early part of the 20th century, the twin aims of liberal education have been depth and breadth of knowledge. Depth of knowledge traditionally was assured by the extensive study of a single discipline via the major. Breadth of knowledge traditionally was assured by requiring some exposure to other disciplines beyond the major, usually through a general education program. As the boundaries between academic disciplines have blurred, both depth and breadth of knowledge are increasingly interdisciplinary. An increasing proportion of students are majoring in interdisciplinary fields, and general education and/or distribution requirements increasingly are accomplished through interdisciplinary courses (Johnson, Ratcliff, and Gaff 2004; Schneider 2004; Brint et al. 2009).

The rise of interdisciplinarity may be interpreted by some as evidence of the declining relevance of disciplines. In fact, interdisciplinarity depends upon disciplines as coherent and dynamic practices of inquiry. While interdisciplinarity often is conceptualized as integrative, it can also mean a diversity of approaches to inquiry and dialogue across methodological and ontological

disagreement (see Camic and Joas 2003; Klein 2010). Moreover, disciplinary majors can be strengthened by fostering interdisciplinary connections. Exposing sociology majors to related disciplines and to interdisciplinary connections can heighten students' awareness of the distinctive elements of the discipline of sociology, the points of overlap and connection between our discipline and others, and the contributions of sociology to newly emerging interdisciplinary fields of inquiry.

Instructors can incorporate material from related fields to highlight methodological and theoretical comparisons to sociology. Faculty advisors can steer students to relevant courses in other disciplinary or interdisciplinary programs that connect with what they are learning in sociology, or encourage students to pursue a minor or second major in those fields. These options both fortify sociological learning and provide students with additional skills and knowledge that can foster their career development (Blumenstyk 2016). Sociology faculty can be encouraged to participate in interdisciplinary programs, in cross-disciplinary co-teaching, in cross-disciplinary linked courses, or campus-wide initiatives such as first-year experience programs. Sociology programs also can collaborate with other programs to co-sponsor scholarly presentations or workshops. All of these options support connecting sociological knowledge with other fields of inquiry, as do co-curricular activities that allow students to explore intellectual convergence and divergence.

Recommendation 9: *Incorporate multiple pedagogies across the curriculum, including those that support active learning within and beyond the classroom.*

Over the last several decades, pedagogy has moved away from instructor-centered to student-centered teaching. Student-centered teaching puts students at the center of a process in which they become more autonomous and independent learners (Weimer 2002). Among the concerns raised in the larger public discourse about the value of college is the question of whether students are actually learning enough during their college careers (Arum and Roksa 2011). This concern, coupled with greater diversity in student populations (more first-generation and non-traditional students and more students entering college with less academic preparation), means that effective teaching strategies are critical. The use of multiple pedagogies and of active learning increases the likelihood that students achieve the learning outcomes of their sociology courses. To add to this complexity, the increasing number of and demand for fully or partially online courses means that sociology faculty, both full-time and contingent, must be able to incorporate and adapt effective active learning strategies to the online environment.

Active learning has a positive impact on student engagement, which has been associated with higher course completion rates and student retention (Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan 2000; McKinney 2007). Active learning includes a number of different models and approaches to teaching strategies and classroom experiences. Pedagogical approaches such as service learning, writing across the curriculum, game-based learning, and problem-based learning can be enhanced by educational technology, such as the use of blogs, discussion boards, and e-portfolios. Pedagogical strategies which promote active learning are especially important in the online learning environment, where increased

student engagement is vital given high incompleteness rates compared to face-to-face courses (Leeds et al. 2013).

Programs support the use of multiple pedagogies and of active learning by providing their faculty with resources and opportunities. Options include pedagogical training and workshops specific to the discipline, specialized training in online pedagogy, and participation in professional activities related to teaching and learning, such as conferences and the scholarship of teaching and learning. While access to training and resources and the needs of student populations will vary across institutional contexts, college and university administrations need to support sociology programs' efforts to address faculty development to improve learning.

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.*

Quality advising and mentoring are essential for student success while in school and after graduation. Advising encompasses the logistics of declaring the major, enrolling in appropriate courses, and meeting credentialing requirements for timely degree completion. Mentoring refers to relationships that foster identity formation and intellectual and professional growth. Both are associated with positive outcomes for students and thus students' attainment of their educational and career goals. In addition, increased pressures for on-time graduation at all levels, more stringent financial aid regulations, and students' heightened concerns about gaining employment after graduation make it critical that students receive appropriate guidance in their decision-making.

Sociology majors come from diverse backgrounds and include many nontraditional students whose needs may differ from traditional student populations; advising and mentoring systems should be prepared to meet the changing needs and experiences of all students. First-generation college students who major in sociology would especially benefit from advising and mentoring that recognize their challenges around interactions with faculty and the ability to enroll in internships (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Senter 2015). Students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds particularly benefit from holistic and proactive advising approaches. These approaches take into account nonacademic factors that affect students' academic experiences and they can help engage students actively in college life (Museus and Ravello 2010).

The traditional model of advising centers on the faculty-student relationship and includes components of both advising and mentoring. However, the national movement at the undergraduate level is increasingly toward professional advisors who are trained in the specifics of this changing landscape, including issues like course transferability, coursework covered by financial aid, and career preparation (Doubleday 2013). Advising in two-year institutions will focus especially on preparation for continued undergraduate study in sociology and information on course transfer. While some programs retain the traditional model of faculty advising of students in their programs, others may rely on other models that include professional advisors in an academic advising center, advisors housed in their programs, or a combination of staff and faculty support. Additional support can be integrated with other campus resources such as internship offices, graduate school preparation workshops, career services, and academic support services departments.

The actual advising model adopted by sociology programs will depend on larger institutional contexts, program mission, the characteristics and aspirations of the student population, and available resources and structures. All programs and their respective major or faculty advisors need to be aware of current degree completion requirements and what advising resources and support services exist for students. Faculty should also keep informed on resources that would help students with career preparation. In programs with online classes and degrees, faculty should be aware of resources and programs available for their online-only students, including online or other alternatives to face-to-face advising.¹² In institutions where students are served by professional advisors in a central academic advising center, programs need to work closely with advisors and communicate discipline-related information to assist students in their decision-making around career preparation or graduate study. It is important that sociology faculty are involved in this process, which may include curriculum planning, development of student handbooks for the undergraduate major, and assisting students with career goals and graduate study.

In institutions that follow a centralized advising model, faculty members continue to play an important role in mentoring to promote students' interpersonal, intellectual, and professional growth. Quality mentoring may help stem attrition, lead to greater involvement in college life, and develop networking and other career-related skills.

