

TEACHING ALONE?

Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks ¹

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INTRODUCTION

This research brief is based on the first phase of a larger study to examine the changes in the size and structure of a teaching and learning network among American Sociological Association (ASA) members, prior to and after the implementation of a new interactive digital library. This teaching and learning network produces and consumes cutting edge pedagogy and teaching materials. In this first research brief we investigate the current size, structure, characteristics, and activities of this network that exchanges of ideas about pedagogy, curricula, and scholarship, prior to the launch of the TRAILS. This analysis is important because previous research demonstrates that studying network structures of academic communities can illustrate knowledge diffusion in a disciplinary field (Sharma and Urs 2008).

Since the mid 1980s, there has been an increased emphasis on the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning in institutions of higher education (Boyer 1990; Medley, Coker, and Soar 1994). Scholars of teaching and learning argue that activities designed to improve pedagogy and enhance curricula need to take place within a community of faculty members rather than in individual classrooms (Shulman 1999). Similar arguments are now being made that research and publishing should not be solitary activities (Cacioppo 2010). In this brief we ask if faculty members participate in networks that overcome isolation and to create and disseminate synthetic and cutting edge knowledge to improve pedagogy. Alternatively, are the majority of sociology faculty members teaching alone

within institutions that do not necessarily support participation in networks that have the goal of improving pedagogy and teaching and learning materials?

THE LIMITATIONS OF TEACHING ALONE

Being alone in the classroom with a group of students or teaching on-line with no one in the room at all can be an isolating activity. Teaching alone rather than in a community may be less likely to enrich curricula, quality of teaching, or the scholarship of the field since these activities are less likely to be evaluated and augmented by peers. The idea of teaching in isolation comes from Robert Putnam's influential book *Bowling Alone* (2000). Putnam argues that there is a decrease in face-to-face interactions in the associations that have traditionally created the social capital to build and maintain communities. There is much evidence both for and against this position. For example, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006; and Wuthnow 1998, dispute Putnam's conclusions by reanalyzing the same data. This research brief is not concerned with whether or not face-to-face networks are disappearing. Instead, it is concerned with sociology faculty members' ability to overcome situations of professional isolation through participating in teaching and learning networks that have the potential of increasing social capital.

Network analysis is distinguished by the attention it pays to the links and relations among actors within a social system (Rogers 2003; Wasserman and Faust 1994). Members of a scholarly network would share ideas, use similar techniques, and col-

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³ TRAILS stands for the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology.

laborate (Moody 2004). Social capital can be defined as the access to contacts and resources in communities and networks. According to Small, the resources that are provided by these networks include information, advice, opportunities, and reciprocity (2009:3). Participating in teaching and learning activities can increase social capital by providing potential presentation and publication opportunities, co-authors, editorships, and advice. Yet, Small (2009) also argues that the ability to participate in networks depends on the characteristics of the institutions in which individuals are associated.

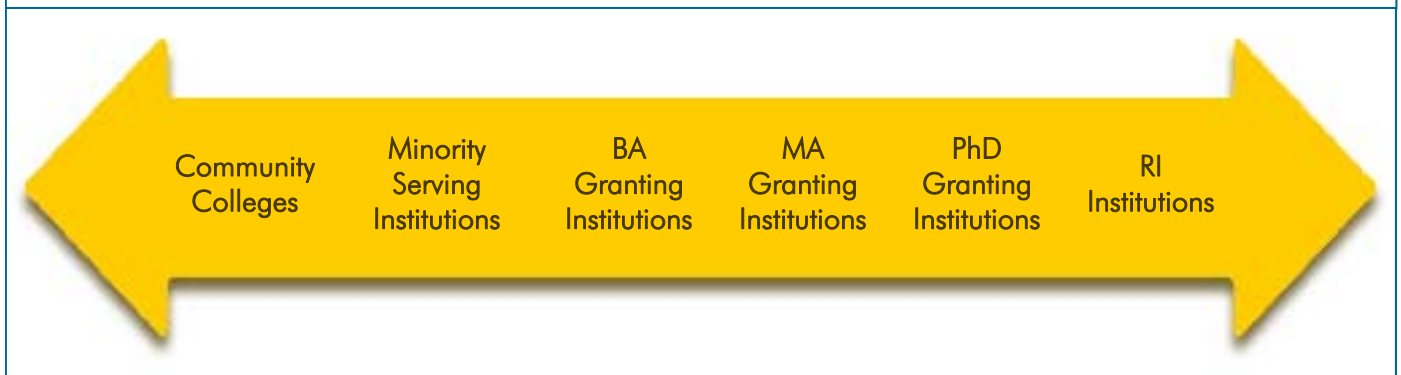
INVESTIGATING THE NETWORK

We measure the size and structure of the current network by examining the links among members of ASA that participate in at least 1 of 10 teaching and learning activities. We distinguish between “consumers” of activities such as purchasers of paper-based syllabi sets available from the former ASA Teaching Resource Center (TRC) and “producers” of knowledge such as authors of articles in the major ASA journal devoted to teaching and learning (*Teaching Sociology*). We make this distinction because each type of activity entails different modes of

through journal co-authorship, and joint conference and other presentations (not examined here).

