

**Report of the ASA Task Force on
First-Generation and Working-Class People in Sociology**

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Task Force Charge

1. Develop a working definition of “first-generation” and “working class” drawing on existing literature, ASA tradition, and the task force’s substantive concerns.
2. Examine existing data and, if possible, collect additional data where gaps exist, to document:
 - a. The pipeline into the profession, specifically the proportion of graduate students who are first-generation/working class.
 - b. The representation of first-generation/working-class sociologists within each academic rank, and in various types of educational institutions.
 - c. Appointment of first-generation/working-class sociologists in new positions as a share of all appointments, by rank of appointment.
 - d. Comparing first-generation/working-class sociologists to their peers in terms of (1) salaries; (2) appointments to Department Chair and other administrative positions; (3) representation on the ASA Publications Committee; (4) representation on ASA Council; (5) representation on editorial boards of ASA journals; and (6) FAD grant awardees.
3. Solicit feedback from first-generation/working-class persons in sociology (at every level from graduate student through full professor status) regarding issues or concerns related to their status within the profession.
4. Review past and present efforts of other scholarly associations to address issues of underrepresentation of first-generation/working class sociologists.
5. Make recommendations to ASA Council as to how the Association can best address the challenge of integrating this population into our discipline in a way that maximizes equity.

Introduction

In March 2017, ASA Council established the Task Force on First Generation and Working-Class People in Sociology and approved the list of task force members in August of that year. The charge for the task force included considering the definition, characteristics, prevalence, experiences, needs, and concerns of this group within the discipline and making recommendations based on those considerations. Throughout this report, the acronym FGWC is used to refer to people in this group.

As members of the task force, we have contributed our time, energy, and sociological expertise to responding to Council’s broad charge. Some of us brought first-hand knowledge to the core questions, as the vast majority of us are FGWC, and many of us have extensive records of research on issues of inequality, social class, first-generation status, and mobility. In keeping with our standpoint on the focal issues (Harding 1986), we instituted an engaged, participatory process for our work that both collected data from, and built community with, sociologists who were the first people in their families to graduate

from college, or whose families had been poor or working-class during most of their childhood. In describing activities throughout this report, the words “we,” “our,” and “task force” are used interchangeably and in all cases denote activities undertaken on behalf of the task force.

During the 2018 Annual Meeting, we held four in-depth focus group interviews with a total of 36 FGWC graduate students and faculty. The focus group discussions were animated and engaging, so much so that participants had to be encouraged to break off their conversations and leave in order to allow the next focus group to start. Shortly after this initial work and Annual Meeting, the task force established a Twitter group and a Facebook page, which both quickly attracted many participants. Currently more than 1800 people follow the group on Twitter and 750 are on the group’s Facebook page. The overwhelmingly positive responses to these activities during the first year of our existence provided an early indication of the broad salience of the issues we were considering.

In 2019 the Task Force hosted a reception for FGWC sociologists during the Annual Meeting in New York that was well attended. Attendees spoke of the excitement they felt, realizing that they were in a space where everyone would have some understanding of their experiences and background. We also distributed FGWC pins recipients could place on their Annual Meeting badges to help them recognize others of FGWC background throughout the meetings. In addition, we offered two workshops, “Managing Graduate Studies as a Working-class and/or First-gen Student,” and “Productivity on the Path to Tenure for First-gen and Working-class faculty Members.”

Drawing on the results of the initial focus group interviews, we developed throughout 2018 and 2019 a relatively lengthy survey that was sent to a random sample of 5,597 individuals who were members of the American Sociological Association at any point between the years of 2014 to 2017. The survey included questions about family background, demographics, educational mobility, stressors, status in the field, and sense of ASA and departmental integration. The survey response rate was 36%, with a 95% completion rate (n=1,996).¹

It is worth noting that those most disadvantaged are probably excluded or underrepresented to some degree from the sample. This is because those included were able to afford membership during at least one of the three years considered and are also probably among those in higher status and resourced departments where membership and meeting attendance are expected. Conversely, those at community colleges and regional public universities, which tend to have more tightly constrained resources, as well as those who were not able to obtain a faculty position, are underrepresented or not represented at all. Thus, the differences in characteristics and experiences the task force found between FGWC and non-FGWC people among current and former members are likely to be under-estimates of the actual divergences between these groups in the discipline.

¹ The task force members would like to express their gratitude to all the people who participated in focus groups, responded to the survey, agreed to follow up interviews, and who sent lengthy follow up emails with detailed explanations of their own challenges and opportunities. To all of those individuals, we would like to assure you that your contributions--whether you got your Ph.D. here or abroad, whether you are working in an academic or practice setting, whether you are employed in a U.S. institution or outside the U.S.—have informed this report and will continue to inform future analyses on the experiences and needs of FGWC people in sociology.

In 2020 the task force organized a series of professional development and networking events for FGWC sociologists. The first (July) was aimed toward discussing vulnerabilities of First Gen/Working Class sociologists in the face of the pandemic. The second, which occurred during the virtual ASA Annual Meeting, focused on strategic approaches to professional meeting attendance and dealing with “imposter syndrome.” The third, which occurred in October, dealt explicitly with family relations and financial vulnerabilities. The fourth, which occurred in December, centered on the particular challenges FGWC persons experience over the holidays. These were well-attended and were organized and coordinated by taskforce members and interested volunteers.

Task force members also conducted in-depth interviews with a selected subsample of survey respondents in the latter part of 2020 and through June 2022, resulting in over 50 interviews to date. These interviews provide rich complementary material regarding some of our key quantitative findings about inequalities and experiences throughout graduate school and into the professoriate. The interviews also expand on some of the survey findings regarding topics such as familial support, service obligations, and intersectional dynamics around race/ethnicity and gender.

During the final stage of our work, the task force members cleaned the survey data that was collected, undertook substantial analyses of it, and wrote two article manuscripts.² Finally, the task force prepared this report, which provides an outline of the task force’s work and process, responds to specific questions from the task force’s charge, and lists a series of recommendations for how ASA and sociology departments might be more responsive to the needs and concerns of FGWC people in sociology.

