4

Measuring College Learning in Sociology

Susan J. Ferguson
Grinnell College

William Carbonaro
University of Notre Dame

This contribution offers a review and synthesis of the current state of learning outcomes and assessment within the discipline of sociology. Based on their review of the literature and discussions with faculty experts, the authors construct a Sociological Literacy Framework, *consisting of a set of essential concepts (the sociological eye, social structure, socialization, stratification, and social change and social reproduction) and essential competencies (apply sociological theory to understand the social world, critically evaluate explanations of human behavior and social phenomena, apply scientific principles to understand the social world, evaluate the quality of social scientific data, rigorously analyze social scientific data, and use sociological knowledge to inform policy debates and to promote public understanding). Following their presentation of the Sociological Literacy Framework, the authors describe and critically evaluate current assessments in sociology and conclude with several recommendations for how a new assessment of student learning in sociology should be constructed.*

Introduction

Sociology is a scientific discipline that is concerned with understanding the social forces that shape and direct human behavior. Sociologists think that human life and human interactions are distinctively patterned, and that these patterns are observable, predictable, and reflect status differences in society. Sociologists also have a nuanced understanding of social structure, and they study the social relationships between individuals, groups, social institutions, and nations. In addition, sociology is both a theoretical and evidence-based discipline that resembles other social science disciplines. Sociology, however, offers a view that is distinctive from the other social sciences in that it attempts to identify how social context influences individuals and groups. No particular theoretical framework dominates; instead, sociology is informed by various theoretical traditions and research methodologies. The discipline formally developed in Europe during the early 19th century in response to social upheaval and a positivist ambition to scientifically measure social forces. Sociology came to the United States after the Civil War with many early American sociologists influenced by Herbert Spencer's evolutionary theories of social Darwinism. Other American sociological traditions, such as the Chicago School, challenged laissez-faire understandings of industrialization and advocated for social reform (Calhoun 2007). Since the late 19th century, both the European and American traditions in sociology have flourished with increasing theoretical and methodological diversity. As a UK curricular document explains:

> An understanding of the distinctive social features of human life is largely a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but sociology is not restricted to the study of contemporary societies. A sociological perspective is fruitfully employed in historical, cross-cultural and transnational comparative studies of

changing forms of human life. Sociology seeks to understand how and why societies, institutions and practices of all kinds came into being, change over time and how they are currently organized, and the likely impact of this on human life and the human environment in the future. (QAA 2007, 2)

Sociology is valuable because it provides scholars, students, and society with useful concepts, theories, and methods to evaluate social institutions and social behavior. Sociology also is exciting to scholars and students because the discipline's concepts and theories can help to clarify aspects of social life that may have hitherto been opaque. Additionally, as the scientific study of society, scientific methods applied in both quantitative and qualitative research and in mixed method approaches are a large part of sociology. As a result, sociology provides practitioners with critical analytical skills and the ability to use scientific methodology to understand social problems. Another measure of the magnitude of the discipline is reflected in the dramatic growth of undergraduate sociology majors. The American Sociological Association reports that in 1987 there were 13,584 bachelor's degrees awarded, but in 2013 there were 42,155 bachelor's degrees awarded in sociology programs across the United States (Curtis 2015).

As our review of the scholarly literature illustrates, sociologists have been debating the parameters of a core curriculum in sociology for over a century. Although much of this prior scholarship has concentrated on all the places the sociology curriculum does not overlap, we believe that the deliberation should now emphasize the common ground in the literature. Some factors that complicate this task are found within the discipline of sociology. These aspects include the breadth and diversity of subfields within sociology, the variability in reasons that college students are attracted to sociology, and the lack of clarity regarding how the sociology major is connected to the labor market. Nevertheless, our review

of the literature and our discussions with sociology faculty show more consensus about essential sociological concepts and competencies than first appears. Thus, instead of focusing on disagreement, our aim in this white paper is to highlight agreement by sociologists on learning outcomes in the introductory course and for the sociology major.

For this review, we consulted both the published literature and a panel of sociology faculty. The Measuring College Learning Sociology faculty panel was composed of sociologists who have demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the overall quality of undergraduate teaching and learning in their field. They represented a variety of institutions, including liberal arts colleges, larger universities, and our disciplinary association.[1] The faculty panel met twice in 2014, and again in 2015, to discuss the sociology curriculum and learning outcomes for introductory sociology and for the sociology major. There were three main goals for the meetings: (a) to discuss and evaluate previous and ongoing efforts to define a set of common learning outcomes for sociology undergraduates; (b) to identify essential representative learning outcomes for both the introductory sociology course and the sociology major; and (c) to evaluate current assessments of student learning in sociology and to envision possible and preferable alternatives.

---

[1] The MCL Sociology faculty panel included twelve faculty members and two officers from the American Sociological Association. Participants were Richard Arum, New York University; Jeanne Ballantine, Wright State University; William Carbonaro, University of Notre Dame; Paula England, New York University; Susan Ferguson, Grinnell College; Sally Hillsman, American Sociological Association; Katherine McClelland, Franklin and Marshall College; Matt McKeever, Mount Holyoke College; Aaron Pallas, Teachers College, Columbia University; Richard Pitt, Vanderbilt University; Josipa Roksa, University of Virginia; Margaret Weigers Vitullo, American Sociological Association; Theodore Wagenaar, Miami University; and Sarah Willie-LeBreton, Swarthmore College.

The MCL Sociology faculty panel generally agreed that sociology has distinct disciplinary knowledge and that building consensus around a set of shared learning outcomes for sociology students is crucial and valuable for the purposes of improving undergraduate education. Moreover, several panelists argued that defining this core in sociology is critical because other entities (e.g., school boards, the makers of the MCAT exam, and numerous assessment companies) are forging ahead with their own initiatives to measure college learning in sociology. The faculty panel also discussed at length the current criticisms of higher education, including concerns about rising costs, high student debt, and whether students are being sufficiently trained for the nation's workforce or for the global economy. In 2011, for example, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of the general public on the value, quality, and mission of higher education. A majority of Americans (57 percent) said the U.S. higher education system fails to provide students with good value for the money that they and their families spend (Taylor et al. 2011, 1). In addition, much recent attention has focused on the White House's College Scorecard, and former Education Secretary Arne Duncan advocated for greater accountability in higher education by having the federal government collect more complete and accurate data on learning outcomes from colleges and universities (Duncan 2015). Given these and other concerns about higher education, the sociology panel believes the sociological community should be active participants in endeavors to improve college learning. Since faculty have always assessed student learning, the panelists see this project as a significant faculty-driven endeavor. The faculty panel is most interested in determining learning outcomes for the introductory course and in measuring the knowledge and skill development over the college career of students, and they are eager to participate in institutional improvement.

One lesson from our research is that the use of the term *core* is problematic because of a long-standing debate in the discipline about whether there is a core or not in sociology. Instead,

we concentrate on several different areas of learning, including content, skills, and abilities. With our faculty consultants, we initially brainstormed a number of other terms to replace this idea of a core in sociology, including *key sociological ideas*, *foundations of sociology*, and *sociological contributions to understanding the social world*. What we eventually developed using the American Association for the Advancement of Science's (2011) *Vision and Change* report were two broad categories that organize learning outcomes for sociology. The first category, labeled the *Sociological Perspective*, contains five organizing concepts or themes we think are central to the discipline of sociology. These five organizing themes or sociology principles are essential concepts or themes and should be introduced in the introductory sociology course and then explored in-depth as the student proceeds through the major. We believe that in addition to having an understanding of these essential sociological themes or principles, students also need to develop and apply disciplinary skills. Thus, the second category is labeled the *Sociological Toolbox*, and it contains six essential competencies or disciplinary skills that sociology majors should obtain. We refer to these skills as essential competencies. These two broad categories will be more fully defined later in this white paper as part of our Sociological Literacy Framework. Briefly, defining essential concepts and competencies helps to advance the quality of undergraduate education in sociology by giving us more effective approaches and goals that increase our understanding of teaching and learning. These essential concepts and competencies are what sociology faculty see as fundamental to the discipline and are learning outcomes worth emphasizing given limited time and resources.

This white paper is a review and synthesis of the current state of learning outcomes and assessment within the discipline of sociology. It reflects a comprehensive summary of prior literature and faculty engagement in discussions about priorities for sociology-specific student learning. It outlines sociology's curricular

priorities and demonstrates sociology's value for college students, faculty, and other key stakeholders. Since we believe that the best interests of students need to be at the center of any curriculum discussion, our aspiration is that this white paper improves our ability to understand student learning and generates new ideas about how to better define and assess student learning within sociology.

The first section reviews the literature on learning outcomes in sociology and describes prior attempts to define a core in sociology. We then describe efforts to define learning outcomes for the introductory course in sociology at the high school and college levels before summarizing the literature on learning outcomes for the sociology major. We conclude our review with a list of twelve areas of agreement in the literature concerning the sociology curriculum. These twelve areas of overlap indicate what most sociologists think are essential for every college-level sociology student to master. Following the literature review, we present our new sociology matrix, the *Sociological Literacy Framework*, which articulates a set of essential concepts and competencies for both the sociology major and for the introductory course. We then describe and critically evaluate current assessments in sociology. Finally, we conclude with recommendations regarding how a new assessment of student learning in sociology should be constructed.

