THINKING ABOUT THE
MASTER’S DEGREE
IN SOCIOLOGY:
Academic, Applied, Professional, and Everything in Between
About the American Sociological Association
The American Sociological Association (ASA), founded in 1905, is a non-profit membership association dedicated to advancing sociology as a scientific discipline and profession serving the public good. With nearly 14,000 members, ASA encompasses sociologists who are faculty members at colleges and universities, researchers, practitioners, and students. About 20 percent of the members work in government, business, or non-profit organizations.

As the national organization for sociologists, the American Sociological Association, through its Executive Office, is well positioned to provide a unique set of services to its members and to promote the vitality, visibility, and diversity of the discipline. Working at the national and international levels, the Association aims to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.

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Preface

In 2004, an informal group of chairs of master’s-only programs asked the American Sociological Association to work with them to develop strategies to ensure the master’s degree is a meaningful professional degree. The ASA Council appointed a Task Force on the Master’s Degree to produce a report that would be useful to sociology departments starting or reviewing an applied, professional, clinical or other terminal master’s program.

The ASA Council asked the Task Force on the Master’s Degree in Sociology to:

1. Identify the key components and characteristics of a professional master’s program collaborating with the Council of Graduate Schools on a project of the same name and with the Society for Applied Sociology and the Sociological Practice Association;
2. Link the BA degree guidelines in the ASA’s Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major II report to potential master’s requirements;
3. Examine how some departments are beginning to develop an understanding and an expansion of local/regional employment opportunities for sociologists with master’s degrees;
4. Describe some interdisciplinary master’s programs in which sociology is the host department or plays a key role;
5. Develop a network of master’s-only department chairs and directors of graduate study to review issues and concerns raised during a meeting at the 2004 ASA Annual Meeting.

The Task Force on the Master’s Degree in Sociology was appointed in June 2005. Membership included the following:

• Barbara Chesney (Chair, through August 2006)
• Juanita Firestone (Chair, through August 2007)
• Rebecca Adams (ASA Council Liaison)
Overview

Significant shifts in the U.S. labor market started with the beginning of deindustrialization in the 1970s—changes that spurred greater demands for increased levels of education. Among all postsecondary degrees nationwide, the number of master's degrees awarded overall has seen the most substantial growth over the past four decades. Although master's-level education has grown faster than the increase associated with both bachelor's and PhD degrees overall, the discipline of sociology has not been a strong participant in that master's degree growth.

Pressed by the growing demand for more education, public institutions of higher learning are under constant pressure to maintain or increase enrollments. However, the funding models used by many states have larger multipliers for graduate students than for undergraduates, creating an emphasis on graduate education. Colleges and universities tend to view graduate programs as enhancing their stature as educational institutions and often press for departments and divisions to expand the production of master's degrees. Because master's students are more likely than doctoral students to pay tuition, college administrators tend to regard master's programs as a source of revenue to support university initiatives.

There has also been encouragement from some organizations concerned with higher education to promote applied and professional master's degrees, including the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the National Research Council (2008). Although some sociology programs have implemented both applied and professional degree programs, departments that grant only master's (and not doctoral) degrees in sociology are often less well supported by their institutions than departments that offer terminal master's degrees in other disciplines. It is not clear if the newer applied or professional sociology master's programs will be better supported. Because the difference between applied and professional degrees is not always obvious, we will use these terms interchangeably throughout this report.
to denote a terminal degree that emphasizes the teaching of skills that will result in professional-level jobs in the field of training.

To assist sociology departments in implementing, modifying, or strengthening a master's program, this report addresses the following areas:

1. criteria for professional, applied, and clinical master's programs,
2. criteria from the ASA report on liberal learning,
3. common characteristics among programs, and
4. key considerations for implementing, modifying, and maintaining a sociology master's program.

These criteria, characteristics, and considerations are not intended to be prescriptive. They are intended to be descriptive and provide guidance to sociology departments as they consider their future development of degree programs. Different programs in different contexts have different challenges, so the discussions herein are unlikely to apply to every program. However, all departments with a master's program or considering one will find useful information.

**Growth of Master’s Degree Programs**

**INTRODUCTION**

More students than ever have started master's programs this fall [2007] and universities are seeing these programs as potentially lucrative sources of revenue. The number of students earning these degrees around the country has nearly doubled since 1980. Since 1970, the growth is 150 percent, more than twice as fast as bachelor and doctorate programs (Fairfield 2007).

In 2005, over 1600 institutions of higher education in the United States offered various master's degree programs; of these institutions, nearly two-thirds were “master's-focused”. Master's degrees account for 90 percent of all graduate degrees awarded and master's education is the fastest growing area of graduate education (Council of Graduate Schools 2005a; Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman 2008). Eighty percent of all individuals seeking graduate degrees are enrolled in master's programs. Compared with previous decades, students enrolled in master's programs are more likely to have spouses and dependents, be employed, and be enrolled part-time (Snyder et al). Many are seeking advanced degrees for the practical purposes of enhancing career advancement or economic mobility (Glazer-Raymo 2004; Fairfield 2007).

The increased emphasis on post-baccalaureate education both in the United States and in other countries has been widely noted. The *Washington Post*, for example, reported that career-oriented programs are “the biggest trend in Master's-level

It is increasingly obvious that a high level of scientific and technological expertise is necessary in a widening array of careers. Gone are the days when most enterprises only occasionally needed some sort of special expertise and, when they did, could simply go out and temporarily hire an appropriately trained technician.

With larger proportions of the population holding bachelor's degrees, many college graduates perceive a need for education or training
beyond the bachelor’s degree. The Baccalaureate and Beyond Study (Nevill and Chen 2007; Redd 2007) found that 40 percent of those graduating with a bachelor’s degree in 1992–93 had enrolled in graduate school by 2003. This proportion was even higher for social science majors. Forty-nine percent of social science majors enrolled in graduate school within 10 years—33 percent in master’s programs, 10 percent in first-professional programs, and 6 percent in doctoral programs.

The primary reasons for this appear to be that obtaining a graduate degree has the potential to significantly increase one’s earning power and career options. According to the Census Bureau (Stoops 2004), earning a bachelor’s degree will, on average, increase average monthly earnings by 69 percent over a high school diploma. A master’s degree increases that average monthly earning by another 21.6 percent. And a doctorate increases average monthly earning by another 33.5 percent.

It is also important to note that given the increasing demand for graduate degrees, and due in part to the drive for better employment and earnings, the perceived need for post-baccalaureate education and training has led to degree creep or an escalation of credentialing (Bollag 2007). As a result, the issue of credential “creep” can have impacts on master’s programs in terms of degree expectations, and on external and internal pressures as well as internal politics. We discuss some of the trends and issues in master’s degree growth in what follows.

PRESSURES FOR MASTER’S-LEVEL PROGRAMS
Public institutions of higher education have experienced multiple pressures to increase enrollments, and the funding models of many states provide larger multipliers for graduate students than for undergraduates. Colleges often perceive that graduate programs elevate their stature as an institution and declare a need for growth in master’s degree production. Administrators often see master’s students, who are more likely than doctoral students to pay tuition, as a source of revenue to support other university initiatives. However, the demographic changes in master’s enrollments (e.g., part-time vs. full-time students, age, race/ethnicity, sex) create a need for improved graduate student services (Alexander and Maher 2006).

Sex and Race
By far the master’s degree is the graduate degree of choice for women and minorities (Council of Graduate Schools 2005a; also see Snyder et al. 2008). This coincides with the emphasis in many institutions on competing to increase diversity within their student bodies. In the mid-1970s, men outnumbered women in graduate education for all racial and ethnic groups except African American. By 2001, women outnumbered men in all groups.

Interdisciplinary Programs
The trend toward interdisciplinary programs is also a source of pressure to create more master’s programs. It is easier to refocus an existing master’s program to fit interdisciplinary perspectives or to create new ones than it is to experiment with doctoral curricula (Felman 2006). The approval processes at the institutional and state levels are often more labor and time intensive at the doctoral level and the financial investment is usually much less for master’s programs.

Institutional Politics
Faculty interested in developing or transforming a master’s program may find their efforts constrained by institutional-level forces as to the type of program they can offer. For example, faculty interested in creating interdisciplinary linkages with other programs in an institutional culture that rewards discipline-specific research and programs may encounter resistance. Conversely, administrators or governing boards that call for greater interdisciplinary linking may resist faculty efforts to offer a disciplinary-specific program. Faculty who seek to offer an applied or professional master’s may encounter resistance in an institution that tends to value traditional scholarship. Alternatively, administrators under pressure to justify institutional investments by showing their relevance of faculty and student activities to the surrounding community may push for an applied focus in a master’s program when faculty are focused on more scholarly approaches.
Research on the Growth of Master's Degree Programs

INTRODUCTION
An ASA ad hoc committee report in 1996 has as one of its charges "To make the MA a meaningful final degree."

Many PhD-oriented graduate programs offer the MA mainly as a consolation price for students who fail to complete their PhD. What programs are especially successful in emphasizing the MA as a meaningful final degree? What are the career lines for which such MAs are being trained? (Hougland et al. 1996)

The report, which focused on departments in which the master's was the highest degree awarded, concluded that the master's degree can be a valuable terminal degree despite its lingering image as a secondary degree to the doctorate; most master's provide solid training in theory, methodology, and substantive areas; and most graduates of these programs either find appropriate employment or enter PhD programs.

The report also noted a number of problems typically confronted by master's-only degree programs. These included limited resources, small numbers of faculty, difficulty in recruiting adequate numbers of students, especially adequately prepared students, and lack of administrative support (Hougland et al. 1996).

In the more than 10 years since the ASA report, societal and institutional changes have brought the master's degree, and the master's degree in sociology to the forefront, although some of the key problems identified in 1996 remain. Master's-level education, especially as a vocational and professional degree, has become an increasingly important area of focus in higher education across all disciplines and professions in recent years. Yet, this growth in master's education reveals a complex array of academic, applied, professional, and interdisciplinary programs that are characterized by varying degrees of clarity about their goals (Council of Graduate Schools 2003; 2004; 2005a; 2005b).
Sociology departments overall have not participated fully as a discipline in the phenomenal growth in master’s education. Sociology is sometimes not well understood by academic administrators and university governing boards, and it can be viewed as lacking a rigorous theoretical and/or empirical base. In such a context, sociology programs that grant only master’s degrees tend to be less well supported by their institutions than master’s-only programs in other disciplines or those sociology programs that grant PhDs and/or undergraduate degrees. Efforts to develop solid sociology master’s programs find little support when these conditions prevail, and existing programs are vulnerable in times of budgetary contraction. Nonetheless, as shown below, sociology master’s programs remain a significant part of the discipline’s landscape. It is in the interest of the discipline’s overall health, therefore, that they be provided with guidance and support.

