

## **Proficient or Deficient? Pre-service Elementary Teachers’ Social Studies Content Knowledge in the Era of NCLB**

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### **Abstract**

Millennial generation pre-service teachers enrolled in undergraduate social studies methods courses are largely the products of NCLB and the concomitant marginalization of social studies during their K-12 education experience. This study examined a sample (N=136) of pre-service elementary teachers’ entry-point social studies content knowledge strengths and weaknesses over a three-year time frame and the degree to which NCLB era K-12 content standards had an impact on pre-service teachers’ entry-point content knowledge scores. The unintended consequences of NCLB on pre-service elementary teachers’ social studies content knowledge and recommendations for intervention and continuous improvement are presented in this paper.

**Keywords:** social studies, elementary, pre-service teachers, NCLB

*“Why do we need a social studies methods course?” “Why do I need to teach social studies lessons during field experience if my cooperating teacher doesn’t teach social studies?”* These questions, although discouraging to social studies methods professors, may have some truth (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008). Boyle-Baise, et al. (2008) reported teachers that declined to mentor “preservice teachers because they felt unable to model quality social studies instruction” (p. 234) as a result of the high-stakes environment caused by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A 2015 study by Hawkman, Castro, Bennett, and Barrow found that elementary preservice teachers (PSTs) in social studies methods courses had few opportunities to observe social studies lessons during their field experiences. Could it be possible that preservice teachers’ (PSTs) questions about the importance of social studies methods have something to do with the educational environment they experienced prior to entering college? The NCLB Era (2001-2015) coincided with the college students’ reported in this study, K-12 educations. Importantly, NCLB lacked provisions for social studies as part of the accountability requirement to determine school effectiveness (Vogler, Lintner, Lipscomb, Knopf, Heafner, & Rock, 2007) and therefore may be one explanation for why PSTs question the theory and best-practices modeled in social studies methods courses today (Hawkman, et al., 2015).

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The researchers in this study, both of whom teach elementary social studies methods courses at the same university in eastern Kentucky, noticed anecdotally, decreased content knowledge and disinterest in social studies among their elementary social studies methods students in recent years. Recognizing that most of the PSTs in their classes were, at the time of this study (2014-2017), products of NCLB, the researchers wanted to understand the PSTs' entry-point (i.e., methods course) social studies content knowledge that could inform remediation plans to better prepare them for certification. These same PSTs after all, would enter a teaching environment shaped by a new federal policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (United States Department of Education, 2015), which has the potential for re-asserting social studies' status in the elementary for years to come.

### Literature Review

Recent studies have examined PSTs' decreased exposure to quality social studies mentoring as part of their preparation for teacher certification (Boyle-Baise, et al., 2008; Hawkman, et al., 2015). The following section addresses this trend more completely by describing how NCLB impacted elementary social studies, and how NCLB challenged the premise and purpose of social studies as part of the public school curriculum.

#### NCLB's Impact on Social Studies

It is without question that NCLB significantly altered social studies' status in the elementary core curriculum nationwide (Winstead, 2011). Sixteen years have passed since the signing into law of NCLB, which essentially relegated social studies to marginalized status in elementary schools across the United States (Bolick, Adams, & Willox, 2010; National Council for the Social Studies, 2017). Several studies conducted over the past ten years confirm the deleterious impacts of NCLB on elementary social studies. One negative impact, consistent in this literature, is that of reduced instructional time for social studies and de-emphasis of social studies as part of the elementary curriculum core (Bolick, et al., 2010; Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, and Stewart, 2008; Vogler et al., 2007; Fitchett, Heafner, & VanFossen, 2014). Interestingly, this trend does not appear to be confined to certain regions or states in the U.S. A five-year review of NCLB conducted by the Center on Education Policy (McMurrer, 2008) in 349 school districts, reported a 76-minute per week average decrease in time spent on elementary social studies since NCLB's implementation. Vogler et al. (2007) reported decreased instructional time for elementary social studies, particularly in the lower elementary (grades k-3), but increased instructional time for social studies in the upper elementary grades (4 and 5) following the inclusion of social studies into South Carolina's state-mandated testing system. In Ohio, more than two-thirds of elementary teachers surveyed reported spending less than two hours per week teaching social studies (Doppen, Misco, and Patterson, 2008). Additionally, a 2010 survey conducted by the Maryland State Department of Education found 88% of the responding teachers stated that social studies was not a priority subject due to its absence from the state-wide assessment program (McComb, 2012).

Several implications of lost instructional time for the social studies exist due to the high-stakes testing environment created by NCLB. First, as social studies loses time during the instructional day, other subjects gain time (Berliner, 2011). The re-distribution of instructional time coincides with school districts' emphasis to prepare students for state-mandated assessments

in areas specified by NCLB, particularly, mathematics and English Language Arts (Vogler et al., 2007). In schools where students receive little to no social studies instruction, students' opportunity to develop essential social, civic, and critical thinking skills necessary in participatory democracy are undermined (Winstead, 2011). Second, recent studies show that social studies is increasingly becoming associated with an integrated curriculum, rather than as a stand-alone subject (Boyle-Baise et al. 2008; Fitchett et al., 2014; Winstead, 2011). Integration may give the impression of good faith attempts to address the time-lost issue, but Fitchett et al. (2014) suggests that integration may actually dilute social studies knowledge and skills. This is evidenced by Boyle-Baise et al. (2008) and Pace (2011). The former study discovered that the only acceptable approach for teaching social studies in some schools is to teach and reinforce reading comprehension, fluency, and phonics; while the latter study found that social studies content is often sacrificed due to time spent on close-reading of historical texts and the teaching of historical writing skills.