Literature Review

> The first wisdom of sociology is this—things are not what they seem.
>
> Peter Berger

Debate about critical learning outcomes in sociology has been ongoing for over a hundred years. Concerns about the content and scope of introductory sociology courses can be documented as

early as the 1909 American Sociological Society (ASS) business meeting, when Jerome Dowd proposed the first committee to investigate the introductory course and to make a recommendation for standardization for course content that would serve as a guide to sociology instructors. This committee of ten scholars included Charles Horton Cooley, Albion Small, Jerome Dowd (chair), and William Graham Sumner, the ASS president of 1908–1909. Dowd's overarching concern was "that sociology teachers, not researchers or theorists, should be the ones who define the scope of the discipline of sociology" (Howard 2010, 83). The committee had substantial agreement on the larger scope of the introductory course; however, they could not fully agree upon a detailed outline of the course, so they amended their report with their individual course outlines. This lack of full consensus on the specific content of introductory sociology continues to this day, with numerous recent attempts to identify a common core in introductory sociology and in the major.[2]

Some of this lack of consensus is due to the nature of the discipline. DiMaggio (1997, 193), for example, argues that sociology appears to be a generalist field in terms of theory, methodology, and content because "sociologists study so many things in so many ways that as soon as outsiders fix a mental image of the field they encounter instances that seem inconsistent with it."

---

[2] There have been many sessions on a core in sociology at regional and national meetings including Greenwood et al. (2014), Jenkins (2014), Kain (2013), and Zipp (2013). Published literature on the core in sociology will be addressed herein and includes the ASA Task Force (2008), Babbie (1990), Collins (1998), D'Antonio (1983), Davis (1983), Howard, Novak, Cline, and Scott (2014), Keith and Ender (2004), Lenski (1983), Persell et al. (2007), Schwartz and Smith (2010), Wagenaar (2004a), and Wagenaar, Keith, and Ender (2004).

This generality makes it difficult to identify specific content for courses or curricula. DiMaggio goes on to argue: "I believe that sociology *does* have a core: the study of social organization from a comparative perspective" (193). In contrast, Abbott (2000) argues that sociology is an endangered discipline among the social sciences because it is organized around an archipelago of empirical questions concerning work and occupations, race and ethnicity, population, stratification, et cetera.

Collins (1998) argues that the common core of sociology is not a set of texts or ideas, but a distinctive intellectual activity: to see that there is sociology in everything, via what Collins labels the sociological eye. The sociological eye is one's ability to see sociology in everyday life. Sociologists see more than the immediate microsituation; the sociological eye also sees the importance of social structure and the relationships between individuals and the larger society. The sociological eye "sees suggestions of social movements mobilizing or winding down, indications of class domination or conflict, or perhaps the organizational process" (3). According to Collins, it is sociologists' ability to perceive the interrelationships between various social phenomena that makes the discipline distinctive. Kai Erikson (1997, 7) similarly contends that sociologists have a unique way of looking at the social world, what he calls "a distinctive intellectual sensibility" or "a distinctive disciplinary lens." He states, "What differentiates us from other observers of the human scene is the way we look out at the world—the way our eyes are trained, the way our intellectual reflexes are set, the way our imaginations are tuned. Sociologists scan the same landscapes as historians or poets or economists, but we select different details to attend to closely, and we sort them in different ways" (3). Erikson's argument reveals that sociologists often study the same subjects and social phenomena as other disciplines, but see

different things. Sociologists observe relationships, social networks, the organization of social structures, or the presence of hierarchies and power.

Other sociologists maintain that the lack of consensus in sociology is due to the structure of the academy. Goldsmid and Wilson (1980), for example, argue that curriculum and course content tend to rely heavily on what has been taught before or on the content of textbooks. In this sense, sociology instruction can be seen as a form of mimicry. As an alternative, Goldsmid and Wilson advocate for sociologists to be more intentional and thoughtful about what the core curriculum is in sociology. They believe that the creation of a common core would provide some minimum standards for the discipline, and it also would be a means to create coherency and structure in departmental curricula. Having shared curricular learning goals and a set of required courses enhances both pedagogy and student learning.

Since 1980, there has been an explosion in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research and in studies of the sociology curriculum. For example, Fink (2003) advocates for designing college courses around different types of learning goals, including goals for foundational knowledge, for application, and for integration of subject content. Beyond course content, Fink also wants courses to enhance learning skills and to have additional learning goals that enhance the human dimension and the students' ability to care about what they are learning. Fink's research and that of others is part of a larger pedagogical movement from a teaching-centered approach to a learning-centered approach. Sociologists have been active in this pedagogical movement from its beginning. Hans Mauksch, for example, started the American Sociological Association (ASA) Project on Teaching Undergraduate Sociology more than forty years ago. Berheide (2005) also has been an active participant, and in her research on strengthening the sociology curriculum she argues that these learning goals need to be infused throughout the sociology curriculum and courses

sequenced in such a way as to provide study in depth,[3] one of the nine goals of the Association of American Colleges' 1985 *Integrity in the College Curriculum* report.

Our review to this point has largely focused on arguments regarding why sociology is a distinctive discipline and the challenges in defining an agreed upon core. What follows is a review of tangible efforts to develop a core in sociology and explicit learning outcomes for the purposes of teaching and program development. Although no consensus exists across proposals regarding what the specific core of sociology should be, there are key concurrences on a number of learning outcomes to be covered either in the introductory sociology course or in the sociology major. We summarize some of these significant pieces of scholarship and then highlight twelve areas of agreement found within this literature. Delineating these areas of agreement is necessary for the discipline to establish learning outcomes and to create meaningful assessments of those learning outcomes. Moreover, having a defined foundation in sociology will help promote the discipline and the major.

Introduction to Sociology

We will describe efforts to define a sociological core at three different levels of schooling: high school, community (two-year) college, and four-year college. At the high school level, local and state boards of education have largely defined the content of sociology courses. In response to teacher requests for curricular standards in sociology, the American Sociological Association began working on high school

---

[3] Berheide states, "The *Integrity* report defines study in depth as comprehension of a complex structure of knowledge. To achieve this comprehension, the *Integrity* report argues that students need a course of study that exposes them to: (1) a central core of method and theory; (2) a range of topics and variety of analytical tools; (3) a sequence that promotes increasing intellectual sophistication in the discipline; and (4) a means to demonstrate mastery of the discipline's complexity" (2005, 4).

standards as early as 1998 and also worked to establish an advanced placement sociology course in 2001. More recently, the ASA advocated to be included in the National Council of Social Studies' guide, *College, Career, and Civic Life: C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards*. As a result, in 2013, the ASA released a "Sociology Companion Document" to the *C3 Framework,* which is a set of high school sociology standards. The document identifies four main content areas that should be covered in high school sociology courses: (a) the Sociological Perspective and methods of inquiry; (b) social structure (culture, institutions, and society); (c) social relationships (self, groups, and socialization); and (d) stratification and inequality. Under each of these four domains, four or five learning goals are delineated. Working in parallel with this effort, an ASA Task Force formed to develop the ASA National Standards for High School Sociology, and their recommendations were formally approved by the ASA Council at the national meeting in August 2015.

Some community colleges also have collaborated in identifying a common core of learning outcomes for the Introduction to Sociology course. A central concern for community colleges is having clear articulation agreements with colleges and universities for classes taken at the community college level to be transferable to four-year institutions. One effort at Glendale Community College in Arizona involved sociologists from ten different community colleges who reviewed learning goals in sociology and designed a common course description and outline (Jenkins 2014). The learning goals borrowed heavily from the ASA guide, *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated* (McKinney, Howery, Strand, Kain, and Berheide 2004, 51–52), which is probably the most cited curricular document in sociology.[4] McKinney et al. outline twelve

---

[4] The earlier version of this document was written by Wagenaar in a 1991 *Teaching Sociology* article, "Goals for the Discipline?" This article became a part of the first edition of the ASA guide: *Liberal Learning and the Major* (1991), edited by Eberts, et al. This 1991 edition was revised by another ASA Task Force in 2004, and it currently is undergoing revision again with the third edition expected in 2017.

broad learning outcomes for the sociology major. In their review of the literature for teaching introductory sociology, Greenwood and Howard (2011, 9) acknowledge the widespread use of the ASA guide *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* (Eberts et al. 1991; McKinney et al. 2004), and they argue that while outcomes for *the major* have been established and revised, no such universal standards exist for *introductory sociology*.

At the four-year college level, D'Antonio (1983) argues for defining a core and describes his colleagues' reluctance to define a common curriculum in the introductory sociology course, including suggestions that to do so would violate academic freedom. Despite this resistance, D'Antonio states that "there is a body of knowledge that can be identified as the core of sociology, which can be introduced to the student at the introductory level. It embodies theories, methods, and findings from research based on these theories and using these methods" (169). D'Antonio creates a core set of topics for introductory sociology that emphasizes three areas: theorists and their theories, sociological concepts (including social organizations, social inequality, socialization, and social change), and methodology.

Two other articles attempting to define a core for introductory sociology that appeared in the same edition of *Teaching Sociology* as D'Antonio's article are by Davis (1983) and Lenski (1983). Davis (1983) argues for organizing introductory sociology courses around empirical scientific findings, which were true, easily demonstrated, thought provoking, and illustrative of the sociological perspective. Davis also prefers causal models, and he demonstrates his teaching model for introductory sociology using data from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) on what he labels *five well-established research results*. In contrast, Lenski (1983) argues the introductory course should utilize a historical and comparative framework and focus on the three structural domains of sociology at the micro (e.g., individuals and relationships), meso (e.g., communities and organizations), and macro levels (e.g., social institutions, culture, ideologies). These two approaches have been criticized for overemphasizing social structure and quantitative methodologies (Reinharz 1986).

