

Extended Commentary: Curricular Conversations: Make Your Program the Best it Can Be

The heart of our activity as faculty is developing and delivering the curriculum. That is what got us excited about our line of work in the first place and what sustains us as life-long learners. We have spent our professional lives learning what our discipline was trying to get us to see about the world and giving us the tools to do that. We want to transmit what we have learned to our students and our curriculum is the vehicle to do that. For that reason, it is important to periodically step back and think about what we are doing and why. Too often we get lost in the minutia of our daily activities and forget the big picture. To paraphrase one of my favorite authors, we need to be able to see the forest among the trees.¹

My experience as an external reviewer (of over fifty-five academic program reviews) tells me that it is a rare department that has an intentional and clearly articulated curriculum. Departments may develop curricula based on the conventional wisdom of their discipline, perhaps informed by their experiences as students in undergraduate and graduate programs, or perhaps with the assistance of guidelines provided by their professional associations. More often, the curriculum is a mash-up of core courses and electives, some of which seem only loosely related to what students should know about the discipline. Catalogs often have courses listed that have not been taught in years.

Some of the reasons for these issues are structural: colleges and universities create groups, usually departments, where the leader, typically a chair or program director, rotates periodically. Sometimes these units are organized by discipline(s), but sometimes, the guiding principle is convenience. In either case, a forward-thinking chair with a goal for curricular development and/or revision has a limited amount of time in which to accomplish this goal before it is someone else's turn. In addition, the chair has little to no power to enact their model

for the curriculum unless their colleagues are on board. (I can remember one department where the faculty were truly collegial and worked well together. One out of fifty-five is not a great batting average. For the other fifty-four departments, a visit by an external reviewer can be helpful.)

That makes it particularly awkward when a colleague proposes a new course that they are really excited to teach. Of course, there is paperwork to complete, and it is always appropriate to check in with other colleagues, but do departments sit down as a group and ask the question: “how does this fit into the larger curriculum?” I would be willing to bet that most often the answer is no.

Most often, the reason these conversations do not take place is inertia. We are constantly being asked to do more with less, and I regularly hear colleagues turn down requests for service or committee work, even if it is in the best interests of their students, because they say they cannot do “one more thing.” So having planned and deliberate conversations about the curriculum might seem unnecessary, if not also burdensome. The cliché: “If it ain’t broke...” come to mind. This is also a common response when it comes to assessment (more on this later).

I would argue that it does not have to be broke to spend time making it better. If we can agree that we want to deliver the best possible curricular experience for our students (not always possible, but we will be optimistic for now), then it behooves us to spend a little bit of time shaping the curriculum to maximize the student experience. The mechanics for how to do this are simple; holding regular department meetings on a regular schedule is a good start. One huge benefit to initiating these regular conversations is that it prepares the department for their periodic program review. Since it is a rare department that takes a pro-active approach to

curriculum review, it is often the shadow of an upcoming academic program review that motivates a department into action.

The Academic Program Review

The process of conducting an academic program review can be a constructive and positive experience.² If the department is currently, or can commit to holding regular conversations on the curriculum, the foundation has been created for a successful academic program review. The academic program review can be the impetus for faculty to talk about their curriculum and to redirect or refocus the curriculum to meet the larger goals.

Too often, program review is something that departments and even institutions forget about until the time approaches for the next accreditation visit. This fosters a sense that accreditation is divorced from the larger goal—of ensuring a quality educational experience for students—and that the activities are meaningless top-down directives that need to be checked off instead of part of an organic process. In the meantime, several years have been lost when conversations on the curriculum could have been taking place.

My experience performing program reviews, largely as a representative of the American Sociological Association's Program Reviewers and Consultants group³ leads me to believe that continuing or initiating the on-going conversations described earlier will make the onset of a program review seem less like a major event and preparation for it less hectic. For many departments, these are conversations that they might already be having and all that is needed is to document them and make them more systematic. Some departments may need to think about initiating these conversations. The forces that drive these conversations are usually quite similar across institutions within disciplines and often across disciplines as well.⁴

While hiring external reviewers and consultants who can perform site visits as external reviewers and facilitate workshops is always a good idea, this paper is designed to provide the reader with step-by-step instructions for how to do some, if not many of the things that institutions require as part of their periodic assessment and curricular review programs. Of course, one size never fits all, so this paper can only provide a template that will likely require customization to meet the institutional context.

