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## Models of the Sociology Minor at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States

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Models of the Sociology Minor at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States

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## Abstract

While the structure and content of the sociology major has been addressed by a variety of scholars and several American Sociological Association (ASA) task forces over the past three decades, the structure, content, and even the purpose of the sociology minor has been ignored. In this article we address this gap in the literature through two investigations. The first utilizes an examination of the websites and academic handbooks of 248 bachelor's degree granting institutions to discern the structure and contents of the sociology minor. We identify four models for the sociology minor found in US higher education. The second study utilizes data gathered through the American Sociological Association 2019-2020 Department Survey. Included in the survey were a variety of questions regarding department chairs' perceptions of the sociology minor. We conclude by suggesting that we should not only be concerned with what the sociology minor currently is, but also consider what the minor could be.

## Keywords

sociology minor, sociological literacy framework, American Sociological Association 2019-2020 department survey, sociology curriculum, stackable credentials, alternative credentials

While the American Sociological Association (ASA) and a variety of sociologists over the past few decades have sought to define and offer guidance for what the undergraduate sociology major should include (Eberts et al. 1991; McKinney et al. 2004; Kain 2007; Pike et al. 2017), there has been no attempt to do the same for the undergraduate sociology minor. The lack of guidance and research on the sociology minor in particular, and academic minors in general, has

left unaddressed the question, what is the function of a minor? Is the minor intended to be a rough equivalent of the major writ small—developing an understanding of the same core concepts and competencies though perhaps less in-depth? Is the minor intended to allow students to earn a credential for broad exploration of topics within the major without being required to complete core course requirements such as theory, methods, and statistics courses? Given the recent emphasis on career-related alternative credentials (Carnevale, Rose, and Hanson 2012; Ganzglass 2014), such as certificates, perhaps the function of a sociology minor could be to develop students' career-related skills such as designing and administering surveys or running focus groups. Once the function of a minor is determined, the next questions are which courses, if any, are required to earn a sociology minor? And are these the courses which should be required?

We address these questions and the gap in the research literature through two approaches. The first is an investigation of the availability of, and requirements for, a sociology minor in a random sample of 248 United States bachelor's degree granting institutions. The second approach utilizes data drawn from the American Sociological Association 2019-2020 Department Survey which included questions about the sociology minor.

In our largely descriptive analysis, we document the availability of the sociology minor at bachelor's degree granting institutions, the range of credit hours required to earn the minor, and the courses most commonly required. We then identify a variety of models for the undergraduate sociology minor found in the US and discuss the potential benefits and drawbacks of each model for students and sociology departments. We argue that the various models for the minor reflect implicit answers to the question, what is the function of the sociology minor?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Beginning with the publication of *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* (Eberts et al. 1991) and continuing with the subsequent task force reports (McKinney et al. 2004; Pike et al. 2017), the ASA has provided significant guidance to departments concerning the sociology major. The first task force advocated a move away from the “Ferris wheel” model of curriculum wherein any student who completes the introductory sociology course has a “ticket” to enroll in any course in the sociology curriculum. A subsequent taskforce (McKinney et al. 2004) advocated for a “spine and branches” model with introductory sociology at the base, the capstone course at the top, and theory, methods, and statistics in between with topical courses branching out from the spine. The most recent taskforce (Pike et al. 2017) called for incorporation of essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the Sociology Literacy Framework (Ferguson 2016) to be woven throughout the major. Despite considerable effort over three decades to strengthen and bring a significant degree of consistency to the undergraduate major, the sociology minor has been left unaddressed.