We know little about these sociology master’s degrees programs (i.e., the political issues they face getting started, the characteristics of their students, their job placement efforts and activities, and the jobs their graduates obtain). Although data are sparse for sociology, the demographics of master’s students generally and the underlying reasons for pursuing a master’s degree suggest that many graduates are likely to remain in the local area after earning their degree, although this varies by the metropolitan or rural location of the school. It would seem likely then that sociology master’s degree programs take into consideration the educational institution’s local labor market and related external community environments to prepare students for viable job opportunities that make their degree worth having. Yet, limited evidence indicates that many sociology programs do not appear to consider or assess the needs of the local labor market in designing master’s education. Even less is known about the career trajectories of master’s degree recipients in sociology. Few terminal degree programs have job placement or alumni-tracking mechanisms, and master’s programs in PhD-granting sociology programs do not emphasize individuals receiving those degrees.

To provide more information, guidance, and support for those sociology departments starting or revamping a master’s program, the ASA task force used a variety of strategies to gather and analyze information that would be helpful in departmental planning and decision making. Data follow on the growth of the sociology master’s degrees, characteristics of high-quality programs based on existing literature, and findings from a web-based survey of the characteristics of sociology master’s degrees. In conclusion, issues are raised that should be considered by departments in setting up or revamping a master’s program.

**MASTER’S EDUCATION IN SOCIOLOGY—SLOW GROWTH**

To provide a perspective on trends in the number of master’s degrees awarded in sociology, overall growth is compared with the growth of other social science disciplines for bachelor’s (Figure 1), master’s (Figure 2), and PhD degrees (Figure 3).

![Figure 1: Trends in Bachelor's Degrees: Total and Selected Social Science, 1970-2006.](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Bachelor's</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Bachelor's</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data in Figures 1-3 derived from Snyder et al. (2008; esp. Tables 258, 262, and 263) and from professional trend data housed at http://www.asanet.org.
As shown in Figure 1, the total number of bachelor’s degrees awarded nationally increased by 88 percent from 1970 to 2006 an average annual growth of 2.6 percent. These increases have been relatively steady across the period, although the last five years have been characterized somewhat by higher growth rates (3.6 percent). In contrast, sociology bachelor’s degrees are characterized by a roller coaster decline from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, followed by a period of steady increases since 1988. While the number of sociology bachelor’s degrees awarded decreased 7.5 percent between 1970 and 2006, there was a 117.9 percent increase between 1986 and 2006.

Figure 2 shows the total number of master’s degrees in all disciplines increasing by 158.9 percent during this 36 year period.

This substantial growth in master’s degrees has been especially strong since the late 1980s averaging nearly 4.0 percent per year. For sociology, however, master’s degrees decreased over this period by 13.1 percent. The highest number of degrees awarded was in 1974 (2,236 degrees), with the number declining steadily to a low in 1987 (970 degrees). Although characterized by slight increases from 1987 through the mid-1990s, the total number of sociology master’s degrees awarded remained relatively stable after 1995 until dropping sharply from 2,031 in 2003-04 to 1,518 in 2004-05 (a 25.3 percent decline in one year) and then increasing somewhat in 2006. That the number awarded (1,577) in the most recent year (2005-06) continued to remain significantly lower than earlier years suggests the possibility of a trend that is anomalous in the context of sharp increases in other fields.
Similar to bachelor’s degrees, Figure 3 shows that the total number of PhDs overall awarded between 1970 and 2006 increased by 88 percent with growth especially strong during the last five years, averaging 6 percent per year. The number of PhDs awarded in sociology, however, declined from a high of 734 in 1976 to a low of 448 in 1990. It increased again to 633 by 2000. The number of sociology PhDs awarded therefore increased by 7.5 percent between 1970 and 2006.

Although master’s degrees in sociology have not kept pace in terms of growth compared with other disciplines, including other social sciences, master’s degrees are still the most common graduate degree in sociology. In this respect they represent the face of the discipline to much of the public.

Diversity Within Sociology Master’s Programs

INTRODUCTION

The Master’s Task Force searched the websites of many colleges and universities to find a diversity of applied or professional sociology master’s programs in terms of their mission, structure, and approach. Appendix A contains profiles of 10 programs to illustrate this diversity.

Our examination of programs suggests that programs vary in the degree to which they emphasize theory, methods, and practice.

- Applied programs tend to put greater emphasis on methods, while traditional academic (PhD preparation) programs tend to emphasize theory.
- Applied programs are more likely to require an internship and/or applied research project than a thesis.
- Applied sociology programs may place more emphasis on theory than do applied interdisciplinary programs.

Programs also show diverse relationships with the undergraduate curriculum, from combined, or accelerated, programs (a five-year bachelor’s/master’s) to strict separation between the programs. See Appendix A for some profiles of 5-year or combined bachelor’s/master’s programs (e.g., DePaul University, University of Maryland-Baltimore County, University of Massachusetts—Boston). Two models appear to fit the concept of “combined” degrees. First is the accelerated model in which undergraduates are allowed to take a limited number of graduate credits and then count these credits toward both the bachelor’s and master’s degrees. The second model does not double count credits, but arranges course scheduling so that both degrees can be completed within five calendar years. Such programs may increase the likelihood of sociology undergraduates entering and completing sociology master’s degrees.

Practical issues that departments need to consider in developing combined programs include the following:
• **Curriculum and faculty capacity**: Are there sufficient faculty to sustain graduate courses? Are classes and course content scheduled so that students can gain desired knowledge and skill levels as well as complete the degrees in five years?

• **Criteria for admission and continuance in combined programs**: Are GPA, class standing, and sociology credit thresholds necessary for admission? What performance standard is required to remain in the combined program?

• **Criteria for program completion**: When is the bachelor’s degree awarded? At what point is a student considered a “graduate student”?

• **University policies**: Can credits count toward two degrees? Does the student records system allow tracking of accelerated or five-year programs?

• For departments with PhD programs, are there two “tracks” or one? For example, should a professional or applied degree emphasis more substantive workplace experiences/requirements for those who do not continue.

**MASTER’S PROGRAMS AND A QUALITY EDUCATION**

Existing literature provides examples of efforts to identify characteristics of high-quality master’s programs. While this literature is not specific to sociology, it is applicable to many disciplines and suggests that successful master’s programs are not confined to traditional prestigious graduate schools.

Traditional views of highly rated graduate departments and a quality education tend to attribute program quality to students and faculty that have exceptional academic credentials and institutions with abundant financial resources. In this model, recruiting better students and better faculty are viewed as the primary means of building a stronger and higher-quality program. Recent evidence, however, suggests that program quality and success reflect factors beyond the quality of students and faculty and the resources available to support them.

One of the few comprehensive assessments focused on master’s programs identified program culture, “planned learning” experiences, resources, and program leadership as significant factors contributing to high-quality programs (Conrad, Haworth, and Millar 1993).

• **Program culture** refers to a common mission, vision, and understanding of the purpose(s) for the program among the program’s stakeholders, and an ethic of cooperative support and intellectual challenge shared by all program participants, students and faculty alike.

• “Planned learning” refers to a concerted effort to build a program with established learning experiences, especially those that reflect the purpose(s) of the program. These include (but are not restricted to) such program components as core courses and linked disciplinary or interdisciplinary coursework, “doing-centered” and/or active learning (such as internships, practica, research), faculty advisors who are attentive to students’ personal and professional needs, a final project that brings together skills from prior coursework in an integrated manner, and extracurricular activities that contribute to professional development and a sense of community (e.g., brown bags, conferences, faculty-student social hours).

• **Resources** include institutional and departmental support not only in terms of financial resources, but also a specific institutional and departmental commitment to master’s education and the students in the program. Such commitments include institutional promotion and tenure policies that facilitate faculty involvement in master’s education, and departmental assistance in placing students after completion.

• **Leadership** is a dimension of program quality that refers to the characteristics of faculty. Program quality is tied to having faculty who are active in their fields and who are committed to master’s education, as well as having faculty with non-university workplace experience. Quality master’s programs are also characterized by

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2 This is a somewhat simplistic summary of these issues. For more detail, see Conrad and Blackburn (1985) and Conrad, Haworth, and Millar (1993).
strong program leadership—individuals who assumed leadership positions in the program and help the program achieve its goals.

This model also included strong support for the value of having "good" students as part of a strong master's program. Such students are defined differently than the conventional view (those with high grade point averages or high test scores) as students who exhibit commitment, diversity, and experience.

Haworth and Conrad (1997) refer to this model as an "engagement theory" of program quality. High-quality programs "are those in which students, faculty, and administrators invest significant time and effort in mutually supportive teaching and learning," and which elicit the participation of all potential stakeholders (Haworth and Conrad 1997: xii–xiii). The engagement theory goes beyond simple inputs as the most important factors in program quality, relying upon a more expansive view that includes institutional culture and process.

There are three sets of guidelines that attempt to operationalize the concept of a quality master's program. They have common characteristics. The first of these guidelines was designed for professional master's programs in social science disciplines, the second for applied and clinical programs in sociology, and the third for liberal learning in sociology bachelor's degree programs. The Applied and Clinical Standards and Professional Master's indicators are relatively recent efforts to define program attributes that are considered essential to establishing these master's programs, and the ASA Report on Liberal Learning provides further support for these criteria.

**CRITERIA FOR PROFESSIONAL MASTER'S PROGRAMS**

Calls for workforce development, greater accountability in higher education, and closer correlation between curriculum and job skills have fueled increased emphasis on practice-oriented, applied, and professional master's degrees (Council of Graduate Schools 2006; Glazer-Raymo 2004; National Academy of Sciences 2008). The concept of "Professional Master's Degrees" was first introduced in the natural sciences and engineering, and it has gained acceptance as a result of an initiative funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation in 1997 (Council of Graduate Schools 2006). The first professional science master's degrees, initiated in doctoral institutions, were expanded to master's-focused institutions in 2001 by the Sloan grant program. In 2004, the Ford Foundation funded the Council of Graduate Schools to develop a similar initiative for the development of professional master's degrees in the social sciences and humanities. While many applied, clinical, or practice-oriented programs already existed in the social sciences, they did not necessarily meet all of the characteristics of a "professional" degree under the definition developed by the Council of Graduate Schools. As a result of this funding initiative, some new "Professional Master's" have now been established in sociology and other social sciences (Council of Graduate Schools 2006). The ASA worked with the Council of Graduate Schools in developing the criteria, conducting a study of the characteristics of master's degree programs in the social sciences, and helping evaluate programs for funding.