### **Social Studies Prepares Students for Citizenship in a Democracy**

Historically, an essential component of American education was the social studies. Founders of the United States, particularly Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, supported the idea that education was a vehicle for promoting patriotism, moral training, and preparation for citizenship (Hooper & Smith, 1993). American schools taught the basic tenets of citizenship to waves of immigrant children arriving in American cities and rural communities at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond (Fraser, 2014). As the nation evolved and American society became more complex, so did the way in which schools approached the traditional subjects of geography and history. A passel of problems facing the still new United States, such as urbanization, World War I, and women's suffrage, to name a few, influenced scholars from all fields of the social sciences to assemble in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1921 to discuss the future direction of preparing American youth for citizenship (Pahl, 2001). In response to a changing American society, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) was founded to advocate for social studies education in the schools and to prepare young people for participatory citizenship (Pahl, 2001). NCSS led the way in social studies education reform in America by unifying the social sciences (i.e., anthropology, geography, history, economics, and government) and promoting integrated approaches for teaching events, issues, and social phenomena (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010). From that time forward, the social studies came face to face with challenges that inadvertently de-emphasized its importance during the school day (e.g., Sputnik, *A Nation at Risk*); but, no challenge seems to have left its mark on social studies as significantly as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.

### **Method**

Anecdotally, the researchers observed their PSTs' foundational knowledge of basic social studies concepts waning over a number of years. They conjectured that insufficient instructional time, coupled with high-stakes testing as a result of NCLB during their PSTs' K-12 educational experience were culpable in causing a decline in social studies content knowledge. The researchers endeavored to assess candidates' foundational social studies knowledge in five key areas at entry-point (i.e., social studies methods course), analyze the results for intervention; and more broadly,

use the results to address recommendations for future social studies teaching and learning at their institution and beyond. Specifically, the researchers developed three research questions:

1. What is the entry-point social studies content knowledge of preservice elementary teachers in eastern Kentucky between 2014 and 2017?
2. Do entry-point social studies content knowledge data of preservice elementary teachers in eastern Kentucky between 2014 and 2017 reveal distinguishing strengths and weaknesses?
3. How do the entry-point social studies content knowledge strengths and weaknesses compare to Kentucky state standards for elementary, middle, and high school social studies during the era of No Child Left Behind (i.e., 2001-2015)?

### Participants

This study took place at a regional, comprehensive university in Eastern Kentucky between the years 2014 and 2017. The education preparation provider (EPP) at this university grants Baccalaureate degrees that lead to initial state certification in elementary P-5 and dual elementary P-5/ special education (with specializations in Learning Behavioral Disorders and Moderate to Severe Disorders). The vast majority of the students at this EPP were raised and educated within the 22-county service region of the university. The service region is located in Central Appalachia, which the Appalachian Regional Commission (2017) has classified as “economically distressed.” The Kentucky Department of Education’s School Report Card database (2017) identified ninety-eight percent of the school districts in the 22 counties of the university service region as either Title I or Title I Eligible. Importantly, many students at this university are considered “place bound” and receive their university courses through ITV (compressed audio), online, and other distance-learning modalities. To meet the various needs of its students, this EPP offers the undergraduate elementary program in ways that are convenient and suited to personal choice. These offerings are: 1) main-campus, face-to-face, traditional; 2) main-campus, face-to-face, Professional Partnership Network (PPN), traditional; and 3) off-campus, ITV or online, non-traditional.

Researcher one (R1) is the principal instructor of elementary and middle grades social studies methods for the EPP. Researcher one’s elementary methods students are classified “main-campus, face-to-face, traditional.” “Main campus” in this classification refers to the students enrolled in the social studies methods course at the main-campus of the Regional Comprehensive University. The PSTs take their social studies methods course face-to-face with the instructor, and a nearby elementary school hosts the students for field experience. Most of the PSTs enrolled in researcher one’s courses are traditional, which for this study refers to students between the ages of 18 and 22, and are those who enter college directly following high school (Adams & Corbett, 2010).

Researcher two (R2) is the principal instructor and director of the EPP’s Professional Partnership Network (PPN). Researcher two’s students are classified “main campus” and are also traditional-aged students. The difference between researcher one and researcher two’s students is in the manner by which the methods course is delivered. In the latter, the students participate in methods and fieldwork concurrently at a partner school, utilizing a professional development school model. The PSTs enrolled in researcher two’s PPN social studies methods course are also classified as traditional-aged students (i.e., between 18 and 22 years of age). Table 1 provides a summary of the researchers’ participants across the five semesters data was collected.

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Table 1 *Summary of the Researchers' Pre-service Teacher Participants in the Study*

Semester	R1	R2	<i>n</i>
Fall 2014	18	10	28
Spring 2015	16	0	16
Fall 2015	17	27	44
Fall 2016	18	19	37
Spring 2017	11	0	11
N =			136

The researchers' PSTs shared other common attributes that defined their status in the EPP. First, each participant had been formally admitted into the Teacher Education Program (TEP). To qualify for the TEP, each participant had to have passed the state-required Praxis I assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics; have passed with a C or higher, three pre-TEP introductory courses in education; and have maintained a 2.75 GPA overall in their coursework. Additionally, the PSTs had to demonstrate competency in the Kentucky-required skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Kentucky Administrative Regulation, n.d.) and have successfully fulfilled a TEP interview. Second, each PST declared as their major either elementary education P-5 or dual elementary P-5/special education. Third, each PST was enrolled in the "Block III" progression point toward Clinical Practice (i.e., student teaching semester). Block III at this EPP consists of elementary reading, language arts, and social studies methods courses, and is generally the final semester before the state-required, 16-week Clinical Practice. All of the PSTs in the study had grown up and received their K-12 education during the NCLB era, and demographical information such as socio-economic status, race/ ethnicity, and gender were not factors in their selection for participation.