It should be noted that some parts of subsection two of the task force’s charge could not be completed, given the pressures on task force members during the pandemic and data availability. However, ASA added two questions about FGWC status to its membership form in 2021. Over time, enough members will have responded to those questions to allow ASA staff to conduct additional analyses in response to that portion of the charge.

Recommendation 1. Continue to collect data on FGWC status for ASA members and, when appropriate, use FGWC as variable of interest in association research. As sufficient data becomes available, examine rates of FGWC members holding administrative positions within institutions, including Department Chair, and serving in leadership positions at the ASA, including Council, Publications Committee, and editorial boards of journals.

Defining First-Generation and Working-Class

One of the main charges for this taskforce was to develop working definitions of first-generation and working class. Our conception and measurement strategy in these regards was informed by and drew on the rich history of sociological research on socioeconomic origins and social class—research that offers a variety of rigorous measures (Brady et al. 2018; Wright 2005). In the end, based on analyses of the relationships found between the various measures in our survey data, and drawing on more recent inequality literatures, we decided to focus on two objective indicators: parental college degree attainment and occupational class status.

² These manuscripts have been submitted for publication. Once published, they will be made available alongside this report.

Parental college degree attainment was derived from a survey item asking, “What was the highest level of education completed by your parent/primary caregiver at the time you completed high school?” If the respondent had two parents/caregivers in the home, the item was repeated for that second person. We coded as first-generation those for whom no parent or caregiver had obtained a bachelor’s degree, and continuing-generation as those for whom at least one parent had earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Approximately 42 percent of our faculty sample was first-generation while the remainder were continuing-generation.

In measuring occupational class status, we drew on research examining the strength and efficacy of schemas such as EGP (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero 1979), which use the occupation of parents to identify people from working class backgrounds versus those from more advantaged class origins. Our indicator is derived from open-ended survey responses to the question “In what occupation did your primary parent/caregiver work, if any, during your childhood? Please specify...their occupation name/title as best you can.” Again, the question was repeated if there were two parents/caregivers in the home. A research assistant coded all open-ended answers into categories consistent with the EGP classification scheme of social class. Two members of our research team then reviewed and refined the initial coding to assure reliability and validity, and then further refined the coding system in a manner consistent with Morgan’s (2017) update of the original EGP categories.

Using an occupational coding schema like EGP and its recent update is especially useful for studying mobility given that it captures economic resources and social network contacts above and beyond advantages that can be tied more directly to parental education attainment (Brady et al. 2018). We coded as working-class those for whom all parents’ or caregivers’ EGP status was working class, and not as working class those for whom one or more parents/caregivers’ EGP status was not working class. Based on this measurement strategy, 45 percent of our sample is of working-class background.³

Taken together, these indicators of first-generation and working-class background: (1) capture most of the salient variation in socioeconomic status; (2) reflect prevailing and contemporary trends and measurement in sociological research; (3) are interpretable and relevant within contemporary public debates and higher education policy; and (4) are “objective” measures that are less likely to suffer from recall bias. Notably, these two measures also overlap considerably in our sample of faculty (correlation = .53) and in the sample of graduate students (correlation = .49). Moreover, as reported in the accompanying manuscripts, they also reliably overlap with traditional prestige and subjective alternatives. In those manuscripts, we treat first-generation and working-class backgrounds separately

³ Although the percentage of respondents of first-generation and working-class backgrounds may seem high, we remind the reader that the survey was fielded by a *Taskforce on Sociologists from First-Generation and Working-Class Backgrounds*. Consequently, respondents of first-generation and working-class backgrounds probably had a higher likelihood of completion based on the recruitment script. At the same time, the demographic breakdown of our sample and first-generation and working-class representation seem to largely mirror findings of a more general and recent membership survey conducted by the ASA. We draw no firm conclusions as to the actual representation of such individuals within the field. Instead, our analyses center on statistical comparisons between groups and relative to the inequalities noted.

while also pointing to their substantial overlap. For summary purposes in this report, we compare those of first-generation and/or working-class backgrounds (FGWC) versus others (non-FGWC).

While using parents' educational status plus an occupational coding schema like EGP was possible for this task force, we recognized that the labor-intensive process of using both might not be possible in other contexts. We found that using parents' educational status alone captured 82.5% of the total group of graduate students we defined as FGWC, and 83% of the total group of FGWC faculty in our sample. We also found that a 5-category subjective measure of class status⁴ had a substantial overlap with EGP (correlation = .44), suggesting that sociologists were generally accurate in their own reflective appraisals of class background.

Recommendation 2. Be aware that while using the more easily implemented first-generation status measure (i.e., neither parent has attained a bachelor's degree) is sufficient in many cases, adding an occupational class-based indicator, such as EGP, can provide even more precision when needed. A closed-ended subjective measure of class status, which is probably more easily measurable, is another option that can be considered although it would not be as precise regarding detailed parent occupation.

Documenting Conditions for First-Generation and Working-Class People in the Discipline

The majority of respondents to the task force's survey held a PhD and were employed in faculty or adjunct/lecturer positions within academic institutions. The educational level and employment positions of respondents were as follows:

Table 1. Education and Employment

Total N	1,996
PhD holder with position as tenure-track/tenured faculty, adjunct faculty or lecturer	60.1%
Current graduate student	27.7%
Postdoctoral scholar	3.5%
Non-PhD who is current an adjunct or lecturer	2.7%
PhD holder working outside of academia	2.4%
PhD holder working at a college/university but in a non-faculty capacity	1.3%
Missing	2.2%

The analyses of faculty (n=982) presented below drew on the first category, but excluded from consideration those employed by universities/college outside the U.S. and/or those who received their PhDs outside the U.S. We did so because: (1) one of our charges was to examine mobility processes specifically, and the status/ranking system of sociology graduate programs and departments are

⁴ The item asked, "During most of your childhood, what social class would you say you were in? Poor, Working Poor, Working Class, Middle Class, Upper Middle Class, Upper Class."