Sociology is not alone in this circumstance. Indeed, as we reviewed the literature on academic curricula we found that few fields have explored the purpose of the minor. Insights gleaned from the limited literature available describe benefits for both programs as well as students (Katz 2010; Hall-Ellis 2016; Burns and Sherman 2019). The minor is often viewed as a means to introduce emerging fields to curricular offerings with potential growth to the field anticipated, for example, Cybersecurity (Katz 2010) and Business Analytics (Burns and Sherman 2019). The minor is also viewed as a “value added” credential that is compatible with and complementary to many other majors, often with the suggestion that students would not select this area of emphasis alone (Diallo 2017) nor select the major with minors in other disciplines (McInerney 1995). Other studies cite the value of the minor as a means to increase the visibility

of a degree program as with Social Work (Keefe 2006) or as a means to prepare students for advanced degrees such as a Masters in Social Work (Keefe 2006) or Business Analytics (Burns and Sherman 2019). A small body of work described how minors provided academic homes for students and academics who experience marginalization in some fields including a Women of Color minor (Goodstein and Gyant 1990) and an Ethnic Studies minor (Hu-DeHart 1993). Benefits to students also include the ability to focus course work, pursue a passion, build skills, and create a competitive edge in the job market (Miller and Irons 2014). One author suggested that the name “minor” itself was a limiting factor in our collective appreciation of the credential because it suggests lesser value or status (Sadigh 2017). Sadigh (2017) prefers to describe the credential as an “interdisciplinary link” and our role as mentors and teachers is to help students articulate this link in their academic journey.

This vision of the “interdisciplinary link” is becoming more important in the minds of administrators, policy makers, and employers in conversations around stackable or progressive credentials and lattice or clustered credentials (Ganzglass 2014). The desire to articulate transferable skills from college to employment is not new (Rossman et al. 2020). However, the comfort with offering credit or non-credit bearing credentials, such as badges and certificates, has increased with the prevalence of online learning modalities. While these degrees were originally the focus of community college curricular offerings (Bouillon 2015), baccalaureate granting institutions have entered the conversation with an emphasis on transferable skills and competency development (NACE 2019) Often referred to as stackable, meaning they can be built upon over time as they may be credited toward another credential, for example, an associate’s degree or certification; or lattice, meaning the move may be lateral. These degrees are viewed as pathways to careers that can help workers pivot to emerging industries and/or elevate within

organizations while continuing to work full time and attend to family and community obligations (Ganzglass 2014). Perhaps the academic minor is the “original stackable credential” as the minor has always offered the promise of additional skills and competencies.

## STUDY ONE: AVAILABILITY OF AND REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SOCIOLOGY MINOR IN THE US

Using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) we identified 526 institutions which granted a bachelor’s degree in sociology. From these we drew a stratified random sample of 248 institutions to represent the number and types of institutions in the state. We considered characteristics including school size (small, medium, large), location and proximity (city, town, suburb), and type (public versus private).

In the summer months of 2019, we then searched institutional websites and academic bulletins to determine whether a sociology minor was offered, the number of credit hours required to earn the minor, and which specific courses, if any, were required.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

As Table 1 reveals 87 percent of the institutions in our sample offered a minor in sociology. While the mean number of course credit hours required for the minor was 18.5, the range of required credit hours was considerable – from a low of 12 to high of 28 hours. Typically, the minor required one or more specific courses along with elective credits. We defined elective credits as those wherein the student has freedom to choose from among all the sociology courses offered by the department as opposed to, for example, choosing one course from a list of three. Using this definition, the average number of elective credits was 12.1 hours. The mean number of elective credits required at the 300 to 400 level was 4.7 hours.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

While courses sometimes had a variety of titles such as “Principles of Sociology,” “Introductory Sociology,” and “Introduction to Sociology,” we readily were able to group them under general course topics typically found in sociology curricula (For example, theory, methods, statistics, etc.). Table 2 shows the courses most frequently required for the sociology minor. Unsurprisingly, the introductory sociology course was a requirement more than twice as often as any other course in the curriculum (72.4 percent). This likely represents something of an underestimate as we included the course in our count only if it was specifically listed as a requirement for the minor. There were a few institutions where the introductory sociology course was a prerequisite for all other courses in the curricula, but the course was not included in the list of required courses despite being a “de facto requirement” for the sociology minor.