The researchers did not select the "place-bound" students, also classified as "off-campus, ITV or online, non- traditional," for several reasons. First, neither researcher taught the ITV (compressed audio) sections of the elementary social studies methods at the off-campus locations. As well, neither researcher taught the online offering of the courses during the duration of the study. Second, the researchers controlled the administration of the entry-point assessment, and agreed that the integrity of the study could be jeopardized by having more than two persons overseeing the assessment protocols. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the researchers decided that the majority of the elementary candidates at the off-campus sites belonged to a different demographic than what the study attempted to understand; that is, students who grew up in and graduated from school during the NCLB era. Because the non-traditional student profile of the off-campus PSTs (Adams & Corbett, 2010) (i.e., aged 23 and older, may be a full or part-time student, married with children, and work in addition to going to school), the researchers felt that these students' experiences with NCLB would be too dissimilar to the experiences of the traditional, main-campus, traditional student.

## **Instrumentation**

To determine the PSTs' entry-point content knowledge in social studies (i.e., research question one) and their resulting content strengths and weaknesses (i.e., research question two) between the years 2014 and 2017, the researchers selected elementary Praxis II practice test bank questions (Educational Testing Service, 2004) to serve as the assessment administered in the study. PSTs must pass the Praxis II exam in elementary education content in order to become certified teachers in Kentucky. The entry-point assessment administered to the PSTs mirrored the official Praxis II test. The assessment contained thirty multiple-choice questions on various topics in social studies; specifically, world geography, world and U.S. history, economics, government, and behavioral sciences. The test questions' topical distribution was: five questions in world geography; twelve questions in world and U.S. history; five questions pertaining to economics; seven questions pertaining to government; and one question associated with behavioral sciences.

To address the third research question and illuminate the quantitative data about the PSTs' educational experiences during NCLB, the researchers consulted the Kentucky Combined Curriculum Documents for Social Studies (KYCCDSS) for kindergarten through twelfth grade (Kentucky Department of Education, 2006) (see Appendix). The KYCCDSS provided the "minimum required standards for all Kentucky students before graduating high school" (Kentucky Department of Education, 2006, para. 1) and organized into Five Big Ideas, Academic Expectations, Program of Studies, and Core Content for Assessment. The Big Ideas in the KYCCDSS represented the organizing themes by which the Academic Expectations (standards) for social studies were aligned. These themes were Government and Civics, Cultures and Societies, Historical Perspective, Economics, and Geography. The Academic Expectations shown in the KYCCDSS represented the knowledge and skills all Kentucky students should have been able to demonstrate upon graduating high school. The specific content and grade-level standards for state assessment purposes were known as the Core Content for Assessment (see Appendix). The Core Content for Assessment standards were particularly germane to this study because they represented what the preservice elementary teachers in the study should have learned in K-12 social studies during the period of No Child Left Behind.

## **Procedure**

The study took place across five semesters between 2014 and 2017. The researchers received permission from the university's Institutional Review Board to use their elementary social studies methods students as participants in this multi-semester study. To collect the data needed to answer the first two research questions, the researchers established common test protocols for administering the entry-point assessment (i.e., the Praxis II test bank questions). These protocols entailed: 1) installing the test into the university's Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard; 2) importing the test into the two researchers' social studies methods course shells; and 3) administering the test to the researchers' student participants during the first week of class meetings for each semester in a computer lab. In addition, the researchers proctored the administration of the test to eliminate cheating and restricted students' access before and after the test by requiring a password for entry into the test and allowing only one attempt for completing the test. A total (N) of 136 students took the entry-point test between fall 2014 and spring 2017 (see Table 1, p. 6). The researchers did not collect data for the spring semester in 2016 due to scheduling issues.

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The researchers employed descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2002) to provide a quantitative summary of the data as reported in the Findings. Specifically, the descriptive statistics included sums, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The use of descriptive statistics addressed issues of generalizability, validity, and reliability. With regard to generalizability, the sample comprised a group of students carefully selected for their common attributes across the three-year time frame of the study and had the greatest likelihood of having been educated during NCLB. The data reported in the findings are not generalizable to the EPP's pre-service teachers as a whole and only describe the outcomes of the uniquely-targeted group. Another issue of the study pertained to the validity of the assessment instrument as the gauge for entry-point social studies content knowledge. The researchers made no claim that the assessment matched the social studies curriculum taught to the PSTs during their K-12 experiences. Therefore, it describes only the PSTs' social studies content strengths and weaknesses on topics identified by Educational Testing Service (ETS) who produces the Praxis II content exam. Finally, the researchers attempted to control for reliability issues by administering the assessment at approximately the same point in the PSTs' semester and before they registered for the Praxis II Elementary Content Exam.

To further illuminate the PSTs' social studies content knowledge as acquired during the era of NCLB, the researchers conducted an item analysis for each test question on the entry-point assessment (see Appendix). The item analysis involved comparing each of the thirty questions on the entry-point assessment with the KYCCDSS (KDE, 2006). The percentages of the correctly answered questions were reviewed against the Kentucky Core Content for Assessment which is shown in the Appendix.