These instructions describe conversations that the department should be having on a regular basis. Often, getting faculty to take the time to sit down and have these conversations is the only obstacle standing in the way of providing students with the best possible curriculum. Occasionally, interpersonal dynamics make having these conversations more challenging.⁵ Fortunately, only in rare cases is bringing in a facilitator necessary so that participants can focus on the content.

If you need more evidence that conversations about curriculum can have benefits, this endnote provides several sources to read that provide examples of sociology departments that have documented their experiences with curriculum development and revision and their outcomes.⁶ Some of their experiences might either resonate with the process in your department, and/or might be helpful in charting your department's next steps.

To make it easier to extract the action items, I have written this paper to look somewhat like one of my reports, complete with "recommendations." They are summarized in Appendix A. *Begin at the End: Curricular Student Learning Objectives*

By now, most faculty are conversant with curricular student learning objectives (SLOs).⁷ These are the skills faculty hope students will have mastered by the time they have completed their degree. For most sociology programs, there are generally three, pretty universal SLOs.

(When it comes to curriculum, most of my examples in this paper will come from my home discipline. Most of my comments can be generalized to other social sciences besides just sociology, although I will confess that I know much less about other disciplines beyond my own.) They might go something like this:

By the end of this curriculum, students will be able to:

1. Understand and be able to use the sociological perspective.
2. Understand some of the basic concepts and theories in sociology and be able to apply them to everyday life.
3. Understand the scientific process, how sociologists collect and analyze data.

You may have others and yours may be better than these. SLOs for other disciplines will also be a little different. Note that they are always written in the format of: “students will be able to...”

That makes them different than course objectives that look like “In this course, we will cover Marx, Durkheim, and Weber...”⁸

If your department has curricular SLOs, it is a good idea to review them periodically to make sure they are consistent with what the curriculum offers as faculty come and go and courses are added, deleted, and changed. If your department does not have curricular SLOs, develop them now. You cannot do the rest of this work without them. Plus, you will make the administrators and assessment people on your campus happy. Having clearly articulated curricular SLOs, while a requirement of most accrediting agencies, is also one of the first steps that the American Sociological Association’s documents on curriculum development⁹ and assessment¹⁰ recommend. While curricular SLOs should be your own, there are some nice examples in Lowery.¹¹ At a more micro-level, individual courses should also have SLOs. Some

courses, such as the introductory course and the capstone course, should have SLOs that will look similar if not identical to the curricular SLOs.

What Is Your Mission?

Very few faculty are trained in writing Mission Statements. When I first started teaching, my institution's Mission Statement was just there, probably crafted by folks in the Communications Office. I did not see how a Mission Statement was relevant to me. I was wrong. Mission Statements, at least departmental Mission Statements, need to reflect the goals of its members. That means that the faculty need to get together and write a short and concise statement about what they hope to accomplish. This is also something that needs to be reviewed periodically as faculty come and go and as curricula change with course additions, changes, and deletions. Here is our department's Mission Statement. It is not great and it needs to be revised but I provide it as an example to show that it does not have to result in a huge document.

The sociology program at Le Moyne College provides students with rigorous training in the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Critical training is provided in scientific and humanistic methods of analysis. Graduates are able to apply diverse analytical perspectives to a global world and are prepared to provide leadership toward a more ethical and just society.¹²

If the department is part of a larger unit, e.g., a college of arts and sciences, the department's Mission Statement should be consistent with the larger unit's Mission Statement. The department's Mission Statement should also be consistent with the Mission Statement of the institution. Almost every institution has one.¹³

The latest iteration of the American Sociological Association's document on curriculum development specifies developing a Mission Statement as its first recommendation.¹⁴ There are some nice examples of Mission Statements in Lowery et al.,¹⁵ but like SLOs, a Mission Statement should be your own.