relatively particular to the U.S.; and (2) some of our inequality metrics (salary in dollars; student debt, etc.) are also somewhat unique to the U.S. case.⁵

Our analyses of graduate students (n=452) drew from the second category above and likewise only focus on those who were currently enrolled in a U.S.-specific graduate program of sociology because the ranking system of graduate programs in the U.S. does not directly correspond to programs outside the U.S. Moreover, metrics such as student loan debt are more a U.S. phenomenon.⁶

Also excluded from the analyses in this report and current (attached) manuscripts pertaining to faculty and graduate students are postdoctoral scholars (n=75), individuals employed outside of academia (n=47), lecturers/adjuncts who do not hold a Ph.D. (n=53), and those with a Ph.D. who are employed in a non-research, non-teaching university or college position (n=25). The sample sizes for these groups were not large enough for systematic quantitative analyses, and many of the metrics used pertaining to mobility and/or inequality were not as directly applicable to these groups. Several taskforce members are nevertheless planning to undertake multi-method analyses of the excluded groups. Such efforts will likely entail the use of applicable survey items but also materials derived from open-ended interviewing.

Demographics

Tables 2 and 3 report gender and racial/ethnic group representation among graduate students and faculty in the resulting samples used in our initial analyses, broken down by FGWC and non-FGWC populations. For faculty, we also include breakdowns by academic rank.

TABLE 2. Graduate Students

		FGWC	Non-FGWC
Total N		249	203
Gender			
	Woman	61.6%	68.1%
	Man	33.8%	28.1%
	Transgender, Gender Queer, Gender non-conforming, different identify	4.9%	4.4%
Race/ethnicity			
	White (Non-Hispanic/Latino/a/x)	66.4%	80.3%
	Black or African American	8.8%	4.9%
	Hispanic, Latino/a/x or Spanish	18.1%	6.4%
	Asian/ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	8.4%	7.9%
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.6%	0.5%
	Multi-racial/Other (Middle Eastern or North African)	3.4%	1.0%

⁵ In supplementary analyses, we nevertheless explored issues of professional integration and isolation among international faculty as well as postdocs and generally find consistency with results from the U.S.-specific faculty sample.

⁶ As was the case for faculty, we nevertheless considered in supplementary fashion metrics such as integration/isolation for the smaller international graduate student sample and found some parallels when it comes to inequalities for those of FGWC backgrounds compared to their non-FGWC peers.

Among graduate students, 61.6% of FGWC respondents were women, compared to 68.1% of the non-FGWC respondents. Among faculty, there were almost no differences in gender proportions across the two groups. When considering race/ethnicity, much larger differences were found. Among graduate students, 33.6% of FGWC respondents and 19.7% of the non-FGWC graduate students were BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, or people of color).

Table 3. Faculty

		FGWC	Non-FGWC
Total N		536	446
Gender			
	Woman	57.4%	56.8%
	Man	39.7%	41.5%
	Transgender, Gender Queer, Gender non-conforming, different identify	3.3%	2.0%
Race/ethnicity*			
	White (Non-Hispanic/Latino/a/x)	74.1%	83.4%
	Black or African American	10.6%	6.1%
	Hispanic, Latino/a/x or Spanish	9.7%	4.3%
	Asian/ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3.7%	6.1%
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.5%	0.5%
	Multi-racial/Other (Middle Eastern or North African)	3.5%	3.5%
Academic rank			
	Non-Tenure Track	12.7%	8.3%
	Assistant	24.6%	29.4%
	Associate	28.2%	29.2%
	Full	34.1%	33.2%

*Totals >100% because respondents could select more than one category

Among faculty, 25.9% of the FGWC respondents and 16.6% of the non-FGWC faculty were BIPOC. When examining academic rank among faculty, FGWC respondents were more likely to be in non-tenure track positions (12.7%), compared to their non-FGWC peers (8.3%) and less likely to be assistant professors (24.6% compared to 29.4%).

We recognize that: (1) *race/ethnic inequalities are by no means reducible to socioeconomic background and that distinct inequality processes and outcomes are relevant to the lives and well-being of minoritized persons; and that (2) the strong demographic overlap between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic background points to the fact that consideration of first-generation and working-class disadvantages in mobility and inequality cannot be strictly divorced from, and indeed should be considered alongside, concerns and attention to racial/ethnic inclusion and equity.*

Recommendation 3. Whenever possible in data collect and programmatic efforts, treat race/ethnicity and FGWC status as intersectional variables, considering both their unique and joint effects.

Table 4 provides further representational distributions of FGWC and non-FGWC faculty by rank and institutional status. These bivariate findings suggest a moderate underrepresentation of FGWC faculty in higher status (i.e., top-20-ranked departments), relative similarity in mid-ranked departments, and minor overrepresentation of FGWC faculty in non-ranked departments, in private colleges, and at community colleges.

Table 4. Faculty by Program Rank/Status

	FGWC	Non-FGWC
Total N	536	446
Top 20 Ranked Department (Private or Public Institution)	16.3%	21.9%
Mid-Ranked (21-50) Department (Private or Public Institution)	23.2%	23.3%
Non-Ranked Department (Private or Public Institution)	27.5%	24.9%
Regional Campus of Public University	10.5%	10.3%
Private College (e.g., liberal arts, religious affiliated etc.)	19.4%	17.1%
Community College	3.1%	2.5%

Notably, the inequalities or potential inequalities in representation and the job-specific pipeline seen in Table 4 are more pronounced in multivariate analyses once we include other status attributes (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, etc.) and control for time since PhD. Multivariate modeling, for instance, reveals that first-generation faculty are 28.6% less likely to be employed in a top-20 department, compared to their continuing education peers. They are also 14.7% less likely to be employed in a top-50 department.

Resources and Compensation

One reason that representational gaps and possible pipeline inequalities may be important is due to resource and/or compensation differences across institutional types. Our analyses of faculty in particular included consideration of salary compensation as well as at least two sources of financial precarity FGWC individuals may encounter at higher levels, namely student loan debt and financial support of extended family members.⁷ Table 5 reports simple bivariate statistics in these regards, disaggregated by faculty rank and FGWC versus Non-FGWC status.