In 2004, a special issue of *Teaching Sociology* returned to this conversation about a core in sociology. The lead article by Wagenaar (2004a) reports his findings from a survey of 301 sociologists and their views regarding which skills, topics, and concepts they see as central to the introduction to sociology course and to the sociology curriculum overall. Wagenaar created a list of seventy-two items that were grouped into the following ten categories: sociological perspective; theory; methods and statistics; differences, inequality, and stratification; social structure and institutions; culture and social change; individual and society; applied sociology; values and commitments; and skills. Wagenaar found that at least six items from these ten categories overlap between the lists of critical concepts and skills sociologists attribute to the introductory course and to the sociology curriculum overall: the sociological imagination, social stratification, sociological critical thinking, social structure, think like a sociologist, and how to use and assess research. Wagenaar also found some differences in what sociologists think are critical categories for the introductory course and for the major (e.g., for the introductory course, the concepts of culture and socialization are rated particularly highly). Wagenaar's results reveal that, although there is some overlap between learning outcomes for the introductory course and for the major, there is little agreement among sociologists about the presence of a core in the field of sociology. No single item in Wagenaar's survey exceeds the threshold of 10 percent among all respondents. However, the overlap does indicate a few areas of agreement among sociologists about a possible list of core concepts, topics, and skills for sociology. He concludes that identifying this sociology core will not only strengthen the introductory students' grounding in the discipline but will also increase the majors' study-in-depth experience (2004a, 17).

Persell, Pfeiffer, and Syed's (2007) research provides a systematic comparison of earlier studies that tried to identify key concepts and content in sociology, including Wagenaar's previously discussed

study. They also interviewed forty-four leaders in sociology to learn their views of a sociological core. Their findings indicate a consensus around nine major themes for introductory sociology: (a) the social part of sociology, or learning to think sociologically; (b) the scientific nature of sociology; (c) complex and critical thinking; (d) the centrality of inequality; (e) a sense of sociology as a field; (f) the social construction of ideas; (g) the difference between sociology and other social sciences; (h) the importance of trying to improve the world; and (i) the important social institutions in society. These nine themes are a useful point of comparison between a number of studies, and many can be found in the following list of twelve domains. Persell and her colleagues note that it is ironic that many of the sociology leaders they interviewed were not teaching introduction sociology, nor had they taught undergraduates for some years. However, their views of the introductory course did not differ much from those found in the SoTL scholarship or from those sociologists who were recipients of the Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award in sociology. Thus, there appears to be some agreement among sociology leaders and teaching-focused publications about what students should understand after taking an introductory course in sociology.

In 2008, the ASA Task Force on a College Level Introduction to Sociology Course published their course outline and learning goals for studying introductory sociology. The summary course outline has nine topics: the sociological perspective; research methods; culture; socialization; social organization; social inequalities; deviance and conformity; social institutions; and social change. This grouping of topics is common in introductory textbooks and syllabi that use a survey approach to teaching sociology. Many sociologists assume we have a core because of these common topics found in introductory texts. However, some departments have rejected the survey model and are pursuing alternatives, such as in-depth case studies (Schwartz and Smith 2010) or thematically focused courses. Howard et al. (2014), for example, described

an effort to evaluate student learning across twelve thematically focused introductory sociology courses. They first enumerated a core set of skills and concepts to be covered in four main areas: a sociological perspective; sociological theory; research methods; and key concepts in sociology. A twenty-question multiple-choice assessment was created and administered to students at the beginning and end of the semester. Students made significant learning gains on all four dimensions, with the greatest gains coming in *sociological theory*. Howard et al. conclude their assessment, albeit limited, does demonstrate considerable learning gains in the four main areas in a thematic introductory sociology class, and they advocate for more discussion and agreement on key learning outcomes for sociology.

The Sociology Major

Many scholars also have articulated learning outcomes for the sociology major. These frameworks often describe knowledge, attitudes, and skills that sociology majors should be able to demonstrate after finishing their undergraduate education. For example, McKinney et al. (2004) offers a comprehensive list of skills sociology majors should be able to demonstrate. McKinney and her colleagues on the ASA Task Force list twelve items that cover sociological concepts, theories, and skills. The authors maintained that these learning outcomes are not to be prescriptive, but rather, they should be used as a guide or model to help sociology departments design their own curricula in accordance with their mission statements and student populations. Some departments may choose to emphasize six of the learning outcomes, whereas others try to emulate more. For example, Lowry et al. (2005) provide the learning outcomes for the sociology major for four different schools (California State University at Fresno, Central Michigan University, Roanoke College, and Skidmore College). While still showing variation, this small sample reveals substantial overlap in learning outcomes for the sociology major.

We were particularly interested in whether or not distinctions were made between learning outcomes for the introductory sociology course versus learning outcomes for the sociology major. Wagenaar's (2004a) study is the only one to compare the learning outcomes for the sociology major with those for the introductory course. Wagenaar found that sociologists agreed that both the students in the introductory course and in the major should be able to explain the sociological imagination, social stratification, and social structure. Both groups of students also should be able to identify sociological critical thinking, to think like a sociologist, and be able to know how to use and assess research. But for the sociology major, deeper knowledge and skills need to be demonstrated, especially skills related to methods and statistics. According to Wagenaar, and we concur, sociology majors should be able to emphasize the interplay of theory and methods and to demonstrate their ability to theorize, conduct sociological research, and show greater complexity of thinking.

Two final documents we reviewed in the literature on creating a core in sociology are the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) benchmark statement for sociology (2007) and the Australian Sociological Association's (TASA) "Sociology: Threshold Learning Outcomes" (2012). The first document, written for the QAA by the British Sociological Association, provides sociology programs in the United Kingdom with a guiding set of learning outcomes for the bachelor's degree in sociology. Although much more comprehensive than any of the U.S. reports on sociological learning outcomes, it includes substantial overlap with prior attempts to identify fundamental sociological skills and knowledge. In particular, the QAA delineates learning outcomes in the following areas: knowledge of sociology as a unique discipline, sociological concepts and principles, and skills specific to sociology. It also includes numerous general skills graduating college seniors should be able to demonstrate that are quite broad and not specific to the sociology major

(e.g., making reasoned arguments, learning and studying skills, and group work skills).

The second document was published more recently in 2012, and it reflects the work of the Australian Sociological Association (TASA), which responded to a governmental charge that disciplines in higher education in Australia must define learning outcomes as part of their *quality assurance activities*. Using discipline experts from across Australia, TASA developed *threshold learning outcomes* or "the minimum outcomes that graduates of bachelor degrees with majors in sociology are expected to have achieved at the completion of their course of study" (TASA 2012, 2). Of interest here is how TASA organizes the sociology threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) into three primary domains: knowledge and understanding; skills; and engagement. Contained within these three domains is a total of seven specific threshold learning outcomes: demonstrate an understanding of sociological concepts; demonstrate an understanding of sociological theories; demonstrate an understanding of research processes; apply concepts and theories; evaluate sociological scholarship; develop arguments using evidence; and communicate sociological ideas and knowledge to both specialist and non-specialist audiences. These Australian sociology learning outcomes parallel nicely the work done in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

Our literature review suggests that although sociologists have struggled to agree upon a core, and even though it can be difficult to see consensus within the discipline concerning the introductory course and the sociology major, many concepts and themes are consistent across several frameworks. We found the following twelve areas of overlap:

1. The unique perspective of sociology
2. The fact that sociology is a science
3. A sense of sociology as a field or as a discipline
4. The importance of theory in forming sociological thinking and research

5. The centrality of social inequality
6. The importance of social structure
7. The relationship between self and society
8. The concept of culture
9. The concept of social change
10. Complex and critical thinking skills
11. Other skills such as writing, oral skills, technological literacy
12. The importance of trying to improve the world

This strong degree of overlap between the many different frameworks and typologies that we reviewed provides an important road map. The Sociological Literacy Framework that we propose builds on this overlap, organizing these different areas of agreement into a concise set of essential concepts and competencies. Importantly, the framework is sufficiently broad in ways that will enable sociologists to make progress in conceptualizing how college learning in the introductory sociology course and in the sociology major could be measured.

The Sociological Literacy Framework: Essential Concepts and Competencies for the Sociology Major

The literature review and discussions from the MCL sociology faculty panel indicate that there is sufficient overlap in various frameworks to enumerate a reasonable number of broad learning outcomes for the introductory sociology course and for the sociology major. Our synthesis of this material led us to create the Sociological Literacy Framework, which summarizes and describes a set of essential concepts and competencies for the sociology major. The framework has two broad categories that organize learning outcomes for sociology. The first category, labeled the *Sociological Perspective*, contains five essential concepts that are central to the discipline of sociology. They should be introduced in the introductory sociology course and then explored in depth as the student

proceeds through the major. In addition to having an understanding of these essential sociological concepts, students also need to develop and apply disciplinary competencies. Thus, the second category, labeled the *Sociological Toolbox*, contains six essential competencies that sociology majors should master. Table 4.1 offers a brief overview of the Sociological Literacy Framework.