¹² For a checklist on best practices for advisement of online students, see the Distance Education Advising Commission Standards for Advising Distance Learners, developed by NACADA (http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Commissions/C23/Documents/DistanceStandards_000.pdf).

For example, the mentoring that might occur in faculty-student collaborative research could significantly affect employment opportunities. The mentoring approach used will be shaped by institutional context and may include program-wide activities, faculty involvement with student sociology clubs, peer mentoring, mentoring strategies for online degree students, and partnerships with career services. As with advising, mentoring relationships are particularly important for nontraditional, minority, and first-generation college students. Particularly in two-year institutions, mentoring can help students develop foundational knowledge and skills for further study in sociology and can support students through degree completion and transfer to baccalaureate programs.

Increasing concern over student retention, engagement, and degree completion has renewed interest in mentoring as a process for improving student success. Hence, programs may be able to access institutional support and resources to expand existing efforts or create new mentoring initiatives. Regular assessment and improvement of advising and mentoring programs fosters access and quality. Assessment will require generating faculty, staff, and student input about these programs, in addition to maintaining relevant data on students enrolled in the program over time. Institutions that rely heavily on contingent faculty (who typically have less time to engage with students and are less familiar with curricular requirements and available resources [Curtis, Mahabir and Vitullo 2016]), may have more difficulty providing sufficient advisement and mentorship to majors.

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

Strong research in the discipline, active engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, quality teaching based on this scholarship, and relevant service are hallmarks of a thriving department. Institutional and program cultures that value such engagement make it possible to advance the discipline and effectively teach and practice current knowledge in the field. Programs should recognize and reward successful teaching practices, new research on teaching and learning, contributions to sociological knowledge through faculty research and publication, and relevant service activities.

A number of practices can help promote this engagement. Suggestions for supporting disciplinary research include providing internal research funding, seed funds to help solicit external funding, time for research, research assistants, funds for professional travel, and funds for research expenses. Offices of research support on campus should receive substantial funding and support. The same strategies will help promote the scholarship of teaching and learning. A well-funded and active center for teaching and learning will help focus attention on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Many such offices have targeted program offerings particularly relevant for new faculty members, faculty members in particular disciplines, and topically specific workshops. The scholarship of teaching and learning should be included in an institution's tenure and promotion policies and valued as scholarly activity. Professional development and opportunities for pedagogical training and innovation should also be made available to adjunct and other contingent faculty.

Pedagogical innovation can be supported through funding, recognition of such activities, inclusion in evaluation procedures for promotion and tenure, and creating a

climate that values such innovations. Assigned time for course development and redevelopment should be offered. Pedagogical innovations also can be promoted by dedicating faculty meeting time to sharing teaching strategies, holding colloquia, and engaging in meaningful problem solving around assessment and student learning.

Service to the public, the institution, the profession, and governmental agencies should be recognized and supported. Such activities reinforce the importance of disciplinary research that lies at the base of effective service. Finally, engage students in research, teaching, and service activities. Students often serve as successful teaching assistants and thrive on doing research directly with faculty members. Indeed the support of student/faculty collaborative research is one way to transform the false opposition of teaching vs. research to a more productive culture of teaching and research. This paradigm shift can benefit student learning, faculty productivity, and both student and faculty satisfaction (Kain 2006).

Expectations and requirements for faculty regarding research and publication, service, and teaching will vary depending on institutional contexts. Hence, the relative emphasis on faculty development in research, teaching, and service will reflect the characteristics and needs of individual programs and institutions. However, all programs benefit from a respectful culture that works to understand the contributions of all the dimensions of professional engagement and the importance of faculty development to build and sustain skills over the course of a career.

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

Well-designed assessment that is created by faculty, focused on student learning, and includes multiple measures should result in reliable data used to sustain and improve program quality. Sociologists are particularly well suited for assessment work given their training in measurement issues and their awareness of the role of social contexts and the impact of organizational structures and cultures.

Assessment works best under several conditions (see Astin et al. 1996). First, effective assessment requires clearly articulated and implemented learning outcomes in both individual courses as well as in the program. Learning outcomes help keep faculty and students focused on what the faculty have decided is important within courses and across the program for student progress.

Second, course learning outcomes should be integrated with program outcomes to promote cumulative learning and assessment across the curriculum. Often course learning outcomes exist without, or are insufficiently linked to, program outcomes.

Third, course assessments of learning indicators should be linked with both course and program outcomes so that students repeatedly see the outcomes listed and experience progressively more challenging assessments of their mastery of them. Assignments, papers, and the like in each course should be connected to course learning outcomes so that students understand the course structure and how it connects with the larger program goals.

Fourth, effective assessment yields data that are used to modify students' educational experiences by improving both individual courses as well as curricula and programs. Data accumulated during assessment work often is not shared with individual faculty members or departments as a whole so that they can make appropriate changes. Some programs have found that a productive mechanism for using assessment results to modify the sociology curriculum is to have an annual meeting or retreat at the end of the academic year with the explicit focus of using assessment results to plan course and program changes for the coming year.

Fifth, campus cultures that value and support data-driven program and course modifications will enhance the utility of assessment. Faculty members should become involved with assessment at the campus level to help develop a supportive culture and should make assessment a regular part of departmental decision making.

Sixth, assessment has the best outcomes when it is a continual and cumulative process rather than a one-shot event resulting in a static product. Doing assessment once every five years, for example, reinforces a "do it and done" approach that limits program and course modifications. As assessment becomes a regular activity, it becomes part of program and campus cultures that value regular reflection and response.

Seventh, students should be involved in the assessment process given that much of the data come from them. Students can help faculty understand the successes and failures of instructional activities, can help formulate the assessment measures, and can help understand the implications of the results.

In short, successful assessment must be comprehensive, systematic, thorough, and iterative. For more information about how to design and implement effective assessment, see *Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major* (Lowry et al. 2005).

Part Three: Strategies

To support sociology programs in the implementation of these recommendations, additional information and practical suggestions are offered here for teaching the foundations of the sociology curriculum using the Sociological Literacy Framework, preparing students for employment, and applying effective strategies in online education.

The Sociological Literacy Framework¹³

Sociology programs in the United States reflect the wide variety of research and theoretical perspectives across our discipline, and they provide students with distinctive experiences. While honoring this diversity of perspectives, the curriculum for the undergraduate sociology major should include the concepts, theories and methodological skills that are the foundation of the discipline. The Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF) provides a firm basis upon which diverse programs can build a curriculum that teaches students about the discipline of sociology and prepares students for careers or further study (Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016). The essential concepts and competencies in the SLF provide a developmental roadmap for building students' knowledge and skills as they move through their undergraduate careers. Note that the emphasis of the SLF is the *undergraduate* major and measurements of student proficiency around the

¹³ We gratefully acknowledge permission from Susan Ferguson and William Carbonaro (2016) to use their work as the basis of this section of the report.