⁷ While analysis of economic precarity among FGWC graduate students presents complications beyond the scope of this report, the Task Force did examine graduate student funding issues in detail. The importance of doing so is highlighted in responses to the survey question, “Have you ever considered dropping out of graduate school due to costs, not being able to pay bills, and/or not being able to cover living expenses?” FGWC graduate students were 26% more likely to respond “yes” to this than their non-FGWC peers.

Table 5. Salary, Estimated Student Debt, and Percent Providing Extended Family Support

	FGWC Faculty			Non-FGWC Faculty		
	Salary	Student Debt at Ph.D. Completion	Provides Regular Financial Support to Extended Family	Salary	Student Debt at Ph.D. Completion	Provides Regular Financial Support to Extended Family
Non-Tenure Track	\$55,075	\$58,295	29.9%	\$61,143	\$31,528	10.8%
Assistant Prof	\$76,061	\$57,805	30.3%	\$80,687	\$32,383	20.8%
Associate Prof	\$89,533	\$40,099	39.1%	\$94,077	\$32,154	13.1%
Full Prof	\$144,475	\$33,692	40.7%	\$157,103	\$14,966	33.1%

At every rank, FGWC faculty reported lower salaries and higher student debt than their non-FGWC peers. Providing support to extended family members, including parents, siblings, or other relatives, is a less frequently examined variable, but one that potentially has a strong influence on the lives of FGWC faculty. Among non-tenure track faculty and associate professors, FGWC individuals were nearly three times more likely to be providing support to family members. Among the other two groups examined, the differences ranged from 8-10%, with FGWC more likely to be providing support.

Further evidence of precarity among FGWC faculty was revealed in responses to a single survey item that asked, “Has debt impacted any of the following for you? Check all that apply; if none, please leave blank.”

Table 6. Impact of Debt on Major Life Decisions

	FGWC	Non-FGWC
Choice of graduate program	22.2%	14.3%
Ability to purchase a home or rent a decent place to live	40.1%	20.4%
Ability to attend professional conferences	34.0%	20.4%
Choice to start a family	22.0%	15.3%
Ability to be food secure	7.5%	4.7%

Our multivariate analyses in the attached manuscript likewise show greater precarity for FGWC faculty in terms of compensation, student debt, and financial support of extended family members. On the compensation side, FGWC inequalities are explained mostly by differences in institutional location and rank as well as productivity. Gaps in debt and familial support, however, remain and are sizeable.

Taken together, less money coming in in the form of salary and more money going out for debt and familial support creates unique and significant resource challenges among FGWC faculty across all ranks, although arguably more so for non-tenure track faculty and assistant professors who earn significantly less and have sizeable levels of debt. These findings were summarized almost point for point in an open-ended comment from one FGWC survey respondent:

...faculty who come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to share their financial resources with their families, which means they might not be able to afford the costs of professional conferences... They are more likely to have student loan debt—adding more strain... They also are more likely to be responsible for their families in ways beyond finances, and they might spend time and energy helping family members with the complex challenges they face, which takes time and energy away from their academic work...

Examining Professional Mobility Issues

Our analyses of mobility and potential pipeline inequalities between FGWC and non-FGWC people in sociology also included distinct analyses of graduate students and faculty.

Graduate Students

For graduate student analyses specifically, we considered relationships between first-generation and working-class backgrounds and: (1) undergraduate attendance at a private post-secondary institution; (2) eventual enrollment in a “top 20” or “top 50” sociology graduate program; and (3) whether any observed inequalities in FGWC representation in higher status graduate programs might be partially explained by undergraduate private school enrollment. Undergraduate enrollment was measured by private college/university attendance versus other. Graduate program attendance was measured by whether the respondent is currently in a top-20 graduate program or a top-50 graduate program versus an unranked graduate program. Modeling included controls such as gender, race/ethnicity, and immigrant status.

First-generation and working-class gaps for undergraduate enrollment are very clear, with the probability of attending a private institution at approximately 31 percent, on average, for those who are first-generation college attenders versus about a 56 percent likelihood for those of continuing-generation background. The gap for those from working class versus non-working-class backgrounds is similarly notable at about 16 percent. Gaps in undergraduate private school enrollment are important if seen by graduate admissions committees as more desirable and/or if private undergraduate enrollment is tied to other experiential advantages, such as conducting research with faculty, participating in study abroad, or receiving more detailed recommendation letters. Our modeling provides some evidence in these regards.

First, there are especially strong and negative first-generation effects when it comes to “top 20” and “top 50” graduate program attendance. First-generation graduate students in sociology land in a “top 20” program about 41 percent of the time, compared to approximately 57 percent for continuing-generation students. We find a similar gap when we consider the broader range of higher status graduate programs (i.e., “top 50”). Secondly and equally notable, our sequential modeling, wherein private undergraduate attendance is introduced to the modeling of graduate program enrollment, suggests that *first-generation and working-class disadvantages in higher status graduate program enrollment are at least partially patterned through undergraduate experiences and credentials*. Supplementary open-ended comments from respondents provide further reinforcement of this point.

I think the under-valuation of lower-ranked schools is a big factor in limiting the success of first-generation students. I started my PhD at a "not in the top 50" university, because I did not have the training or background to be competitive at a more elite school (Nor was I even aware that it would be important to try and get into one).

I feel that since my family lacked the educational cultural capital as I applied for college (i.e., my mother thought that community college is the same as Harvard), I feel like I am forever disadvantaged in regards to education. A mediocre [college] led to a mediocre PhD.

Faculty

In our faculty analyses, we similarly considered educational mobility and undergraduate and graduate enrollment but were able to extend the analyses even further sequentially to include occupational mobility relative to current job placement (i.e., current job in a top-20 or top-50 department, versus non-top-50 and/or unranked department). We also included race/ethnicity, gender, immigrant status as well as controls for marital/partnership status, children in the household, whether the respondent was in an academic unit other than sociology, and number of years since earning PhD (given that educational and occupational mobility prospects may very well have changed over the decades owing to expansions of higher education and relative growth or decline of sociology departments).