Again unsurprisingly, the next two most frequently required courses were theory (35 percent) and methods (30.9 percent). These requirements implicitly suggest a view that the sociology minor should include many of the same requirements as the major. Social Problems (10.6 percent) was the only other course specifically required for the minor by more than ten percent of institutions in the sample. Interestingly, more institutions (5.5 percent) required a course with a focus on inequality or social stratification including “Race and Ethnicity,” “Sociology of Gender,” or “Social Class,” than required a statistics course (2.8 percent), the latter being a course often required for the sociology major. We found no cases where a capstone course was required for the minor.

#### *Four Sociology Minor Models*

We then analyzed the combinations of requirements for the sociology minor and identified four models, two of each reflected the differing assumptions about the purpose of the minor – “the minor is the major writ small” or “the minor is a credential reflecting a broad exploration of



sociological topics.” While 20 percent of the institutions had minors with requirements that did not fit any of these models, 80 percent of minors fit one of the models we identified.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The first model, reflecting Eberts et al. (1991) description of the state of the sociology major, we call the “Ferris wheel.” In this model the introductory sociology and/or social problems courses are the ticket that allows students to board the Ferris wheel at any point in the curriculum. After completing this requirement students were free to enroll in any other sociology course as an “elective” to fulfill the required number of course credit hours for the minor. We found that 30 percent of institutions with a minor used this approach.

The second model we labeled “Anything Goes.” In this approach to the minor, one does not need a ticket. There are no specific courses required, any combination of sociology courses will count. The student simply needs to complete a minimum number of credit hours in sociology to earn the minor. While some courses in the curriculum may have prerequisites for enrollment, the minor itself does not specify any requirement beyond a total number of credit hours. This model was utilized in 12 percent of institutions offering the minor. Together the “Ferris wheel” model and the “Anything Goes” model account for 42 percent of the institutions in our sample which offer a minor. These two models implicitly or explicitly reflect the assumption that the purpose of the minor is to allow students to earn a transcriptable credential for their broad exploration of topics within the major without being required to complete core course requirements in the major.

The “Ferris wheel” and “Anything Goes” models have some advantages from a departmental perspective. In this approach, each faculty member’s courses count for the minor, helping to increase course enrollments in times of scarce and threatened resources while

avoiding conflict among faculty members as to “whose course” should count for the minor. From the student perspective, with a maximum of a single specifically required course, the minor is accessible, efficient, and malleable, thus encouraging enrollment in the minor. It also provides students the opportunity to explore topical areas of interest without having to complete “core” courses they may view as simply “alternative” versions of required courses in their major. For example, they are not required to take a sociology research methods course because they already have a research methods course in another social science discipline. Or perhaps they can avoid a course they would prefer not take such as theory. It is also likely that this approach encourages students to declare a minor when they realize that they only need one or two more courses to complete the requirements for the minor, again building enrollments in sociology courses.

While the flexibility of these approaches to the minor can be defined as an advantage, it can also be seen as a disadvantage. The lack of structure makes it difficult, if not impossible, to identify and assess learning outcomes for the minor (as opposed to outcomes for specific courses). It also creates the problems associated with the “Ferris wheel” model (Eberts et al. 1991) wherein students may take the introductory course (or, in some cases, no introductory course) and have a “ticket” to enroll in any other sociology course. The result is that faculty encounter students ready for study-in-depth and students who are sociological novices enrolled in the same upper-level course. This creates challenges for faculty in determining the level of depth/rigor at which to approach the course and likely demands spending more time reviewing sociological basics than would be necessary if all students had completed core courses such as theory and methods, or even any introduction to the discipline, prior to enrolling in the upper-level course.

Our third model, “The Core,” is the most highly structured approach to the sociology minor. Nearly 22 percent of institutions in the sample offering a sociology minor utilized this approach. “The Core” model included the introductory course and/or social problems, theory, and methods as required courses, allowing students to choose other sociology courses as electives to fulfill the minimum required credit hours for the minor. Sometimes these courses were pure electives (choose from any course in the sociology curriculum) and other times students were required to pick a course from a list of three to five options.