SLF must be calibrated appropriately to that level. The fact that professional sociologists in both academic and applied settings also make use of these concepts and competencies—albeit with demonstrations at higher levels of sophistication and complexity—speaks to the validity of the framework as reflective of the disciplinary core.

The main goal of a well-designed sociology curriculum is to catalyze a change in how students think about social phenomena by learning and applying sociological concepts, theories, and skills that enable them to view the social world as a sociologist does. The SLF offers a set of ideas and guidelines around which programs can begin or continue conversations about their curriculum, when concepts or skills should be introduced, and how they will be reinforced and deepened through additional coverage in required and elective courses at the beginning, middle, and end of the major.

This approach can be used for considering course goals for introductory courses as well as for curriculum goals at two-year colleges. In these contexts, learning outcomes can incorporate the suggestions outlined in Recommendation 2 for foundational knowledge in the early career of sociology undergraduates. For example, a two-year college may choose to incorporate activities using quantitative and qualitative data analysis in the learning outcomes of introductory and sophomore-level classes so that students are ready for more advanced skills in a research methods course after transferring to a four-year program.

The essential concepts and skills of the SLF are intentionally broad and open-ended, so that they can be appropriately tailored for different programs and different courses. Thus, the SLF can be used as offered or adapted when

developing or revising student learning outcomes for courses in the sociology curriculum. This structure allows for variability in terms of specific context while ensuring that sociology majors will be able to employ the major concepts and methodological tools that define the discipline. Many programs will go beyond the minimum guidelines represented in the SLF. The strength of the SLF as an exemplar is that it allows for academic freedom while advancing the knowledge and skills that will help students achieve their career goals and be engaged citizens.

An expanded description of the SLF from “Measuring College Learning in Sociology” (Ferguson and Carbonaro 2016) follows. Additional resources are available from the ASA with suggested practices for a variety of ways to teach these concepts and competencies. They include but are not limited to TRAILS, *Teaching Sociology*, the ASA pre-conference on teaching, and regular workshops at the annual meetings. All faculty who teach undergraduates are encouraged to take advantage of these resources.

The Sociological Literacy Framework

Adapted from Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) and used with permission.

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. Below, each essential concept is briefly summarized with a description of related themes and topics.

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 grounded and that differentiate it from other social sciences. Topics related to this concept include: the founding theoretical traditions; 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 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.

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 the micro, meso, and macro-levels 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 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 nonprobability 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 differentiate 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:** Sociology students who are able to use all of these essential concepts and competencies of the Sociological Literacy Framework are better prepared 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.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Association of American Colleges & Universities launched this advocacy initiative in 2005.

Supporting Student Career Readiness

There is ample evidence that sociology's integration of communication, problem-solving, quantitative, ethical, and applied skills translates into graduates' career readiness and positive employment outcomes. The ASA's 2012 *Bachelor's and Beyond Survey*¹⁵ found that students major in sociology for a variety of reasons. They are drawn to sociological concepts, they want to improve society, and they also want to prepare for a job or graduate education. A majority of sociology graduates are using a number of practical skills related to their major in their current job, including organizational and leadership skills, working with diverse groups, working in teams, and using a computer to locate information (Senter, Spalter-Roth, and Van Vooren 2015). This survey also found that graduates who strongly agreed that the concepts and skills they learned in sociology are helpful on the job were more likely to report being in a career-type job, were more likely to be very satisfied with the job, and were more likely to have received a variety of job advancements.

However, sociology majors can still be uncertain of the connection between the skills they are acquiring and their future employment. McKinney and Day found that sociology majors do not describe themselves as sociologists or even future sociologists: "We're going to get a piece of paper that says we are a sociologist, like sometimes I think

¹⁵ For more information on the 2012 survey, Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, see <http://www.asanet.org/research-publications/research-sociology/research-projects/bachelors-and-beyond-2012>. For the 2005 survey, What Can I Do With a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology?, see <http://www.asanet.org/research-publications/research-sociology/research-projects/bachelors-and-beyond-2005>.

of myself [as one], but not really' and 'I don't really think I have the qualifications to be [a sociologist] professionally'" (2012:150). Additionally, majors are not likely to "sell" themselves as sociologists nor to explain their sociological skill-set to future employers, perhaps in part because relatively few job ads list "sociology major" as a qualification. Spalter-Roth et al. reported from a national survey that seniors majoring in sociology were "not aware of strategies that could enhance their ability to search for employment that draws on sociological skills and concepts. Relatively few students listed these sociological skills on their résumés or discussed them in job interviews" (2010: 318).

Short interviews with faculty at a range of institutions¹⁶ and a review of TRAILS resources on supporting sociology graduates' career readiness point to a number of practical strategies that sociology programs and individual faculty can implement to prepare students for meaningful employment and address students' "awareness gap" regarding their skills. These strategies include: embedding support of student career readiness in program goals; identifying opportunities to integrate career readiness throughout the program's curriculum; and making effective use of networks on and off campus.

¹⁶ In fall 2015 and spring 2016, the Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Task Force posted notices in Footnotes, on the Teaching Sociology listserv (TEACHSOC), and the Teaching with a Sociological Lens Facebook page asking for examples of the curricular and co-curricular innovations and best practices that sociology programs use to support students' transition to employment after graduation. Individuals representing 19 programs responded, and Task Force members conducted short telephone interviews with them to learn more about how these programs are helping their students prepare for employment.

Strategies to Support Student Career Readiness and Transition to Post-Baccalaureate Employment

Embed supporting student career readiness in program goals. As discussed in Recommendation 7, effective sociology programs provide curricular and co-curricular structures to help students develop and apply their knowledge and skills in ways that will be useful to them after finishing their degree. Ideally, these structures are linked to relevant program goals and outcomes. The specific nature of these goals and how to achieve them will depend on institutional context and mission, program size, student needs, and curricular structure.

Assessing student needs and aspirations is a critical step in supporting students in their transition to employment. Why did students choose the sociology major? What skills and knowledge are they gaining in the sociology program and what is being missed? How prepared are students to apply these skills and knowledge after they graduate? To what sorts of employment and career trajectories do the students aspire? Do students know how to articulate their sociology skills and knowledge to potential employers? Are students aware of campus resources to help them develop their résumés, apply for internships, and network with alumni/ae?

Once programs have answers to such questions, appropriate structures can be developed to meet the needs of students within institutional and program context. Sociology programs should periodically reflect on their goals and the structures in place to achieve those goals as part of their regular program reviews and assessments, and then clearly communicate these goals to students and other constituencies.

