



2014

Another Nibble at the Core: Student Learning in a Thematically-focused Introductory Sociology Course

Jay R. Howard
Butler University, jrhoward@butler.edu

Katherine B. Novak
Butler University, kbnovak@butler.edu

Krista M.C. Cline
Butler University, kcline1@butler.edu

Marvin B. Scott
Butler University, mbscott@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Educational Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Howard, Jay R., Katherine B. Novak, Krista M. C. Cline, and Marvin B. Scott. 2014. "Another Nibble at the Core: Student Learning in a Thematically-focused Introductory Sociology Course." *Teaching Sociology* 42(3):177-186. Available from: digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/591/

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Another Nibble at the Core Student Learning in a Thematically-Focused Introductory Sociology Course

Jay R. Howard¹

Katherine B. Novak²

Krista M. C. Cline²

Marvin B. Scott²

¹*College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN, USA*

²*Department of Sociology and Criminology, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN, USA*

Abstract

Identifying and assessing core knowledge has been and continues to be a challenge that vexes the discipline of sociology. With the adoption of a thematic approach to courses in the core curriculum at Butler University, faculty teaching Introductory Sociology were presented with the opportunity and challenge of defining the core knowledge and skills to be taught across course sections with a variety of themes. This study of students ($N = 280$) enrolled in 12 sections of a thematically-focused Introductory Sociology course presents our attempt to both define and assess a core set of concepts and skills through a pretest-posttest questionnaire to measure student learning gains relative to: (1) a sociological perspective, (2) sociological theory, (3) research methods, and (4) key concepts in sociology. Results show significant learning gains on all four dimensions, with the greatest gains coming in sociological theory. There were no significant differences in pretest scores by gender or by whether students had taken a sociology course in high school. Seniors scored significantly higher on both the pretest and the posttest, but after we controlled for pretest scores seniors did significantly better only on the subset of questions related to sociological theory. Students who took a sociology course in high school scored lower on the methods subscale of the posttest and had lower overall total posttest scores than their counterparts.

Keywords: introduction to sociology, learning outcomes, sociology curriculum, course assessment, high school sociology

In the midst of an era of calls for greater accountability and assessment of student learning in higher education, such as Arum and Roksa's (2011) *Academically Adrift*, sociology as a discipline finds itself in the unenviable position of struggling to both define and assess the content and skills we expect students to learn. This is particularly true in the case of the Introductory Sociology course. Given the encyclopedic nature of introductory sociology textbooks, it is impossible for faculty members to "cover" everything included in the text. With the growing recognition that "less is more" when it comes to long-term retention (see, for example, Halpern and Hakel [2003]), individual faculty members are often left to their own devices in determining how to limit the topics, concepts, and ideas covered in their Introductory Sociology courses.

One approach to addressing the concerns regarding what skills and what content to cover is to teach introductory sociology thematically rather than in the traditional survey of the discipline format. When a department agrees to teach introductory sociology in this manner, faculty members must identify the key skills and content that students should learn regardless of the organizing theme used in a particular section of the course. In what follows we present the results of one department's attempt to identify and assess skills and content learned in a thematic approach to introductory sociology.

A Thematic Approach to Teaching Introductory Sociology

Driven in large part by university assessment requirements for the Introductory Sociology course, which is a part of the core curriculum, faculty who teach the course at Butler University met to discuss our desired common learning outcomes in Introductory Sociology and how to assess them in a manner that would not result in an onerous additional workload for the faculty involved. Butler University is a moderately selective institution with an undergraduate student enrollment of approximately 4,200 students. The university prides itself on its liberal arts tradition and on infusing the liberal arts into professional degree programs.

As a part of the university's core curriculum, Introductory Sociology is designated as a "Social World" course. Faculty from a variety of disciplines, which are primarily but not exclusively in the social sciences, teach the Social World courses. The core curriculum learning objectives are the same for all Social World courses, regardless of the department or discipline offering the course. The objectives include to study selected questions about human beings and the social, cultural, economic, and political world in which they are embedded; to develop an understanding of the variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods that social scientists use to study the social world; and to develop the ability to discern the social, scientific, and ethical dimensions of issues in the social world and to understand the interaction between society's values and its definition of social problems. Within this context, introductory courses that offer a traditional survey of the discipline are discouraged.