The primary indicators of a professionally oriented social science program were developed and modified after discussions among Council of Graduate Schools and the social science disciplinary societies (e.g., ASA, American Anthropological Association, American Economics Association, American Historical Association, American Psychological Association, and the American Linguistics Society). These indicators are described in Table 1.

The first column of Table 1 characterizes 10 indicators of a professional master's degree program; the second column provides measures of the indicators that were used in a survey of websites to see whether such programs existed in the social sciences. Most master's programs surveyed did not have all of these criteria according to the results of the web survey (Council of Graduate Schools 2003).
**TABLE 1. Indicators of Professional-Level Master’s Degree in the Social Sciences***  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>MEASURE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Offers skills-based courses (e.g., marketing, management, and statistics) and courses at the boundaries of disciplines</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if there was a skills-based course that enhanced employability and if the courses were outside the confines of the particular discipline.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Emphasizes writing and communication skills</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if it offered a specific writing course, especially aimed at writing for nonacademics, or if such writing skills were indicated to be an important part of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Has final project or team experience</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if rather than (or in addition to) a thesis, there was a final or “capstone” project with a research experience, conducted for a client or as a team research experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Has advisory board of industry/government/nonprofit employers</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if an advisory board was indicated on the website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Has required internship</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if an internship was listed among the requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Has faculty with experience in nonacademic employment</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if there was evidence of professional or nonacademic employment or volunteer activity for at least one faculty member, through examination of faculty websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Has off-campus activities</td>
<td>Programs received a positive score if there was evidence that students had the opportunity or were encouraged to participate in off-campus activities that enhanced professional skills, aside from a required internship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Has marketing of careers on website</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if there was evidence of listing the kinds of jobs available to master’s (not PhD) graduates or if there was a link to career or placement services or both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Has tracking or conducts surveys of graduates</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if there was a listing of alumni and a description of their careers and/or if there was a website survey for alumni to complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Has assessment, quality control</td>
<td>A program received a positive score if there was a notation or description of outside professional accreditation or licensing.</td>
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**CRITERIA FOR APPLIED AND CLINICAL PROGRAMS**  
In its Standards for Applied and Clinical Sociology Programs at the Master’s Level, the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology (2003) identified the key components of master’s programs in applied sociology, clinical sociology, and sociological practice. The Commission was established in 1995 by the Society for Applied Sociology and the Sociological Practice Association in response to a perceived need for greater standardization of quality at both the bachelor’s and master’s levels (Perlsstadt and Iucovitch 2003). As it developed the Standards over a several year period, the Commission reviewed documents from other accrediting bodies and solicited input from sociologists. Standards were first established for bachelor’s programs, and then master’s programs.

The Commission viewed this set of standards as the minimum necessary requirements for implementing a quality master’s program. Table 2 lists seven components of the Standards for Applied and Clinical Sociology Programs at the Master’s Level.

**TABLE 2. Standards for Applied and Clinical Master’s Programs**

1. **Preconditions for review.** To be considered for accreditation, the institution and program must meet certain preconditions. The institution must be accredited and must have policies that are ethical and nondiscriminatory, that protect the confidentiality of student records, and that specify grievance procedures for students and faculty. The program must have an administrative structure, sufficient resources, an appropriate name, and at least three faculty members.

2. **Program structure.** The program must identify its mission and goals in relation to sociological practice and it must specify outcomes for student learning. It must maintain close relationships with practitioners, disseminate detailed information about the program to students and prospective students, maintain adequate records, and devote adequate resources to the practice aspects of the program.

3. **Learning objectives.** The Standards specify learning objectives or outcomes that should be met by students who complete the program. Learning objectives are specified in the following areas:
   a. Knowledge (theory and methods, especially focusing on their relationship to sociological practice and their uses in practice settings)
   b. Skills (communication, problem definition/intervention, software, leadership, planning, organizational, group process, technological, and client service)
   c. Professional orientation and ethics (identity as a sociological practitioner, adherence to professional standards of conduct, and awareness of social, ethical, and political constraints on practice)
### TABLE 2. Standards for Applied and Clinical Master’s Programs (continued)

4. **Practice experience.** Students in the program must complete at least 200 hours of supervised onsite field experience, in addition to at least 40 hours for training, planning, advising, and report writing. The program must specify expectations for site supervisors and students, show that supervisors are appropriately qualified, maintain records of student progress, and provide appropriate compensation for faculty supervisors. In addition, the program must provide a mechanism, such as a portfolio, through which students may demonstrate their use of theory, methods, skills, ethics, and professional identity in field experience settings.

5. **Areas of specialization/concentration.** The program must provide students with the opportunity to have a substantive specialty. For each substantive area, the program must identify learning objectives, provide appropriate advising, have faculty who are qualified in the area, and make practice experiences available to students.

6. **Integrative product.** Students must demonstrate their ability to integrate theory, methods, and practice experience in an integrative product. This could be a thesis, a presentation, a paper submission, a grant application, a comprehensive examination, or any other mechanism determined by the program.

7. **Monitoring/quality control.** The program must collect information that will allow it to evaluate the effectiveness of its administrative procedures and policies and assess the extent to which the student learning outcomes for the program are being met. Changes in the program should be based on assessment findings and program review recommendations.

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These the Standards adopt a “value-added” approach—that is, they include theory and methods components that are typical for a sociology master’s degree, but add a practice component. On completion, therefore, graduates should be prepared to enter sociology PhD programs, as well as to seek employment in practice settings. Unlike the professional master’s program, the standards for applied and clinical master’s programs do not include a standard specifying the development of job placement strategies or the monitoring of the career trajectories of alumni who might be mentors for current students.

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**CRITERIA FROM THE ASA REPORT ON UNDERGRADUATE LIBERAL LEARNING**

According to the ASA Report on Undergraduate Liberal Learning (McKinney et al. 2004):

> The best thing sociology can do for undergraduate students, whether majors or not, is to teach them to learn effectively so that they can keep up with rapid changes in society, particularly in knowledge, and live meaningful, engaged, and productive lives. If we can achieve this goal and their on-going learning is based on a template of understanding the importance of social structure and culture—the sociological perspective—then we will have succeeded in providing an education worth having and in producing citizens and workers who will be of continuing value to their communities and employers.

The Task Force on Undergraduate Education focused on the value, meaning, and importance of sociology as part of an undergraduate liberal arts education—what this disciplinary education means to the individual and why it was of value to the community. The Task Force report, *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated*, provided a series of recommendations for sociology departments to consider for their students to achieve a mastery of the discipline, especially through sequential learning or “study in depth.” This report put forward 16 separate recommendations for sociology departments to consider as part of a strong undergraduate curriculum.

The Master’s Degree Task Force examined these criteria for their relevance and applicability to defining quality master’s education. Although graduate programs are distinctly different from undergraduate programs, there is a recognition that many of the same general objectives apply if at a different level of competency. Of the 16 criteria for quality undergraduate programs, 10 appear relevant to a quality master’s program. They are listed in Table 3.
TABLE 3. Recommendations from Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated

1. Departments should develop a mission statement, goals, and learning objectives for their sociology program and make them public, especially to students.

2. Departments should gauge the needs and interests of their students, and department goals and practices should, in part, reflect and respond to these needs and interests as well as to the mission of the institution.

3. Departments should infuse the empirical base of sociology throughout the curriculum, giving students exposure to research opportunities across several methodological traditions, providing repeated experiences in posing sociological questions, developing theoretical explanations, and bringing data to bear on them.

4. Departments should structure the curriculum to increase students' exposure to multicultural, cross-cultural, and cross-national content relevant to sociology.

5. Departments should promote faculty development and institutional culture that promotes teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

6. Departments should encourage diverse pedagogies, including active learning experiences, to increase student engagement in the discipline.

7. Departments should offer community and classroom-based learning experiences that develop students' critical-thinking skills and prepare them for lives of civic engagement.

8. Departments should offer and encourage student involvement in out-of-class (co- and extra-curricular) learning opportunities.

9. Departments should develop effective advising and mentoring programs for majors.

10. Departments should assess the sociology program on a regular basis using multiple sources of data, including data on student learning.

Taken from McKinsey et al.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AMONG QUALITY PROGRAMS AND CURRICULA

Appendix B presents a comparison of these three sets of criteria to test the overlap among the aspects of quality education identified in sociology programs. There is substantial interconnection and overlap among the three. The Liberal Learning report recommendations have much in common with many of the criteria for quality professional and applied or clinical master's programs. As already noted, these criteria are also consistent with the characteristics that underlie quality master's education mentioned in the literature. This high degree of overlap suggests that application of the standards for applied/clinical and professional programs can help address weaknesses that plague some and perhaps many such programs.

The first recommendation of a “mission statement, goals, and learning objectives” for example, is consistent with the master's literature indicating that programs should have clear direction or purpose. A mission statement is one way of formally establishing program direction. Having a clearly defined program purpose that is universally supported by all constituents enables departments to more easily define goals and measure program outcomes. As indicated in Appendix B, this is also a standard set by the applied/clinical guidelines, but not by professional programs, although it is implicit in the later criteria.

Consistent with an emphasis on planned learning experiences, the Liberal Learning report recommendations encourage substantive planning of core and required courses and program structure, diverse pedagogies, community-centered learning experiences, and skills that should be part of the program (Recommendation 4—infuse the empirical base of sociology throughout the curriculum). They also recognize the importance of effective advising and mentoring for students. These planned learning experiences are also a focus of both Applied/Clinical standards and Professional Master's indicators.

The Liberal Learning report recommendations also note the importance of promoting “faculty development and an institutional culture that rewards scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning.” Having university and departmental cultures that reward...
faculty participation (e.g., teaching, advising, or leading) is a significant factor in establishing high-quality master's programs as well. Finally, the recommendations point to the importance of ongoing assessment using multiple sources of data, integral to both applied/clinical programs as well as professional master's programs. Assessment allows departments to gauge program strengths and weaknesses in order to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses.

Can these criteria be found in current sociology master's programs? To answer this question, the ASA Task Force conducted a survey of current sociology master's programs. Because there is significant overlap among the criteria for professional and applied or clinical master's programs, and there has been increasing interest in establishing pilot "professional" programs within and/or connected to sociology departments over the past several years, we examined whether current programs had the characteristics considered important for successful professional master's programs.

ARE THE CRITERIA FOR QUALITY MASTER'S PROGRAMS REFLECTED IN CURRENT SOCIOLOGY MASTER'S PROGRAMS?

To assess the prevalence of professional master's program criteria in existing sociology programs, the ASA Task Force conducted a survey of the universe of sociology graduate department websites. It included only those that admit students to a terminal master's program (terminal master's can be offered in departments granting PhDs).