Analyses pertaining to educational mobility generated practically identical results to the graduate student analyses. Specifically, we found notable first-generation and working-class background disadvantages when it comes to undergraduate private institution attendance, and a lower overall likelihood of top-20 or top-50 graduate program attendance for FGWC respondents. Consistent with some prior literature on the expansion of higher education during earlier decades and the widening of post-secondary opportunities, the likelihood of private undergraduate and more prestigious graduate program attendance was significantly higher for older generations of scholars within our data. First-generation and working-class disadvantages persisted nevertheless, even with time since Ph.D. included. Like the graduate student analyses, it seems to be the case that first-generation and working-class underrepresentation in "top 20" and "top 50" graduate programs is mostly accounted for by private undergraduate institutional advantages among more background-advantaged individuals.

Educational mobility trajectories, while interesting in and of themselves, may also be consequential for eventual job placement. For this reason, we modeled current employment among faculty in a "top 20" and "top 50" sociology program, examining the representation of those of first-generation and working-class backgrounds with controls, and then with undergraduate and graduate program enrollment added. Background is clearly meaningful in these analyses. The likelihood of "top 20" job placement for first-generation scholars, and representation in "top 50" departments for scholars of either first-generation or working-class backgrounds, is lower. Alternative analyses we undertook predicting the converse—i.e., non-top 50 job positioning, where resources, compensation and professional visibility and status tend to be lower—shows statistically significant over-representation of faculty of first-generation and working-class backgrounds.

Such gaps in job placement seemed to be mostly, if not entirely, a function of where one attended graduate school. Specifically, the odds of obtaining a top-20 job were markedly higher among those obtaining PhDs from top-20 graduate programs; the odds of obtaining a top-50 job were significantly

higher among those who obtained their PhDs from a top-20 or top-50 department. Such findings point to first-generation and working-class background disadvantages in the educational pipeline—disadvantages that eventually have occupational consequences.

In the context of networking, and when interacting with folks at private schools, it's easy to feel "out of place." The amount of privilege many in the field currently have is hard to process. Furthermore, I underestimate(d) my own contributions and worth. I think this has an impact on salary negotiations, etc.

Mentorship and Professional Socialization

Our analyses of graduate students also considered whether there were any observable FGWC disadvantages in mentorship, advising and professional socialization within departments. Survey items asked whether respondents felt they received adequate to excellent mentorship; whether they felt that their advisor had gotten to know them personally; and the extent to which they felt their department was providing adequate socialization support.

In all three regards, there are significant and sizeable disadvantages. Approximately 68 percent of FGWC graduate students report good mentorship (compared to 82 percent of non-FGWC graduate students) and 71 percent reported that their advisor had gotten to know them (versus 83 percent). Departmental socialization support is a scale indicator (range = 3-12) capturing support surrounding grant applications, letters of reference, presentation preparation and research. FGWC graduate students average 8.1 on this indicator versus 8.5 for non-FGWC graduate students. Advantages in these regards are especially observed in our multivariate analyses for those in top-50 ranked graduate programs.

From the very beginning, I did not know things that other grad students already knew, and it did not occur to any professors to teach these things. (They assumed everyone already knew.) I have struggled with setting reasonable work expectations for myself, finding professors to mentor me, and understanding all the unwritten rules and expectations (e.g., re: publishing, funding and getting funding, knowing what a dissertation even looks like). My network is minimal because no one helps me make connections, and I don't know how exactly to reach out to strangers.

Professional Visibility

Our analyses of faculty considered whether background and/or inequalities produced within the educational/occupational pipeline had consequences for professional visibility. Indicators of professional visibility included election/appointment to a national academic society position, number of journal editorial boards served on, whether one had served on a grant review panel, and whether one has received federal funding for research. FGWC disadvantages are observed for election/appointments, grant review panel membership and federal funding for research, most of which is explained by whether one is in a top-50 department as well as controls for rank, book/article productivity and time since PhD. These findings again highlight the importance of background but also how educational and occupational mobility processes tied to one's background can have implications throughout one's career.

Integration and Sense of Isolation:

Both faculty and graduate student analyses examined respondents' overall sense of integration versus isolation across three distinct domains of academic life: in departments, on college/university campuses,

and at professional conferences. FGWC respondents, both graduate student and faculty, report a significantly higher sense of isolation across all three contexts.

For graduate students of FGWC background, sense of isolation at department, campus and professional conference levels are strikingly high, at 60 (versus 34) percent, 41 (versus 21) percent, and 63 (versus 48) percent respectively. FGWC faculty respondents likewise report a higher degree of isolation across each of the three contexts considered (37 versus 25 percent for departmental; 31 versus 14 percent for college/university campuses; and 53 versus 33 percent for professional conferences). Notably, and according to our multivariate analyses, the sense of isolation FGWC graduate students experienced is relatively constant regardless of the status of the graduate program. And, for FGWC faculty, such effects persist regardless of the status of their job, their rank, and level of book/article productivity.

Difficulty connecting with and understanding higher status individuals. Being seen as an oddity. Having different hobbies than those you're surrounded by and therefore having less small talk. Having less wealth and more to worry about retirement and colleagues not understanding that.

Other Concerns and Inequality Issues to be Examined

Several taskforce members plan on continuing to work with these data over the next two years and address other issues and inequalities that FGWC graduate students and faculty likely experience and that are measured by distinct survey items or within open-ended and/or interview materials. These include, to name but a few:

- Variations and potential intersections of FGWC background with gender, race/ethnicity and immigrant status.
- Variations in factors surrounding decision making when it comes to graduate program attendance, job seeking and job preferences among FGWC graduate students and faculty.
- Similarities and distinctions between FGWC scholar experiences in the U.S. versus elsewhere.
- Family tensions and financial flow to and from family members.
- Connections to home community and family members and the role this plays or may play in professional integration versus isolation.
- Stability in one's academic career (e.g., movement) and time and timing of promotion among FGWC faculty versus their non-FGWC peers.
- Leaving graduate school or one's academic career, or contemplating doing so, among FGWC graduate students and faculty, and the reasons why.