The department's version of the Social World course provides an examination of a topic within sociology and through that topic introduces the basics of the discipline. So while the course is an introduction to the discipline of sociology covering much the same ground as a traditional survey course, the topics and concepts are introduced through the lens of a particular organizing theme. Unlike in upper-level topic courses where the goal is to provide students with a relatively in-depth

understanding of sociological content in these areas, in this course these themes are used to illustrate key sociological concepts and how the sociological perspective can be applied to a topic or social issue. Thus, the goals are the same as in a traditional introductory sociology course. Through this approach we are able to focus on topics of greatest interest to our students and faculty and potentially are able to more effectively demonstrate the utility of sociology to our students and foster student engagement in the course. The thematic topics for the Introductory Sociology version of the Social World course have, to date, included Health and Illness, Sport, Inequality, Gender, Race and Ethnicity, Crime, and Family. Themes are announced in advance, and students are free to select the course section with the theme of most interest to them.

Faculty from a variety of disciplines in the humanities (Connor 1998; White 1990), social sciences (Sternberg and Pardo 1998), and sciences (Becker 2005; Lung 1999) have advocated the use of a thematic approach. They have argued that a thematic approach enhances learning by representing content knowledge to students in a familiar cultural context (Ratcliff 1997), making the subject more relevant to students (Conner 1998; Lung 1999), providing a unifying theme for course content (Sternberg and Pardo 1998), and facilitating complex thought and the acquisition of critical thinking skills (White 1990). Themes might also be used to help students better understand a topic as well as the world in which they live (Ratcliff 1997).

There are few studies assessing the outcomes of thematic courses. Thus, there is little empirical evidence to support the claims pertaining to thematic courses within the literature. Although we do not assess the overall effects of a thematic approach to student learning, we do examine whether core introductory sociology concepts can be effectively addressed through a topics approach.

In addition to the core learning objectives shared by all Social World courses, sociological versions of the course, hereafter referred to as Introductory Sociology, include four additional learning objectives collectively identified by the sociology faculty at Butler University: (1) to understand and begin to apply the major theoretical perspectives, research methods, and key concepts of sociology as a social science; (2) to develop an understanding of the relationship between the individual and the larger social world in which he or she lives; (3) to think critically about one's own beliefs, behaviors, and biases; and (4) to develop a sense of cultural relativism and enhance students' understanding of self, other individuals, and social groups.

Through our struggle to identify and operationalize course goals in the development of a topic-focused course and to assess the learning of skills and content knowledge, we offer one approach to the challenge of defining the core content for the Introductory Sociology course. As Zipp (2012) and Greenwood and Howard (2011) have argued, it is important that departments determine the specific skills or content their students need. While Zipp (2012) rightfully concludes that sociologists have failed to come to an agreement on what skills and knowledge need to be covered in the Introductory Sociology course, he calls for greater thought and clarity both at the department level and at the disciplinary level regarding how we want our discipline to be seen through the Introductory Sociology course. Likewise, Greenwood and Howard (2011) call for a thoughtful examination of what and how much should be covered in an Introductory Sociology course, with careful attention being paid to the demographic characteristics and particular needs of one's students.

The few attempts to define a core set of concepts, ideas, and perspectives that should be taught in Introductory Sociology have failed to garner widespread agreement and acceptance. D’Antonio (1983), then the Executive Officer of the ASA, in an essay titled “Nibbling at the Core,” developed a list of topics and concepts that included theorists (Marx, Durkheim, Mead, and Weber), theoretical perspectives (functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interaction), research methods–related concepts and approaches, and a list of key sociological concepts (e.g., inequalities, groups, socialization, and social change). D’Antonio (1983:174) noted that there was “nothing unique” about his list and that the majority of introductory sociology textbooks covered everything on the list along with a myriad of other topics and concepts.

While the ASA report, *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major* (ASA 1991), suggested that Introductory Sociology should seek to provide a survey of the discipline, efforts to identify a core set of topics, concepts, and ideas have continued to meet with only limited success. Wagenaar (2004) surveyed 301 sociologists regarding how much coverage topics should receive in the introductory course and in the discipline. When respondents were asked to identify the five most important concepts, topics, and skills for coverage in the Introductory Sociology course, no single item received the support of more than 10 percent of respondents (Wagenaar 2004). Similarly, when Keith and Ender (2004) compared the content of 35 Introductory Sociology textbooks from the 1940s and the 1990s, they found that while there was a commonly shared structure in the textbooks in terms of chapter headings, the concepts used to introduce the discipline were quite diverse with the majority of concepts included in only one textbook and fewer than 3 percent of concepts found in all 35 textbooks.