In addition to intersecting well with the U.S. literature on learning outcomes in sociology, the Sociological Literacy Framework dialogues well with the United Kingdom's benchmark statement for sociology (QAA 2007), and the Australian Sociological Association's threshold learning outcomes (TASA 2012). Although we present the concepts and competencies of the framework separately, undergraduates should nevertheless learn them in a fully integrated fashion, with each supporting and augmenting

Table 4.1 Brief Overview of the Sociological Literacy Framework

The Sociological Perspective (Essential Concepts)	The Sociological Toolbox (Essential Competencies)
The Sociological Eye: Sociology as a distinctive discipline	**Apply Sociological Theories to Understand Social Phenomena** (Theory)
Social Structure: The impact of social structures on human action	**Critically Evaluate Explanations of Human Behavior and Social Phenomena** (Evaluation)
Socialization: The relationship between the self and society	**Apply Scientific Principles to Understand the Social World** (Sociology as a Science)
Stratification: The patterns and effects of social inequality	**Evaluate the Quality of Social Scientific Methods and Data** (Methodological Practice)
Social Change and Social Reproduction: How social phenomena replicate and change	**Rigorously Analyze Social Scientific Data** (Quantitative and Qualitative Data Literacy)
	Use Sociological Knowledge to Inform Policy Debates and Promote Public Understanding (Public Skills and Citizenship)

the other. In our view, what makes sociology *exceptional* is its perspective (i.e., the essential concepts that students learn), but what makes it *valuable* is the knowledge and skills that students gain and can integrate together. Accordingly, what makes sociology distinctive is the *sui generis* of the major or the combination of the items in the Sociological Literacy Framework, not the individual items on their own.[5] Sociologists understand the social world by using both theory and evidence to pose and answer important questions about society. Concepts and competencies are used together in sociological research, and students should recognize this integration in their courses and in their knowledge and application of sociology outside of the classroom.

The Sociological Perspective: Essential Concepts

The Sociological Perspective consists of five essential concepts that reflect larger organizing themes that lay the foundation of critical undergraduate knowledge in sociology. Each concept is a shorthand label or starting point for the overarching principles that underlie both the introductory sociology course and the sociology major. Taken together, these essential concepts and related themes provide an organizational model for what knowledge is expected in the college-level sociology curriculum. These essential concepts illustrate how sociologists view the social world and how sociology contributes to our understanding of the human experience. Below each essential concept is briefly summarized with a description of related themes and topics.

The Sociological Eye

The first essential concept in the Sociological Perspective is the *sociological eye*, a term we adopted from Randall Collins (1998). Sociology students should be able to delineate the major theoretical

---

[5] Thank you to Diane Pike for this insight on an earlier draft.

frameworks and distinctive assumptions on which our discipline is founded and that differentiate it from other social sciences. Topics related to this concept include: the founding theoretical traditions (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Mead); a critique of rational choice as the primary explanation of human behavior; and an introduction to the *sociological imagination* and the *social construction of everyday life*, two constructs that facilitate understanding of how social forces affect individuals and how actions of individuals both constitute and are shaped by daily life.

Social Structure

Students of sociology should also be able to describe social structure and how structural forces affect human action and social life at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society. More specifically, sociology students should be able to distinguish important social institutions in society that make up the social structure, and how they affect individuals and each other. In addition, students should be able to differentiate the processes through which social roles and statuses, relationships, social groups, formal organizations, and social networks influence human thought and action. Students should recognize how hierarchy, power, and authority operate across these structural contexts. Finally, students should be able to provide examples of these concepts related to social structure in multiple historical and cultural settings.

Socialization

Students of sociology should be able to explain the relationship between the self and society, particularly how the self is socially constructed and maintained at multiple levels of society. Related topics include the processes and agents of socialization; the role of culture in shaping human thought and action; the operation of social norms, including the study of social control, anomie, and

deviance; the power of the self-fulfilling prophesy; and the role of human agency in describing behavior. Finally, students should be able to explain concepts and theories that illustrate how the self and social interaction influence the larger society and social structure.

Stratification

The essential concept of stratification comprises the different forms of social inequality in human societies and the processes through which they are established and operate. Related critical topics include the theories of social stratification; the structure of inequalities of power, status, income, and wealth; the distinction between social and economic mobility and how ascriptive and meritocratic traits are related to each; and the impact of changes in the opportunity structure on inequality and social mobility. Additionally, students should be able to identify structural patterns of social inequality and their effects on groups and individuals, and explain the intersections of race, social class, gender, and other social factors at both the macro level and micro level of society.

Social Change and Social Reproduction

Sociology students also should be able to identify the social processes underpinning social change and describe how demographic and other types of social change affect individuals and social structures. More specifically, students should be able to explain how social structures change as a result of social forces, including the actions of social groups through social movements and collective action; the impact of macro level economic and social changes such as industrialization, secularization, and globalization; and struggles over social institutions that are linked to social and economic development and mobility. A critical component of social change is *social reproduction*, which emphasizes the basic processes

of how social structures reproduce themselves from generation to generation in cultural, social, political, and economic terms.

Table 4.2 summarizes all five essential concepts that form the Sociological Perspective.

Table 4.2 The Sociological Perspective: Five Essential Concepts

Essential Concept	Significance (Students Will . . .)
The Sociological Eye	Recognize key theoretical frameworks and assumptions on which the discipline is founded and differentiated from other social sciences.
Social Structure	Articulate what sociologists mean by *social structure* and how structural forces affect human action and social life at the micro, meso, and macro levels.
Socialization	Explain the relationship between the self and society and how the self is socially constructed and maintained at multiple levels.
Stratification	Identify how social structures create and reproduce different forms of social inequality in human society through specific processes, and interpret empirical patterns and effects of social inequality.
Social Change and Social Reproduction	Comprehend how social structures reproduce themselves across generations but also how social change occurs in cultural, social, political, and economic terms.

The Sociological Toolbox: Essential Competencies

The six essential competencies in the Sociological Toolbox are the skills that we think sociology students should be able to demonstrate at different points in the sociology curriculum. For example, in introductory courses these skills are introduced, in intermediate courses these skills are developed and applied, and in advanced courses they are particularly emphasized. By the time sociology majors graduate, they should have developed mastery of these skills.

Apply Sociological Theories to Understand Social Phenomena

Sociology students should be able to move beyond folk explanations of social phenomena and instead invoke evidence-based theories of sociological phenomena. Sociology students should be able to demonstrate how to apply sociological theories and concepts to the social world around them by doing the following: using the sociological imagination to analyze social problems in context and to generate and evaluate solutions; and by applying other sociological theories and concepts to social phenomena, both locally and globally.

Critically Evaluate Explanations of Human Behavior and Social Phenomena

Sociology students should be able to describe the role of theory in building sociological knowledge and evaluate the limitations of different theoretical frameworks. This essential competency provides students with the tools to critically evaluate claims about the social world by identifying and appraising assumptions underlying theory construction and social policy, deductively deriving theories from assumptions, inductively reasoning from evidence to theoretical conclusions, and effectively using sociological theories and evidence to suggest real-world solutions to social problems.

Apply Scientific Principles to Understand the Social World

Sociology students should not only be able to describe the role of social research methods in building sociological knowledge, but be able to identify major methodological approaches and the design of doing research including sampling, measurement, and data collection. Students should learn to conduct and critique empirical research through the articulation of the effective use of evidence, the generation of research questions or hypotheses from

sociological theories and concepts, and the recognition of the limits of the scientific method in understanding social behavior.

Evaluate the Quality of Social Scientific Methods and Data

Sociology students should be able to critically assess the empirical sociological research of others and be able to identify the assumptions and limitations underlying particular research methodologies in sociology. The particular characteristics that sociologists use to evaluate the quality of research methods and data sources include operationalizing concepts into measurable variables; learning the importance of precision, reliability, and validity of data sources; and understanding the distinctions between probability and non-probability samples.

Rigorously Analyze Social Scientific Data

Students should be able to articulate and apply disciplinary standards for data analysis and also delineate the differing goals, strengths, and limitations of different modes of analysis. These methodological skills should include an ability to fathom basic descriptive and inferential statistics and the importance of statistical and experimental controls for making causal claims when analyzing data. Students also should be able to evaluate multiple representations of data in public discourse. The ability to evaluate statistical information and analyses is central to the quantitative literacy of sociology students.

Use Sociological Knowledge to Inform Policy Debates and Promote Public Understanding

We want sociology students to be able to use all of the essential concepts and competencies of the Sociological Literacy Framework to engage with and have an impact upon the world in which they live and work. This last competency is not solely the ideal of using sociological education to develop better citizens, but in addition,

it covers a broad range of abilities and potential applications for sociology students, including being able to express sociological ideas in a clear and coherent manner, in both written and oral communication, to the general public. Sociology students also should be able to demonstrate informational, technological, and quantitative literacy. This essential competency suggests that sociology students should understand the kinds of work sociologists do, including an awareness of how sociology is used in clinical and applied settings, and the value of sociological knowledge and skills in the workplace. Additionally, students should be aware of public sociology and be able to use and understand the value of sociological theories and knowledge when participating in public discourse and civic life. This essential competency effectively parallels one of the goals of LEAP, Liberal Education and America's Promise, which argues that learning outcomes are essential for success in life, civil society, and work in the 21st century.[6]

Table 4.3 describes the six essential competencies that make up the Sociological Toolbox in the Sociological Literacy Framework.

Uses of the Sociological Literacy Framework

Taken together, these five essential concepts and six essential competencies create a Sociological Literacy Framework that can be modified and applied in a variety of academic settings. The model distinguishes between learning outcomes that demonstrate what

---

[6] LEAP promotes essential learning outcomes that include: "1) broad knowledge of culture, science and society, as well as competence in specific fields; 2) intellectual and practical skills, such as inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy; teamwork and problem solving; 3) studies and experiences related to democratic and global citizenship and intercultural competence; and 4) integrative, applied and adaptive learning" (LEAP 2015).