Although a program's website may not reveal all of the program's characteristics, the Task Force chose this form of data collection because of its economy, efficiency, and coverage (this method is not affected by low response rates). Each program was coded as to whether or not it had a non-thesis option and how many of the nine primary criteria for professional master's degrees were present. We cross-tabulated the results by the number of faculty in the department and by the highest degree offered by the department, to learn if these key indicators of departmental resources and mission influenced the presence of programs that met the criteria of professional master's programs. Table 4 shows the initial exploration of these data, breaking out the percentage of programs (total and by size of faculty) showing each of the 10 indicators, as well as a total score. More detail on the methods can be found in Appendix C.

No matter what their institutional characteristics, virtually all programs (96 percent) admit terminal master's degree students, according to the website survey. The proportion of programs admitting terminal master's students is not significantly different by size of departments or institution type. Terminal master's degree programs did vary modestly, though significantly, by region. The fewest are found in the institutions located in the northeast and mid-Atlantic states while the highest proportions are found in the southeast and western states.

Master's programs have on average 3 of the 10 program characteristics (“Mean Overall Program Score”), but this varies significantly by size of faculty. Approximately 14 percent of the programs granting master's degrees have none of the characteristics of professional master's programs. Larger departments (19 or more faculty) are more likely to have none of the professional program characteristics than are smaller departments, and the smallest departments (fewer than 10 faculty members) are least likely to have a score of zero (no professional master's criteria). These small departments were most likely to offer a final project or team experience (almost 60 percent do compared with under 50 percent of the largest departments), to have a nonacademic advisory board (although relatively few departments do), and require a nonacademic internship. They are as likely as larger departments to have faculty with nonacademic experience, to market careers on the website, and to track their graduates as the larger departments. The largest departments are most likely to have off-campus activities. With few exceptions, the percentage of departments characterized by each of the criteria is relatively low. These findings suggest that small departments are either trying to find a niche by offering professional programs or that they are under pressure to do so.
Table 4: Sociology Master's Program Characteristics by Faculty Size (Percentage of Programs Exhibiting Characteristic).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>N*</th>
<th>NUMBER OF FACULTY</th>
<th>CRAMER'S V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>11 to 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admits Terminal Master's Students</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Non-Thesis Option</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Program Indicators</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers Skills-Based Courses</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing/Communication Emphasis</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project/Team Experience</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonacademic Advisory Board</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires Nonacademic Internship</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty-Nonacademic Experience</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus Activities</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markets Careers Website</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement/Tracking of Graduates</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Overall Program Score (0-10)</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Programs with Program Score = 0</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance: * p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01; **** p < .001.

Note: Faculty categorizations are selected by quartiles.


Table 5 provides a slightly different context for thinking about the presence or absence of the characteristics of professional programs. It presents program characteristics by the highest degree offered by the departments, master's or PhD. A key characteristic of master's-only departments is that they offer a non-thesis option. A non-thesis option is more than twice as likely to be offered by master's-only programs (75 percent compared with 35 percent in PhD programs) and as indicated in Table 4, in departments with fewer than 10 faculty members. Terminal master's programs are also more likely to require nonacademic internships.

These findings suggest that programs offering a terminal master's degree offer a different educational experience than do institutions that also award doctoral degrees in sociology: master's programs within PhD-
granting institutions are not only more likely to include faculty with nonacademic experience, but are also more likely to have placement and/or tracking of graduates, two of the characteristics of professional master’s programs.

Overall sociology departments do not offer explicitly designed master’s programs that are to meet the criteria suggested for a successful professional master’s program, but, on average have programs with only three such criteria. A nonthesis option is more common in smaller departments and those awarding a master’s degree only. Of the 10 program characteristics the Council of Graduate Schools associated with an explicitly designed professional master’s degree programs, sociology programs tend only to have the most commonly occurring characteristics include skills-based courses (offered by 88 percent of all programs), faculty with nonacademic experience (62 percent), final project or team experience (46 percent), an emphasis on writing and communication (38 percent), and a required nonacademic internship (31 percent). Nonacademic internships are more likely to occur in master’s-only programs, whereas PhD programs are more likely to have placement and tracking of graduates as well as faculty with nonacademic experience.

Most programs with terminal master’s degrees do not include job placement or alumni tracking mechanisms. Program curricula would probably benefit from these, especially the tracking of alumni, to set up networks for recent graduates. The small faculty size of these departments may preclude such activities. In the next section, we will discuss key considerations that sociology faculty members and department chairs should consider before implementing and modifying master’s programs, if these programs are to be successful.

Implementing, Modifying, and Maintaining a Master’s Program — Some Key Considerations

Implementing, modifying, and/or maintaining any educational program, especially a quality one, is not easy. The existing literature on the factors underlying quality master’s programs suggests a set of issues that programs should consider as part of the implementation process. Given that individual programs have different purposes, goals, and resources, each will need to assess the relevance of these issues for their specific program. The following section is framed as a set of broad questions for individual departments to consider rather than a statement of best practices, because practices are highly dependent on the particular situation and context of each department.

DOES THE PROGRAM HAVE ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT?
The availability of resources is the first issue to consider in implement or revamping a master’s program. Resources can be viewed in a variety of ways and master’s programs need to consider the availability of multiple types of resources to operate in a successful manner. These include support for faculty, students, and infrastructure (Conrad, Haworth, and Millar 1993; Haworth and Conrad 1997). Programs clearly need the financial commitment of their institution. Faculty teaching master’s-level courses are diverted from the undergraduate program—taking time away from undergraduate teaching, advising, and counseling among others. A key consideration then, is whether there is sufficient support for additional faculty lines or adjuncts to cover those commitments. Perhaps more importantly, does a department have sufficient institutional resources to sustain a master’s program without undermining the undergraduate program? Since a professionally active faculty is viewed as an invaluable asset to graduate programs, does the university provide sufficient sabbatical and travel support? For students, does the institution support assistantships (either research or teaching) that help to attract and retain higher caliber students? Providing
resources for infrastructure can be as broad as maintaining adequate library materials or as department specific as providing computer laboratories or research space.

Departments should also consider other types of institutional support. Does the institution provide tenure, promotion, and merit policies that recognize a commitment to master’s education? For students, do the institution and the department offer career services? From this perspective, having a university career center and a departmental faculty linked to the community can provide access to suitable jobs that are likely to utilize skills developed through the program. The program profile of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County (Appendix A), for example, indicates that the department has forged links with local employers and offers on-campus interviews with a private research firm.

These types of links also speak to relationships that bring the community and university alumni into the educational process as stakeholders. Departments starting or revamping a master’s program should consider the use of advisory boards with members selected from the university as well as local agencies, businesses, and alumni networks (Council of Graduate Schools 2006). For departments that are similar to others, it may be possible to think about such boards as interdisciplinarily, serving the interests of multiple departments simultaneously. Most programs with terminal master’s degrees do not include skills-based courses that would be job specific or would equip graduates with vocational skills such as non-profit management or graphic and visual design, along with more traditional theory and methods courses. Nor do they include job placement or alumni-tracking mechanisms. The program curriculum would probably benefit from these, especially tracking alumni, to set up networks for recent graduates. The small sizes of the faculty may preclude such activities. Finding ways to outsource these activities could be one means of alleviating the problem of overburdened faculty in small departments.

In thinking about the availability of resources for developing and sustaining master’s programs, the institution, the department, individual faculty, and links to the alumni and community are all considerations.

ARE PROGRAM PURPOSES AND/OR GOALS UNIVERSALLY SUPPORTED?

Once a decision is made that there are adequate resources to implement or revamp a master’s program, its mission and goals need to be clarified. Although master’s programs are stereotypically divided into “academic/research” and “applied/professional” degree tracks, a recent body of work indicates that master’s programs are more diverse and complex than this dichotomy assumes (Conrad, Haworth, and Millar 1993; Council of Graduate Schools 2003; Glazer-Raymo 2005: esp. pp. 23–34). It is also important for programs to recognize that the vast majority of master’s degrees are terminal degrees—relatively few individuals actually go on to doctoral study, and fewer still complete it. Faced with the complexity of master’s education, and its generally terminal nature, programs need to have a clear understanding of their purposes and goals. Programs may choose to focus on a single purpose or direction or may opt to incorporate multiple program directions or tracks (e.g., Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, the University of North Dakota, and Suffolk University [Appendix A]).

Having a clearly defined program enables better recruitment of both faculty and students. Faculty recruitment can be better targeted to fill those needs. Similarly, departments can better target prospective students who will have a clear view from the outset of the purpose of the program and what they can expect to learn and how they can expect to use the knowledge obtained. As a result, they can make informed choices, especially if the program has multiple tracks. For aid in deciding on program curriculum, the Standards for Applied and Clinical Master’s Programs of the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology (2003) suggests learning objectives that are appropriate for master’s programs in applied sociology, clinical sociology, and sociological practice. For general information about assessment of student learning, see the ASA publication Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major (Lowery et al. 2005). Publications by the Council of

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3 For example, see the websites http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ous/international/usnet/us/edlite-masters-degree.html and http://educationusa.state.gov/graduate/about/degrees.htm.
Graduate Schools (e.g., 2003; 2005a; 2006) also provide information about the more career-oriented professional master's Degree.

Program assessment is now considered an essential element of any established program and such assessment is aided by having a clearly stated program purpose (Council of Graduate Schools 2005b; 2006; Holm and Johnson 2001). There are always shifts over time within a graduate program as well as in its external environment, and assessment allows programs not only to gauge program quality, but also to understand the changing dynamics of the program and its relationship with the larger community.

Finally, having a program with a clearly defined purpose is more likely to garner support from appropriate stakeholders. Faculty, administrators and students are more likely to be engaged and committed participants in programs that have a clear purpose. Building and maintaining quality master's programs requires a strong commitment on the part of faculty to sustain and participate in the program, as well as administrators who support it.

**DOES THE PROGRAM INCORPORATE "PLANNED" LEARNING EXPERIENCES?**

"Planned learning experiences" should be developed as part of the program's mission and goals. These experiences are educational efforts that help focus and direct a student's engagement in the program and in the educational enterprise (Conrad, Haworth, and Millar 1993; Haworth and Conrad 1997). These are illustrated by clearly defined core requirements and the incorporation of active learning experiences such as internships, field research, practica, or individual or group projects that address the practical needs of local organizations. Many of the program profiles in Appendix A show how differing programs have incorporated or structured such elements as program curriculum, required and elective courses, multiple options for increasing writing proficiency, differing program tracks, and internships, practica, thesis/non-thesis options, and capstone courses or final research projects to build an educational experience of value to their students.

The planning of coursework requires departments to think about the skills and knowledge students should acquire or develop as part of their educational experience and their preparation for the labor market. Is it important, for example, for students to learn to communicate with different audiences, both orally and in writing? Should students develop some form of "graphic" literacy? Will the program emphasize interdisciplinary as well as disciplinary coursework?