Developing Measures of Learning Objectives

In following the advice of Zipp (2012) and Greenwood and Howard (2011), and through our collective attempt to settle on measurable outcomes for our thematic Introductory Sociology course, we offer what D’Antonio (1983:169) might refer to as another “nibble at the core.” The faculty teaching the Introductory Sociology course developed a 20-question multiple-choice assessment instrument that would tap into our key learning objectives and through the use of a pretest and posttest provide an assessment of student learning gains over the course of the semester. Our goals were two-fold. First, we needed to meet university expectations for assessment of student learning in all Social World courses. Second, we wanted to assess gains in sociological understanding and knowledge in an Introductory Sociology course with a topical focus rather than the typical survey of the discipline approach. After considerable discussion, we settled on four key components of learning outcomes for the Introductory Sociology course at Butler University that built upon our identified learning objectives. While recognizing the limitations of the “three theoretical perspectives,” this approach is still ubiquitous in introductory sociology textbooks and does provide a means for teaching critical thinking. The three perspectives provide a way of demonstrating that a given topic can be examined from multiple angles, with different insights resulting, and provide an opportunity to weigh the merits of those insights. Therefore, we decided that measures of students’ ability to use the *three theoretical perspectives* should be part of the assessment. The six questions (two on each of the three perspectives) are application-oriented in

that they require students not only to recognize the names and define the perspectives but to sufficiently understand them in order to apply them in social situations.

Our second learning objective has to do with the *sociological perspective/sociological imagination*. We want students to grasp the relationship between the individual and the larger social world. Therefore, we included five questions related to the sociological perspective. Three of the questions tested a general understanding of the focus of the sociological perspective (one definitional and two applications) and the other two addressed the difference between macro- and micro-level sociological explanations.

A third learning objective for the Introductory Sociology course at Butler University is for students to develop an understanding of research methods used to create sociological knowledge. We developed four questions related to *research methods* covering the concepts hypothesis, independent versus dependent variables, and qualitative versus quantitative methods.

Additional learning objectives included understanding and beginning to apply *key concepts* in sociology and developing a sense of cultural relativism. Although it was clear that a question on cultural relativism/ethnocentrism should be included in the assessment, settling on additional key concepts proved to be especially challenging. Given the thematic approach to the course, it was surprisingly difficult to find a few key concepts that would be covered in all sections of the course regardless of the organizing topic. We settled on the concepts of culture, ethnocentrism, status versus role, manifest function, and the relativity of deviance. Admittedly, these concepts were selected more as a matter of convenience—because we felt that each concept could be reasonably included in each section of the course regardless of the organizing theme—than because these five concepts were somehow more central to the discipline than some other list of five key concepts. One could easily argue that some or all of the five concepts should be replaced with different “key” concepts. But given the lack of consensus in the discipline and more generally to provide guidance, we chose to go with this list of key concepts because it was practical for us to do so. We do not intend to imply that these are the most essential concepts to be taught in Introductory Sociology; rather they are five concepts drawn from a much longer list of potential key concepts.

While some would contend that multiple-choice questions are a poor way to measure students’ learning or the development of critical thinking skills, we disagree. While objective forms of testing often are reduced to simple recognition-based testing requiring only lower-level cognitive processes, multiple-choice questions can be written in such a way as to require higher-level cognition. For each of the learning objectives (theoretical perspectives, sociological perspective, research methods, and key concepts), we selected (from test banks) or wrote questions that required the application of higher-order thinking skills rather than simple “match the definition with the correct term” recognition-level questions that require only memorization of terms—a lower-order skill. This approach, we contend, helped us get at another learning objective for the Introductory Sociology course—the development of critical thinking skills. We view students’ overall score on this instrument as an assessment of students’ critical thinking skills, albeit by no means a perfect measure. However, our current focus is on content mastery, development of the ability to use the three theoretical perspectives, and demonstration of a sociological imagination (the last two are

arguably forms of critical thinking) rather than on assessment of gains in critical thinking skills more generally.