Table 4.3 The Sociological Toolbox: Six Essential Competencies

Essential Competency	Significance	Proposed Learning Outcome
Apply Sociological Theories to Understand Social Phenomena	Sociology provides concepts and theories that reveal hidden patterns in the social world.	Students will be able to identify how sociological concepts and theories relate to everyday life.
Critically Evaluate Explanations of Human Behavior and Social Phenomena	Sociology provides the tools to critically evaluate claims about the social world.	Students will possess a critical lens for understanding human behavior and societies.
Apply Scientific Principles to Understand the Social World	Sociology is an evidence-based discipline.	Students will articulate the importance of evidence and scientific methods for explanations of social phenomena.
Evaluate the Quality of Social Scientific Methods and Data	Sociology requires high-quality research methods and data to describe and explain social phenomena.	Students will be able to identify the characteristics of high-quality data and methods in sociological research.
Rigorously Analyze Social Scientific Data	Sociology relies on scientifically valid methodologies to analyze data.	Students will identify disciplinary standards for both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data.
Use Sociological Knowledge to Inform Policy Debates and Promote Public Understanding	Sociological research can create a more knowledgeable citizenry and serve as a resource for policymakers.	Students will use their sociological knowledge and skills to engage with and impact the world around them.

students should be able to comprehend, and what they should be able to do. The framework is flexible and easily adaptable by sociology faculty and departments with different strengths, interests, and emphases. It sets a clear target that faculty can use in developing their courses while preserving pedagogical autonomy in the classroom.

The main goal of the Sociological Literacy Framework is to catalyze a change in how students think about social phenomena by learning and applying sociological concepts, theories, and skills that enable them to view the social world as a sociologist does. It provides an essential set of concepts and skills that will help to train students how to think critically from a sociological perspective. With this goal in mind, the framework also is designed to help instructors and departments develop and organize introductory, required, and advanced courses. We want to provide sociology programs with a set of ideas and guidelines to begin or further conversations about the curriculum and when certain concepts or skills should be introduced. We also want sociology programs to think about how courses are linked together or sequenced across the undergraduate major, and how learning in sociology can increase in depth over time. Sweet, McElrath, and Kain's (2014) research on the coordinated curriculum suggests that a structured curriculum with linked learning goals will facilitate the achievement of performance outcomes. Thus, the framework will bring coherence and consistency across students' course work, and it also will help their instructors target, teach, and develop more of these learning outcomes within and across sociology programs at different colleges and universities.

The essential concepts and competencies that we present in the Sociological Literacy Framework are intentionally broad and open-ended so that they can be appropriately tailored for different courses. The introductory course should provide students with exposure to the main perspectives of sociology (essential concepts or themes) and introduce the basic skills (essential competencies) that the

framework delineates. In addition, since Bain (2004) argues that learning goals should foster deep-learning and practical application, we see our framework as helping to support developmental logic and deep learning within the major. Different courses within the sociology major may drill down and provide students with greater depth and exposure to a subset of themes and skills within the framework. As students progress through the sociology major, they gain greater competency in each learning outcome. Moreover, this approach to learning focuses on learning as a process; subsequent courses will extend and multiply knowledge and skill acquisition. Advanced courses within the major should give students more opportunities to develop and practice specific skills in the toolbox. Ideally, sociology programs can use the Sociological Literacy Framework to ensure that many (or most) of the dimensions are covered by a diverse array of courses within the major. The framework also is a scaffold on which instructors can begin to overlay specific sociological content in their courses. This underlying scaffold will help provide cohesion to courses and readings based on the potentially disparate, seemingly disconnected array of facts that sociologists produce with their research in different subfields. In sum, this framework can be used to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment.

Essential Concepts and Competencies for the Introductory Course

The Sociological Literacy Framework lists essential concepts and competencies that we would expect students to demonstrate at the completion of a major in sociology. But what might we expect students in the introductory course itself to learn, and how does that relate to the goals for the major? Our literature review and the MCL Sociology faculty panel identified learning outcomes for the introductory course that were similar to those for the sociology

major. For example, the faculty panel agreed on six major learning outcomes for the introductory course, which we incorporated into the Sociological Literacy Framework:

1. Identify and apply major theoretical paradigms to social problems.
2. Recognize and apply the sociological imagination.
3. Interpret empirical patterns and the effects of social inequality.
4. Obtain working definitions of key concepts.
5. Explain the process of the scientific method and be able to identify different methods of data collection.
6. Articulate how sociology views the world distinctively from or similarly to other social sciences.

In addition, the MCL Sociology faculty panelists reaffirmed the importance of the introductory sociology course because it is often the only course in sociology that many college students will take. As such, they want this course to convey a basic understanding of the essential concepts and competencies that are fundamental to the discipline. Achieving this goal can be a challenge, however, because of the diversity of approaches in teaching introductory sociology at the college level. Two primary teaching models for the introductory course are *the survey textbook model*, where the focus is on content and teaching a list of topics rather than on teaching skills, and *the problem-solving model*, where the focus is on teaching critical thinking skills. Similar to arguments made by Greenwood and Howard (2011), several faculty panelists emphasized the importance of teaching both concepts and skills in the introductory course by introducing a few concepts or the vocabulary of sociology and then assigning different types of materials to apply those concepts. For example, some faculty members assign readings from newspapers, empirical case studies, or even pieces of fiction, and then ask students to apply their sociological

learning to those readings. Still others organize their introductory course around specific themes, such as those found in Joel Charon's *Ten Questions: A Sociological Perspective* (2013). Each of these approaches can incorporate the essential concepts and competencies found in the Sociological Literacy Framework.

A related concern about the introductory course taught at most colleges and universities is that this course often is seen as serving two different functions. As McKeever (2014) argues, the first is as a service course to the college or university, as it commonly fulfills distribution requirements being satisfied by first- or second-year undergraduates. As such, it might be the only opportunity for students to encounter the discipline. For that reason, the emphasis of the introductory course is often on trying to get a general sense of the discipline across in at least a minimal fashion. Theoretical and methodological complexity tends to be simplified so that content, perspective, and some sense of method can be communicated. The second purpose of the introductory course is as the first interaction with the discipline for future majors, nearly all of whom do not realize they will be majors when they sign up for the course. For such students complexity is something they will encounter in subsequent courses. Consequently, we often spend time in subsequent courses undermining some of the material from introductory sociology when we reproblematize certain content and conclusions on theoretical or empirical grounds.

Regardless of teaching approach or purpose of the introductory sociology course at the college level, the same essential concepts and competencies that are identified for the sociology major in the Sociological Literacy Framework are applicable to the introductory course. Research supports this dual emphasis on concepts and skills: The American Sociological Association's Integrating Data Analysis (IDA) project argues for data analysis to be brought into the sociology curriculum in a manner that is "early, often, and sequenced." Hillsman and Vitullo (2014) report that 40 percent of the students in the twenty departments that participated

in the 2005 NSF-sponsored IDA project used data analysis modules as first year students. After the data analysis modules, students stated that they felt less fearful about working with numbers; they understood that sociology is a science, not just based on opinions; and they saw how important it was to base new social services on empirical data.

Hillsman and Vitullo (2014) further argue that, in today's technologically enhanced world, there is a wealth of accessible data on the Internet that students in introductory classes can use to discover evidence of concepts in empirical data. We agree with their assertion and think that bringing the empirical basis of the discipline squarely into introductory courses supports the kind of learning-centered, inquiry-based pedagogies that have been shown to improve learning outcomes that are called for in this white paper. Thus, the essential competencies in the Sociological Literacy Framework should be introduced in the introductory course. To be sure, we would not expect students to have fully developed their expertise in applying scientific principles to understand the social world or their ability to evaluate the quality of social scientific data or to be able to rigorously analyze social scientific data until they completed their sociology major. These methodological skills should be introduced, but mastery is accomplished as the student takes more sociology courses beyond the introductory level.

Finally, the ability to interpret findings and to collect data and conduct basic analysis are valuable skills strongly linked to employment opportunities for sociology majors. Students in introductory courses are potential majors who are increasingly concerned about their future employment and need to know that a degree in sociology can lead to interesting and rewarding careers (Eagan, Lozano, Hurtado, and Case 2013). Students in the major need to have a solid understanding of the kind of work sociologists do and of the value of their sociological knowledge and skills in the workplace. Sociology majors often use the skills they learn in social service agencies, consulting firms, market research firms,

and nonprofit organizations, just to name a few. Employers also are seeking college graduates who can demonstrate a broad range of skills, including the ability to deal with complexity (Hart Research Associates 2013). As a discipline that attracts many underrepresented minority and first generation college students, curricular content that explicitly makes the connection between the major and the skills employers' value can be seen as a social justice issue. The last essential competency in the framework's Sociological Toolbox makes this point: Sociology students and majors should be able to apply their sociological knowledge and skills to life outside of the classroom and to life after college.

Current Assessments of Student Learning in Sociology

In 2005, the ASA Task Force on Assessing the Undergraduate Sociology Major issued a report to provide guidance to departments on assessing student learning. In the report, Lowry et al. (2005) argue that the most critical reason that sociology departments should assess academic majors and programs is because it is a constructive method to enrich student learning. In addition, academic program assessment enables faculty to make a conceptual distinction between *teaching* and *learning* that has the potential to greatly enhance both. Lowry et al. advocate for sociology faculty to have serious discussions about what we want our students to learn and to achieve. Sociologists Atkinson and Lowney (2014) similarly argue that one of the most critical stakeholders in assessment is the student. They state, "We owe them [the students] the best, most cohesive process of introducing them to the discipline we love and then gradually but consistently deepening their analytical, theoretical, and problem-solving skills, as they advance through the degree requirements" (194). They also provide a guide to help departments design an assessment protocol and offer

several examples of program assessment tools, including portfolios, major writing assignments, and pre–post measures.

The ASA Task Force report on assessment also includes many useful examples of departmental practices that are—and should be—used to measure student learning within the sociology major, such as (a) direct measures of learning, such as capstone courses, course-embedded assessments, student portfolios, and departmentally developed or nationally normed tests; and (b) indirect measures of learning, such as surveys and focus groups of current students and alumni, surveys of employers and graduate schools, and external reviews. All the practices described in the report can be tremendously helpful to individual sociology programs and departments as they critically evaluate their own practices and student learning outcomes. In the rest of this section, we will focus in particular on assessments that have the potential to allow for comparisons of student learning outcomes across institutions and over time.