Our fourth model, “The Core Lite,” was very similar - requiring the introductory course and/or social problems, either theory or methods (but not both), and elective courses. This model was utilized by almost 17 percent of the institutions offering a minor. Together, “The Core” and “The Core Lite,” accounted for just over 38 percent of the approaches to the minor. These two approaches reflect an implicit assumption that the sociology minor should present students with much the same experience as the major – developing an understanding of the same core concepts and competencies, though perhaps in less depth.

Just as the first two models have benefits and drawbacks for the department and students, so does the approach reflected in “The Core” and “The Core Lite” models. For students, these models offer a more cohesive overview of the discipline. Ideally, students are developing transferable and marketable skills such as data collection and analysis, the ability to be a critical consumer of quantitative and qualitative data, and the ability to recognize how the social context influences individuals’ behavior and perceptions (for example, the ability to recognize structural racism). With some coaching from faculty to recognize the skills they are developing, students can then articulate them in job application cover letters and interviews, arguably, providing an advantage over students with the same major but lacking a sociology minor. By having a core of

required courses, students are also more likely to develop a sense of community with their peers enrolled in the same series of sociology courses which can lead to improved retention and graduation rates.

For the department, these models create a minor which has the potential for identifiable learning outcomes which could be assessed and used to promote the minor and enrollment in sociology courses. Likewise, it decreases the likelihood of having students ready for study-in-depth alongside students who are sociological novices enrolled in the same upper-level courses. Alternatively, there are drawbacks to these models such as potential overcrowding in the required core courses (theory and methods) as minors compete with majors for the limited number of “seats” available. The more structured approach also risks being a barrier to students choosing to enroll in the minor should they decide in the latter part of their undergraduate experience to pursue a minor in sociology and then are unable to complete the core courses in a necessary sequence or because they perceive a sociology research methods course, for example, is merely a repetition of another research methods course they completed for their major.

To recap, we found the sociology minor was offered at nearly 90 percent of the bachelor’s degree granting institutions that offered the sociology major. Our research shows the sociology minor is much less “standardized” than is the sociology major. Typically, six courses (18.5 credit hours) were required to earn the minor, but the range of required credit hours was wide. The only course required in more than half of the institutions was introductory sociology. The four model approaches to the minor reflected, implicitly or explicitly and in nearly equal percentages, differing assumptions about the function of the minor, either “the minor is the major writ small” or “the minor is a credential reflecting a broad exploration of sociological topics.”

**STUDY TWO: DEPARTMENT CHAIRS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIOLOGY MINOR**

In fall 2019, department chairs were asked to respond to American Sociological Association 2019-2020 Department Survey. At our suggestion, ASA representatives agreed to include questions concerning the sociology minor. We wanted to investigate whether departments offered a minor as well as enrollment trends in sociology courses, in the sociology major, and in the sociology minor. We also sought to identify what chairs perceived to be the benefits of offering a minor for students as well as for the department. Finally, we wished to know whether departments assessed learning outcomes in the minor and, more specifically, chairs' thoughts about the relationship between the minor and the five essential concepts and six essential competencies included in the Sociological Literacy Framework (Ferguson 2016).

Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent to 970 sociology departments offering a bachelor's degree in sociology. The response rate was 45 percent (N=438). As might be expected in an ASA survey, respondents tended to be from Carnegie Classification institutions that offered degrees beyond the bachelor's.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Over 98 percent of respondents indicated that their institution offered a bachelor's degree in sociology and nearly 90 percent offered a minor. Almost 18 percent offered a Ph.D. in sociology and nearly 27 percent offered a Master's degree.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

As Table 5 reveals, just over 30 percent of the chairs responding estimated that enrollment in all sociology courses has decreased over the last five years, while a nearly equal number reported that enrollments have increased and 38.5 percent reported enrollments have stayed about the same. When we asked about changes in the number of graduates earning a sociology major versus a minor, the significance of the minor becomes apparent. A higher

percentage of chairs reported increases in the number of graduates with a minor than reported an increase among graduates with a major (31 to 24 percent). Conversely, a higher percentage of chairs also indicated a decrease in the number of students graduating with a sociology major than the minor (36.5 to 13.6 percent).