Methods

Study Design

As noted above, we assessed student learning in the department's Introductory Sociology course using a pretest and posttest approach measuring some basic sociological knowledge. Both the pretest and posttest were embedded in all sections of this course offered during spring 2012 (6 class sections) and fall 2012 (6 class sections). The average section size was 23.5, which is typical for courses offered in the Social World section of the core. Nine of these sections were taught by full-time faculty members (four different faculty) and three were taught by adjunct instructors (two different adjuncts).

The pretest was administered on the first day of class, and the posttest was incorporated into the final examination. We received institutional review board approval for this study prior to data collection, and students were informed of the nature of the study at the onset and were asked for their cooperation. While students knew they would be participating in a posttest at the end of the semester, they were not told that the posttest would contain the same set of questions as the pretest. All but two students agreed to participate.

Respondents

For this study we analyzed data from the 280 students who completed both the pretest and posttest.¹ As indicated in Table 1, the vast majority of the students in this course were freshmen (64.3 percent) or sophomores (19.6 percent). Only 19.6 percent of the students had taken a sociology course in high school, and only 7.9 percent were declared sociology majors.

Most of the sociology majors in the sample took Introductory Sociology during the fall (vs. the spring) semester (82 percent vs. 18 percent, $p < .01$). This is to be expected because, with few exceptions, we require incoming freshman sociology majors to take this course in their first semester to help connect them to the department and because this course serves as a prerequisite for our upper-level course offerings. There were no other statistically significant differences in students' demographic characteristics across the two semesters during which the data were gathered.

Measures

As described earlier, the pretest and posttest measured learning objectives in four areas: the sociological perspective, theoretical perspectives, research methods, and core sociological concepts. The instrument was pretested in a pilot study conducted during the fall 2011 semester, at which point several items were revised due to minimal variability in students' responses.

In the final version of the instrument (see the appendix for sample questions) used in this study, learning in each area was evaluated using a set of multiple-choice questions. Each question had four or five responses options, with one correct answer. There were 20 items in total. Items were

scored 0 = incorrect and 1 = correct and added to provide an overall measure of students' level of sociological learning.

In the same manner we calculated subscales for each area assessed. Five questions were used to assess students' understanding of the sociological perspective. Three of the questions tested a general understanding of the focus of the sociological perspective. Six questions were used to assess students' understanding of the three main theoretical perspectives in sociology. There were four questions related to research methods. The final five questions covered selected key concepts typically covered in an introductory sociology course.

Results

Pretest-Posttest Gains in Learning

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences in pretest scores across the seven course themes offered and the 12 different sections of the course. No significant differences in total pretest scores or in performance on the subscales were found in either instance.² Independent *t* tests examining differences in performance on the total pretest and subscales of the pretests across the two semesters yielded only one significant difference in scores. Students taking Introductory Sociology during the fall semester scored significantly higher on the methods subset of questions on the pretest ($M = 3.16, SD = .91$) than students taking it during the spring semester ($M = 2.92, SD = 1.04$), $t(278) = -2.10, p = .036$. Additional analyses (not shown) suggest that this difference is due to the fact that a greater percentage of the students in Introductory Sociology during the spring semester were freshmen.

To evaluate student learning in Introductory Sociology, we used the paired-samples *t* test to assess whether the scores changed from the pretest to the posttest overall and in each subarea. The results, presented in Table 2, indicate that there were significant student gains from the pretest to the posttest for total scores and scores in each of the four topic areas assessed.

The biggest gain was observed in the area of theory (approximately 2 points), and the smallest gain was observed on the methods questions (0.5 points). This is probably because few students are exposed to sociological theory prior to taking a sociology course, whereas students are exposed to the scientific method throughout their educational careers. With the higher baseline score on the methods questions, there was also less room for improvement on this subset of questions.

To determine whether there were differences in the performance of students across section topics, we conducted paired-sample tests on pretest and posttest scores (total and subscales) for each topic. Significant gains were observed in all but four instances. However, for each of these four topics, there was a small sample size ($n < 25$) and the statistical significance level approached significance ($p < .07$), suggesting that this was likely an issue of statistical power rather than a reflection of differences in learning within these sections.