Identify opportunities to integrate employment preparation throughout the curriculum. Preparation for employment can be integrated throughout all levels of the curriculum, both inside and outside the classroom. As with any skill, students benefit from having repeated opportunities to engage with and apply employment-related issues with increasing levels of complexity. For example, discussions of how sociological training could be utilized in the work world can start as early as the introductory course. Some programs list student familiarity with career opportunities as one of the learning objectives for the course, and exposing students to career possibilities for sociology majors can also help to recruit students to the major. Intermediate-level courses such as research methods can include a career component by highlighting how each research skill is used in work settings or by partnering with community or campus organizations to develop an applied project that students in the course carry out. Students also can develop career readiness in capstone courses. This work can be done in a traditional capstone seminar where students engage in independent research and publicly disseminate the results of their projects, or in specific assignments that ask students to develop résumés and build job search skills.

Faculty can encourage students to think about careers without creating separate units on careers and without distracting from the sociological content of the course. For example, faculty might create assignments in introductory, methods, or statistics courses that require students to locate and summarize data from the Occupational Outlook Handbook, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, or the national studies of employers from AAC&U. Assignments in intermediate courses on organizations, work, stratification, and gender can require students to reflect on how the

concepts and theories addressed in the course shed light on their own career aspirations and prospects.

Programs also can offer or require students to take courses that are specifically focused on career readiness, or include career readiness units in the capstone course. The purpose of career development courses or pro-seminars, which typically are one or two credits, is to discuss ways to encounter the job market with a bachelor's degree in sociology. They can be offered early in the curriculum to help orient students to the major, or to seniors to help them transition to employment. In these courses, students explore career interests, develop a résumé, practice job interview skills, and network with people in their career interest areas. The resources available from the ASA's *Bachelor's and Beyond Surveys* and the ASA publication, "21st Century Careers with an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology" can be especially useful in these courses (see Appendix).

Some sociology programs make a distinction between the B.A. and B.S. degrees, with the latter designed to have a more explicit career focus. Programs can require students to complete cognate courses in grant writing, non-profit administration, social welfare, public relations, GIS, or other areas of study available at a particular institution. Similarly, some programs have developed concentrations within the sociology major — e.g., in criminology or social welfare — that provide students with a strong background in sociology while also emphasizing a link to employment. Some institutions have electronic badges or certificates that allow students to highlight specific skills they have acquired throughout their undergraduate programs. Sociology is well-positioned to create badges or certificates in areas such as cultural competency, survey design, data collection, statistical analyses and report writing.

Students also benefit when they have experience applying their sociological skills in applied courses, service learning, and/or internships. Applied sociology, which focuses on applying “sociological knowledge or research tools on a particular problem identified by some client with some practical outcome in mind” (Ballantine 2010:1), prioritizes hands-on development and application of sociological knowledge and skills in nonacademic settings. Similarly, service learning and other kinds of community-based learning asks students to work in partnership with community organizations to address a social need. Internships give students hands-on experience in an organization that can help them link classroom and applied learning. Internships are especially valued by employers. In both the 2015 AAC&U survey and the 2012 *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey, employers identified internships as the most important credential for applicants to have on their résumés to improve the likelihood of being considered for a job. Internships provide students with an opportunity not only to learn valued skills, but to demonstrate their ability to exercise them. Like employers, sociology students also value applied experiences and internships, and many sociology graduates wish they had more opportunity to explore these options (Senter, Spalter-Roth, and Van Vooren 2015). Internship programs require significant investments of faculty time and resources, and programs should support faculty in this work.

Make effective use of networks that support students’ transitions to employment. Both on and off campus networks can expose students to the various ways that a sociology major can be applied in a nonacademic setting and help students make connections to explore their own career interests. For example, student groups, such

as a sociology club¹⁷ or a chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta, the International Sociology Honor Society, can sponsor networking opportunities that bring majors and alumni/ae together, in social media, for job fairs, and in guest lectures. These connections can help majors see how their sociological skills can be professionally useful in today's job market. Successful alums can show majors the myriad job paths where sociology, and liberal education in general, can be useful. Fostering student networks with program graduates helps current students imagine the wider possibilities about how they can use their sociology education and thus broadens their understanding of sociology and its application.

Most institutions have units or individuals in career services or alumni relations whose responsibility it is to keep in touch with graduates and to help current students prepare for the job market. Building relationships with these units can help sociology programs support their students. For example, career services professionals can be coached on the specific kinds of skills that sociology students gain, and then invited to classes to conduct a workshop on résumé development that highlights these skills. Professionals in the alumni office can help programs keep in touch with their graduates and can co-sponsor networking opportunities in different employment areas.

Finally, the ASA network can help support students' career readiness. Various links to the ASA website can be embedded in the program's own webpage, including

¹⁷ For more information on sociology student clubs, see the ASA's *The Sociology Club Guide: Ideas for Generating Student Involvement in Departments of Sociology*, edited by Valerie Jiggetts and Karina Havrilla (http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/Sociology_club.pdf).

the Careers in Sociology page¹⁸ and the Student Forum.¹⁹ These pages include a wealth of information about connecting the sociology major to employment in the 21st century, as well as about how to connect to sociology student networks. The ASA also maintains a presence in a wide array of digital communities, including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, to which students can connect via links on the program's webpage. Programs can join the ASA Department Affiliates program that has a number of benefits including access to the quarterly ASA undergraduate student newsletter, *The Independent Variable*, and professional development, teaching, and department leadership and management webinars.

¹⁸ <http://www.asanet.org/career-center/careers-sociology>

¹⁹ <http://www.asanet.org/asa-communities/student-forum>

Effective Online Teaching and Learning

Online instruction is an integral part of the education landscape and, where offered, should be included in regular program planning, assessment, and review. This inclusion can ensure that online offerings fit well within the curriculum and that online courses are undifferentiated from face-to-face courses in terms of quality and who teaches them. A review of the literature on online instruction and interviews²⁰ with faculty members who teach sociology online yielded three main findings and six suggested practices for effective use of online education in sociology.

Main Findings

Online instruction is simply another strategy for teaching and learning, with its own strengths and weaknesses. Instruction in sociology occurs across a continuum from face-to-face to web-enhanced to hybrid/blended to fully online courses. Online instruction uses technology as one of many ways to deliver a rigorous curriculum. As with other strategies, there are advantages and disadvantages to online instruction.

²⁰ In summer 2015, the Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Task Force posted notices in Footnotes, on the Teaching Sociology listserv (TEACHSOC), the Teaching with a Sociological Lens Facebook page, and invitations were sent to TRAILS subscribers, Teaching and Learning Section members, and regional associations seeking participation from ASA members who taught sociology courses online. Individuals representing 26 programs volunteered, and Task Force members conducted short telephone interviews with them to learn more about their experiences with teaching sociology online.