[Insert Table 6 about here]

As Table 6 shows, department chairs' perceptions of changes in the number of majors and minors. Almost a third of the chairs who responded to the survey indicated that the number of graduates with a sociology major was declining. While the number of graduates with a sociology minor was more stable, a lower percentage of chairs viewed students with a minor (89.7 percent) as important for undergraduate enrollment in sociology courses than students with a major (98.0 percent) or students satisfying a general education requirement (97.3 percent). Given that majors must complete a greater number of credit hours in the discipline than minors, it is perhaps understandable that department chairs see the minor as less important for enrollment in sociology courses. With the percentage of chairs reporting growth in the number of students completing a minor and a corresponding decline in the number of majors, it appears that department chairs are undervaluing the sociology minor as a source of student enrollment.

[Insert table 7 about here]

We asked department chairs to indicate the importance of a variety of potential benefits of offering a minor in sociology. We included five potential benefits for the department such as increased course enrollments and three potential benefits for the student including the potential for the minor to make students' work in sociology visible on a transcript. As Table 7 reveals, chairs viewed the benefits to the department as more important than benefits to the students with the four benefits related to increasing course enrollment ranked most important. Only one of

three benefits to students (“The minor makes students’ work in sociology visible on a transcript”) was ranked ahead of any of the benefits for the department.

[Insert Table 8 about here]

Pike et al. (2017:52) suggest that the Sociological Literacy Framework (SLF), advanced by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016), provides a developmental roadmap for building undergraduate sociology majors’ knowledge and skills, preparing them for careers or further study. While the report and the SLF framework focus on the major, in half of the four sociology minor models described above, there is an implicit assumption that the minor ought to promote learning and development of these same essential concepts and skills. Therefore, we asked sociology department chairs to offer their perceptions of the extent to which the minor in sociology at their institution emphasizes these concepts and competencies. Table 8 shows that chairs have a great deal of confidence that their sociology minor does in fact develop the SLF concepts and competencies. Over 90 percent of chairs suggested that their sociology minor developed each of the five essential concepts “a great deal” or “some.” They were equally confident, 89 percent and above, that their sociology minor developed five of the six essential competencies “a great deal” or “some.” The sole exception was “Rigorously analyze social scientific data” with only 76 percent of chairs saying, “a great deal” or “some.” Ironically, while chairs perceived their sociology minor developed the SLF concepts and competencies, fewer than 12 percent of respondents indicated that their department articulated learning outcomes specifically for the sociology minor (as distinct from the sociology major). Lacking assessment data, the chairs were reporting their impressions rather than any empirical measurement of students’ achievement of the SLF concepts and competencies.

Consistent with what we found in our first study, the chairs who responded to the ASA survey reported that nearly 90 percent of institutions offered a minor in sociology. While the number of graduates with a sociology major had decreased in over a third of the programs represented, graduates with a minor held steady suggesting an increasingly important role for the minor in maintaining and potentially increasing enrollments in sociology courses. While chairs tended to view the benefits of the minor primarily from a departmental perspective, they acknowledged benefits for students and strongly felt that the minor contributed to the understanding of the SLF's five essential concepts and to development of five of the six SLF essential competencies. It was unclear, at best, as to whether the concepts and competencies were assessed in any systematic way for students minoring in sociology. Because the vast majority of the chairs who responded to the survey noted that they do not attempt to systematically assess learning outcomes of the sociology minor, it is not possible to use this data to directly tie to teaching and, particularly, learning outcomes. We speculate that the use of some high impact practices, such as analysis of data and writing intensive work, may be less often utilized in the Ferris wheel and Anything Goes models of the minor. To the degree that structure predicts pedagogy, we speculate that less intentional models lead to less scaffolded and integrated experiences for students.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of these two studies provide a unique glimpse into the sociology minor in US institutions of higher education. In sum, the minor is widely offered, but has little in the way of consistent structure and the learning outcomes are not typically assessed. The first step is to think intentionally about the sociology minor. Which approach are you taking? Is it the right approach for your department's context?



