

Learning Goals

Department of Sociology, Merrimack College

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Merrimack College's Sociology Department subscribes to the 12 learning goals detailed on pp. 51-52 of the American Sociological Association's (2004) document *Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated: Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Sociology in the Twenty-First Century*.¹ They read as follows:

"The sociology major should study, review, and demonstrate understanding of the following:

1. The discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality, such that the student will be able to: (a) describe how sociology differs from and is similar to other social sciences and to give examples of these differences; (b) describe how sociology contributes to a liberal arts understanding of social reality; and (c) apply the sociological imagination, sociological principles, and concepts to her/his own life.
2. The role of theory in sociology, such that the student will be able to: (a) define theory and describe its role in building sociological knowledge; (b) compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations; (c) show how theories reflect the historical context of the times and cultures in which they were developed; and (d) describe and apply some basic theories or theoretical orientations in at least one area of social reality.
3. The role of evidence and qualitative and quantitative methods in sociology, such that the student will be able to: (a) identify basic methodological approaches and describe the general role of methods in building sociological knowledge; (b) compare and contrast the basic methodological approaches for gathering data; (c) design a research study in an area of choice and explain why various decisions were made; and (d) critically assess a published research report and explain how the study could have been improved.
4. The technical skills involved in retrieving information and data from the Internet and using computers appropriately for data analysis. The major should also be able to do (social) scientific technical writing that accurately conveys data findings and to show an understanding and application of principles of ethical practice as a sociologist.
5. Basic concepts in sociology and their fundamental theoretical interrelations, such that the student will be able to define, give examples, and demonstrate the relevance of culture; social change; socialization; stratification; social structure; institutions; and differentiations by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and class.

¹ Available at http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/documents/teaching/pdfs/Lib_Learning_FINAL.pdf.

6. How culture and social structure operate, such that the student will be able to: (a) show how institutions interlink in their effects on each other and on individuals; (b) demonstrate how social change factors such as population or urbanization affect social structures and individuals; (c) demonstrate how culture and social structure vary across time and place and the effect is of such variations; and (d) identify examples of specific policy implications using reasoning about social-structural effects.

7. Reciprocal relationships between individuals and society, such that the student will be able to: (a) explain how the self develops sociologically; (b) demonstrate how societal and structural factors influence individual behavior and the self's development; (c) demonstrate how social interaction and the self influences society and social structure; and (d) distinguish sociological approaches to analyzing the self from psychological, economic, and other approaches.

8. The macro/micro distinction, such that the student will be able to: (a) compare and contrast theories at one level with those at another; (b) summarize some research documenting connections between the two; and (c) develop a list of research or analytical issues that should be pursued to more fully understand the connections between the two.

9. In depth at least two specialty areas within sociology, such that the student will be able to: (a) summarize basic questions and issues in the areas; (b) compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations and middle range theories in the areas; (c) show how sociology helps understand the area; (d) summarize current research in the areas; and (e) develop specific policy implications of research and theories in the areas.

10. The internal diversity of American society and its place in the international context, such that the student will be able to describe: (a) the significance of variations by race, class, gender, and age; and (b) will know how to appropriately generalize or resist generalizations across groups.

Two more generic goals that should be pursued in sociology are:

11. To think critically, such that the student will be able to: (a) move easily from recall analysis and application to synthesis and evaluation; (b) identify underlying assumptions in particular theoretical orientations or arguments; (c) identify underlying assumptions in particular methodological approaches to an issue; (d) show how patterns of thought and knowledge are directly influenced by political-economic social structures; (e) present opposing viewpoints and alternative hypotheses on various issues; and (f) engage in teamwork where many or different viewpoints are presented.

12. To develop values, such that the student will see: (a) the utility of the sociological perspective as one of several perspectives on social reality; and (b) the importance of reducing the negative effects of social inequality.”