Recommendation 1: Write or revisit your Mission Statement.

What Is Your Vision?

Vision Statements, like Mission Statements, are not something that faculty think of often. Also, like Mission Statements, they are important to guiding the curriculum.¹⁶ The difference is that unlike a Mission Statement that is a declaration of who you are now, a Vision Statement is aspirational, a declaration of what you hope to be. Spend some time discussing what your vision is and use that to craft a Vision Statement. The Vision Statement should articulate with and build on your Mission Statement.

Recommendation 2: Write or revisit your Vision Statement.

Who Are You?

No department can cover the breadth of the discipline, especially small departments at small institutions. Instead, most departments become known for being strong in particular areas that are either strengths and interests of the faculty or are consistent with the mission of the institution or both. To differentiate your department from those at similar institutions, the faculty need to articulate who they are. The next step is to develop what I like to refer to as an Identity Statement. While Mission and Vision Statements are public documents that should ideally be prominently displayed on the department's webpage and elsewhere, an Identity Statement is initially a private document (it can be made public if the faculty feel that this would be appropriate) that describes the curriculum and the faculty who deliver it. For example, it might make sense that a small department in a small, religiously affiliated institution specializes in the sociology of religion even though this is a relatively small sub-field in sociology. A school that has a strong education program may elect to offer one or more courses in the sociology of education, again, a relatively small sub-field in sociology. The rise in health sciences programs at

many institutions may drive a department to offer courses in the sociology of health, medical sociology, the sociology of aging, and death and dying. Other departments might have a curriculum that is designed to train students to be social activists or to be able to perform community-based research. These are quite different goals than preparing students to go on to complete graduate programs. Having a curriculum that does not quite mimic a more traditional curriculum can be explained with an Identity Statement. It should go without saying that an Identity Statement must be your own.

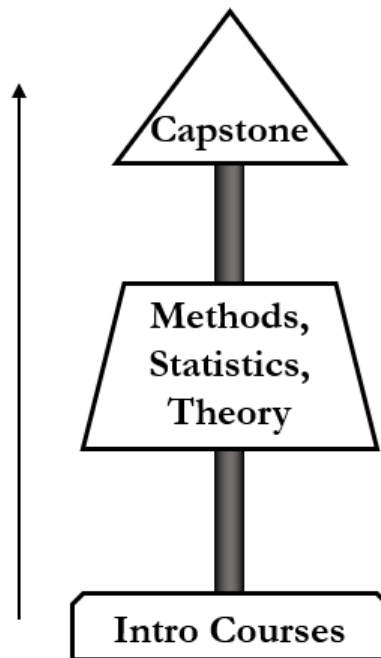
Recommendation 3: Write or revisit your Identity Statement.

The Core

Every discipline has a set of core courses that make up their curriculum. They usually consist of an introductory course, courses on theory, skill-based courses, such as methods and statistics, and a capstone course.¹⁷ Since sociology is a discipline that neither accredits nor certifies its curricula, this is the closest thing there is to a “national standard,” and this is also probably true for most social sciences. Institutions that can provide justifications for varying from this list of courses, usually because of institutional context, can be assured that they are still in line with “best practices.” I have visited departments with two theory courses, some with two methods courses, some with no required introductory course, and some without a capstone course. While these cases are rare and relatively unusual, having thought through these decisions and providing justifications supported by Mission Statements, Identity Statement, Student Learning Objectives, or some combination of these, can make curricular sense.

The core is often referred to as the “spine.” Another metaphor that is often helpful is to view the core as the trunk of a tree and the electives make up the branches.

Figure 1: Sample Sociology Core Curriculum adapted from McKinney et al.¹⁸



The only aspect of this curricular model that is mandatory is that the capstone course needs be the last course in the curriculum. That means that all the other core courses in the curriculum should be completed prior to the capstone course. The introductory course is usually the first course, but because some programs have elective courses that are “drop in” (that is, no prerequisites necessary), students may have to back-fill the introductory course.