The two large-scale standardized assessments that are used most widely to measure sociological knowledge and reasoning are the Major Field Test (MFT) conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior (PSBFB) section of the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) conducted by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). ETS reported aggregated results for 2,543 examinees (in 110 postsecondary institutions) who took the MFT in sociology from September 2012 to May 2014 (ETS 2014). In contrast, roughly 85,000 people take the MCAT each time it is offered (although each sitting often includes individuals who have taken the exam at least once in the past) (AAMC 2015).

The MFT for sociology is designed as an end-of-program assessment that measures the discipline specific skills and knowledge of sociology majors. The MFT was designed to be shorter and less difficult than the now-defunct GRE in sociology, with the population

of interest being all sociology majors rather than only those with an interest in attending graduate school (Szafran 1996). ETS describes all of its major field tests as measuring "the mastery of concepts, principles, and knowledge expected of students at the conclusion of a major" (ETS 2012). Although the exam assesses factual knowledge, ETS also argues that the MFT measures "students' abilities to analyze and solve problems, understand relationships, and interpret material" (ETS 2012). The MFT is designed to help academic departments evaluate student learning for the purpose of self-study by providing individual-level scores that can be aggregated to the department level.

The MFT for sociology is a two-hour multiple-choice exam with 140 questions. Some questions are stand-alone measures, and others are divided into question sets based on graphs, data, and diagrams provided for test takers on the exam. In describing the MFT for sociology, ETS states that most questions "require knowledge of specific sociological information, but the test also draws on the student's ability to interpret data, to apply concepts and ideas, and to analyze sociological data, theories and relationships, deductively and inductively" (ETS 2012). ETS identifies thirteen content areas for the exam: general theory; methodology and statistics; criminology and deviance; demography and urban sociology; organizations; race, ethnicity, gender; social change; social institutions; social psychology; social stratification; critical thinking; gender; and global. The last three areas (critical thinking, gender, and global) are described by ETS as "integrated into the entire [MFT]," which suggests that numerous questions may be designed to test multiple, overlapping content areas.

ETS divides the MFT in sociology into two main sections, each with its own subscore: core sociology (described as "general theory and methodology and statistics"), and critical thinking. The observed correlation between these two subscores among examinees is very high ($r = .85$), which indicates that students' scores on the two sections are very strongly associated with each other

(ETS 2014). A total score as well as subscores for core sociology and critical thinking can be estimated for each individual student. Subscores in nine additional content areas (general theory; methodology and statistics; criminology and deviance; social stratification; race, ethnicity, gender; social psychology; gender; and global) can be estimated, but these scores are only valid at the department level and are not available for individual students, due to the smaller number of questions in each area (ETS 2014).

ETS provides fifteen sample questions from the MFT on the ETS website, and the questions cover a wide range of substantive topics within sociology (ETS 2003). Although ETS (2003) provides a caveat that the questions should not be considered "representative of the entire scope of the test in either content or difficulty," it is possible to make some generalizations about the types of questions that appear on the MFT. All the sample items are stand-alone questions (as opposed to question sets). Many of the questions depend on an examinee's background knowledge of key concepts, sociological terminology, or factual knowledge. For example, one question asks, "A person who sells drugs in order to become wealthy best fits which of Merton's modes of adaptation to anomie?" Clearly, prior knowledge of the concept of anomie is necessary to determine the correct response ("Innovator"). One can reasonably deduce this correct answer, but only if one has prior knowledge of the core concept. Another sample question is much more narrowly focused on factual knowledge: "Which of the following Supreme Court decisions most significantly improved the legal status of African Americans in the United States?" The examinee is given five possible responses, each of which is the title of a Supreme Court case (*Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education* is the correct response). This item solely evaluates specific factual knowledge and is completely divorced from sociological reasoning. Other questions focus on specific research findings: "Research has shown that a bystander is most likely to help a person in distress if [correct response: there are no other bystanders present]."

Once again, there is little to no reasoning involved in determining the correct response to this question; it is solely a test of factual knowledge. Finally, two of the fifteen sample questions (one on factorial designs, and another on the difference between a sample and a population) were completely divorced from sociological content; neither question required any knowledge of sociology to be answered correctly.

The PSBFB section of the MCAT shares similarities with but also differs from the MFT in assessing sociological knowledge and skills. The AAMC describes the PSBFB section of the MCAT as measuring a student's understanding of "the ways psychological, social, and biological factors influence perceptions and reactions to the world; behavior and behavior change; what people think about themselves and others; the cultural and social differences that influence well-being; and relationships between social stratification, access to resources, and well-being" (AAMC 2015, 1). This section of the MCAT consists of fifty-nine questions, for which examinees are given ninety-five minutes to answer. Roughly 30 percent of the content for the PSBFB is sociological, 65 percent is psychological, and 5 percent is biological. According to the AAMC, this section of the MCAT tests knowledge and concepts that are typically taught in a first-semester psychology or sociology course.

There are several important contrasts between the MFT and MCAT's PSBFB. First, the main purpose of the MCAT's PSBFB is fundamentally different from the MFT: The MFT is largely designed for program evaluation, and the MCAT is used exclusively as a tool to make relative comparisons among students to determine admission to medical school. Consequently, whereas the MFT provides overall scores and subscores for both programs and students, the PSBFB of the MCAT does not provide subscores that specifically describe an examinee's sociological knowledge (since it comprises only 30 percent of this section of the exam). In addition, when compared with the MFT, the PSBFB is designed as an assessment

of the learning that occurs in an introductory sociology course, rather than the full major. Relatedly, unlike the MFT, the MCAT assesses a population of students who are not expected to be sociology majors but rather those who have likely taken an introductory sociology course or another entry-level sociology course for students planning to apply to medical school.

The overall scope of the sociological content of the MCAT's PSBFB is considerably more circumscribed than the MFT. There is a strong emphasis on social psychological theory and research on the PSBFB, with questions on the following content areas: social processes that influence human behavior, self-identity, social thinking, and social interactions (AAMC 2015, 18–25). Additional content areas include understanding social structure (theoretical approaches, social institutions, and culture), demographic characteristics and processes, and social inequalities (26–31). Methodology and statistics are not explicitly described as *sociological content* on the MCAT, but there is ample representation of this knowledge and skill set in the PSBFB. In short, the MCAT has less breadth in content relative to the MFT and our own Sociological Literacy Framework.

MCAT examinees also are commonly asked to reach a specific conclusion based on a graph or table that is provided in the PSBFB section. For example, one sample question includes a graph describing how mortality rates (on the y-axis) change by age (on the x-axis) for individuals with different marital statuses (e.g., continuously married, divorced, never married). Examinees are given a series of statements and asked to identify which statement was unsupported by the graph. Other questions provide examinees with specific research questions ("researchers were interested in whether early mental health issues were associated with later educational attainment") in which they are asked to identify independent, dependent, and mediating variables. As with the MFT, these tests of methodological and statistical skills and knowledge are often independent of background knowledge in sociology.

In other words, even though the content of these examples is socio-logical, the knowledge needed to answer these questions could be learned in many other natural and social science disciplines.

The MCAT's PSBFB relies exclusively on question sets rather than the kinds of stand-alone questions that make up the bulk of the MFT. Examinees are given one or two paragraphs that describe a research topic, a research question, and occasionally some specific published research studies. A table or graph is typically also included as part of the question set. Four multiple-choice questions follow the information that is provided. The questions often isolate specific theories and concepts, and examinees are typically asked to apply their knowledge to concrete examples. For example, they are presented with an example of a study that examined whether individuals who experience mental health problems are more likely to drift to a lower social status as adults. The question requires the examinee identify which concept best describes this pattern ("social mobility"). Other questions require examinees to identify which theory (e.g., functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism) best describes a given relationship or pattern. Interestingly, although the format differed, the MFT and MCAT both assessed examinees' familiarity with many of the same theories and concepts that are typically taught in introductory sociology courses.

Future Assessments

The MFT and MCAT clearly have some strengths. Both assessments identify some key content areas and skills that overlap with our proposed Sociological Literacy Framework. Numerous items on these assessments measure whether students possess core knowledge (in the form of major theories and basic methodology), and they also assess the breadth of student learning across several major subfields in the discipline. The MFT and MCAT both have items that are well suited to measure fundamental skills and knowledge

that should be taught in an introductory sociology course, and each exam could be a useful starting point for a new assessment designed for that purpose.

However, both assessments also share several important weaknesses and limitations, particularly when we consider assessing learning within the major. First, neither assessment adequately measures the ability of test takers to *reason sociologically*. Most questions on the MFT are recall questions that measure a student's background knowledge; students are rarely asked to apply the theories and knowledge that they have learned to solve intellectual problems using a sociological perspective. Several sociology faculty on the MCL panel expressed concern that the MFT is too driven by specific content and uses too much specialized technical language (jargon). For example, the *Brown* question on the MFT could be reworked to measure whether students can think sociologically about *how change happens* in societies. Students who can apply different sociological theories to make sense of *Brown's* impact on society and can incorporate the role of institutions, social structure, culture, and human agency in an explanation of social change are demonstrating sociological reasoning. Future assessments of student learning must allow examinees an opportunity to demonstrate these important abilities. Second, the MFT and MCAT do a very poor job of measuring the depth and specialized character of students' sociological skills and knowledge. Consequently, neither assessment is well suited toward measuring how much sociology majors learn within the major. The MCAT is fairly well aligned to the curriculum for an introductory sociology course and consequently does not provide many opportunities for students to demonstrate the depth of their learning. The MFT includes material that might be learned in some advanced and specialized courses, but these questions typically involve the basic recall of information (e.g., the *Brown* and bystander effect questions), and they do not provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate the overall breadth and depth of their knowledge.