### Findings

With regard to research question number 1, "*What is the entry-point social studies content knowledge of pre-service elementary teachers in Eastern Kentucky between 2014 and 2017?*," the researchers found that for each of the five semesters, the pre-service teachers struggled with the questions on the assessment. Table 2 displays the mean and standard deviation for each semester data was collected.

Table 2 *Pre-service Elementary Teachers' Entry-Point Assessment Means and Standard Deviations (Note: The maximum assessment score is 30.)*

Semester	<i>n</i>	Entry-Point Assessment Scores	
		M	SD
Fall 2014	28	16.28	3.63
Spring 2015	16	16.5	4.09
Fall 2015	44	16.34	3.34
Fall 2016	37	14.89	3.23
Spring 2017	11	16.45	3.98

The data show the entry-point assessment means range from 14.89 with a standard deviation of 3.23, to 16.45 with a standard deviation of 3.98. All of the means represent failing scores on the thirty-question assessment and the standard deviations verify that the participants' scores varied little when compared to their peers.

Upon closer examination, the researchers noted little difference in the assessment means produced by their PSTs in the social studies methods courses they taught. As described earlier, researcher one's participants were classified "main-campus, face-to-face, traditional" and researcher two's participants were classified "main-campus, face-to-face, PPN, traditional." Figure 1 compares the mean scores the researchers' students across the five semesters data was collected. Based on this data, the entry-point social studies content knowledge was nearly identical for candidates choosing the traditional social studies methods course (R1) and the PPN methods course (R2). Thus, a preservice teacher's decision to enroll in either the traditional or PPN social studies methods course did not appear to have been a factor in their entry-point social studies content knowledge, as both groups' means constituted failing scores on the assessment.

Figure 1. *Mean Results of Entry-point Social Studies Assessment Per Semester*

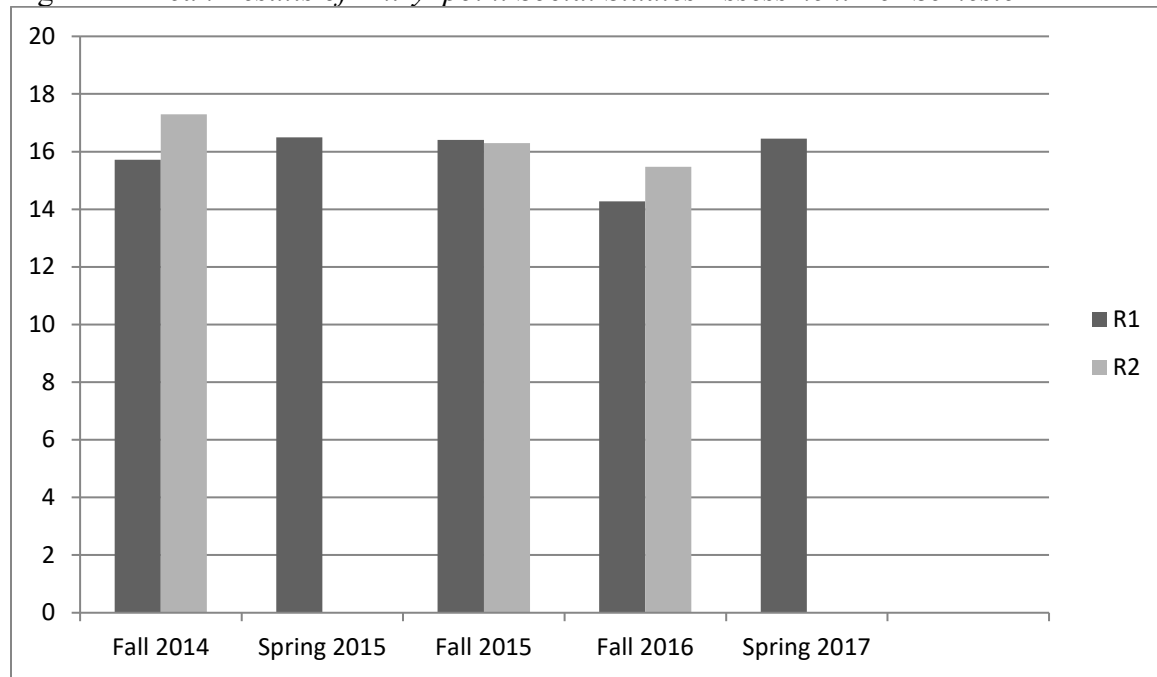


Figure 1. The y-axis shows the mean of questions answered correctly. The x-axis shows the researchers students per semester administered.

By conducting an item analysis of the entry-point assessment used in the study, the researchers were able to answer the second research question, "do entry-point social studies content knowledge data of preservice elementary teachers in eastern Kentucky between 2014 and 2017 reveal distinguishing strengths and weaknesses?" Figure 2 delineates the top five yielding correct and incorrect answers. Out of the 136 participants in the study, only 6% answered correctly a question on climate, which examined the effects of volcanic activity, while 98% correctly answered a civil rights question involving Rosa Parks. Judging by these two questions, it may appear that the participants taking the test struggled with questions related to geography and fared better on questions pertaining to American History. However, the item analysis shows inconsistent



results, indicating that the participants in the study may have had disparate experiences with social studies during their K-12 schooling. Discerning the PSTs’ entry-point social studies content strengths and weaknesses based on the information provided in figure two, is difficult because there does not appear to be a consistent pattern within the content strands. For instance, two geography related questions yielded 6% and 23.5% correct, while two other geography related questions yielded an 86% correct response. The difference in these questions resided in what was asked of the preservice teachers. The responses for the former geography questions required specific geography content knowledge, whereas the responses for the latter geography questions required map reading skills. The PSTs in this study appeared to be more adept at interpreting information rather than recalling specific details.