The model in this diagram does not suggest a sequence for methods, statistics, and theory other than they constitute the “middle” part of the students’ curriculum, i.e., before the capstone and after the introductory course. I have seen these three courses sequenced in many different ways and they made sense if the department had thought through why they wanted their students to take them in a particular order. Note: McKinney et al.¹⁹ describe the curriculum as having four tiers, what amounts to one tier for each year of undergraduate status. Very few departments have

the luxury of having their students long enough to justify courses at four distinct levels. Pike et al.²⁰ recommend three tiers.

Recommendation 4: Revisit the core curriculum.

Electives

Assuming a core of courses, the electives offered by a department are often a compilation of courses that have evolved over time, reflecting the interests of faculty and in some cases, responding to student requests or what is likely to enhance enrollments. The rise of criminology curricula within sociology departments is a good example of this. Departments often consider the creation of individual courses on a case-by-case basis. It is a rare department that considers new course proposals with the entire curriculum in mind. For that reason, the course listings in the institution's catalog are often out of date and in need of trimming. A useful exercise to perform that will help with this task is called a zero-based curriculum review.²¹

A zero-based curriculum review asks that participants consider building an ideal curriculum from scratch. The core of the curriculum is where to begin. Does your curriculum follow national standards (if they exist) or at least best practices? In sociology, that means an introductory course, theory, methods, statistics, and a capstone course. If so, you are ready for the next step. If not, what are the reasons for this? The point of this exercise is to make the existence of every course in the curriculum intentional.

The electives then revolve around the spine at levels appropriate to their intended spot in students' progression. Departments may wish to have courses at the introductory level (100/200 or 1000/2000) that may be taken without pre-requisites in order to boost enrollments and to attract majors. Courses at a higher level (300/3000) may require at least an introductory course. Courses at the highest level (400/4000) may require some or all of the core. A capstone course

would be an example of such a course. There might arguably be additional courses at the highest level that do not have core pre-requisites if there is institutional context that makes such an offering appropriate. For example, our institution has a college-wide senior core class requirement, and that course has no pre-requisites other than senior standing. Since it is intentionally interdisciplinary, it is not a true capstone course.

This might be a good time for faculty to consider having conversations about and standardizing what constitutes an entry-level, mid-range, and advanced course. This might include expectations about the use of tests versus writing assignments and in the case of the latter, how many paper assignments and how long they might be. While some institutions have such guidelines, I have found that very few departments adhere to these guidelines. The result can be courses with widely discrepant levels of work and expectations even at the same level.

One additional benefit of performing a zero-based curriculum review is that it provides the best possible justification for convincing administrators who are not familiar with disciplines other than their own that the department has done its due diligence in ensuring that they have reviewed the curriculum and that gaps in the curriculum are based on a systematic review that uses national standards as a point of comparison. In an era when very few institutions will provide departments with a tenure-track line to replace a faculty member who has retired or left the institution, this exercise provides the department with a compelling argument that is evidence-based.

Recommendation 5: Conduct a zero-based curriculum exercise to revisit the electives.

Currently, one of the best models for determining what areas should be covered in a sociology curriculum is “The Sociology Literacy Framework.”²² An exercise using the Sociology

Literacy Framework is included as Appendix D. Other disciplines should look for similar documents that provide at least a model that can be emulated if not copied.

Course Student Learning Objectives

If the assessment person on your campus has not already made this clear, most accrediting agencies want to see student learning objectives on every syllabus. Follow the same format for your course's student learning objectives as the curricular learning objectives.

By the end of this course, the student will be able to:

- Walk and chew gum at the same time.
- Count from 1 to 100 backward by 5s.
- And so on...

Recommendation 6: Display student learning objectives for the course prominently on every syllabus.

This would be a good time to share syllabi with all your colleagues so they can at least see what your course's SLOs are. This is particularly important if your course is a pre-requisite for a more advanced course. The next step is to include a summary on the syllabus of how the course connects to the curricular SLOs. For example, upon completing the capstone course, students should be able to demonstrate the ability to create, analyze, and discuss empirical data—this meets curricular learning objective number (wherever it appears in your list of curricular SLOs).