Student Characteristics and Performance

A set of regressions was run to examine variations in baseline performance on the pretest at the beginning of the course based on student characteristics. For these regressions, dummy variables

were created to represent students' gender (female = 1; male = 0), whether the student had taken a high school sociology course (HS sociology = 1; no HS sociology = 0), and major (sociology major = 1; nonsociology major = 0). In addition, four dummy variables were constructed to represent students' class standing (freshman, sophomore, junior and senior), with freshman being the omitted (reference) category.

As shown in Table 3, there were significant differences by class standing. Upper classmen (juniors and seniors) scored higher than average on the total pretest and on the subset of questions on the sociological perspective. Differences in performance on the sociological concepts questions approached significance, as did difference in performance on the methods questions, for seniors (relative to freshmen). Apart from this, student performance was similar on the pretest across the other characteristics examined.

Regressions predicting student performance on the posttest, holding pretest scores constant, were conducted to assess whether student characteristics affected performance. The regression model predicting students' performance on the theory posttest (Table 4) indicates that seniors performed better than underclassmen (freshmen) on the theory section of the assessment. In addition, those students who took sociology in high school had significantly lower scores than individuals with no background in sociology on the posttest methods questions, after we controlled for pretest scores and other student background characteristics. There were no observed differences in performances between males and females or major on the posttest.

Discussion

Results of our investigation suggest that students are acquiring a solid base of sociological learning in the Introductory Sociology course, regardless of section theme. Thus, the thematic approach to learning sociology appears to be an effective method of introducing basic sociological concepts, theories, the sociological perspective, and research methods to students.

We found some differences in the performance of students in these courses based on class standing and whether they had taken sociology in high school. In particular, seniors performed better than freshmen in the area of theory. This finding is consistent with the existing literature on cognitive development and the effects of college on student critical thinking skills. Drawing on their review of the research literature on the impact of college on students, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that seniors have an advantage in critical thinking skills over freshmen. Understanding and applying the sociological perspective require the ability to view the world from multiple perspectives. Thus, it is likely that the theory questions on the pretest-posttest required higher cognitive thinking skills on the part of students than did the other test items.

The reason for the lower performance of students who had taken sociology in high school is less clear. It is possible that this variable is working as a proxy for GPA and/or academic preparation. Sociology courses in high schools are often taught by teachers with little training in sociology (DeCesare 2005a; Lashbrook 2001). DeCesare (2005b), in his study of 95 years of high school sociology, concluded that high school sociology courses have tended to focus on social problems, current events, and citizenship education. Given this approach, a high school sociology course may not prepare students well for a college-level sociology course and may lead to overconfidence on

the part of students with respect to their learning and preparation for the college version of the course. Finally, there may be a selection effect within high schools, with less motivated students opting to take sociology. Given that the College Board does not offer an Advanced Placement (AP) version of Introductory Sociology, the better high school students may be choosing more rigorous AP courses as electives (AP Psychology, for example) instead of sociology. Insofar as this is the case, one would expect fewer gains among this group in classes taken in this, or any subject, at the college level. The lower performance on the research methods subscale in particular seems to support this hypothesis, as students are exposed to some of the concepts we measured (hypotheses, independent variable, and dependent variable) in AP courses in the natural sciences. Given DeCesare's studies (2005a, 2005b), which illustrate that high school teachers tend not to take a scientific approach to sociology, students who take sociology as a high school elective may be less likely to be exposed to these concepts.

Conclusion

In sum, the results of the assessment of the thematic Introductory Sociology course at Butler University suggest that students are making considerable learning gains in their understanding of the sociological perspective, major theoretical perspectives, research methods, and key sociological concepts. Of course, without a baseline of data from courses using the traditional survey of the discipline version of Introductory Sociology, we cannot claim that the learning in the thematic approach is greater than or less than in the traditional approach. Future research is needed to assess whether thematic courses are, in fact, superior to a more traditional "survey" approach in terms of their learning outcomes. What we do know from our study is that the thematic approach is a viable method for teaching what our department has defined as core concepts within sociology.

Due to the nonexperimental nature of this pretest-posttest design, it is not possible to rule out selection effects. We were not able to assign students randomly to sections of Introductory Sociology courses. Nor did we have data available regarding students' performance in other courses. We also did not attempt to control for instructors' pedagogical strategies across sections of the course. Most of the instructors used an interactive lecture approach, supplemented with other engagement strategies, as their primary pedagogy, but we made no attempt to measure the impact of variation in pedagogical approaches. Finally, our study can be criticized for relying on objective measures of student learning through multiple-choice questions rather than, for example, a more nuanced assessment of student writing using a grading rubric. However, one of our goals was to create an assessment measure that would be applicable across the range of themes used in the course and that would not create a significant additional workload for the faculty involved.