A recently published exhaustive meta-analysis of the literature on online education concluded that 92 percent of relevant studies addressing online education in multiple disciplines find that online education is at least as effective as, if not better than, traditional formats in terms of typical end-of-course measures (Nguyen 2015). Other research supports the view that appropriately structured online courses can provide the type of intense participation and potential for practice and review that leads to improved learning (Hanover Research Council 2009). Some researchers have found that the online modality helps quieter students engage in the course and contributes to the creation of a community of learners (Vesely, Bloom, and Sherlock 2007).

The faculty interviewed by Task Force members also identified strengths of online education. For example, they valued the flexibility that the online schedule provided both them and their students. Faculty also reported that the format provided access to a more diverse community than the more traditional classroom context and that they got to know their online students better than their face-to-face students.

Some faculty observed that in conversations around difficult topics, students were more open and vulnerable in the asynchronous discussion format. Moreover, there was the added benefit of being able to revisit the conversations for additional reflection and review. Perhaps this advantage is linked to the intentionality and control surrounding presentation of self that is possible in the online context where students can use avatars and have the time and space to consciously choose when and how to disclose information about themselves. Other faculty reported that the relative anonymity of online instruction

and the lack of readable body language cues often made conversations about difficult topics addressed in sociology especially challenging. The asynchronous environment required faculty to be vigilant about student comments and more intentional about getting feedback about how things were going.

Online education also has challenges. In a study of 118 sociology courses, Bergstrand and Savage (2013) found that students reported learning less in online sociology courses and rated their online courses less highly. The slightly lower ratings for online sociology courses reported by these authors is in contrast to Nguyen's (2015) conclusion noted above that online education is at least as effective as, if not better than, traditional formats in terms of typical end-of-course measures. It should be noted that Bergstrand and Savage (2013) studied 21 graduate student instructors at one school, did not include individual student demographic and other data, and used student perception data, whereas Nguyen's (2015) meta-analysis examined dozens of studies in multiple disciplines using more concrete measures of learning outcomes. It is also possible that sociology may be less conducive to the online format. Additional research is needed to determine if the differences between these two sets of findings are due to sampling and measurement issues, distinctions in disciplinary subject matter, institutional context, or other factors. Future research should also help identify the specific elements of online instruction that contribute to or detract from successful learning and how those elements might vary across disciplines and student characteristics.

While outcome measures may be at least relatively comparable, lower grades and higher drop rates are common in online courses (Xu and Jagers 2013). The

faculty interviewed for this volume mentioned that both students and faculty had to invest more time and energy in online courses in order to produce learning outcomes that were similar to traditional formats. This added time investment becomes intensified when institutions employ rigorous external guidelines, such as those outlined by Quality Matters, a well-established and highly regarded online course certification and assessment program. Access to sufficiently robust technology—including computers and high speed internet—was also cited as a barrier to learning online, and it was noted that English fluency and technological literacy can be additional barriers for many students.

As with any teaching strategy, online instruction comes with particular strengths and weaknesses. The goal is to become familiar with the advantages while minimizing the limitations (Clark-Ibanez and Scott 2008). Many faculty members we spoke with noted that teaching online for the first time exposed them to the wealth of digital content available, which enhanced both their online courses and their face-to-face courses as well.

Online and face-to-face offerings should be as comparable as possible. This commitment means not only that courses are offered in various formats but that these courses use similar active learning approaches and have comparable learning objectives, deliverables, and transferable skills. Online courses should be included in assessments and be connected to teaching evaluation processes. As with face-to-face delivery, these assessments need to be embedded into the course assignments as much as possible and the findings need to be reflected and acted upon. Comparability should apply to professional autonomy, salary, compensation, and professional development

opportunities for instructors as well. Ultimately, faculty interested in teaching online must first be concerned with effective teaching in any context and then make appropriate modifications for an online environment that enhances student learning.

Adopt the practice of matching task to talent with faculty teaching assignments. Faculty should be trained in effective pedagogies across all course formats, and teaching assignments should be made based on aptitude, willingness, and enthusiasm. It is critical to faculty and student success that programs avoid creating stratification systems through online program development in which only untenured or adjunct faculty members are assigned to teach online. Program cultures should avoid tacitly (or explicitly) reinforcing the idea that online instruction is less valid than face-to-face instruction. Putting a faculty member into an online course at the last minute with no support, for example, creates the potential for low quality education and poor working conditions. While this practice may be counter to institutional economic incentives for adopting online curriculum delivery platforms and rapidly responding to shifting enrollments, it is imperative that programs resist practices that result in online courses becoming under-resourced and marginalized.

Suggestions for Teaching Online

High quality online education exhibits many of the same characteristics as other forms of educational delivery: it is student-centered; it is included as part of an integrated and progressive curriculum; it has clearly identified learning objectives; it has relevant and quality assessment activities; and it is offered by qualified and well-supported instructors who have access to adequate resources to do their jobs

effectively. However, online education also presents unique challenges. Six practices especially relevant for teaching sociology online are identified below.

1. *Use sociological principles for increased learning.*

Students learn more from courses informed by the sociological eye. As sociologists, we know that the socially constructed nature of the educational system informs every aspect of online learning. Course management systems used in online delivery, such as Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, etc., serve as the frames within which roles are defined, norms are articulated, identities are formed, social bonds are created, and deviance is defined. The interactions that occur online have effects on, and are affected by, cultural inequalities. The online environment can be a place where norms are redefined, inequalities addressed, and biases tempered. Perhaps the most striking difference between online and face-to-face teaching is the shifting of power between students and faculty. The traditional “sage on the stage” role for the instructor by necessity morphs into that of designer, advocate, facilitator, and coach in the online context. Faculty members and students both need to be resocialized into these roles. Benson et al. (2002) offer further discussion of the ways that sociological perspectives help understand the structural and cultural contexts of online instruction.

Faculty interviewed for this volume agreed that sociological concepts heavily inform the online experience. One faculty member uses Collins' (2005) *Interaction Ritual Chains* as a way to help socialize students to the online culture. Another pointed out that the demand for online teaching in some areas comes from the administration and not the students, and is a reflection of McDonalidization (Ritzer 2012). The institutionally imposed standardized courses

and rubrics of many online curricula are illustrations of McDonaldization as well. Faculty time and activities at some institutions are monitored and assessed for time on task measures in much of the same way that Frederick Taylor (1911) described standardized and routinized work. One interviewee commented that online instruction is an irrational response consistent with Glassner's (2010) "culture of fear" argument and that caution should be used so that sociologists do not build themselves out of jobs by focusing on fixing the wrong problems.