Recommendation 7: Include a statement on the syllabus that says which of the curricular student learning objectives are covered in the course.

Another conversation should occur between faculty who teach the same course, e.g., multiple sections of an introductory course. While faculty should be free to conduct their classes

however they see fit, each section of a multi-section course should have the same student learning objectives. Some departments use a common text which should make standardizing SLOs relatively easy. But this is not necessary.

Recommendation 8: Standardize student learning objectives on all sections of a multiple-section course.

Curriculum Mapping

Curriculum mapping is an exercise that has become a regular part of assessment on most campuses. It is a required part of the assessment process on my campus and if it is not mandatory on your campus, it will be soon. I find that it is often explained in terms that make it seem a more difficult task than it is (or should be). A curriculum map is a matrix with all the courses listed on one axis and the curricular SLOs listed on the other. The cells of the curriculum map indicate whether or not a course covers that particular SLO(s). Curriculum maps can include notation that indicates whether that learning objective is introduced to students, whether students practice that skill, or are expected to master it. Each course in the curriculum should cover at least one curricular SLO and courses such as a capstone course should cover all of them. One might reasonably ask that any course that does not cover at least one curricular SLO, why is it in the curriculum? This exercise will build on the zero-based curriculum review described earlier in this paper and I provide an example in Appendix E.

Recommendation 9: Build or revisit the curriculum map.

Steven Sweet (Professor of Sociology at Ithaca College) and Susan Ferguson (Professor of Sociology at Grinnell College) have created a curriculum mapping tool for sociology that automates some of the steps described here and produces a detailed custom report with suggestions on next steps.²³

Assessment

Readers of journals on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) should be well-acquainted with the need for assessment data. Briefly, the author must provide data that support the effectiveness of the pedagogy beyond simply “I tried it and I like it.” There are examples in almost every SoTL journals that describe how this can and should be done. Most journals on pedagogy such as *Teaching Sociology*, *PS*, *Teaching of Psychology*, have been publishing papers that contain assessment data.²⁴ No conversation about curriculum should ignore student learning assessment. While many view assessment with fear and trepidation and perform it reluctantly if not “kicking and screaming,”²⁵ I prefer to think of assessment as “Am I doing a good job as an instructor?”²⁶ Few academics who care about their teaching would argue that this is an unimportant measure of their professional work. Couched in these terms, assessment is simply measuring effectiveness of an in-class technique, an out-of-class assignment, or an entire course. Assessment at the departmental level is a little more divorced from the lives of individual faculty since it is the product of the collective, but all faculty should still care if students are finishing the curriculum with the goals that faculty wish them to possess. The conversations suggested in this paper will get the process moving.

Program reviews usually require evidence that the department has been engaging in regularized assessment activities. Ideally, these activities should be part of ongoing conversations about the curriculum to create what our accrediting body (and probably yours) likes to refer to as a “culture of assessment.”²⁷

The next step is selecting appropriate assessment instruments. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss specific assessment instruments since they should be selected with a knowledge of the local conditions: institutional context, curricular SLOs, etc., but there are many

excellent examples of assessment data collection techniques in SoTL journals. For a few examples of departments that have tackled assessment and come away feeling that it was worth the time and energy, see Clark and Filinson (2011), McKinney and Naseri (2011), Pedersen and White (2011), and Jennings, Rienzi, and Lyda (2006).²⁸

Ultimately, the purpose of assessment should be to see what is working and what is not working. Is the curriculum getting students at the end of four years to the point that they can do the things you articulate in your curricular learning objectives? If not, what changes need to be made in individual courses or to the curriculum as a whole? This is referred to as “closing the loop” and making these adjustments constitutes a full assessment cycle. Assessment means conversations among the faculty of the department or program. While it is possible to conduct curricular assessment without 100 percent participation, the task is immeasurably harder because there will be gaps.