Ideally, an assessment instrument such as the one described herein would be used on multiple campuses using a variety of approaches to teaching Introductory Sociology. This would allow us to develop a measure of the relative merits of various approaches for promoting students' learning in sociology.

Echoing the comments of Zipp (2012), as well as Greenwood and Howard (2011), there remains a significant need for further debate, discussion, and, we hope, agreement on the key learning outcomes for Introductory Sociology in the discipline. Perhaps the greatest benefit of adopting the

thematic approach to teaching Introductory Sociology is that it forced faculty members to have needed conversations about what should be our shared goals for learning content and skills. Additionally, university and core curriculum assessment requirements forced us to address how we would seek to determine whether students are effectively learning that content and those skills. This study represents our attempt to take “another nibble at the core” by identifying what those learning outcomes could be and providing one means of assessing them. We encourage others to join in the conversation and to provide their views of the most appropriate Introductory Sociology learning outcomes and strategies to assess them.

Appendix

APPENDIX

Sample Assessment Questions

Sociological Theory

A sociologist using an interactionist approach in research at a Butler Bulldogs basketball game would probably focus on

- a. what books the coach of the team has read during the past year.
- b. a “fan” who has fallen asleep during the game’s final two minutes.
- c. the interaction among fans during the pregame ritual of tailgate parties.
- d. the cleanliness of the restroom facilities in Hinkle Fieldhouse.

Research Methods

Dr. Beck is interested in examining the relationship between violent video games and aggression in children. He makes an educated guess that may be either verified or discarded once he has examined the data. This educated guess is also known as a

- a. theory.
- b. open-ended question.
- c. rumination.
- d. hypothesis.

Key Concepts

A person who criticizes the Amish farmer (who tills his fields with horses) as uneducated and backwards is exhibiting

- a. ethnocentrism.
- b. cultural relativism.
- c. absolutism.
- d. the Thomas theorem.

Sociological Imagination

You are much more likely to experience a divorce from your spouse than were your grandparents. This is true because of all of the following except

- a. people in our grandparents’ generation were more moral people than we are.
 - b. a divorce is easier legally to get today.
 - c. the social costs of divorce are lower today.
 - d. women today have a greater ability to support themselves.
-

Note: The complete assessment instrument is available by request to the authors.

Notes

Reviewers for this manuscript were, in alphabetical order, Jamie Gusrang and Sara O’Sullivan.

1. For various reasons, 26 students took only the pretest or only the posttest. These 26 cases were fairly evenly distributed across the 12 sections of Introductory Sociology.
2. The results for the ANOVAs are as follows: total pretest, $F(6, 273) = .642, p = .697$; sociological perspective subscale, $F(6, 273) = .851, p = .532$; theoretical perspectives subscale, $F(6, 273) = .256, p = .956$; research

methods subscale, $F(6, 273) = .467, p = .832$; sociological concepts subscale, $F(6, 273) = 1.023, p = .411$. The F values and p values were similar for the ANOVA by section of the course.

Author Biographies

Jay R. Howard is dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and professor of sociology at Butler University. His research and teaching interests include introductory sociology, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and religion and popular culture.

Katherine B. Novak is professor of sociology at Butler University. Her research and teaching interests include youth and adolescent substance use, criminology, and social psychology. She is the co-author of the textbook *Individual and Society: Sociological Social Psychology* (Routledge 2013).

Krista M. C. Cline is assistant professor of sociology at Butler University. Her research and teaching interests include introductory sociology, research methods, gender and society, and women's health and well-being.

Marvin B. Scott is professor of sociology at Butler University. His research and teaching interests include introductory sociology, race and racism, caste and class, school desegregation, and polity and society.