### *Structure*

Roughly 40 percent of the institutions offering the sociology minor explicitly or implicitly assume the minor should cover much of the same territory as the sociology major developing familiarity with the same SLF essential concepts and engendering the same essential competencies. We argue that departments following this approach to the minor ought then to develop ways of assessing the minor to ensure it is achieving these outcomes. Departments in institutions with smaller student populations may want to follow this approach in order to “steer” students into particular courses thus ensuring sufficient enrollment. Conversely departments with an abundance of majors may, of necessity, choose to avoid competition among majors and minors for seats in the required courses. Alternatively, the structured approach with more specifically required courses presents barriers to student enrollment in the minor.

Another nearly 40 percent of institutions take more of what Eberts et al. (1991) called the “Ferris wheel” model wherein the introductory sociology course (or no course at all) provides the “ticket” to enroll in all other sociology courses. This approach allows students to explore topical areas within sociology while avoiding barriers to enrollment in the minor. Given that the goal of this approach is not to provide students with an experience that approximates the major, though less in-depth, there is little need to assess the minor itself. While assessment in individual courses is appropriate, the myriad number of course combinations leading to the minor would make assessment of the minor in any comprehensive way exceedingly difficult. The assessment may instead need to focus on documenting the types of opportunities provided or the transferable skills obtained. While approaches will vary, we encourage departments to be intentional about the structure of their sociology minor. If the goal is to provide students with at least a partial understanding of the SLF concepts and competencies expected of sociology majors, there is a

strong argument for greater scaffolding of courses including requiring theory and methods courses.

### *Reframing the Benefits*

While these two broad approaches, the minor as major writ small and the minor as an exploration of sociological topics, are the existing approaches, the next step is to consider whether they are the only possible approaches or the most desirable approaches? Should the only option available to undergraduate students be a major or an 18 credit hour minor? Are more intentional groupings possible? Given the current interest in higher education regarding stackable credentials and career outcomes, could departments do more to create smaller groupings of three or four courses that could be transcriptable and both more attractive to students and beneficial for their career prospects? While faculty members are sometimes leery of an over-emphasis on careers in higher education, it has become clear that since the 2008 recession both students and their parents are increasingly career focused (Sigelman et al. 2018; Strada 2018). The 2008 Great Recession led to students' and parents of students' greater concern with Return on Investment (ROI) of a college education (Seltzer 2019; Leckrone 2020). Also given that fewer students were born in the years immediately following the 2008 Great Recession and that a significant number of K-12 students have "disappeared" from the US educational system during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gaudio 2020), departments and universities will be forced to compete for students and majors more than ever before (Kline 2019). If Sociology departments fail to be sufficiently attuned to demonstrating for prospective students the value of a sociology degree and the associated skills in the labor market, departments may find themselves facing the same drastic declines in enrollments that Humanities departments are currently facing. What are the skills developed and the core content explored in the sociology curriculum that could be assets for students' careers

whether they are traditionally aged undergraduates or returning adults seeking to “retool” for a career move? For example, given that students in sociology courses are often interested in social services careers, might research methods courses that teach skills that could be used in assessment of social service programs (survey design, interviewing, running focus groups, basic statistics, etc.) be grouped as a credential? In a similar vein, sociology programs could consider creating groupings of courses that provide an introduction to the broad spheres of society wherein social service workers often find themselves employed (Crime, Juvenile Delinquency, Family, Medical Sociology, etc.). Majors in almost any discipline are likely to benefit from a systematic understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Sociology departments could consider grouping together courses related to areas of diversity as a credential. Such approaches could enable sociology departments to reclaim areas of the curriculum that have long been central to sociology yet are in danger of being siloed into specialty areas. Such areas include Criminology, Gender Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies. These areas are often claimed by other disciplines (Ballantine et al. 2016) but are central to sociology.