Core requirements provide the foundation of sociology as a discipline. These are master's-level courses that are offered on a regular basis and typically emphasize an understanding of theory, research methods, and statistics. Departments may vary in the extent to which these courses are emphasized, but in all cases they are not advanced baccalaureate courses that require extra work on the part of graduate students, but graduate courses that are rigorous and intellectually challenging. In the case of applied or professional degrees students should become aware of how this course work can be applied in the world of work and could increase their employability.

Master's programs might also include a set of disciplinary or interdisciplinary courses that contribute to personal and professional development, such as nonprofit management. (About 6 out of 10 of social science master's graduates are employed in institutions of higher education and other nonprofit organizations [Proudfoot 2006]). These experiences could also include courses that allow students to apply learning in a comprehensive manner. Thesis work, capstone courses, or applied projects, for example, require master's students to draw on the foundations established in prior coursework and to conceptually integrate material from what are often viewed as distinct and unrelated courses. Internships afford opportunities to explore the relevance of the discipline in a work environment and can provide exceptional learning experiences outside of the classroom, especially when well planned and monitored.

To increase employability, planned learning experiences also involve activities outside of class that connect master's students to a professional orientation and to social and community networks. Departmental
activities might include such things as brown bag luncheons including faculty and students, professional symposia, and colloquia. A professional orientation and the development of personal networks can be extended beyond the department’s borders through encouraging activities in local organizations of professional interest and attending local and regional presentations and conferences. These efforts enhance student learning by connecting students to the practice of the discipline and can potentially build links to employment opportunities after graduation.

Finally, given the increase in part-time, older, and working students, the educational experience needs to be considered in terms of how to address the specific situations of “nontraditional” students. Such considerations may include issues such as whether online courses can supplement or replace onsite coursework. Can accelerated master’s programs, which award bachelor’s and master’s degrees in a five-year program, provide a quality educational experience? If so, how should such programs be structured? What are the appropriate pedagogical standards for achieving a quality program and meeting program goals?

DOES THE PROGRAM IDENTIFY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES?
Assessing the needs of local and regional employers to understand the fit between master’s-level education and available local, regional, and national employment opportunities is important in order to provide an education that has practical value to the individual (e.g., profile of University of Maryland-Baltimore County [Appendix A]). But few departments systematically track local/regional employment opportunities and incorporate that information into master’s education. Limited data suggest that few programs focus on employment opportunities for students or play a role in placing or referring students to available jobs.4 An important issue is whether sociology departments can make their programs both intellectually rigorous and competitive in meeting the skills needs of the local economy. To maintain their relevance, sociology departments need to begin considering these issues more directly. The Task Force’s view is that successful programs are likely to involve a curriculum that educates students with the specialized knowledge and skills that also meet local labor needs. Thus, tying student and faculty recruitment to labor force needs is especially important.

Tracking Alumni
Tracking alumni is one way to increase social capital, networks, and employment opportunities for current students. The web survey of departments that award master’s degrees suggests that very few programs effectively track their students post degree to assess what kinds of employment opportunities were available to them. Because creating and maintaining such systems can be difficult to implement, departments may need to be creative in approaching these tasks. It may be possible, for example, to include a requirement in the capstone experience that current students interview a set number of recent graduates and report their findings; this could be easily implemented and would be cost effective. In addition, it would create a database that would allow departments to collect addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses so that ultimately more systematic data could be collected. It would also be an opportunity to provide current students a research exercise, and help students build links to alumni in the community and work force.

DOES THE PROGRAM FIT WITH THE UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY CULTURES?
Master’s programs operate within dynamic environments. Institutions, departments, and the surrounding communities are characterized by change. A significant question is whether a master’s program comfortably fits within the existing structure and culture at the various levels. Whatever the direction of the program, does it meet the needs of the surrounding community as well as those of the students? In a university that significantly focuses on and values doctoral education, is

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4 Data were gathered from a survey of department chairs at the 2007 ASA Annual Meeting. See Appendix C for a brief description of survey methods and sample.
Conclusion

Although historically, and even today, perceived to be a poor relation of the PhD or a consolation prize for not receiving one, the master's degree is by far the most common graduate degree awarded in sociology. If the decline in the number of degrees awarded is any indication of the health of the master's degree in sociology, it should be clear that these programs are not in the best of health compared with other more employment-oriented fields. The 13 percent decline between 1990 and 2006 is a strong statement that such programs are in need of reexamination.

The phenomenal rise in master's education nationwide and in other disciplines suggests a significant demand in the workplace for the skills associated with these degrees. Applied and professional programs in natural science and in some social science disciplines have clearly embraced many of the qualities that are essential to achieving and maintaining high-quality programs. Efforts to improve program quality are focused on the master's as a terminal degree, and the potential employment opportunities available to master's students. Because a master's degree increasingly appears to be a terminal degree as opposed to a stepping-stone to a PhD, and competition for master's students among academic programs is increasingly fierce, master's programs in sociology need to be able to demonstrate their worth to remain a viable choice. That worth appears to be gauged in large measure as value in the marketplace—a master's degree as a purely scholarly endeavor (except for the few for when it's a stepping stone to a PhD) seems to have become a less desired commodity than in the past. If potential students do not understand or see the value of the terminal sociology degree, either in terms of increased income or career potential, other choices are likely to be the result.

With this context, the discipline of sociology is in need of more attention to the master's degree. Currently, it seems evident that in a marketplace of increasing competition, the master's degree in sociology is neither well understood and may not be well positioned to meet the...
desires of those seeking master's education. Some applied and professional programs have made efforts to improve program quality by implementing program standards and incorporating as part of program structure, characteristics that have been identified as essential to maintaining program quality. In no small part, this involves a view that program quality is more than the simple inputs of attracting better faculty and better graduate students. Program quality is about process and culture as well as about resources. Resources may come first, but other issues are equally important. Is there a clear direction for the program and are program goals universally understood and supported? Are the program curricula and the associated learning experiences tied to program goals? Does the educational experience have value to local labor market needs? How does the program fit within university and community culture? Does the program have resource support—not only in terms of financial support, but also in less tangible forms of support, such as merit and promotion policies tied to participation in master's education? There is little question that a program can be implemented and limp along with little guidance or effort. However, if a terminal master's degree in sociology is to be a competitive choice for students, then implementing and maintaining well-considered and high-quality programs are crucial. For the health of the discipline, therefore, greater support is needed for the development and growth of strong master's programs in departments, colleges, and universities that provide them as part of their sociology program.

The Future

To learn more about master's programs in sociology and to aid in better positioning these programs, the Task Force on the Master's Degree in Sociology in cooperation with the ASA Research Department will conduct a longitudinal survey to learn what becomes of master's graduates—do they go on to gain PhDs, do they enter the labor market directly and, if so, in what types of jobs? How are these outcomes related to the theories, concepts, and research skills they learned; the planned learning experiences in which they participated; the social capital they developed; and the job placement programs that existed. The first year of the survey will examine the characteristics of the programs in which they participate. The second year of the survey will examine employment and additional education outcomes. The findings from this survey will be made available as they proceed. As part of its mission, the Task Force may revisit issues of accreditation as part of an effort to make sociology master's programs more competitive with professional master's programs in fields such as public administration, public health, and counseling psychology, in which students gain certification to practice. Finally, the Task Force will embark on a series of workshops to be held at regional and annual sociology meetings throughout the United States to work with programs that desire to embark on or revamp a master's program.
References


Appendices

APPENDIX A - PROGRAM PROFILES

We provide 10 brief profiles of programs awarding the master's in applied or professional sociology. These programs were selected partly because of the diversity they represent and partly because of the detail that they provided on their websites or in e-mail correspondence. They are not intended to represent best practices or preferred models, but they do offer useful examples of how to address a variety of difficult questions in organizing such a master's program. Certain patterns emerge across these profiles.

First, these programs raise questions about the value of the traditional sociology curriculum in the applied setting. Many of these programs have elected to maintain that curriculum while others have chosen to vary it. One variation is to remove or reduce the required theory components. Another variation is to shift the usual thesis project to an internship or applied research problem.

Second, most of these programs have existed for over a decade, many for two or three decades. Despite having graduated a number of students over those years, very few of the programs profiled have collected data on their graduates in terms of the jobs they move into and the career path they follow. Some programs feature selected graduates on their websites, but these former students are selected either because of their ideal career outcomes or simply because they were among the few who kept in touch. However, many of these programs are now recognizing the need for better data and are starting keep better track of their graduates and to contact students from years past.

Third, many of these programs have strong relationships with research institutes within the university. These institutes, ranging from criminology centers to nonprofit initiatives, provide funding for many students, as well as both internship opportunities and later job placement.

Fourth, these programs have diverse relationships with the undergraduate curriculum. For some programs, all of the master's graduates were actually undergraduate students who enrolled in a combined bachelor's/master's program. Some programs mix these dual-degree students with other students who have enrolled solely for the master's, bringing a bachelor's degree earned earlier and usually from another school. Still others offer no such track for the undergraduates and maintain strict separation between the two programs.
Fifth and finally, although applied master's programs are often identified as an alternative to the PhD track, many of the programs are keenly aware that some of their students will continue on to a PhD. One program allows students interested in continuing to a PhD (at another institution) to take theory electives that are otherwise not required of the master's students.

The following ten profiles provide a window into the varieties of applied master's programs that are being offered by sociology programs. These should not be viewed as statistically representative; neither do they constitute a set of best practices. In reality, the great diversity of programs that are found across the United States is a result of diverse needs in the local job market, diverse resources by colleges and universities, and diverse expectations for graduating students. The Task Force was struck by the interesting tools that these programs have created and the unique ways that they are solving their local problems. Both new and existing programs may find some helpful models among these profiles.

American University

American University offers a Master of Arts degree in Sociology with five concentrations. These include Race, Gender, and Social Justice; Global Sociology; Social Inequality; and Gender and Family. In 2006 the MA program added the fifth concentration: Public Sociology (MAPS). The MAPS Concentration is based upon the professional master's model. Accordingly, the Concentration has an advisory board, and its classes offer students opportunities to address problems of contemporary relevance in the community.

The department website provides these descriptions of the missions of the MA program and the Public Sociology concentration:

**The Department of Sociology’s Master’s degree program… focuses on forms of inequality, their origins and patterns of reproduction, related to issues of social justice, and how these issues vary within and between societies. It is intended to produce and apply knowledge for the benefit of society.** The degree program aims not only to teach academic skills, but also to develop knowledge which will be of value to those involved in working for the promotion of social equality. Courses are designed to enable students to deepen their knowledge of a specialty area, to develop advanced and systematic theoretical understandings, and to develop methodological areas for vocational and professional competence.