Faculty were keenly aware that because the school is a bureaucratized rational system, they needed to re-create community through engagement strategies, such as discussion boards and group projects. Other participants thought that sociology was especially well suited to teaching online because it can be learned and experienced anywhere, anytime. Another instructor stated that teaching online runs the risk of isolating students who cannot gain a robust understanding of society by sitting alone at their computers; this instructor added assignments to his course that required students to socially engage. In short, when sociological insights are consciously and explicitly used to inform the design and development of a course, students learn not only from the content delivery, but also from analyzing the culture, structure, and systems of stratification present in the online context.

2. Remember that good teaching is good teaching.

Online course development should be based on the same pedagogically sound design principles one uses with any course. An effective comparative model is presented by Graham et al. (2001) who offer an online application of the "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," originally published in the AAHE Bulletin

(Chickering and Gamson 1987). Good practice in all classes encourages student-faculty contact. In the online environment this means that instructors should provide clear guidelines for interactions with students. Instructor and student profiles could enhance student-faculty contact. Faculty need to be present in their teaching; this approach is especially critical in online classes (Pelz 2010).

A second good practice (Graham et al. 2001) encourages cooperation among students. Early online courses focused on the digital presentation of reading materials and individual written assignments and had little to no student interaction. Online courses need well-designed discussion boards and group assignments to leverage this cooperative benefit. Group projects can be facilitated with online software such as Google Docs.

Using active learning techniques is a third good practice that is vital in the online as well as face-to-face context. Online classes, for example, might be organized around large and small projects, might include student presentations, and might employ case studies. Fourth, good practice means giving prompt feedback, which is especially time intensive in online environments but critical to engagement and learning. Rubrics can help streamline the feedback and dictation software can make it more efficient. The fifth principle emphasizes time on task. Our interviewees consistently noted that explicit deadlines and guidelines, as well reminders, perhaps sent by text, enhance online student success. The sixth good practice emphasizes high expectations, which has been an area of contention for some faculty contemplating teaching online. Again, rubrics can help establish and make visible such expectations. Sharing competent student work as examples can also help.

Finally, the seventh good practice is that faculty be respectful of diverse talents and ways of learning. Online instruction has the potential to reach the most underserved students who might not otherwise have access to postsecondary education. Meeting the varied needs of these students is critical. For example, videos and observation exercises might be used in addition to readings. Students could be given choices regarding assignments.

3. Handle the unique logistics of the online environment effectively. Having noted that good practice transcends teaching modalities, programs should recognize the ways in which online learning is different and respond accordingly. For example, most interviewed faculty reported that, unlike their face-to-face classes, they had to have their online courses completely designed before the start of the semester, which forced them to be much more organized. As a result, they often felt that their courses lacked flexibility, so backups and contingencies had to be part of the initial course design. Faculty have to be much more explicit in their instructions and expectations and must provide more feedback through discussion boards and grading; again, good rubrics help. Similarly, students write more, including more assignments and more communication with the instructor and other students in the class. All this writing creates an environment in which everyone potentially reads more as well. Because increased writing means the grading load is also increased, faculty need to adopt course designs that use self and peer assessment effectively.

In some ways, time is experienced differently in online courses. Videos and lectures need to be much shorter. Voice-overs on a set of slides are more effective than

watching a person saying the same thing (O'Rourke, Main, and Cooper 2014). Asynchronicity has to be planned for, as do time zone differences and bandwidth restrictions. Students who would never attempt to complete an entire face-to-face class in one week sometimes assume that a week of intensive work can get them through an online course. Because online instruction is so contact intensive, faculty need to get in the habit of posting answers to prompts in announcements and FAQ pages. The online experience often gets defined as less visible and, therefore, as less important. Both faculty and students report that it is easier to forget or lose track of an online class because of its virtual state. Because face-to-face obligations tend to take precedence, effective programs design courses that create and maintain digital visibility and momentum toward completion.

Effective and appropriate inclusion of multimedia resources matters even more in the online context, compared to face-to-face instruction. Online students need variation in delivery for improved learning and for relevant examples of the course content. Faculty need to be trained and supported so they can gain competence in their use of technology. At the most basic level, faculty need to understand how their students are accessing the course material and use mobile friendly resources when possible. Many textbooks are now available in smartphone friendly formats, for example, and many textbooks now include audio options that allow students to listen as they commute. Students should be reminded that a smart phone is not a computer and it may be unrealistic for them to think they can successfully complete the course if that is their only digital access. Multimedia can also be a barrier to learning for students with visual, auditory, perceptual, and cognitive needs that are not easily met by typical

delivery modalities. Faculty and students would benefit from adopting a commitment to the principles of Universal Design in Learning. These principles were developed by learning accessibility experts and guide faculty to create courses that strive for the greatest amount of accessibility for the greatest number of users that ultimately eliminates barriers for all learners.

Cheating occurs in all class formats, and the literature suggests that academic honesty differs little in face-to-face and online classes (Haynie 2014). The online environment does facilitate some types of cheating, such as having someone else take the course or having multiple students take an exam together. Tests, test banks, essays, papers and cribbed assignments are commonly available online. Students potentially have access to everything and everyone when taking tests and completing assignments online so effective programs need to design course elements with that potential in mind. There are systems for monitoring students by video and restricted internet access while taking exams, although costs may be an issue and it takes time for someone to review all the videos. In order to reduce cheating, recall and definitional questions can become application questions and case studies with current events. When multiple-choice tests are used they can be strictly timed or used for mastery based formative assessment or adaptive release (the ability to release content based on a set of rules such as time or score received on earlier assignments). Group projects might use synchronous and asynchronous presentations. Google Docs can be used for group projects so that instructors can see exactly what each student contributed.

4. *Set clear expectations.* Many of those interviewed indicated that online classes are more difficult to teach. What campuses say happens in online classes and what actually happens may be two different things for both students and faculty. Often online courses are advertised to nontraditional students as more flexible and then they are surprised by strict deadlines and expectations to meet online synchronously. Often the students most likely to sign up for online courses are the ones who need the most support for college in general (Haynie 2015). As a result, some campuses restrict first-year students from taking online courses. Student preparedness matters greatly, so being explicit about the course technology requirements and online skills and not making assumptions about their familiarity with technology is critical. The faculty interviewed for this volume confirmed that all types of classes from introduction to sociology to statistics to capstone can be taught online but they take significant design and implementation time and may require different implementation strategies.