### *Communicating the Value of the Minor*

Once a department has settled on an approach to the minor, messages tailored to specific audiences are essential. For students, how does a sociology minor enhance their major? Administrators often overlook the importance of minors for enrollments when making decisions about sociology departments as a result of program reviews (Senter, Ciabattari, and Amaya 2020). Therefore, chairs need to ensure that administrators understand how a minor supports campus goals and the strategic plan as well as builds enrollment in the department. Departments will need to share with employers, perhaps through coaching of students in writing resumes and cover letters, the skills and competencies gained through a sociology minor.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

This work represents the first study of its kind and invites scholars to further explore the structure and the learning outcomes of the minor. This piece builds on Kain's 2007 *Teaching Sociology* publication regarding the sociology major curriculum and reminds us that course design and pedagogical choices need to be made with the larger picture of student learning in mind. Departments that use the Ferris wheel and Anything Goes models may find that scaffolding of courses becomes very difficult when a class may include novice learners of sociology and students ready for advanced study in-depth. Future research could explore the degree to which the lack of intentionality shapes pedagogy and learning. Scholars may also want to explore the ways that the minor can be more closely aligned with specific career trajectories and what those learning objectives might look like. The design and purpose of sociology credentials within community colleges represents an important direction for future research. Lastly, we know little about why students chose minors and what messaging might prove effective.

While the minor has been overlooked by department chairs in terms of importance for course enrollments, it has the potential to be a considerable asset during times when resources in higher education, including faculty lines, are scarce and threatened. Whether re-examining the sociology minor to be intentional about its goals or considering the creation of new credentials, each approach helps to demonstrate the value of sociology in the curriculum and solidify its place in higher education. The minor can be an important asset for both students and departments, especially in the context of increasing competition for scarce resources. Sociology departments face a significant challenge in creating minors that will lead to desired student learning outcomes while also meeting departmental need to build enrollment in particular

courses. The two need not be in opposition but designing a curriculum for the minor that meets both sets of needs will require intentional planning and implementation.

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END MATTER

Table 1. Characteristics of Sociology Minor in IPEDS Sample

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**Table 1. Characteristics of Sociology Minor in IPEDS Sample  
(N=248)**

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| <b>Characteristics</b>                                       | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|----------------|
| Percent of institutions offering sociology minor             | 87.0           |
| Mean number of credits hours required                        | 18.5           |
| Maximum number of credit hours required                      | 28             |
| Minimum number of credit hours required                      | 12             |
| Mean number of elective course credits required              | 12.1           |
| Mean number of upper level (300-400) course credits required | 4.7            |
| N  | 248            |

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**Table 2. Courses Most Frequently Required for the Sociology Minor in IPEDS sample (N=248)**

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| <b>Course</b>                                  | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|----------------|
| Introduction to sociology                      | 72.4           |
| Social theory                                  | 35.0           |
| Research methods                               | 30.9           |
| Other required course                          | 12.9           |
| Social problems                                | 10.6           |
| Social theory or research methods              | 6.5            |
| Introduction to sociology or social problems   | 5.5            |
| Inequality/social stratification (topics vary) | 5.5            |
| Statistics                                     | 2.8            |
| N  | 248            |

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Table 3. Four Models for the Sociology Minor in IPEDS Sample

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**Table 3. Four Models for the Sociology Minor in IPEDS Sample (N=217)**

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| <b>Model</b>     | <b>Percent</b> |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Ferris wheel  | 30.0           |
| 2. Anything Goes | 12.0           |
| 3. The Core      | 21.7           |
| 4. The Core Lite | 16.6           |
| N                | 217            |

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**Table 4. ASA Survey Sociology Credentials Offered by Institutions (N=438)**