What Might Departments Do?

The task force's survey included a closed-ended item that asked "What might departments do to more effectively support graduate students and faculty from underrepresented backgrounds, including those who are first-generation college graduates, those who were raised working class and those who experienced low income? Please pick up to three that you believe would be most helpful, if any." The

response categories and proportion of FGWC and non-FGWC respondents who selected them are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

The results suggest that there are not large divergences between FGWC and non-FGWC people regarding how departments might better support graduate students and faculty from underrepresented backgrounds. Among both graduate student and faculty respondents, the two most frequently selected options were admitting and/or hiring more FGWC people and providing better mentorship processes. Graduate students are more likely than faculty to choose setting up alternative reimbursement models that would not require fronting conference-related expenses. Across both graduate students and faculty, FGWC respondents were more likely to select providing professional socialization, resources for travel, and flexibility in time to degree, while non-FGWC leaned more heavily toward adjustments to the tenure clock, alternatives to reimbursement models, and openly discussing diversity aims and goals.

Figure 1. Graduate Student Responses to What Might Departments Do?

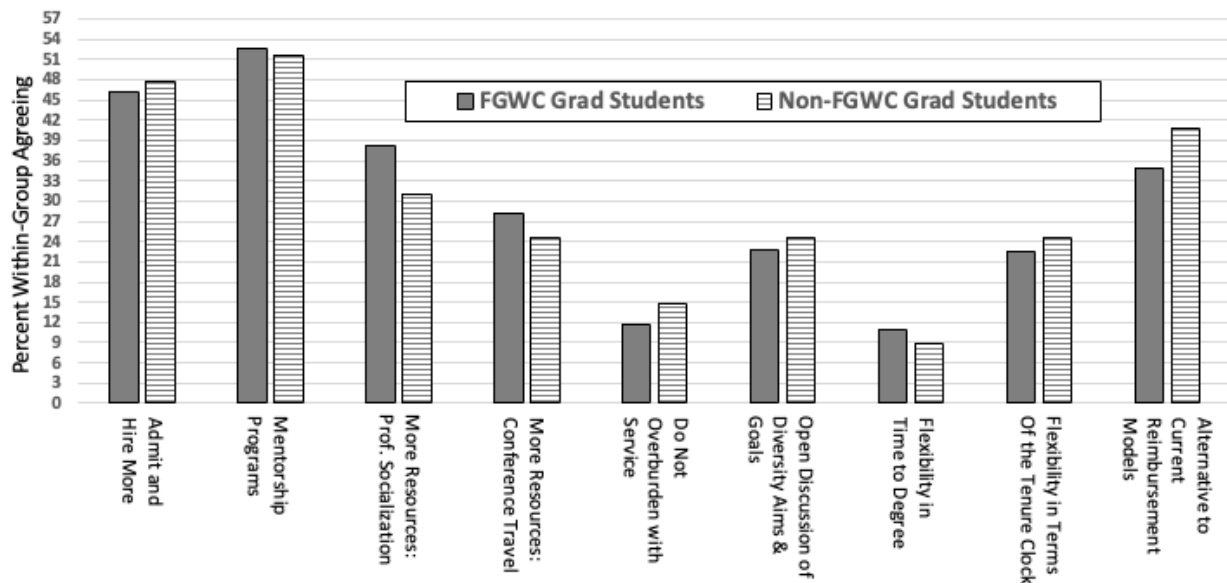
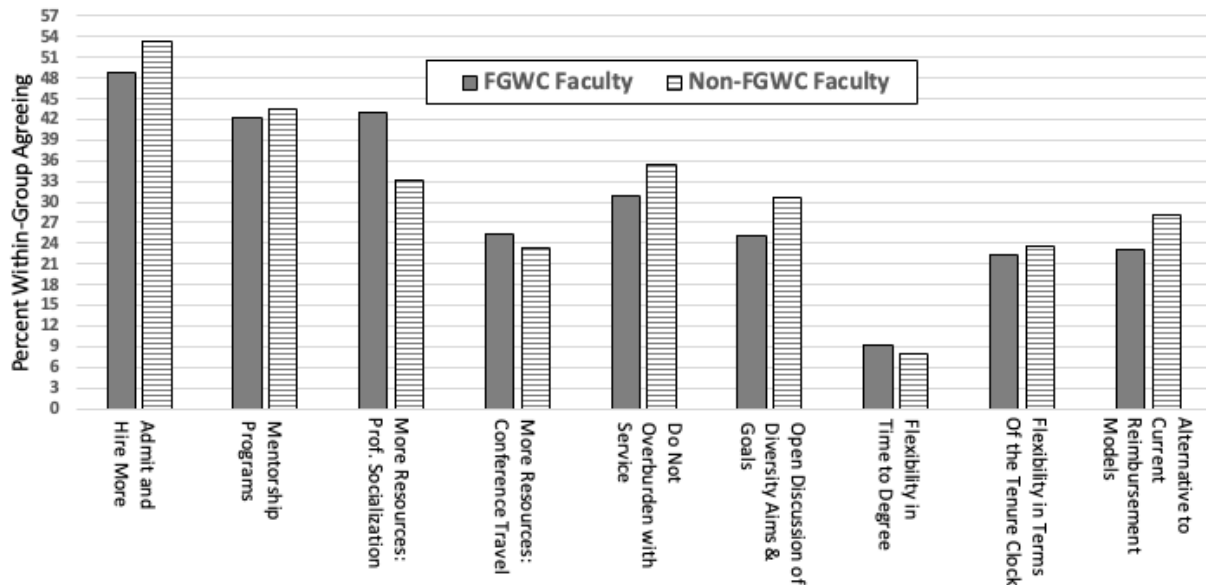


Figure 2. Faculty Responses to What Might Departments Do?