5. *Do not reinvent the wheel.* Course management systems have come a long way in helping to facilitate online teaching and learning. Many have publicly available courses in a variety of disciplines as examples. Structure and organization matter more in online courses but the relevant design choices can inform face-to-face classes as well. Think iteratively as you build out a course and use existing resources liberally with appropriate citations. Many campuses have course designers and technology specialists to help faculty develop their online courses. They can also help you locate accessibility resources available on your campus, like captioning and electronic resources. There are also substantial online resources and training to help faculty. For example, there are programs that can make

video clips interactive (Zaption and WireWax are examples). This is a way to test for understanding as well as to create adaptive release for sequential course elements. Be sure to observe copyright rules. Also, note your administration's approach to intellectual property and be informed about who owns your course once it is posted. Some campuses follow the practice that if you received a stipend to develop the course, the course belongs to the school and can be assigned to any appropriate faculty member.

6. *Imagine the possibilities.* While the weaknesses of online instruction are evident, the potential is unlimited. Online instruction can provide high quality education to students who would never have access to higher education, but campuses must focus on rigor and equity. Instructors can leverage scarce resources by working with other campuses, using digital resources, and exploring the potential of virtual worlds. For example, a recent study demonstrated how virtual reality can be used to increase empathy for those in poverty (Bae 2016). Using TED talks enables instructors to expose students to world-class speakers about many sociological topics. Students at universities around the world can work together in an online course on globalization and social justice (Bell et al. 2015; see also Coates 2012). Students in Anchorage can take classes with students from various subcultures throughout the state of Alaska and can thereby become more informed and aware citizens of their state. Let your imagination run pedagogically wild with creative online teaching opportunities. Take advantage of the many resources available to faculty for assistance with the design and implementation of online courses.²¹

²¹ See the resource list maintained by the ASA at www.asanet.org/teaching-online

In short, incorporate quality online instruction when the departmental, program, and institutional contexts warrant it. Conceptualize online instruction within a larger framework of a well-designed sociological curriculum in a way that does not isolate online courses but integrates them in a holistic and comprehensive sociology program.

Part Four: Conclusion

Rigorous and high quality undergraduate programs in sociology must prepare students for 21st century life and work. Strong undergraduate programs are essential to the development of future graduate students and scholars in the field. Thus, the recommendations in this report can serve as a foundation for assessing and improving the overall quality of teaching, learning, and scholarship throughout the discipline of sociology.

This third iteration of *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major*, like its predecessors, has developed critical and authoritative guidelines that address the technological, political, and economic conditions of the current landscape. The expansion of online education and increasing external demands for both program assessment and career preparation affect academic programs across diverse institutional contexts, whether they are public or private, research or teaching-centered, or, increasingly, both. Collectively, we should be eager to rise to the challenges and opportunities before us.

Best wishes for the work ahead.

Appendix A: The Academic and Professional Affairs Program

The ASA Academic and Professional Affairs Program (APAP) advances the place of sociology in colleges and universities; strengthens departments and their programs; engenders effective communication and collaboration with sociology departments; and provides services in support of excellence in teaching and learning, department management and leadership, and professional development. These services include TRAILS—the Teaching Resources and Innovation Library for Sociology; the production of teaching, career, and professional publications; and Carla Beth Howery Teaching Enhancement Fund grants. APAP also oversees the Department Affiliates Program; the Department Resources Group; the Department Chair and Director of Graduate Studies Conferences; and Educational Component workshops at the Annual Meeting.

TRAILS²² is an online, peer-reviewed digital library of high quality teaching resources, including syllabi, class activities, assignments, and lectures. All TRAILS resources are accompanied by a cover page with a suggested citation. Publishing in TRAILS is evidence of scholarly teaching excellence that can be added to other forms of evidence such as teaching portfolios, peer observations, and teaching evaluations for hiring, promotion and tenure reviews. TRAILS is an extension of the APAP's Teaching Resources Center (TRC). Charles A. Goldsmid started the TRC in 1976; it was initially housed in the Carnegie

²² <http://trails.asanet.org>

Library at Oberlin College. Under the leadership of Hans O. Mauksch, and with the approval of ASA Council, the TRC became an ongoing function of the ASA Executive Office in August 1978. In March 1980, under the leadership of Carla Beth Howery, it became a major component of the ASA Academic and Professional Affairs Program. The ASA Teaching Resources Center was established with support from the Lilly Endowment, Inc.; the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE); Oberlin College; and ASA Council. In addition to the teaching resources available in TRAILS, the TRC also publishes other academic and teaching related materials that can be purchased in the ASA online bookstore.

The Carla Beth Howery Teaching Enhancement Fund²³ grant program supports teaching projects that advance the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) within the discipline of sociology. The Carnegie Foundation has defined SoTL as “problem posing about an issue in teaching or learning, study of the problem through methods appropriate to the disciplinary epistemologies, application of results to practice, communication of results, self-reflection, and peer-review.” Howery Teaching grants can support an individual, a program, a department, or a committee of a state/regional association.

The Department Affiliates Program²⁴ provides an organization-level link between ASA and departments of sociology. Faculty, staff and students in Affiliates receive a broad array of benefits including regularly offered webinars

²³ <http://www.asanet.org/career-center/grants-and-fellowships/teaching-enhancement-fund>

²⁴ <http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/department-leaders/department-affiliates>

on topics related to professional development, department and program leadership and management, and teaching; *The Independent Variable*, a quarterly newsletter delivered via email to undergraduate students in the department; and a free year of membership in the ASA for first-year graduate students. Affiliates also receive a free copy of the annually published *ASA Guide to Graduate Departments*, a department subscription to *Footnotes*, and bundles of career materials for undergraduates including the booklet *21st Century Careers with an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology* and the brochure, *Sociology: a 21st Century Major*.

The Department Resources Group²⁵ (DRG) provides a cadre of trained consultants who make departmental visits to assist with reviews, evaluations, curriculum building, and program development. As trained outside visitors, DRG consultants bring a fresh and informed perspective to departments in the process of program review, curriculum development, or the establishment of assessment protocols. DRG sociologists participate in an ongoing training program focused on trends in the discipline and in higher education more generally, as well as best practices in conducting program reviews and helping others to build and maintain strong sociology curricula and teaching and learning environments. Departments are expected to provide DRG visitors with a reasonable honorarium and to cover travel-related expenses.

Every year at the ASA Annual Meeting department chairs and directors of graduate studies programs gather in conferences that provide training tailored to these critical

²⁵ <http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/department-leaders/department-resource-group>

leadership positions. In addition, these conferences provide a rare opportunity for department leaders to network and share ideas and insights with peers from other departments around the country. The Annual Meeting Educational Component is also organized by the Academic and Professional Affairs Program and includes pre-conference courses as well as workshops on teaching and learning, department leadership and management, research and policy, and professional development.