Finding a good balance between the breadth and depth of student learning is important, particularly in a broad field like sociology, where the curriculum and required coursework for the major can vary greatly across departments. The large diversity of subfields and specialty areas within the discipline can be viewed by some as posing a major challenge in developing a valid assessment of learning outcomes among sociology majors. The American Sociological Association, for example, currently has fifty-two sections, each of which is organized around the substantive interests of its members. However, even the largest sociology departments struggle to teach courses in more than a small minority of these areas. In addition, undergraduate majors commonly take specialized courses in several different areas. Thus, although sociology majors are learning *essential* concepts and competencies, they also are learning *specialized* knowledge and skills that will be difficult to measure with a standardized assessment. Recognizing this challenge, we argue that we do not need to measure—and could never measure—everything students learn. What we need and want to measure are the essential concepts and competencies that are found in all fields and subfields of sociology (e.g., the concepts and competencies that we articulate in the Sociological Literacy Framework).

We propose five ways to move beyond the limitations of current assessments of learning in sociology. First, a valid assessment for measuring learning within the major should be designed to cover content that is normally presented in courses that are required in most typical undergraduate programs: introductory sociology, sociological theory, research methods, and statistics. Key concepts, theories, skills, and knowledge that should be mastered in these four courses should be identified and incorporated into the new assessment. Since the MFT and MCAT cover some of this material, both of these assessments serve as useful building blocks for a new assessment. However, an improved assessment should require that students demonstrate that they can *apply* their knowledge and skills to solve sociological problems. Both multiple-choice

questions and written essays can evaluate students' abilities as sociological problem solvers.

Second, a new assessment of sociological learning should include an essay or open-ended component that would provide flexibility in allowing students to demonstrate the depth of their learning and the more specialized knowledge that they have acquired. Written responses also would allow students to demonstrate their ability to reason sociologically as described above. Indeed, many of the MCL Sociology faculty panelists favored the essay format of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) because it emphasizes problem solving, synthesizing information, and constructing an argument using critical thinking skills. Wagenaar (2004b, 233) also advocates for an essay-type of assessment instrument over a multiple-choice instrument because it would better assess "the integrated nature of the ideal sociology curriculum more fully and accurately, testing in a more authentic manner students' abilities to think sociologically." A sociology assessment would have to be focused centrally on sociological problems and questions. For example, examinees could be provided with an essay prompt regarding changes in gender inequality in the United States during the 20th century. The prompt could be structured so that it is possible for students to use different theories and content knowledge in their response. A student who has expertise in social movements could build an argument using theories and research from that area, while another who has expertise in the family could use a different perspective on the same question.

The main disadvantages of including open-ended responses in an assessment are increased costs for the training and labor to grade each response, issues related to ensuring high levels of intercoder reliability, and the length of time required for students to take the assessment. Administering the written component of the assessment to only a subsample of examinees could reduce these costs. In developing a new assessment tool, assessment designers also should pay close attention to the correlation between the subscores for

multiple-choice and essay responses. Even though our intuition is that essay responses measure different knowledge and skills than multiple-choice questions, it is an open question that can and should be addressed with empirical analyses of data.

Third, although a new assessment should measure essential knowledge and skills for all students, customizable test modules could measure the depth of students' knowledge in specific sub-areas, based on departmental areas of strength and specialization. For example, a department that has an area of emphasis in the sociology of culture (or perhaps has a concentration or required course work in that area) could select a culture module for inclusion in the assessment. This module would have a greater number of questions in the subfield of cultural sociology, and it would measure students' specialized knowledge within this area. The modular approach would enable departments to better align the assessment with their course offerings and enhance the sensitivity of the measurement instrument to the depth of student learning.

Fourth, the MCL Sociology faculty panel agreed that future assessments of learning in sociology should measure *growth* in student knowledge and abilities. Therefore, any new assessment should allow for valid comparisons between pretest and posttest scores. For the introductory course, comparable scores at the beginning and end of the course are needed, whereas for the major, students' knowledge should be assessed after declaring the major and then again upon completing the major. The focus on test score gains makes it especially important to create assessments that account for possible floor and ceiling effects. In particular, the posttests for the introductory course and the major should differ in both content and difficulty since we expect that students will learn much more in the major than in the introductory course.

Fifth, the American Association for Higher Education has argued that we need to think about learning and assessment as multifactorial processes (Astin et al. 1992; Pike 2014). Therefore, we advocate measuring student learning at multiple points in the

teaching process and utilizing several instruments of assessment. We also want these tools to help foster active learning among our students. The MCL Sociology faculty panel similarly agreed that a new assessment should serve the best interests of faculty and students, and not lead to faculty teaching to the test in college classrooms. Several panelists argued that the primary purpose of a new instrument should be to improve teaching and learning. If that is the case, departments might be a more appropriate unit of analysis than the individual student. The unit of analysis is an important issue to consider in designing the assessment because it has implications for how the test is designed. In other words, if student level data are not needed, matrix sampling could be used to create a test with greater breadth, higher reliability, and a lower overall burden on each examinee.

Conclusion

For many years, sociologists have debated important questions regarding teaching and learning in our discipline: What features of our discipline are distinctive from other social sciences? What skills and knowledge should our students be learning? How can we best measure how much our students are learning? Our review of the literature and our discussions with the MCL Sociology faculty panel strongly suggest that, as a discipline, we have made significant progress toward answering these questions. Our goals in this white paper have been to document this progress and to suggest how sociology can move forward as a discipline in establishing a shared framework to articulate learning outcomes and devising valid assessments to measure these outcomes.

    After reviewing the research literature on the sociology curriculum, we found substantial overlap in the numerous typologies that describe what students in an introductory course and sociology majors should be learning. The Sociological Literacy Framework is a synthesis of these prior efforts that succinctly

summarizes five essential concepts and six essential competencies that can be introduced to sociology students in introductory courses, reinforced in other classes, and mastered by sociology majors. It is designed to be a flexible tool for faculty as they design their courses and continually revise and rethink curricula for the major. Indeed, the framework is a starting point for deeper conversations among faculty within sociology programs and departments regarding learning outcomes and how they can devise and arrange curricular offerings that are aligned with those outcomes. The Sociological Literacy Framework also can serve as a useful resource for test makers, external reviewers, and accrediting bodies. The framework should not be used by any of these entities as a checklist, but instead we hope it will be a useful anchor for understanding the choices that departments have made in setting learning outcomes for students.

There have been many efforts to describe the foundational knowledge and competencies that sociology students should be learning, but there has been less discussion and progress regarding how instructors, departments, researchers, and professional organizations (e.g., the American Sociological Association) can measure the knowledge and skills that sociology students are learning. Assessment can serve many different purposes. Every year, students in thousands of courses are assessed by their instructors for the purpose of assigning letter grades. Instructors have been tremendously creative in devising course-embedded assessments to measure their students' intellectual growth during a semester (Diamond 2008; Lowry et al. 2005; Persell and Mateiro 2014). These local assessments are essential ingredients to successful teaching because they define for students the content and skills that they should be learning. They also provide direct feedback to students regarding their progress toward meeting those goals. However, these course-embedded assessments are not well suited for the broader goals of measuring variation in student learning across classes, across and between departments, and over time. This statement is not

a critique of these assessments; they were not created with those purposes in mind, nor should they have been.

This white paper has shown that sociology lacks an assessment that adequately measures students' progress toward mastering the essential concepts and competencies that we describe in the Sociological Literacy Framework. Although a standardized assessment should be only one of several tools that departments use to measure student learning (Lowry et al. 2005), it is a weighty and necessary tool that can allow departments to compare their progress with their peers and to their students' performance in past years. Departments can benefit from a valid and reliable standardized assessment tool, and researchers can also use this instrument to measure factors that are correlated with student learning in postsecondary education. It also would allow them to measure, for example, whether discipline-specific knowledge and skills in the field of sociology have long-term effects on labor market, civic, and other adult outcomes. Finally, the American Sociological Association also can use data from such an assessment to evaluate how well the discipline is serving its undergraduate population.

We reviewed the two most widely administered standardized assessments in sociology—the ETS Major Field Test and the Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior section of the MCAT—and described their strengths and limitations. We argued that a new assessment instrument is needed, and made specific recommendations regarding how such an assessment should be designed. In our view, students must be allowed to demonstrate both the depth and breadth of their learning. This objective is a great challenge given the breadth of topics covered and methodologies used in sociology. However, we believe that these challenges are surmountable, and we hope that future research can identify concrete strategies for resolving these tensions.

We close by encouraging sociology faculty and teachers to consider Fazzino's argument (2014) for *passionate pedagogy*—teaching that demonstrates an emotional transparency about the love of

teaching, or what Van Auken (2012) calls *intellectual excitement*. Sociology is a prominent and exciting subject to teach, and we should convey our passion for our discipline to our students. Our aim is that the proposed Sociological Literacy Framework helps instructors and departments build rigor, coherence, and continuity into their courses and curriculum and that new assessments can measure students' growth toward mastering the learning outcomes that are central to our discipline.

References

Abbott, Andrew. 2000. "Reflections on the Future of Sociology." *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 2: 296–300.

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). 2011. *Vision and Change in Undergraduate Biology Education: A Call to Action*. Washington, DC: AAAS Press.