The External Program Review

When the time comes for the formal review process, having initiated these conversations will position you for what comes next. If this is your department’s first program review, or if it is the first one requiring an external reviewer(s), or if you just want to see some suggestions for how the review process will play out, a nice step-by-step description is in Dawson (1989) and more recently Crowley (2019a; 2019b).²⁹ A few papers that provide the perspective of external reviewers include Brown (2012) and Sides (2007).³⁰ A particularly helpful paper is Holm (2008),³¹ who provides a Dean’s perspective of program reviews.

Tying It Together

This paper is designed to provide a series of steps that faculty can follow to take a series of courses and make them part of a coherent curriculum. More importantly, this curriculum can

then be recognized as a product of a collective rather than discrete units produced by independent contractors. Occasionally, faculty territoriality is often the major obstacle to effective curriculum review. Faculty sometimes forget that the curriculum belongs to the department and that it is the product of a collective effort. While individual faculty may develop courses, each course must have a purpose within the curriculum and make a positive contribution to it.

If this problem exists, perhaps the best way to address it is to appeal to common goals. Ultimately, we all share the goal of wanting to provide our students with the best possible experience that the discipline has to offer. We owe it to them to work to go beyond what we do in the privacy of our classrooms and link this work to a larger model that reflects a vision shared by all members.

Hopefully, this paper has provided some suggestions that would make discussing your curriculum an enjoyable next step toward enhancing your reputation as an excellent teacher in an outstanding department that can be viewed as a team that functions well together rather than an underperforming problem department. For most of us, the rewards of being acknowledged like this is why we entered academia in the first place.

Appendix A: Recommended Steps

Here are the recommended steps described in this paper.

Recommendation 1: write or revisit your Mission Statement.

Recommendation 2: write or revisit your Identity Statement.

Recommendation 3: write or revisit your Vision Statement.

Recommendation 4: revisit the core curriculum.

Recommendation 5: conduct a zero-based curriculum exercise to revisit the electives.

Recommendation 6: display student learning objectives for the course prominently on every syllabus.

Recommendation 7: include a statement on the syllabus that says which of the curricular student learning objectives are covered in the course.

Recommendation 8: standardize student learning objectives on all sections of a multiple-section course.

Recommendation 9: build or revisit the curriculum map.

Appendix B: Checklist on Progress Toward a Better Sociology Curriculum³²

Instructions: Put a 3 next to recommendations that your department is doing pretty well, a 2 next to things that your department is partially doing, but not at the level you would like to see, and put a 1 next to things that your department has just begun to do, does at a nominal level, or doesn't do at all. Then total your score.

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

_____ **Recommendation 2:** Within the sociology major, include required and elective courses that incorporate essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the

Sociological Literacy Framework.

_____ **Recommendation 3:** Include required courses in: introductory-level sociology, sociological theory, research methods, statistical analysis, substantive topic areas, and a capstone experience within the sociology major.

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

_____ **Recommendation 5:** Provide multiple opportunities within the curriculum for students to engage in empirical inquiry that includes research design, data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

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

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

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

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

_____ **Recommendation 10:** Develop and maintain advising and mentoring processes that support students' decision making in achieving their educational goals, engage students in career planning, and offer guidance on further study in sociology and related fields.

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

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

_____ **TOTAL SCORE (highest possible 36; middle score 24; low score 12)**

Appendix C: Recommendations ³³

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

Recommendation 2: Within the Sociology major, include required and elective courses that incorporate essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the Sociological Literacy Framework.

Recommendation 3: Include required courses in: introductory-level Sociology, Sociology theory, research methods, statistical analysis, substantive topic areas, and a capstone experience within the Sociology major.

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

Recommendation 5: Provide multiple opportunities within the curriculum for students to engage in empirical inquiry that includes research design, data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

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

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

Appendix D:

The Sociological Literacy Framework ³⁴

Instructions: Optimally students gain knowledge and skills related to the essential concepts and competencies in at least three different courses, with increasing complexity and sophistication in each course. Put a 3 next to essential concepts and competencies that a typical major will be exposed to in three or more courses with at least three levels of complexity. Put a 2 next to things

that they will probably experience at two levels of complexity in two different courses, and a 1 next to concepts and competencies the student is likely to be exposed to just once. Put a 0 next to concepts or competences to which the typical major is unlikely to be exposed.