Recommendation 4. In collaboration with interested task force members and potentially the new ASA First-Generation and Working-Class Community, develop a resource guide for departments on how to best support FGWC students and faculty. The resource guide should encourage departments to identify and consider department- and institution-specific issues faced by FGWC faculty and students, as well as the more general issues identified in this report, and provide guidance and ideas for how to respond effectively.

What Might ASA Do?

In considering how ASA might better respond to the needs of FGWC people in sociology, we began by exploring the activities of other scholarly associations. An inquiry sent to the executive directors of scholarly societies that are members of the American Council of Learned Societies revealed that the vast majority had not examined the issue or taken any specific actions in response to this group’s needs. A notable exception was the American Political Science Association, which has established a committee on “First Generation Higher Education Scholars in the Profession” that undertakes activities quite similar to those planned by the ASA Community on First-Generation and Working-Class Sociologists that Council approved in March of 2022. They also highlight scholars on their website in a manner similar to ASA, and provide Annual Meeting travel funding in a manner similar to ASA’s Annual Meeting Travel Fund and Student Forum Travel Fund opportunities.

To further explore ways ASA might respond to the needs of this group, the task force’s survey included a closed-ended item that asked “In what ways might ASA support and encourage those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to become more active as ASA members and at the annual conference? Please pick up to three that you believe would be most effective, if any.” The response categories and proportion of FGWC and non-FGWC respondents who selected them are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

While there were some minor differences between the groups, the results suggested a good deal of agreement between FGWC and non-FGWC individuals regarding how ASA might better support FGWC people in sociology. Among both graduate students and faculty, the two most frequently selected options selected were creating mentorship networks and considering cheaper and alternative meeting locations. The next two most frequently selected options were providing professional socialization workshops and offering a FGWC reception at the Annual Meeting. Between 20 and 25% of respondents in both groups selected eliminating institutional affiliation on Annual Meeting name tags.

Recommendation 5. Recognize and celebrate ASA Sections that offer mentorship programs, while encouraging other Sections and Communities to consider starting their own. Develop mentorship programs that are open to any ASA member that are complementary to section offerings. When matching mentors and mentees, take FGWC status into account.

Recommendation 6. Work to expand the accessibility of the Annual Meeting to individuals with limited financial resources and capacity to travel. Create an Annual Meeting evaluation process that can measure the degree and nature of participation and quality of experience for first-generation scholars as well as other attendees. Consider options for creating and expanding virtual venues for scholarly presentations and professional development. As part of these efforts, share this report with the Annual Meeting Redesign Committee to help inform their thinking.

Recommendation 7. Continue to develop and expand ASA professional development programming, including webinars, workshops, pro seminars, and AMAs, covering topics such as demystifying the publications process, non-academic career paths, financial literacy for new faculty, and managing the transition from graduate student to faculty member. Make some of these specific to FGWC sociologists and consider the relative advantages of recording events for later asynchronous viewing versus refraining from recording in order to create a safer space for asking questions and sharing experiences.

Figure 3. Graduate Student Responses Regarding What Might ASA Do?

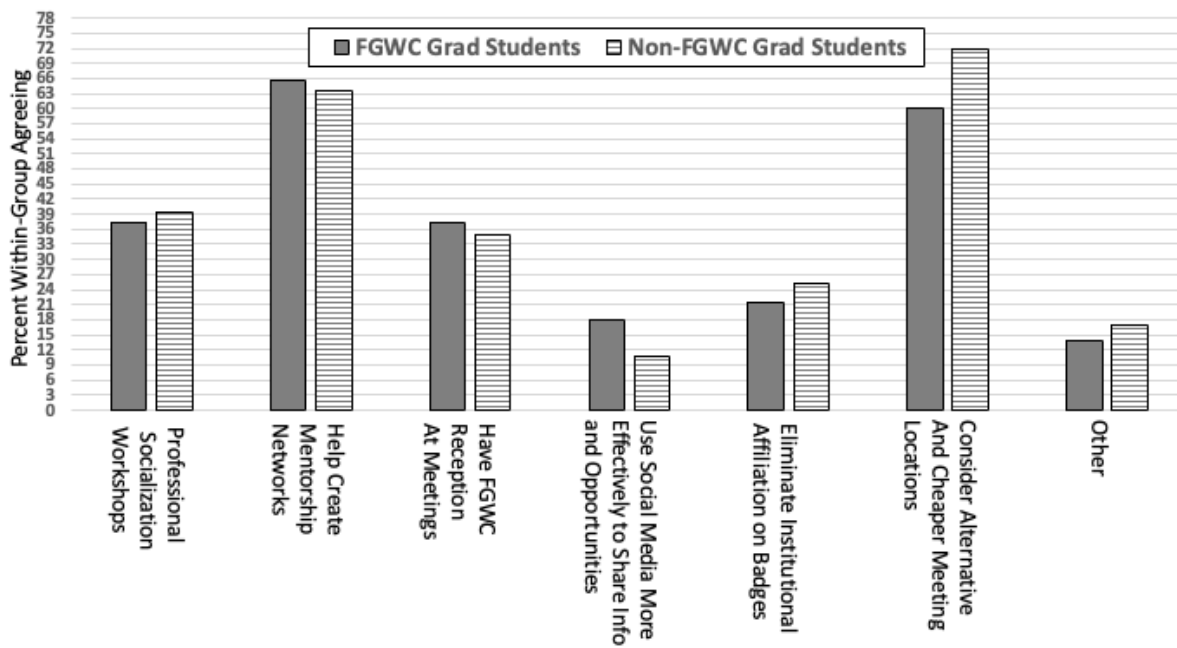
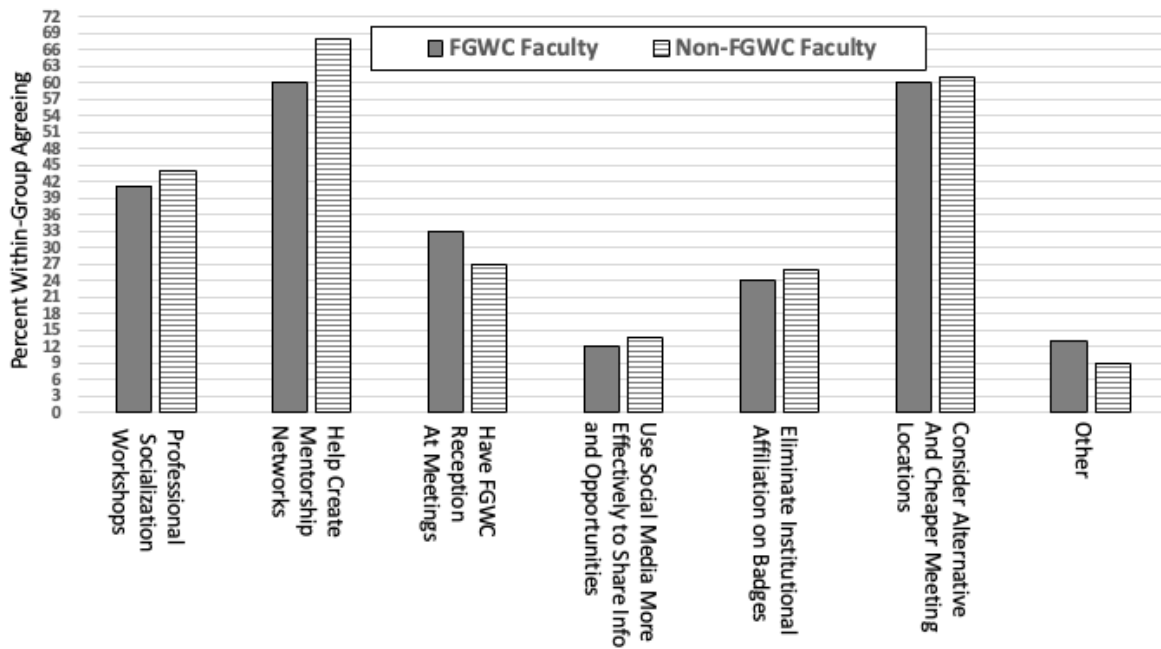