Other activities and groups within ASA dovetail with APAP to maximize support for sociology faculty and departments seeking to build strong sociology programs. The ASA Section on Teaching and Learning in Sociology²⁶ focuses on education in sociology, and working to enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning in sociology. The Section publishes a newsletter and offers a full program of sessions and roundtables during the ASA Annual Meeting. *Teaching Sociology*, an ASA quarterly journal, showcases scholarly and practical articles on teaching concerns.

For additional information on any of these services, see the ASA website, email apap@asanet.org, or call 202-383-9005 (extension 323).

²⁶ <http://www.asanet.org/asa-communities/sections/teaching-and-learning>

Appendix B: Annotated Resources

Curriculum

ASA Reports on Curriculum and Assessment. The excellent publications provided over time by the ASA offer a wealth of specific resources, including *Sociology and General Education* (2007), *Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major* (2005), *Report of the ASA Task Force on Sociology and Criminology Programs* (2010), and *Models and Best Practices for Joint Sociology-Anthropology Departments* (2006).

Measuring College Learning in Sociology. This is a comprehensive analysis of the development and rationale for the Sociological Literacy Framework that offers in-depth insights and empirical support for the foundational components of the sociology major. See Ferguson, Susan J. and William Carbonaro. 2016. "Measuring College Learning in Sociology." Pp.135-87 in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century*. Edited by Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

TRAILS, the ASA Digital Library for Teaching Resources. This rich database is a benefit of ASA membership and provides peer-reviewed course syllabi, class exercises, and many resources on pedagogy and teaching and learning. Learn more about TRAILS at <http://www.asanet.org/teaching-learning/trails>.

Employment Outcomes

American Association of Colleges & Universities LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) Initiative.

This resource includes regular surveys of employers and recent college graduates, demonstrating that employers value broad skills of liberal education. The 2013 report, *It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success* (Hart Research Associates 2013) is available at <https://www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013SurveySummary>.

The 2015 report is *Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success: Selected Findings from Online Surveys of Employers and College Students Conducted on Behalf of the Association of American Colleges & Universities* and is available at <https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research/2015-survey-falling-short>.

ASA Bachelor's and Beyond 2012 Research Briefs. This series of briefs analyzes the longitudinal data from the 2012 national survey of sociology majors, tracking them from their senior year of baccalaureate study into the first years of their post-graduate life. The briefs highlight the reasons why students chose to major in sociology, the role of social capital in graduates' early career outcomes, and how programs can use the project to help launch students into careers. The principal investigator for this study is Dr. Roberta Spalter-Roth, and the study was supported by a grant from the Sociology Program of the National Science Foundation. The briefs can be found at <http://www.asanet.org/research-publications/research-sociology/research-projects/bachelors-and-beyond-2012>.

Education Under Review: Examining the Value of Education for Student Success—in Career and Life.

This 2016 report from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* analyzes results of a survey of more than 500 senior academic officers at two- and four-year institutions. It discusses findings on the value of a college degree, accountability, career preparation, student debt, and student outcomes. The report is available at <http://results.chronicle.com/LP=1282?CIGWCHSOS1A>.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Resources. Based on the work of a NACE Task Force on Career Readiness, this website defines the characteristics associated with career readiness and offers sample materials and assessments. This information can be accessed at <http://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-resources/>.

Online Teaching and Learning

Academic Advancement Network of Michigan State University. A comprehensive resource of value to both novice and expert online faculty can be found at <http://fod.msu.edu/oir/online-teaching>. Note that this resource connects users to many other valuable online resources for all teaching modalities.

Center for Applied Special Technology. This comprehensive site describes the principles of universal design in learning and helps faculty apply this information to an online context. It can be accessed at <http://www.cast.org/search?query=teaching+online>.

Quality Matters. This site provides an overview of this frequently used online assessment resource. The creators describe their resource as based on best practice-based quality standards and appropriate evaluation tools and procedures. It can be accessed at <https://www.qualitymatters.org/>.

Sociology Online Resource List. This list, developed by the Liberal Learning Task Force and maintained by the ASA, includes resources to help design and augment your online sociology course. Accessible at <http://www.asanet.org/teaching-online>.

Appendix C: Task Force Process

This report is the product of 24 months of work by over 20 sociologists who comprised the ASA Task Force on Liberal Learning.

In August 2014, ASA Council approved a proposal to establish a Task Force to update the ASA document *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated: Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Sociology in the Twenty-First Century* (McKinney et al. 2004a). Council's charge to the Task Force included examining three pressing issues impacting sociology departments: the proliferation of online courses and programs; the increasing emphasis on employment outcomes in the liberal arts; and increasing pressure to establish a set of shared essential learning outcomes for the undergraduate major.

Jeffrey Chin and Edward Kain were appointed as the Task Force Co-Chairs and Margaret Weigers Vitullo was designated as the ASA Staff Liaison. A call for volunteers was announced in *ASA Footnotes* and at their next meeting, ASA Council formally appointed 22 sociologists to the Task Force, including faculty from institutions ranging from research intensive universities to community colleges. Three Task Force members had to step down prior to the completion of the Task Force's work.

Chin, Kain, and Vitullo divided the Task Force into three sub-committees whose charge was to explore the three focus areas established. Kain chaired the subcommittee on shared essential learning outcomes; Chin chaired the subcommittee on employment; Vitullo chaired the subcommittee on online learning. In spring 2015, Kain was unable to continue in his role as co-chair and Task

Force member Susan Ferguson agreed to step into these roles. The three subcommittees began meeting in early 2015 on a regular (usually bi-weekly) schedule using the ASA's GoToMeeting platform to review work completed and to discuss next steps. Each subcommittee researched their topic and began to compile recommendations and memos.

The Task Force met as a whole at the annual ASA meeting in Chicago in August 2015 and again at the ASA annual meeting in Seattle in August 2016.

The subcommittees completed drafts of their work in spring 2016. These drafts were collected and given to a new six-person subcommittee of Task Force members comprised of two representatives from each of the three topical groups: Teresa Ciabattari, Melinda Jo Messineo, Renee Monson, Diane Pike, Rifat Salam, and Theodore Wagenaar. The new subcommittee was referred to as the "bead weavers" and was given the task of producing a single document that wove together the work of the three subcommittees. This group produced multiple drafts that were submitted to the Co-Chairs for review, reviewed by the entire Task Force in August 2016, workshopped by the entire Task Force during the 2016 Annual Meeting, revised by the writing subcommittee, reviewed by the Co-Chairs again, and presented to the full Task Force for editorial feedback and a vote in October 2016. The final round of editorial revisions occurred during the last few months of 2016 and the report was presented to ASA Council at their 2017 winter meeting.

The document before you is the final version approved by ASA Council. It reflects the collaborative effort and contributions from every member of the Task Force.

We hope you find this report a useful resource.

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