Figure 2. *Entry-point Assessment Top Five Correct and Incorrect Topics*

<b>Top 5 Correct</b>	<b>% Correct</b>	<b>Top 5 Incorrect</b>	<b>% Correct</b>
(Q 18) civil rights	98%	(Q4) climate	6%
(Q 2) map reading	86%	(Q17) technology/world economy	20%
(Q3) map reading	86%	(Q22) American government	21%
(Q27) supply and demand	85%	(Q1) land features	23.5%
(Q12) ancient history	71%	(Q14) effects of Communism	29%

Figure 2. *The columns show the question topics from the entry-point assessment yielding the top 5 correct and incorrect responses. The percentages indicate the number of students out of the sample (N=136) answering the questions correctly.*

Only one question pertaining to American History made it onto a top five list, and that question had to do with civil rights, while another question having to do with ancient history, made it onto the top 5 correct list. Figure 3 presents the PSTs’ content category strengths and weaknesses more clearly. As shown in Figure 3, participants appeared to be least successful answering questions having immediate relevance in Americans’ lives, specifically those having to do with United States government. The correct response rate for the seven government questions on the test was 48%. The PSTs answered best on questions having to do with American History with 68% correct, but there were only three questions related to American History on this test. The other nine history questions fell into the category of World History, and this happened to be the content strand receiving the next to lowest percentage correct, 49%.

The researchers compared the PSTs’ entry-point assessment data against the K-12 social studies Core Content standards (see Appendix) to answer the third research question. The researchers considered the question, “*how do the entry-point social studies content knowledge strengths and weaknesses compare to the Kentucky state standards for elementary, middle, and high school social studies during the era of No Child Left Behind,*” especially important since all the PSTs in the study were K-12 students during NCLB. The Appendix provides a detailed summary of the assessment questions as they corresponded to the K-12 social studies Core Content standards in Kentucky during the NCLB period. Of the thirty questions on the assessment, none were applicable to the Kentucky primary (i.e., grades K-3) social studies standards. Four questions on the assessment applied to the fourth-grade social studies standards,

Figure 3. *Pre-service Teachers' Performance on Entry-point Assessment by Strand*

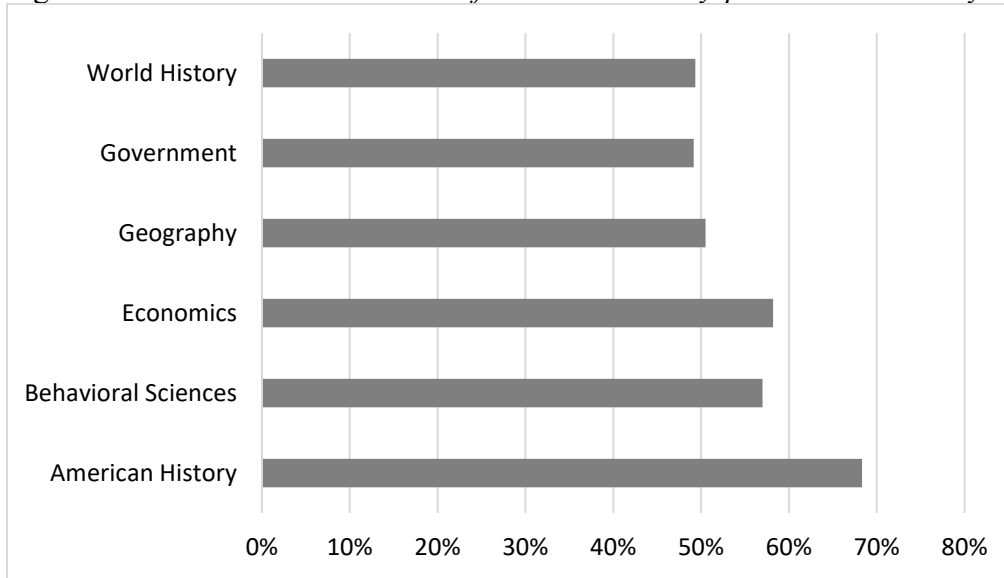


Figure 3. *Percent average of questions answered correctly on the Praxis II test bank questions (Educational Testing Service, 2004) by strand.*

specifically in the area of Geography. Seventeen of the thirty assessment questions (56%) applied to the fifth-grade social studies standards and show a dispersal across the five Big Ideas (themes) in the Kentucky social studies standards: 1) Government and Civics (4 questions), 2) Cultures and Societies (3 questions), 3) Economics (3 questions), 4) Geography (3 questions), and 5) Historical Perspective (10 questions). Of these seventeen questions, four of them were among the top five missed questions on the entry-point assessment (please see Figure 2). The correlation between the question topics and the Big Ideas with the percentage of pre-service teachers answering correctly were:

- #1 land features/Geography (23.5%)
- #4 climate/Geography (29%)
- #17 technology and world economy/Economic (20%)
- #22 American government/Government and Civics (21%).