Five Essential Concepts

1. _____ **The Sociological Eye.** The first essential concept in the sociological perspective is the sociological eye, a term adopted from Randall Collins (1998). Sociology students should be able to delineate the major theoretical frameworks and distinctive concepts and assumptions upon which our discipline is grounded and that differentiate it from other social sciences.

2. _____ **Social Structure.** Students of sociology also should be able to describe social structure and how structural forces affect human action and social life at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society. More specifically, sociology students should be able to distinguish important social institutions in society that make up the social structure, and how they affect individuals and each other.

3. _____ **Socialization.** Students of sociology should be able to explicate the relationship between the self and society, particularly how the self is socially constructed and maintained at multiple levels of society.

4. _____ **Stratification.** The essential concept of stratification comprises the different forms of social inequality in human societies and the processes through which they are established and operate.

5. _____ **Social change and social reproduction.** Sociology students also should be able to identify the social processes underpinning social change and to describe how demographic and

other types of social change affect individuals and social structures.

Six Essential Competencies

1. _____ **Apply Sociological Theories to Understand Social Phenomena.** Sociology students should be able to move beyond folk explanations of social phenomena and instead invoke evidence-based theories of sociological phenomena.

2. _____ **Critically Evaluate Explanations of Human Behavior and Social Phenomena.** Sociology students should be able to describe the role of theory in building social knowledge and evaluate the limitations of different theoretical frameworks.

3. _____ **Apply Scientific Principles to Understand the Social World.** Sociology students should not only be able to describe the role of social research methods in building sociological knowledge, but be able to identify major methodological approaches and the design of doing research including sampling, measurement, and data collection. Students should learn to conduct and critique empirical research through the articulation of the effective use of evidence, the generation of research questions or hypotheses from sociological theories and concepts, and the recognition of the limits of the scientific method in understanding social behavior.

4. _____ **Evaluate the Quality of Social Scientific Methods and Data.** Students should be able to critically assess the empirical sociological research of others and be able to identify the assumptions and limitations underlying particular research methodologies in sociology. The particular characteristics that sociologists use to evaluate the quality of research methods and data sources include: operationalization of variables; learning the importance of precision; reliability and validity of data sources; and understanding the differences between probability and non-probability samples.

5. _____ **Rigorously Analyze Social Scientific Data.** Students should be able to articulate and apply disciplinary standards for data analysis and also delineate the differing goals, strengths, and limitations of different modes of analysis.

6. _____ **Use Sociological Knowledge to Inform Policy Debates and Promote Public Understanding.** Sociology students who are able to use all of the essential concepts and competencies of the Sociological Literacy Framework are better prepared to engage with and have an impact upon the world in which they live and work. This essential competency suggests that sociology students should understand the kind of work sociologists do, including an awareness of how sociology is used in applied settings, and the value of sociological skills in the workplace.

Note: This activity can be modified to engage a group of faculty members in mapping learning outcomes to program course offerings. To do this, ask faculty to read over the list of concepts and competencies and think about the material they cover in their own courses. If they address a concept or competency in a course, ask them to write down the name/number of that course next to the concept or competency. Optimally, if you compile the results across all faculty, each concept and competency will be covered in at least three different courses with three levels of sophistication.

Appendix E:
Sample Sociology Curriculum Map

	SLO1 - sociological perspective	SLO2 - basic concepts and theories	SLO3 - methods and statistics	SLO4 - something else?
100/1000-level				
Intro	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	

Social Problems	Introduce	Introduce	Introduce	
200/2000-level				
Methods	Introduce		Reinforce and practice	
Statistics/Data Analysis	Introduce		Reinforce and practice	
Introductory topical courses	Reinforce and practice	Reinforce and practice	Reinforce and practice	
300/3000-level				
Theory	Reinforce and practice	Reinforce and practice		
Advanced topical courses	Reinforce and practice	Reinforce and practice	Reinforce and practice	
400/4000-level				
Advanced specialty courses	Master	Master	Master	
Capstone	Master	Master	Master	
Internships	Master	Master	Master	

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