**The MAPS concentration… is designed to provide students with training to use theories and methods of sociology in a wide range of work settings, including social activism and advocacy. The program of study leads to career paths ranging from grassroots organizing and work in community-based non-profit agencies and non-governmental organizations to employment in government agencies, legislative offices, "think tanks," advocacy organizations, or private consulting.**

MA students are required to take two theory courses, two research methods courses, a statistics course, and an independent research course focused on the student's master's research or master's thesis. They also are required to pass a comprehensive exam on theory and methods. In addition, students take 9 to 12 credits in their concentration and 6 to 9 credits of electives. Students in the MAPS program meet the concentration requirement by taking a seminar in public sociology, a public sociology internship seminar, and a course in social policy analysis. The elective courses may come from outside the department, and they may include up to 3 credits of internship.

According to the 2007 ASA Guide to Graduate Departments, there currently are 12 full-time students and 57 part-time students enrolled in the program. Thirteen students were awarded master's degrees in the academic year ending in 2006, eight in 2005, and thirteen in 2004.

The University of Central Florida

The Department of Sociology at University of Central Florida, located in Orlando, offers a graduate program leading to the Master of Arts degree in Applied Sociology. Beyond a curriculum appropriate for general applied sociology, the program includes a graduate track in Domestic Violence as well as instruction and opportunity pertaining to the study of deviant behavior, social disorganization, social inequalities, and urban and environmental sociology. A primary focus of the program is the variety of social problems in society with special attention given to the central Florida area and the different community policies that have evolved to confront them. Toward this objective, the program promotes the application of sociological and social psychological knowledge, principles, and research skills in a variety of organizational, community, and institutional settings. Examples of competencies in applied sociology include effective skills in program design and evaluation research; planning, feasibility and needs assessment studies; data management, analysis and presentation; and the application of general systems and social conflict theories to organizational problems, community development and planned change.

Degree-seeking students in the Applied Sociology program may elect to follow either a thesis or a non-thesis course of study, both of which require 30 hours of coursework. Research oriented seminars and practical experiences provide advanced training in the application of sociological and social psycho-
logical knowledge, principles, and research skills. A supervised practicum is available to help students combine their graduate work with a career interest. Recognizing that students differ in their career goals and training, our program is designed to accommodate the needs of both full- and part-time students. Many seminars are taught in the evening to accommodate a working student population. Full-time students should complete the program in two years.

All students are required to take social theory, social research, and research analysis. In addition, students select a minimum of 12 credit hours of non-restricted electives in consultation with their faculty adviser. Students may complete a thesis or an internship. Students wishing to complete the Domestic Violence track must take Seminar on Domestic Violence: Theory, Research and Social Policy and Reactions to Domestic Violence as well as two courses from a list of restricted electives.

De Paul University
The Master of Arts program at De Paul University has had some success in attracting students. According to the 2007 ASA Guide to Graduate Departments, there currently are 39 full-time students and 26 part-time students enrolled in the program. Ten students were awarded master’s degrees in the academic year ending in 2006, 29 in 2005, and 22 in 2004. One reason for the program’s success in attracting students may be its flexibility requirements—in particular, the three options it provides for fulfilling its writing requirement and the opportunity it offers undergraduate students to begin the program before they receive their bachelor’s degree.

The program’s writing requirement may be fulfilled in three ways: by completing a thesis, a research project, or a literature review or theoretical essay. The department’s website provides responses to Frequently Asked Questions about the master’s program. These FAQs review the pros and cons of the three choices for students with different career goals. For example, students who plan to enter PhD programs should strongly consider a thesis, because some PhD programs prefer this. However, research reports are more practical for demonstrating research skills. They may be preferred to theses by employers in applied settings, and they may also be easier to convert into conference presentations or publications. The literature review or theoretical essay may be best for those who already are working in their chosen career.

De Paul is on a quarter system, and courses in the Sociology MA are four credits each. The program requires three courses: Sociological Perspectives (theories and their link to research), Research Methods, and either Data Analysis or Qualitative Methods. Students are advised to take these required courses in the first year of study. The nine elective courses are spread over the two years of the program. One of the electives offered is a four-credit internship. Normally, the writing project is completed in the second year. Students are advised to connect their writing project to the elective courses they take. Students who write a thesis may take a course in Thesis Research close to the time that they finish the thesis. Also, once they have an approved topic, students who write literature reviews or theoretical essays may take a Theoretical Essay course to refine their topic. Otherwise, students do not receive course credit for the writing project.

Undergraduate students at De Paul can take courses for graduate credit if certain conditions are met. This makes it possible for students to obtain both the bachelor’s and master’s degree within five years. To be eligible for this program, undergraduates must take at least six sociology courses before beginning their senior year, they must have a grade point average of at least 2.75 overall and 3.25 in sociology, and they must agree to pursue the MA after receiving their BA. Students in this program may count up to three graduate level courses taken as undergraduates toward the graduate program.

Humboldt State University
The master’s program at Humboldt State University offers tracks in Teaching Sociology and Sociological Practice. The Sociological Practice track is accredited by the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology. According to the 2007 ASA Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology, the program has thirty full-time and ten part-time students. Seven students graduated in the academic year ending in 2006, seven in 2005, and eight in 2004.

Before beginning their second semester, students receive an evaluation of their work. If it is not satisfactory (B or better), they are dismissed from the program. Students submit a plan of study before the end of their first full year of work. This includes a purpose statement that explains how graduate study fits the student’s personal and/or career goals, measurable learning objectives tied to the student’s track and specialization, and a tentative thesis or project proposal.

Students in both tracks are required to take three courses: Quantitative Methods; Contemporary Social Theory; and either Family or Race, Ethnicity, and Gender. They also are required to complete a thesis or project. Students in the Practicing Sociology Track are more likely than those in the Teaching Sociology Track to complete projects.

The Department of Sociology defines a project as work that is undertaken to address questions or needs of a client or placement organization and/or work that takes on a non-traditional presentation form....Projects may take
the form of program evaluations, program development plans, or other products such as training manuals, videos or curriculum. All students must demonstrate the linkages to a theoretical and methodological literature that inform the project. Practicing Sociology students are required to produce a project or thesis derived from their practice experiences.

A Community Presentation on the thesis or project is required of all students. Practicing Sociology students usually make this presentation before the program’s Advisory Board, which meets twice per year. Teaching Sociology students may present their work at a department colloquium. Presentations at professional meetings also meet this requirement if a faculty member attends the session and submits a formal written evaluation.

Besides the courses required of all students, Teaching Track students also are required to take Teaching Sociology and Teaching Assistantship, two of four area seminars, and two other electives. Students also may elect to take a Teaching Internship. In addition, the department offers a Graduate Certificate in College Teaching, which can be obtained by taking several additional courses from outside the department.

The Practicing Sociology Track offers specializations in Program Evaluation and Community Action, the latter of which is only a few years old. Students in both specializations are required to take courses in Practicing Sociology and Qualitative Methods, one of four area seminars, one methods elective, and one substantive elective. In addition, they are required to complete 240 hours of field placement related work. At least 200 of these hours must be on site, and at least 125 hours must be at a single placement. The Program Evaluation and Community Action specializations differ from each other primarily in the way students meet the field experience requirement.

The department houses the Humboldt Journal of Social Relations and three research institutes. The research institutes host some student field placements. Most such placements have been through the Center for Applied Social Analysis and Evaluation, which has provided field experience opportunities for over 100 students. The other institutes are the Institute for the Study of Dispute Resolution and the Altruistic Behavior and Prosocial Behavior Institute.

Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne
Since 1983 Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne has had a practice component in its baccalaureate program. The Master of Arts in Sociological Practice program, approved in 1999, builds on faculty expertise in this area. So far, the program has graduated only two students—one in 2002 and one in 2005. According to the 2007 ASA Guide to Graduate Departments, there currently are 7 full-time students and 15 part-time students enrolled in the program.

The department website describes the mission of the Sociological Practice program in this way:

Through excellence in research, teaching and mentoring, the graduate program seeks to prepare skilled practitioners of sociology. Sociological practitioners couple their knowledge of sociological theory with skills in both quantitative and qualitative research methods to conduct research, engage in analysis of social problems and social policy, and design interventions to effect change in the functioning of social groups, organizations, and/or institutions. In addition, sociological practitioners are skilled at translating sociological theory, analysis, and research findings to a nonacademic audience.

The program includes a core of 18 credits and electives of 15 credits. The core consists of three-credit courses on theory and practice, statistics, research methods, and professional development, plus six credits of either practicum or thesis.

The practicum and thesis serve as capstones for the program. Each is spread over two semesters. The practicum is a supervised practice experience in the community through which students apply knowledge and skills acquired in the program. Prior to the practicum, the student works with a faculty mentor to form a practicum committee, develop a practicum proposal, and have that proposal approved by the Institutional Review Board (if necessary) and the Practicum Committee. After completing the practicum, the student writes a report that is shared with the host organization and also presents the results at an appropriate forum to representatives of the organization and to faculty members. A similar process applies to the thesis, except that the student does not work with a community organization and the proposal's focus is on using theory and methods to address a problem.

Brief biographies of current students appear on the program’s website. Most have career aspirations that pertain to sociological practice, although most appear to be planning to complete theses rather than practica.

The University of Maryland—Baltimore County
The MA program in applied sociology was created at UMBC a quarter century ago, in response to a growth of area organizations, including many federal and state agencies, conducting research on the issues of health and aging. Today, the program is quite large, with about 65 enrolled students, many of who are part-
time and pursuing the degree alongside their existing job commitments. Other students pursue the MA as part of a joint BA/MA program for UMBC undergraduates. Overall, the department awards about 15-20 degrees every year. Students are required to complete 10 courses (30 credit hours) of coursework.

In keeping with the applied focus, none of those courses is in theory but at least 3 must be in statistics and research methods. According to the graduate program director, William Rothstein, "many substantive courses are not explicitly sociological but rather apply sociological and social science concepts and/or methods to issues in health and aging. They include health care organization and delivery, social epidemiology, and evaluation research." Rothstein adds that the department also teaches graduate courses on gender and diversity, and that a few of the graduate students choose to focus their studies on gender.

Another course offered as part of the program creates the opportunity for students to engage in international fieldwork by traveling to Switzerland to conduct aging and health-related research. Rothstein estimates that about 10-15% of the students enrolled in the MA program participate in this program. Also, about 15% of the students pursue an additional Graduate Certificate in the Non-Profit Sector, a program that is offered in cooperation with the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations.