Only one question from the seventeen appeared on the top five correct list of questions (please see Figure 2), and that was question #18 (98%) and having to do the Civil Rights Movement.

The remaining thirteen questions on the entry-point assessment were dispersed among the middle and high school social studies standards as shown in the Appendix. Among these thirteen questions were four that the PSTs answered successfully and are listed among the top 5 correct questions. These questions and the percentage answering correctly were (please see Figure 2): question #2 (86%), question #3 (86%), question #27 (85%), and question #12 (71%). The number of times the questions corresponded to the middle and high school social studies standards does not appear to have had a significant effect, since questions, two and three, appeared in the standards five times and one time, respectively, and achieved an 86% success rate. Whereas question #12, having to do with ancient history, appeared in the standards ten times and the PSTs achieved a 71% response rate. A closer examination of the social studies standards with the entry-point assessment results (see Appendix), indicates that the number of times a question topic was presumably taught during the PSTs' K-12 experience, does not appear to be a significant factor in their overall content knowledge retention.

**Discussion**

The findings from this study indicate that NCLB had an impact on social studies education in Kentucky in several ways. First, the item analysis of the ETS Praxis II test bank questions revealed significant gaps in the study’s PSTs’ social studies content knowledge. Because PSTs in Kentucky must take and pass the elementary content Praxis II exam for certification, the content deficiencies shown in the entry-point assessment data is cause for alarm, especially as a fundamental purpose of the social studies is to prepare students for life in a participatory democracy. However, the PSTs’ scores on the entry-point assessment may be no worse or better when compared to other PSTs in the state or nation. Whenever a standardized test (and similarly, its practice test) is used to gauge students’ prior knowledge, it is important to consider how the test’s content parameters are developed. Content experts prepare questions for the Praxis II exams and these questions are subsequently reviewed by panels of “ETS experts as well as content advisory groups” (Educational Testing Service, 2017, para. 4). As the pre-service teachers in this study were all from eastern Kentucky, it may be that the content deficiency is indicative of the region. A larger study of PSTs’ entry-point social studies content knowledge using Praxis II test bank questions should be conducted to determine if similar results occur in other regions of the United States.

Second, the PSTs in this study were K-12 students during the era of NCLB (2002-2015). The Kentucky school report card data for students in fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades between 2007-2011 revealed gaps in social studies content knowledge across Kentucky (see Figure 4). In Kentucky, the goal was for all students to reach the proficient level in content knowledge on state assessments. The Kentucky Department of Education considered an apprentice score as below standard and requiring support to reach proficiency. Novice scores reflected a more serious gap of content knowledge requiring remediation. Between 2007 and 2011 as our PSTs

Figure 4. *Kentucky School Report Card Data: Students’ Social Studies Test Results, 2007-2011*

School Year	Grade level	Percent Tested	Novice	Apprentice	Proficient	Distinguished
2007-2008	5 <sup>th</sup>	100	11	30	45	14
	8 <sup>th</sup>	99.9	12	12	42	16
	11 <sup>th</sup>	99.7	20	42	26	13
2008-2009	5 <sup>th</sup>	100	10	29	45	16
	8 <sup>th</sup>	99.9	12	32	39	17
	11 <sup>th</sup>	99.7	20	40	27	14
2009-2010	5 <sup>th</sup>	99.98	12	33	42	13
	8 <sup>th</sup>	99.95	11	32	39	17
	11 <sup>th</sup>	99.75	19	41	27	13
2010-2011	5 <sup>th</sup>	99.98	11	29	44	16
	8 <sup>th</sup>	99.94	10	30	41	19
	11 <sup>th</sup>	99.67	19	39	28	13

Figure 4. *Data compiled from Kentucky School Report Card, Kentucky Department of Education, 2007-2011.*

were still in school, the number of Kentucky students in the novice and apprentice levels remained relatively stable in fifth grade. The eighth-grade percentages of novice and apprentice students

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rose from a low of 24% to a 45%. Finally, high school percentages in the novice and apprentice levels hovered between 19% and 42%. The data suggests a high percentage of Kentucky students did not receive the instruction and remediation necessary to meet proficiency levels on state assessments in social studies during the time under investigation. The collective PSTs' (N=136) entry-point assessment mean of 16.092 out of 30 questions suggests a failing performance on the Praxis II practice test. Could the high number of PSTs' missed questions correspond to the fact that over half of the students in Kentucky could not reach a proficient level of knowledge in social studies on their state assessment? What are possible explanations that contributed to this low success rate?

One possible explanation is each of the PSTs in this study attended elementary, middle, and high school during the NCLB era. Elementary schools especially shifted their focus away from core content subjects such as social studies in order to spend more time developing students' literacy and mathematics skills to meet annual yearly progress mandates. Nettleton (2017) noted that early elementary students (i.e., grades K-3) often spent four hours daily engaged in literacy lessons and two hours daily engaged in mathematics. This left little room for social studies as a stand-alone subject. To address this issue, Nettleton (2017) also found that teachers often integrated social studies content into reading instruction, although the degree of the effectiveness for what students learned in social studies is unknown. For most Kentucky students during the NCLB era, including the PSTs in the study, formal and regular social studies instruction began when they entered 5<sup>th</sup> grade and when social studies became a part of the Kentucky school accountability system (KDE, 2006).