Figure 4. Faculty Responses Regarding What Might ASA Do?



In addition to the recommendations that arose explicitly from the survey data, and based on their own experiences and insights, the task force members offer three additional recommendations.

Recommendation 8. Liaise with the ASA First-Generation and Working-Class Community to assure that over time ASA leadership remains aware of the work of this task force, including the recommendations herein, the success of the 2019 reception as a potential model for FGWC receptions moving forward, and the option the Community has to propose Annual Meeting pre-conferences. Facilitate the transfer of the task force's Twitter and Facebook accounts to the Community. Encourage and empower the FGWC Community (and all Communities) to create a civically engaged subcommittee charged with identifying ways that ASA can be more responsive to the needs and concerns of their members and share suggestions with Council when appropriate.

Recommendation 9. For now, hold on the formation of a Status Committee on FGWC. This will provide time for the current recommendations of the FGWC task force in this report to be implemented and to begin to see their impact. It will also allow the newly formed FGWC Community the opportunity to establish itself and further gauge the needs of FGWC sociologists. Revisit the question of whether there is need to establish a separate Status Committee on FGWC People in Sociology in three years. Council might consider consulting with the FGWC Community at this time.

Recommendation 10. Place a moratorium on use of the data the task force has collected until the end of 2024 such that only ASA itself and task force members have access to the data and can continue to analyze and publish findings based upon it. Any manuscripts based on the data will be reviewed by ASA staff prior to submission for publication in any venue and will include an acknowledgement and disclaimer provided by ASA. After 2024, ASA may want to consider implementing a data sharing plan that would allow other researchers to petition for access to de-identified versions of the task force's data.

Conclusion

The work of the Task Force on First-Generation and Working-Class People in Sociology, as reflected in this report, demonstrates the multiple and significant challenges faced by FGWC people working in academic sociology, whether they are graduate students or faculty. The report also demonstrates the intersectional nature of those challenges, particularly in the interaction between FGWC status and race/ethnicity and the ways those challenges reverberate and accrue across the professional pipeline, from the undergraduate level through graduate school and on into careers.

Underlying systems of inequality that fundamentally characterize our society are at the root of the disparities revealed in this report and are not easily or simply addressed by any single department, or the American Sociological Association. Still, we found it heartening to see the degree of agreement among FGWC and non-FGWC respondents regarding specific actions that sociology departments and the ASA could undertake to work toward ameliorating disparities and lowering barriers to success where possible.

It is our hope that the findings and recommendations included in this report and the articles, once they are published, will help shift departmental thinking and practice, as well as ASA policies and programs, in a way that will lead to a discipline that can more fully benefit from the insights and contributions of

people from FGWC backgrounds. Indeed, FGWC people in sociology and their thoughtful allies may be uniquely qualified and effective in working toward the larger societal changes that could lead to a more just, diverse, and equitable profession and society.

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Report of the ASA Task Force on First-Generation and Working-Class People in Sociology

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Continue to collect data on FGWC status for ASA members and, when appropriate, use FGWC as variable of interest in association research. As sufficient data becomes available, examine rates of FGWC members holding administrative positions within institutions, including Department Chair, and serving in leadership positions at the ASA, including Council, Publications Committee, and editorial boards of journals.

Recommendation 2. Be aware that while using the more easily implemented first-generation status measure (i.e., neither parent has attained a bachelor's degree) is sufficient in many cases, adding an occupational class-based indicator, such as EGP, can provide even more precision when needed. A closed-ended subjective measure of class status, which is probably more easily measurable, is another option that can be considered although it would not be as precise regarding detailed parent occupation.

Recommendation 3. Whenever possible in data collect and programmatic efforts, treat race/ethnicity and FGWC status as intersectional variables, considering both their unique and joint effects.

Recommendation 4. In collaboration with interested task force members and potentially the new ASA First-Generation and Working-Class Community, develop a resource for departments on how to best support FGWC students and faculty. The resource guide should encourage departments to identify and consider department- and institution-specific issues faced by FGWC faculty and students, as well as the more general issues identified in this report, and provide guidance and ideas for how to respond effectively.

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