As the program has grown in recent years, the department has been able to foster stronger relationships with area employers and now even offers on-campus interviews with a private research firm. Rothstein reports positive outcomes for the programs graduates: "In recent years our graduates who are well trained in methods and statistics and health or aging have gotten excellent positions in federal and state agencies, private research organizations, medical schools, and universities. A few graduates have gone on to PhD programs, mostly applied programs such as gerontology. We have been able keep in touch with many of our graduates." You can learn more about the MA in applied sociology at UMBC, by visiting http://www.umbc.edu/sociology/ and clicking "MA/PhD Programs."

The University of Massachusetts, Boston

The sociology faculty at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, developed an applied MA program in sociology in the early 1980s. Today, that MA program takes two forms. The traditional post-baccalaureate MA program has now been joined by a five-year combined BA/MA program. Studies for the applied degree include required core courses in Fundamentals of Applied Sociology, Research Methods, and two of the following: Complex Organizations, Applied Social Theory, Social Policy, and Social Problems. Additional specialty courses allow students to concentrate in a substantive area by taking at least two courses in one of the following fields: medical sociology, criminology/corrections, social policy, forensic services, advanced research methods, dispute resolution, gerontology, or counseling.

The department's internship program gives students the chance to use their applied skills in a local organization, and it often leads to both research topics and career opportunities. According to one assessment of the MA program:

Several of the participants completed internships or assistantships in the Center for Survey Research and McCormack Institute on campus. With the extensive training they received, many of these alumni obtained full-time positions there and continued research and data analysis. One student, who currently works in the McCormack Institute at UMass, started his career in the field of corrections. After beginning the program, he acquired a teaching assistantship and resigned from his position as a corrections officer. When the assistantship ended, one of his professors helped him look for a position that would be suitable to his career goals. He began working at a homeless shelter, and eventually returned back into the research sphere by obtaining a position in Homeless Management Information Systems at the McCormack Institute. He says that it is different from that which he has done in the past, but, thankfully, it has put his research skills to work again. (from Newman, Tracey. 2003. "Alumni Experiences and Outcomes: Graduate Program in Applied Sociology." Master's Research Paper, University of Massachusetts, Boston. The full report is on-line at http://www.umb.edu/academics/departments/sociology/graduate/formsfolder/alumni.htm.)

As the final requirement for degree completion, students select a master's thesis, a research paper, or a comprehensive examination. The master's thesis is a relatively formal research experience that is presented at a public defense which includes a three-person committee. The research paper allows students to shift from the strict formatting of the thesis by exploring a substantive research area with a committee of two professors—an option that has helped to reduce UMB's time-to-degree. The comprehensive exam asks students to answer six questions; two each in a) social theory and policy, b) methodology, and c) the student's area of concentration.

The quote above regarding the success of the UMB internship program is from the master's research paper of one of the students in the applied MA program. Tracey Newman began this research, along with her peers, in Professor Russell K. Schutt's Foundations of Applied Sociology course in the fall of 2002. The students in Schutt's class interviewed 48 alumni out of a total
of 148 graduates between the program's founding in 1985 and the last cohort prior to the study in 2002. Their interviews assessed three aspects of these graduates' experiences: pre-program experience, experience with the program itself, and post-graduate experience. Tracey Newman then continued to analyze this data a semester later for her research paper. According to Schutt, "I thought that such a survey would be a good way to learn about the discipline while also honing some research skills and getting some career ideas" (from an email correspondence).

To highlight one component of the findings, most respondents went into one of three fields: research and data analysis, teaching, or human services. And according to these graduates, the program at UMB helped them immensely:

"I got a raise in pay and have been transferred into a more management-oriented position. There aren't many people that I work with who have the skills that I learned at UMass, so I am considered a valuable asset to the firm." (Quoted in Newman 2003)

The University of North Dakota
Students graduating from the MA program in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Dakota typically continue along one of three career paths. While some students continue on for a PhD in another program, other students either move directly into teaching positions or take jobs in the research field. For instance, Sonia Zimmerman used the MA to become an assistant professor in the UND Department of Occupational Therapy. Carol Archbald used her MA training to gain entry into a PhD program at the University of Nebraska and now serves as an assistant professor at North Dakota State University. Bradley Anderson studied for his PhD at Iowa State, after completing the MA at UND, and now works as a statistician at the Substance Abuse Research Unit at Brown University. Chad Iha's graduate work eventually led him to a career as a research analyst at the North Dakota Department of Transportation.

The department describes its mission as follows:

The mission of the sociology masters program is to prepare students for advanced academic training, for university teaching careers, or for professional careers that allow them to apply their advanced sociological training. Using an applied learning format, the program will provide each cohort of students with advanced theoretical, methodological and analytical tools and skills with which to examine, explore, advance, and apply sociological knowledge to a common sociological question. Each course in the core curriculum will focus on different aspects of the common sociological question, and the output of that course will be exploration of the common sociological question from epistemological, theoretical, methodological, analytical, and ethical viewpoints.

To fulfill this mission, the department's goals include developing the professional identities of the students through participation in regional research meetings; fostering research ethics through human subjects' research training; establishing core knowledge of sociological foundations through its core curriculum; demonstrating advanced research skills through the completion of a master's thesis; and exploring career possibilities through a professional seminar.

Although the MA program has existed at UND for several decades, a recent program assessment is being used to make the program stronger and to significantly increase the amount of data that is available on the program's graduates.

In addition to the core curriculum, students in the MA program are encouraged to declare "cognates" in research methods, theory, or teaching, with the first cognate leading primarily to research careers, the second cognate leading to further graduate education, and the third leading to immediate teaching careers.

Northern Arizona University
The Applied Sociology Program at Northern Arizona University, located in Flagstaff, is designed to increase the student's understanding of group, organizational, and institutional processes that structure communities and human experience. The program emphasizes the application of sociological theory, knowledge, and methodologies in efforts to address contemporary issues and problems facing society. The Applied Sociology Program prepares students for professional practice in applied research settings and for further academic studies in sociology and related fields. The curriculum affords students the opportunity to customize the program and they can finish it by following four different paths. They pursue either the Applied Research or the Sociological Perspectives option and, similarly, either an internship or thesis.

All students take the following courses: Graduate Seminar (Meet the Faculty), Applied Sociological Theory, Applied Social Research Methods and Design, and either Qualitative Research Methods or Quantitative Analysis. Students who complete the Applied Research concentration also complete courses on qualitative research methods or quantitative research methods (whichever they do not complete as part of the core), program evaluation, and two courses from the following list: social policy, advanced planning for human
services, graduate research, social research laboratory practicum, intermediate statistics, two courses on statistical methods, multivariate statistical analysis, and applied sampling. In contrast, those who complete the Sociological Perspectives concentration select four substantive courses from those that the Department offers.

The thesis option, which is recommended for those who are interested in an academic career, enables students to pursue independent research projects that may be applied in nature or involve basic sociological inquiry. In contrast, the internship program provides hands-on experience to help students bridge the gap between theory and practice. In lieu of a thesis, internship students complete a proposal for a program evaluation, a needs assessment, an organizational analysis, a formal grant proposal, or a research report.

Suffolk University

The Sociology Department at Suffolk University, located in Boston, Massachusetts, offers two graduate programs: the Master of Science in Criminal Justice, and beginning fall 2007, the Master of Arts in Women’s Health. The Department has a distinguished and talented faculty, consisting of 14 full-time professors with PhD degrees and 11 adjunct faculty instructors from a diverse background of professional and academic experiences. The research and community involvement of the faculty is brought directly into the classroom. Students have the opportunity to gain rich out-of-classroom experiences that bring Sociology alive. The Department offers internship courses that provide engaging work experiences in the student’s field of interest. Students have completed internships in federal, state, and local agencies, district courts, law offices, and social service agencies.

The Master of Science in Criminal Justice Program is designed for mid-career working professionals as well as for those who seek to enter the fields of: probation, policing, corrections, juvenile justice, victim advocacy, court and offender services, or criminal justice policy. It combines intellectual breadth and depth with a pragmatic, career-oriented focus. The core courses provide a foundation in the areas of law, criminology, and applied research. The optional requirements allow students to choose their own areas for specific application of theory and research methods. Students may elect to pursue specialized concentrations in the areas of domestic violence and substance abuse treatment, two growing areas within the fields of criminal justice. Related electives include graduate courses in public administration, mental health counseling, psychology, human services, business administration, communications and government. All courses are offered in the late afternoon or evening in order to meet the scheduling needs of working professionals. Students may attend either full- or part-time, and may begin the program in either the fall or spring semester or in the summer. Full-time students can complete the program in 12 months. An internship program is available whether for students who are pursuing specialized concentrations or are in the general program. Students can gain academic credit and experience in the field through one of a wide range of placement options. A master’s thesis is encouraged but not required.

The Master of Arts degree in Women’s Health is the first graduate-level social science degree in Women’s Health in the United States. Suffolk’s Program goes beyond a purely biological or clinical model to offer students a broad understanding of women’s health as including cultural, emotional, psychosocial, legal, and economic components.

The program will train students to serve as effective analysts and advocates for women’s health and assist them in advancing professionally within women’s health-related fields both in the U.S. and internationally. To help students develop a holistic perspective on women’s health, program courses not only highlight the diversity of women and their health issues across race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, national identity, and health or disability status, but also emphasize skill- and career-building with community partners through a required internship program. The program thus enables students to develop intellectual power and practical experience in an integrated way to help them in subsequent job seeking. The MA in Women’s Health enables students to pull together knowledge from all of their courses and think about problems of interest in a way they would probably never get another chance to do, either in school or on the job.

This program is designed to accommodate both full-time and part-time students. For full time students, the program is a three-semester program in which the first two semesters are classroom-oriented and the third semester revolves around an internship. Courses are scheduled so that half-time students are able to complete in three calendar years. Altogether, the program consists of 36 credit hours. All students must complete a sequence of core courses including: Sociology of Women’s Health, Female Physiology and Gynecology, Epidemiology of Women’s Health and Illness, Diversity in Women’s Health and Illness, Women and Health Care Systems, and Advocacy for Women’s Health. Students focus their program in a particular area of interest by choosing from a variety of electives in the sociology, government, public administration, criminal justice, communications and journalism, psychology, and education and human services departments. In addition, all students will
complete a one-semester internship that will be arranged with the help of the program staff and faculty. Anticipated locations for this internship may include local hospitals, research institutes, community organizations, policy institutions and women’s groups.

The Department has three active research centers. Students have opportunities to be involved in the work of these centers through research assistantships and work-study. The Center for Crime and Justice Policy Research provides methodological skills and substantive expertise in the conduct of basic and applied research to assist government agencies, community groups, academic institutions, and private sector organizations in the development, implementation and evaluation of various criminal justice and related social issues. The Center for Restorative Justice is a community-engaged academic center committed to the promotion of restorative justice practices, principles, and values in New England. CRJ offers public events, workshops and talks on the theory, practice and implementation of restorative principles and practices by practitioners, scholars and community members. The Center for Women’s Health and Human Rights works to further the health and human rights of women and girls everywhere by exploring and extending the linkages between women’s health and women’s human rights. The Center is the first academic institute in the United States to focus on women’s health and human rights in the humanities and social sciences. It is dedicated to research, teaching, networking and advocacy.