Another possible explanation for the PSTs' poor performance on the entry-point assessment used in the study, was that by the time these students entered middle and high school, Kentucky's state budget was reviving from a harsh economic downturn caused by the 2008 recession. The state's General Assembly eliminated money for textbook adoptions, including

Figure 5. *Kentucky Department of Education High School Social Studies Requirements 1998-Present*

School Year	Number of Courses	Required Courses
1998-2007	3	US History Economics and Government World Geography and World Civilization
2008-2010	3	Courses are expected to include strands of: US History Economics Government World Geography World Civilization
2011- Present	3	Courses are to include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for social studies

Figure 5. *Compiled from Kentucky Department of Education Report, n.d, pp.6-8)*

social studies. In the years that followed, school districts chose not to replace lost and torn textbooks and more students found themselves sharing textbooks that could not leave the school for fear of being lost (WDRB, 2014). Teachers had to find other resources to supplement their instruction and become more dependent on web-based sources. New state requirements for high

school graduation involving social studies and changes made to social studies standards during the NCLB era may also have contributed to the PSTs' less than stellar performance on the entry-point assessment used in the study (see figure 5). The ambiguity of the high school requirements beginning in 2011 coupled with a lack of specific courses they were required to take may have caused these PSTs to have disparate experiences with social studies in high school and therefore contributed to their lack of prior knowledge on several questions of the entry-point assessment. Additional research investigating the impact of decreased instructional resources and changes to state social studies standards during the NCLB era would help augment the findings reported in this study.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to determine if NCLB had an impact on the PSTs' entry-point social studies content knowledge. Although a direct cause cannot be claimed—that NCLB did negatively impact the PSTs' social studies content knowledge—the researchers uncovered several worthwhile insights. First, the researchers learned that they must prepare their PSTs for teaching social studies in Kentucky, and that the Praxis II exam for certification (i.e., the Praxis II practice test used in the study) does not necessarily reflect the content standards of individual states. Second, the researchers learned that they, and other EPP faculty and clinical partners, must conduct regular curriculum audits to ensure teacher candidates are taking university courses aligned with state content standards for social studies and recommend course changes when necessary. Third, the researchers learned that although they can provide support for their PSTs' social studies content deficiencies, the onus of claiming responsibility of the deficiency rests ultimately on the teacher candidates. The researchers will continue to model best practice and engaging social studies methods that PSTs will emulate in the field. It is our hope that the next PSTs—the post-millennials—enter our social studies methods embracing, rather than lamenting, social studies, and become the new advocates for social studies education in Kentucky and beyond.

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Appendix

Entry-point Assessment Question Topics Compared to the Kentucky Combined Curriculum Document for Social Studies (2006)

<b>CCD Social Studies – Primary (grades K-3)</b>				
<b>Big Idea</b>	<b>Academic Expectation</b>	<b>*Core Content for Assessment</b>	<b>Test Bank Question</b>	<b>% to Answer Correctly</b>
Government and Civics	2.14 2.15	n/a	n/a	--
Cultures and Societies	2.16 2.17	n/a	n/a	--
Economics	2.18	n/a	n/a	--
Geography	2.19	n/a	n/a	--
Historical Perspective	2.20	n/a	n/a	--
<b>CCD Social Studies – Fourth Grade</b>				
<b>Big Idea</b>	<b>Academic Expectation</b>	<b>*Core Content for Assessment</b>	<b>Test Bank Question</b>	<b>% to Answer Correctly</b>
Government and Civics	2.14 2.15	n/a	n/a	--
Cultures and Societies	2.16 2.17	n/a	n/a	--
Economics	2.18	n/a	n/a	--
Geography	2.19	SS-04-4.1.1	Land features Map Reading Map reading Climate	23.5% 86% 86% 51%
Historical Perspective	2.20	n/a	n/a	--
<b>CCD Social Studies – Fifth Grade</b>				
<b>Big Idea</b>	<b>Academic Expectation</b>	<b>*Core Content for Assessment</b>	<b>Test Bank Question</b>	<b>% to Answer Correctly</b>
Government and Civics	2.14 2.15	SS-05-1.2.1 SS-05-1.2.2  SS-05-1.3.2	American Government American Government American Government American Government American Government	68% 53% 21% 64% 68%
Cultures and Societies	2.16 2.17	SS-05-2.3.1	Explorers: Map Reading Explorers: Map Reading American Government	51% 52% 51%
Economics	2.18	SS-05-3.4.1 SS-05-3.4.2	Urbanization and technology Urbanization and Technology Environment and World Economy Climate	63% 63% 33% 51%
Geography	2.19	SS-05-4.4.2 SS-05-4.3.2 SS-05-4.4.1	Land Features Urbanization Environment and World Economy	23.5% 63% 33%

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Historical Perspective	2.20	SS-05-5.2.1	Civil Rights	98%
		SS-05-5.2.2	American Government	51%
			American Government	68%
			Explorers: Map Reading	51%
		SS-05-5.2.4	Explorers: Map Reading	52%
			World Religion	52%
			Diversity	56%
			Effects of Communism	29%
			American Government/History	34%
Technology and World Economy	20%			
American Government/History	51%			

### CCD Social Studies – Sixth Grade

Big Idea	Academic Expectation	*Core Content for Assessment	Test Bank Question	% to Answer Correctly
Government and Civics	2.14 2.15	n/a	n/a	--
Cultures and Societies	2.16 2.17	SS-06-2.1.1	World Religions World Religion	65% 52%
Economics	2.18	SS-06-3.1.1 SS-06-3.2.1 SS-06-3.3.1 SS-06-3.4.2  SS-06-3.4.3	Comparative Economies Comparative Economies Comparative Economies Labor Trends Urbanization Environment/World Economy	62% 62% 62% 56% 63% 33%
Geography	2.19	SS-06-4.1.1 SS-06-4.3.2 SS-06-4.2.1 SS-06-4.2.2 SS-06-4.4.1 SS-06-4.4.2	Map Reading Diversity Land Features Urbanization Climate Urbanization	86% 56% 23.5% 63% 51% 63%
Historical Perspective	2.20	SS-06-5.1.1	World Religions Civil Rights Prehistoric Culture	65% 98% 63%