References

- American Sociological Association. 1991. *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- Arum Richard, Roksa Josipa. 2011. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker David. 2005. "A Case for Nonsurvey Introductory Biology Courses." *Cell Biology Education* 4(2):128–31.
- Connor Mary E. 1998. "The Role of the Immigrant in United States History: A Thematic Approach." *Social Education* 62(7):421–26.
- D'Antonio William V. 1983. "Nibbling at the Core." *Teaching Sociology* 10(2):169–85.
- DeCesare Michael. 2005a. "The High School Sociology Teacher." *Teaching Sociology* 33(4):345–54.
- DeCesare Michael. 2005b. "95 Years of Teaching High School Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 33(3):236–51.
- Greenwood Nanc A., Howard Jay R. 2011. *First Contact: Teaching and Learning in Introductory Sociology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Halpern Diane F., Hakel Milton D. 2003. "Applying the Science of Learning to the University and Beyond." *Change* 35(4):36–41.
- Keith Bruce, Ender Morten G. 2004. "The Sociological Core: Conceptual Patterns and Idiosyncrasies in the Structure and Content of Introductory Sociology Textbooks, 1940–2000." *Teaching Sociology* 32(1):19–36.
- Lashbrook Jeff. 2001. "Sociology in High Schools: A Profile of New York State." *Teaching Sociology* 29(3):354–59.
- Lung Mark A. 1999. "A Thematic Approach: Making a Biology Course Relevant and Process-oriented." *The American Biology Teacher* 61(1):18–22.
- Pascarella Ernest T., Terenzini Patrick T. 2005. *How College Affects Students, Vol. 2*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ratcliff James L. 1997. "What Is a Curriculum and What Should It Be?" Pp. 5–29 in *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change*, edited by Gaff J. G., Ratcliff J. L., and associates. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sternberg Robert J., Pardo Jennifer. 1998. "Intelligence as a Unifying Themes for Teaching Cognitive Psychology." *Teaching of Psychology* 25(4):293–96.

Wagenaar Theodore C. 2004. "Is There a Core in Sociology? Results from a Survey." *Teaching Sociology* 32(1):1–18.

White V. Alan. 1990. "The Single-issue Introduction to Philosophy." *Teaching Philosophy* 13(1):13–9.

Zipp John F. 2012. "2011 Hans O. Mauksch Address: Teaching for Whom?" *Teaching Sociology* 40(4):301–11.

Table 1. Characteristics of Study Participants (N = 280).

Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Female	59.3
Male	40.7
Class standing	
Freshman	64.3
Sophomore	19.6
Junior	8.9
Senior	7.1
High school sociology course	
No	80.4
Yes	19.6
Sociology/criminology major	
No	92.1
Yes	7.9

Table 2. Paired t-Test Results (N = 280).

	Pretest		Posttest		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Total score	11.78	3.03	16.20	2.73	-23.03 ^a
Sociological perspective (range 0–5)	3.06	1.19	3.93	0.93	-11.78 ^a
Theoretical perspectives (range 0–6)	2.81	1.31	4.96	1.31	-21.66 ^a
Research methods (range 0–4)	3.04	0.98	3.55	0.71	-8.02 ^a
Sociological concepts (range 0–5)	2.88	1.09	3.76	1.05	-10.41 ^a

^ap < .001.

Table 3. Predictors of Pretest Performance (N = 280).

Variable	Total Score	Sociological Perspective Score	Theory Score	Research Methods Score	Concepts Score
Female	-.094	-.024	-.089	-.093	-.046
Class standing					
Sophomore	.050	.062	.014	.071	-.008
Junior	.156 ^a	.152 ^a	.057	.095	.116
Senior	.163 ^b	.151 ^a	.062	.105	.122 ^a
High school sociology	.038	.086	.002	.028	-.015
Sociology major	.070	.020	.017	.042	.118
R ²	.057	.047	.014	.030	.040

Note: All values given as beta.

^ap < .05. ^bp < .01.

Table 4. Predictors of Posttest Performance (N = 280).

Variables	Total Score	Sociological Perspective Score	Theory Score	Research Methods Score	Concepts Score
Female	.052	.001	.041	.083	-.020
Class standing					
Sophomore	.013	.002	.098	.021	-.087
Junior	.019	.012	.064	-.030	.052
Senior	.061	.061	.139 ^a	-.064	.048
H.S. Sociology	-.122 ^a	-.100	-.085	-.135 ^a	-.023
Sociology Major	.045	.111	.045	-.085	.062
Pretest Score	.380 ^c	.334 ^c	.185 ^b	.236 ^c	.093
R ²	.171	.139	.073	.079	.031

Note: All values given as beta.

^ap < .05. ^bp < .01. ^cp < .001