American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC). 2015. "What's on the MCAT 2015 Exam? Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior." https://www.aamc.org/students/ download/374014/data/mcat2015-psbb.pdf

American Sociological Association. 2013. "Sociology Companion Document for the C3 Framework." Pages 73–76 in *College, Career, and Civic Life: C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

American Sociological Association. 2015. "ASA National Standards for High School Sociology." Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

ASA Task Force on a College Level Introduction to Sociology Course. 2008. "College-Level Sociology Curriculum for Introduction to Sociology." Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Association of American Colleges. 1985. *Integrity in the College Curriculum*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges.

Astin, Alexander W., Trudy W. Banta, K. Patricia Cross, Elaine El-Khawas, Peter T. Ewell, Pat T. Hutchings, Theodore J. Marchese, Kay M. McClenney, Marcia Mentkowski, Margaret A. Miller, E. Thomas Moran, and Barbara D. Wright. 2003, 1992. "Principles

of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning." *AAHE Bulletin* 45 (4).

Atkinson, Maxine P., and Kathleen S. Lowney. 2014. *In the Trenches: Teaching and Learning Sociology*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Babbie, Earl. 1990. "The Essential Wisdom of Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 18, no. 4: 526–30.

Bain, Ken. 2004. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Berger, Peter L. 1963. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Berheide, Catherine White. 2005. "Searching for Structure: Creating Coherence in the Sociology Curriculum." *Teaching Sociology* 33, no. 1: 1–15.

Calhoun, Craig, Ed. 2007. *Sociology in America: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Charon, Joel M. 2013. *Ten Questions: A Sociological Perspective*, 8th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage.

Collins, Randall. 1998. "The Sociological Eye and Its Blinders." *Contemporary Sociology* 27, no. 1: 2–7.

Curtis, John W. 2015. "Bachelor's Degrees in Sociology, 1987–2013." Unpublished table compiled for the American Sociological Association. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

D'Antonio, William. 1983. "Nibbling at the Core." *Teaching Sociology* 10, no. 2: 169–85.

Davis, James A. 1983. "Five Well-Established Research Results That I Think Are Probably True, Teaching in Introductory Sociology, and Worth Teaching." *Teaching Sociology* 10, no. 2: 186–209.

Diamond, Robert M. 2008. *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A Practical Guide*, 3rd ed. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

DiMaggio, Paul. 1997. "Epilogue." In *Sociological Visions*, edited by Kai Erikson, 185–215. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Duncan, Arne. 2015. "Toward a New Focus on Outcomes in Higher Education." Press release of Secretary Arne Duncan's Speech at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County by Department of Education, July 27.

Eagan, Kevin, Jennifer B. Lozano, Sylvia Hurtado, and Matthew H.
    Case. 2013. *The American Freshman: National Norms—Fall 2013*. Los
    Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Eberts, Paul, Carla B. Howery, Catherine W. Berheide, Kathleen
    Crittenden, Robert Davis, Zelda Gamson, and Theodore C.
    Wagenaar. 1991. *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major: A Report to
    the Profession*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Educational Testing Service (ETS). 2003. "Major Field Test in
    Sociology: Sample Questions." https://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/
    MFT/pdf/mft_samp_questions_sociology.pdf

Educational Testing Service (ETS). 2012. "Major Field Test in
    Sociology: Test Description." https://www.ets.org/s/mft/pdf/mft_
    testdesc_sociology_4imf.pdf

Educational Testing Service (ETS). 2014. "2014 Major Field Test
    Comparative Data Guide: Major Field Test for Sociology." https://
    www.ets.org/s/mft/pdf/acdg_sociology.pdf

Erikson, Kai. 1997. "Prologue: Sociology as a Perspective." In *Sociological
    Visions*, edited by Kai Erikson, 3–16. Lanham, MD: Rowman and
    Littlefield.

Fazzino, Lori L. 2014. "Passionate Pedagogy and Sociology." *Teaching/
    Learning Matters*, Newsletter of the American Sociological
    Association Section on Teaching and Learning, Spring.

Fink, L. Dee. 2003. *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An
    Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. San Francisco:
    Jossey-Bass.

Goldsmid, Charles A., and Everett K. Wilson. 1980. *Passing on
    Sociology: The Teaching of a Discipline*. Washington, DC: American
    Sociological Association.

Greenwood, Nancy A., Carol A. Jenkins, and Diane Pike. 2014. "Toward
    Developing a Core Content in Introductory Sociology: Ideas for
    Building Consensus within the Discipline." Session 82. Midwest
    Sociological Society Meeting, April 3-6, 2014. Omaha, Nebraska.

Greenwood, Nancy A., and Jay R. Howard. 2011. *First Contact: Teaching
    and Learning in Introductory Sociology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and
    Littlefield Publishers.

Hart Research Associates. 2013. *It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*. Washington, DC: AAC&U.

Hillsman, Sally T., and Margaret Weigers Vitullo. 2014. "Comments on First Draft of White Paper." Unpublished notes.

Howard, Jay R. 2010. "Where Are We and How Did We Get Here? A Brief Examination of the Past, Present, and Future of the Teaching and Learning Movement in Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 38: 81–92.

Howard, Jay R., Katherine Novak, Krista M. C. Cline, and Marvin B. Scott. 2014. "Another Nibble at the Core: Student Learning in a Thematically-Focused Introductory Sociology Course." *Teaching Sociology* 42: 177–186.

Jenkins, Carol. A. 2014. "The 'Core'—Introduction to Sociology at a Community College." Paper presented at the Midwest Sociological Society meetings in Omaha, NE, April 3–6.

Kain, Ed. 2013. Handout from "Teaching the Core of Sociology—or Not! What Should Introductory Students Know?" ASA Annual Meeting, New York City, August.

Keith, Bruce, and Morten G. Ender. 2004. "The Sociological Core: Conceptual Patterns and Idiosyncrasies in the Structure and Content of Introductory Sociology Textbooks, 1940–2000." *Teaching Sociology* 32, no. 1: 19–36.

LEAP. 2015. "LEAP at a Glance" handout. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Lenski, Gerhard. 1983. "Rethinking the Introductory Sociology Course." *Teaching Sociology* 10, no. 2: 153–168.

Lowry, Janet Huber, Carla B. Howery, John P. Myers, Harry Perlstadt, Caroline Hodges Persell, Diane Pike, Charles H. Powers, Shirley A. Scritchfield, Cynthia M. Siemsen, Barbara Trepagnier, Judith Ann Warner, and Gregory L. Weiss. 2005. *Creating an Effective Assessment Plan for the Sociology Major*. Report of the ASA Task Force on Assessing the Undergraduate Sociology Major. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

McKeever, Matthew. 2014. "Comments on First Draft of White Paper." Unpublished notes.

McKinney, Kathleen, Carla B. Howery, Kerry J. Strand, Edward L. Kain, and Catherine White Berheide. 2004. *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated: Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Sociology in the Twenty-First Century*. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

Persell, Caroline Hodges, and Antonio E. Mateiro. 2014. "Assessing Strategies for Teaching Key Sociological Understandings." In *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in and Across Disciplines*, edited by Kathleen McKinney, 114–131. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.

Persell, Caroline Hodges, Kathryn M. Pfeiffer, and Ali Syed. 2007. "What Should Students Understand after Taking Introduction to Sociology?" *Teaching Sociology* 35: 300–314.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). 2007. *Subject Benchmark Statement for Sociology*. Gloucester, UK: QAA.

Reinharz, Shulamit. 1986. Book review of *Teaching Sociology: The Quest of Excellence*, edited by Frederick L. Campbell, Hubert M. Blalock, and Reece McGee. *Journal of Higher Education* 57, no. 4: 445–448.

Schwartz, Michael, and R. Tyson Smith. 2010. "Beyond the Core: The Hot Topic(al) Alternative to the Survey-Based Introduction to Sociology Course." *American Sociologist* 41, no. 3: 249–276.

Sweet, Stephen, Kevin McElrath, and Edward L. Kain. 2014. "The Coordinated Curriculum: How Institutional Theory Can Be Used to Catalyze Revision of the Sociology Major." *Teaching Sociology* 42: 287–297.

Szafran, Robert. 1996. "The Reliability and Validity of the Major Field Test in Measuring the Learning of Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 24: 92–96.

Taylor, Paul, Kim Parker, Richard Fry, D'Vera Cohn, Wendy Wang, Gabriel Velasco, and Daniel Dockterman. 2011. *Is College Worth It? College Presidents, Public Assess, Value, Quality, and Mission of Higher Education*. Report of the Pew Research Center. Washington, DC: Pew Social & Demographic Trends.

The Australian Sociological Association (TASA). 2012. "Sociology: Threshold Learning Outcomes." Hawthorne, Victoria: Australian Sociological Association.

Van Auken, Paul. 2012. "Maybe It's Both of Us: Engagement and Learning." *Teaching Sociology* 41, no. 2: 207–215.

Wagenaar, Theodore C. 1991. "Goals for the Discipline?" *Teaching Sociology* 19, no. 1: 92–95.

Wagenaar, Theodore C. 2004a. "Is There a Core in Sociology: Results from a Survey." *Teaching Sociology* 32, no. 1: 1–18.

Wagenaar, Theodore C. 2004b. "Assessing Sociological Knowledge: A First Try." *Teaching Sociology* 32, no. 2: 232–238.

Wagenaar, Theodore C., Bruce Keith, and Morten G. Ender, Eds. 2004. Special Issue on the Core in Sociology. *Teaching Sociology* 32, no. 1: 1–42.

Zipp, John. 2013. "Approaching a Common Core in Sociology." Draft document presented at the ASA Annual Meeting in New York City, August 9–12.