### CCD Social Studies – Seventh Grade

Big Idea	Academic Expectation	*Core Content for Assessment	Test Bank Question	% to Answer Correctly
Government and Civics	2.14	SS-07-1.1.1	World Religions	71%
	2.15	SS-07-1.1.2	Ancient History	71%
Cultures and Societies	2.16	SS-07-2.1.1	World Religions	65%
	2.17	SS-07-2.3.1	Ancient History	71%
		SS-07-2.3.2	Ancient History	71%
Economics	2.18	SS-07-3.1.1	Ancient History	71%
		SS-07-3.4.1	Ancient History	71%
Geography	2.19	SS-07-4.1.1	Map Reading	86%

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		SS-07-4.3.2	Ancient History	71%
Historical Perspective	2.20	SS-07-5.1.1 SS-07-5.3.1 SS-07-5.3.2 SS-07-5.3.3 SS-07-5.3.4	World Religions Prehistoric Culture Prehistoric Culture Prehistoric Culture Ancient History World Religions World Religions	65% 63% 41% 63% 71% 65% 52%
<b>CCD Social Studies – Eighth Grade</b>				
<b>Big Idea</b>	<b>Academic Expectation</b>	<b>*Core Content for Assessment</b>	<b>Test Bank Question</b>	<b>% to Answer Correctly</b>
Government and Civics	2.14 2.15	SS-08-1.1.1 SS-08-1.1.2  SS-08-1.3.1 SS-08-1.2.1  SS-08-1.2.2  SS-08-1.3.2	American Government American Government American Government/History American Government American Government American Government American Government American Government/History American Government Taxation	64% 64% 34% 68% 68% 53% 21% 64% 34% 53% 42%
Cultures and Societies	2.16 2.17	SS-08-2.1.1  SS-08-2.3.1	World Religions Diversity Diversity	65% 56% 56%
Economics	2.18	SS-08-3.1.1 SS-08-3.4.3	Comparative Economies American Government/ History Comparative Economies	62% 34% 62%
Geography	2.19	SS-08-4.1.1 SS-08-4.2.1	Map Reading Land Features	86% 23.5%
Historical Perspective	2.20	SS-08-5.1.1  SS-08-5.2.1  SS-08-5.2.2  SS-08-5.2.3 SS-08-5.2.4	World Religions World Religions American Government Diversity Explorers/Map Reading Explorers/Map Reading Diversity American Government American Government American Government American Government/History American Government American Government	65% 52% 51% 56% 51% 52% 56% 64% 51% 68% 34% 64% 51%
<b>CCD Social Studies – High School (9-12)</b>				
<b>Big Idea</b>	<b>Academic Expectation</b>	<b>*Core Content for Assessment</b>	<b>Test Bank Question</b>	<b>% to Answer Correctly</b>

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Government and Civics	2.14 2.15	SS-HS-1.1.1	American Government	53%
			American Government	21%
		SS-HS-1.1.2	American Government	68%
		SS-HS-1.2.1	American Government	53%
			American Government	21%
		SS-HS-1.2.2	American Government	53%
		SS-HS-1.3.1	American Government	68%
	SS-HS-1.3.3	American Government	42%	
Cultures and Societies	2.16 2.17	SS-HS-2.1.1	World Religions	52%
		SS-HS-2.3.1	Civil Rights	98%
			Diversity	56%
		SS-HS-2.3.2	Diversity	56%
Economics	2.18	SS-HS-3.1.1	Supply and Demand	85%
		SS-HS-3.2.1	Comparative Economies	62%
		SS-HS-3.2.3	Labor Trends	56%
			Comparative Economies	62%
			Labor Trends	54%
			Urbanization	63%
		SS-HS-3.4.2	Environment/World Economy	33%
			Environment/World Economy	33%
	SS-HS-3.4.3	Climate	51%	
Geography	2.19	SS-HS-4.1.1	Map Reading	86%
		SS-HS-4.2.2	Land Features	23.5%
			Map Reading	86%
			Environment/ World Economy	33%
		SS-HS-4.4.2	Climate	51%
Historical Perspective	2.20	SS-HS-5.1.1	Explorers/Map Reading	51%
			Explorers/.Map Reading	52%
			Prehistoric Culture	41%
			World Religions	65%
			Ancient History	71%
			World Religions	52%
			Technology/World Economy	20%
		SS-HS-5.2.2	Civil Rights	98%
			Urbanization	56%
			Comparative Economies	63%
		SS-HS-5.2.3	Diversity	62%
		SS-HS-5.2.5	Diversity	62%
		SS-HS-5.2.6	Effects of Communism	29%
		SS-HS-5.3.1	Civil Rights	98%
		SS-HS-5.3.2	World Religions	52%
			Explorers/Map Reading	51%
SS-HS-5.3.4	Explorers/Map Reading	52%		
SS-HS-5.3.6	Effects of Communism	29%		
	Effects of Communism	29%		
	Civil Rights	98%		
	Labor Trends	56%		

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