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| <b>What degrees, minors, or other formal programs in sociology are offered by your college or university? (Please select all that apply)</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|----------------|
| Bachelor's degree  | 98.2           |
| Minor  | 89.7           |
| Either or both types of MA degrees   | 26.7           |
| Master's degree (free-standing, meaning a degree program to which students apply separately and independently from the PhD program)          | 19.9           |
| PhD degree   | 17.7           |
| Master's degree (integrated into a PhD program)  | 11.6           |
| Certificate  | 6.8            |
| Associate's degree   | 1.6            |
| No formal awards, but sociology courses offered  | 0.2            |
| Not sure   | 0.0            |
| N = 438  |                |

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**Table 5. ASA Survey Changes in enrollment and number of graduates with sociology major and minor (N=438)**

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| <b>Change</b>         | <b>All Sociology Courses</b> | <b>Major Graduates</b> | <b>Minor Graduates</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Increased             | 30.9                         | 24.0                   | 30.8                   |
| Stayed About the Same | 38.5                         | 39.2                   | 49.4                   |
| Decreased             | 30.6                         | 36.5                   | 13.6                   |
| Do not offer          | n.a.                         | 0.2                    | 6.2                    |
| N=438                 |                              |                        |                        |

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**Table 6. ASA Survey Importance for Undergraduate Enrollment in Sociology Courses  
(N=438)**

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| <b>Importance for enrollment</b>                    | <b>Very Important</b> | <b>Very Important/Important</b> |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sociology majors                                    | 78.1                  | 98.0                            |
| Students satisfying a general education requirement | 68.5                  | 97.3                            |
| Sociology minors                                    | 41.0                  | 89.7                            |
| Students satisfying requirements for other majors   | 30.9                  | 81.3                            |
| Students taking elective courses                    | 29.5                  | 84.5                            |

N = 438

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Table 7. ASA Survey Benefits of offering a sociology minor

| <b>Benefit</b>  | <b>Very</b>      | <b>Very</b>                     |
|---|------------------|---------------------------------|
|   | <b>Important</b> | <b>Important/<br/>Important</b> |
| The minor draws students from other majors into our courses.  | 54.7             | 90.9                            |
| The minor encourages students in other programs to enroll in other sociology courses beyond the core (theory, methods, statistics).                                       | 47.6             | 88.0                            |
| The minor helps us increase course enrollments.   | 49.5             | 85.2                            |
| The minor helps recruit majors.   | 32.1             | 79.2                            |
| The minor makes students' work in sociology visible on a transcript.  | 29.3             | 77.2                            |
| The minor encourages students in other programs to enroll in our core courses (theory, methods, statistics).  | 21.7             | 57.8                            |
| The minor encourages enrollment in sociology courses without students having to meet all of the college or school-wide requirements (e.g., credits in a second language). | 18.1             | 49.6                            |
| The minor allows students to "salvage" student credit hours when they leave the major.  | 13.9             | 40.1                            |

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N = 438

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Table 8. ASA Survey Sociological Literacy Framework Essential Concepts and Competencies Achieved in the Sociology Minor

| <b>Essential Concept/Competency</b>  | <b>A Great Deal</b> | <b>A Great Deal/Some</b> |
|--|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Concepts</i>  |                     |                          |
| Sociological perspective   | 92.0                | 100                      |
| The impact of social structures on human action and social life                      | 88.8                | 100                      |
| Social inequality  | 81.3                | 98.9                     |
| The relationship between self and society  | 61.4                | 97.8                     |
| Social change and reproduction   | 31.5                | 91.3                     |
| <i>Competencies</i>  |                     |                          |
| Critically evaluate explanations of human behavior and social phenomena              | 79.7                | 99.3                     |
| Apply sociological theories to understand social phenomena                           | 67.5                | 98.2                     |
| Apply scientific principles to understand the social world                           | 58.9                | 96.0                     |
| Use sociological knowledge to inform policy debates and promote public understanding | 41.2                | 92.3                     |

|  |      |      |
|--|------|------|
| Evaluate the quality of social scientific data | 36.4 | 89.5 |
| Rigorously analyze social scientific data      | 23.7 | 75.9 |

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N = 438

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