APPENDIX B - COMPARISON OF CRITERIA

Comparison of Recommendations from ASA’s Report on Undergraduate Liberal Learning, Applied and Clinical Sociology Program Standards, and Council of Graduate Schools Indicators of Professional Master’s Programs in the Social Sciences

[In column 1, each of the 16 recommendations is listed (and numbered) in the order in which it appears in the Liberal Learning report. In columns 2 and 3 are comparable items from the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology and the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) Professional Master’s indicators, each numbered as they appear in their respective documents. The Liberal Learning recommendations clearly exhibit some overlap with standards established for applied and professional programs. It is important to recognize that we focus only on comparisons with the Liberal Learning recommendations—more overlap may exist between the other two than are shown here.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major</th>
<th>Applied and Clinical Sociology Program Standards</th>
<th>Professional Master’s Programs in the Social Sciences (CGS Report)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Departments should develop a mission statement, goals, and learning objectives for their sociology program and make them public, especially to students.</td>
<td>2.0: Program shall have a mission statement that clearly articulates its vision as a program—the program’s mission shall be reflected in: a) its goals and objective, b) its administrative and organizational structures, c) services it provides to its students, d) its faculty characteristics and professional development, and e) the nature of its public and professional service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.0.1: Programs shall establish and maintain close, reciprocal, and ongoing relationships with sociological practitioners and practitioner associations.</td>
<td>2.2: The program shall accurately reflect its characteristics and the nature of its offerings in public documents.</td>
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continued
## Comparison of Recommendations from ASA’s Report on Undergraduate Liberal Learning, Applied and Clinical Sociology Program Standards, and Council of Graduate Schools Indicators of Professional Master’s Programs in the Social Sciences (continued, pg. 2 of 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated (continued)</th>
<th>Applied and Clinical Sociology Program Standards (continued)</th>
<th>Professional Master’s Programs in the Social Sciences (CGS Report) (continued)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Departments should develop a mission statement, goals, and learning objectives for their sociology program and make them public, especially to students. (continued)</td>
<td>2.3: The program shall maintain accurate and timely information about students’ progress in the program. Support services available to the student (e.g., through the institution) shall include program and career advisement and employment assistance.</td>
<td>11. Departments should encourage diverse pedagogies, including active-learning experiences, to increase student engagement in the discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Departments should gauge the needs and interests of their students, and department goals and practices should, in part, reflect and respond to these needs and interests as well as to the mission of the institution.</td>
<td>4. Has advisory board of industry/government/nonprofit employers.</td>
<td>6. Has faculty with experience in nonacademic employment—positive score if there was evidence of professional or nonacademic employment or volunteer activity for at least one faculty member.</td>
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<td>8. Departments should structure the curriculum to underscore the centrality of race, class, and gender in society and in sociological analysis.</td>
<td></td>
<td>12. Departments should offer community and classroom-based learning experiences that develop students’ critical-thinking skills and prepare them for lives of civic engagement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Departments should structure the curriculum to increase students’ exposure to multicultural, cross-cultural, and cross-national content relevant to sociology.</td>
<td>2.2.1: Programs shall establish and maintain close, reciprocal, and ongoing relationships with sociological practitioners and practitioner associations.</td>
<td>5. Has required business/industry/organizational internship—positive score if internship was listed among the requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Departments should structure the curriculum to recognize explicitly the intellectual connections between sociology and other fields by designing activities to help students integrate their educational experiences across disciplines.</td>
<td>4.0: Students will be able to integrate academic studies with occupational realities through practice experience—the purpose of practice experience is to provide sociological practice students with supervised work experiences at a site where they can learn how to apply sociological theories, methods, skills, professional orientations, and ethics.</td>
<td>continued</td>
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1. Offers skills-based courses and courses at the boundaries of the discipline—positive scores for skills-based courses that enhanced employability and if the courses were outside the confines of the particular discipline.
Comparison of Recommendations from ASA’s Report on Undergraduate Liberal Learning, Applied and Clinical Sociology Program Standards, and Council of Graduate Schools Indicators of Professional Master’s Programs in the Social Sciences (continued, pg. 4 of 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major (Updated)</th>
<th>Applied and Clinical Sociology Program Standards (continued)</th>
<th>Professional Master’s Programs in the Social Sciences (CGS Report) (continued)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. Departments should offer and encourage student involvement in out-of-class (co- and extra-curricular) learning opportunities.</td>
<td>7. Has off-campus activities—positive score if there was evidence that students had the opportunity or were encouraged to participate in off-campus activities that enhanced professional skills, aside from a required internship.</td>
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<td>14. Departments should develop effective advising and mentoring programs for majors.</td>
<td>2.3.2: An advisor shall be assigned to each student during enrollment in the program—the advisor shall assist the student to develop a plan of study.</td>
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<td>15. Departments should promote faculty development and an institutional culture that rewards scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>16. Departments should assess the sociology program on a regular basis using multiple sources of data, including data on student learning.</td>
<td>2.0: Student learning outcomes attached to the program’s goals and objectives shall be quantitatively and/or qualitatively measurable.</td>
<td>10. Has assessment, quality control—positive score if there was a notation or description of outside professional accreditation or licensing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.0: The program shall demonstrate its commitment to continuous quality improvement through having appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the program’s administrative procedures and practices as well as student learning.</td>
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APPENDIX C - METHODS FOR SURVEYING CURRENT MASTER’S PROGRAMS

Methods for Task Force Charge #1

Task Force Charge #1: identifying the key components and characteristics of a professional master’s program (collaborating with the Council on Graduate Schools on a project of the same name)

ASA’s elected Council asked the Task Force on the Master’s Degree in Sociology to identify key components and characteristics of professional master’s degrees. A subcommittee of the Task Force composed of Marie Cornwall (Brigham Young University), Carole Seyfrit (Radford University), and Roberta Spalter-Roth (ASA staff liaison) conducted a survey of 218 sociology program websites that were listed in the 2004/2005 (the latest year for which data were available) IPEDS data set as granting at least one master’s degree and coded the characteristics of the websites. Following the instructions of Council, this subcommittee used program characteristics previously used in a multidisciplinary website survey of professional social science master’s programs conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools.

The research team (including the subcommittee members and their research assistants) printed copies of departmental websites and analyzed and coded graduate program descriptions to determine if they met the criteria of a professional master’s program (see Table 1 in the text).

A web-based analysis was undertaken as a remedy for the low-response rates obtained in many disciplinary surveys of departments and the labor intensive, multi-method follow-up techniques required to increase response rates to a usable level. Two important advantages of a content analysis of websites are that (1) it can be completed relatively quickly and (2) it is relatively inexpensive. The disadvantage of this method is that websites may not accurately reflect the availability and characteristics of master’s-level programs. Instead they may reflect the lack of resources to design websites that adequately exhibit program characteristics, a lack of program information updates, or lack of consensus as to what should be contained on webpages. On the other hand, whether accurate or not, it does reflect the face that the department is presenting to the world, especially to potential students choosing among programs.

In reviewing websites coders noted also whether in their view the sociology department offered a professional master’s program (the presence of a “possible” professional degree). After the website analysis was completed, ASA
Research and Development staff included 2003 institutional-level characteristics from IPEDS and program-level features from ASA’s 2002 departmental survey in to form comparison groups. These comparison groups include:
- Faculty size in AY 2001/2002, derived from ASA’s department survey.
- Type of institution, based on 1994 Carnegie Codes (IPEDS, recoded)
- Regional location of institution (IPEDS, recoded)
- Highest degree offered (derived from IPEDS masters and doctorate data)

Over 80 percent of the included institutions were public, about half were research universities awarding a PhD as the terminal degree in their programs, and about 45 percent had 14 or more faculty members. The remaining programs were in master’s comprehensive schools, awarding a master’s degree as a terminal degree, with fewer than 14 faculty members.

Methods for Survey of Department Chairs on Local/Regional Employment
In an attempt to provide some baseline empirical data about the types of skills and likely employment of students enrolled in master’s programs, a subgroup of the larger taskforce created a brief questionnaire, which was distributed to department chairs and/or directors of graduate studies at the American Sociological Association Annual Meetings in Montreal (August 11–14, 2005). Questionnaires were provided to individuals attending the annual meeting for department chairs. Relatively few surveys were completed and returned to the taskforce (N = 17) and these data were not used for purposes of analysis in the report.

APPENDIX D – WEB RESOURCES

The following is a short list of websites that address a variety of issues that departments or faculty are likely to encounter when building or modifying new or existing master’s programs. It should not be considered an exhaustive list, but rather an introduction to some of the more important issues and considerations.

   Council of Graduate Schools “mission is to improve and advance graduate education in order to ensure the vitality of intellectual discovery. Council of Graduate Schools accomplishes its mission through advocacy, innovative research, and the development and dissemination of best practices. Supporting graduate education is critical to achieving the highly skilled workforce needed for the U.S. to compete effectively in the 21st century global economy.” The site provides a variety of resources about graduate education.

2. http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm
   Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment—An excellent resource for assessment, comprehensive and well-organized website. The site is maintained by Ephraim Schechter at North Carolina State University.

   U.S. Department of Education site that defines various master’s program types.

   Standards for Applied and Clinical Sociology Programs at the Master’s level by the Commission on Applied and Clinical Sociology.

5. http://educationusa.state.gov/graduate/about/degrees.htm
   Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State website provides a variety of information on graduate study in the United States.
   Council for Higher Education Accreditation—everything one would want to know about accreditation and then some. According to the site, “Accreditation” is review of the quality of higher education institutions and programs. In the United States, accreditation is a major way that students, families, government officials, and the press know that an institution or program provides a quality education.” The site has links to multiple other sources of information.

   A Council of Graduate Schools-sponsored website specifically devoted to professional master’s education.

   This page on the American University offers a fairly comprehensive selected bibliography of graduate student and program assessment.

   National Teaching and Learning Forum website indexes a broad spectrum of higher education associations with links to each. Virtually all have links to other sites of value (e.g., assessment, graduate program issues).

    This page, part of the University of South Carolina at Aiken, offers a basic set of indicators for assessing graduate programs.

11. http://www.asanet.org/cs/root/lefnav/research_and_stats/profession_trend_data/trend_data_on_the_profession
    This site is trend data on the sociology profession from the Research and Development Department of the American Sociological Association.

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