We investigate also whether or not this potential exchange of social capital occurs across status groups. As Small (2009) suggests, individual network participation may depend on institutional characteristics. Therefore, we investigate whether network participation appears constrained or encouraged by academic departments across the spectrum of institutions of higher education (see Figure 1 for the range of schools we investigate; note that minority-serving institutions are examined as a separate category in this analysis, but in the larger higher education context do also overlap with the other categories). If cutting-edge social science education is needed along a broad spectrum of schools, are faculty members from each type of institution equally likely to produce and consume these materials? We suggest that faculty members from Research I schools are less likely to participate in a teaching and learning network than those at master’s and baccalaureate schools because there is more emphasis on research, outside funding, and publication, but less emphasis on teaching (Kelderman 2010). In addition, we ask whether all faculty members, regardless of their demographic characteristics, are

Figure 1 Spectrum of Science Education.



network participation. Consumption of teaching and learning materials is a one-way process in which consumers do not have input into the kind of knowledge that is being produced. In contrast, those who produce, edit, and review teaching and learning materials are engaged in interaction with other producers. For example, those who write articles for *Teaching Sociology* have interactions with those who review and edit these articles. This interaction is not necessarily face to face, however. Both consumption and production activities create opportunities for developing network ties. Network ties can provide information about cutting-edge readings, classroom exercises, and course outlines. They can result in the creation of additional social capital

equally likely to consume and produce teaching and learning knowledge. We suggest that this is not the case. Scholars who are professionally older will participate in more activities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this brief we answer a series of specific questions about the current teaching and learning situation in sociology. These include the following:

- Is there a teaching and learning network based on activities? What is its size and structure?
- In what type of teaching and learning activities do most network members participate?

- Does this vary by type of institution of higher learning?
- Does this vary by the characteristics of the participant?
- Does this network have a large core of faculty members who participate in all activities or is there a small core which connects the network?
- What are the characteristics of participants in the network?

RESEARCH DESIGN

DATA AND SAMPLE

The project team used the 2008 ASA membership database as the starting point for constructing the project dataset. The ASA membership database provides demographic, institutional, and participatory information including faculty member's gender, race, ethnicity, education level, year of PhD, employment status, institution, section membership, subscriptions to the journal *Teaching Sociology*, and purchase of syllabi sets from the former ASA Teaching Resource Center (TRC). Demographic and institutional information missing in the membership database was filled-in based on our searches of web-based resources (i.e. faculty curriculum vitae and biographies placed on departments' web sites). We identified and coded the type of institution where faculty members were employed based on Carnegie 2005 classification codes.

In addition to this information, we collected and integrated into the dataset additional participation data from other ASA sources about faculty members involvement in teaching and learning activities in 2008 which included the following: editing and contributing to the TRC materials, presenting at the Teaching and Learning section sessions and roundtables at the 2008 ASA Annual Meeting in Boston, publishing, reviewing, and editing articles in *Teaching Sociology*, serving on committees of the ASA Teaching and Learning section, and, finally, participating in the ASA Department Resources Group, or DRG (faculty consultants who assist departments with a wide variety of needs, including external reviews, curriculum development, and assessment). The full list of variables collected and the main sources of data are presented in the Appendix. Because we used only one year of data the network may appear to be less dense than it actually is.

Only 5,445 individuals were included in the study's sample out of the 14,426 ASA members in 2008. Those members who were included in the study

met the following four criteria: an individual had to 1) be an ASA regular, associate, or emeritus member of ASA, 2) reside in the U.S., 3) be employed by a U.S. higher education institution, and 4) be employed in a faculty teaching position (full-time or part-time). The study sample did not include college administrators, postdoctoral associates, graduate and undergraduate students, retirees, the unemployed, international scholars, or those employed outside academia. We assume that these individuals have a weaker interest in teaching and learning than faculty members.

RESEARCH METHODS

To analyze the patterns of purchase and participation we used two analytical tools. The first was network analysis to describe and visualize the structure of the network (or lack of it) of teaching and learning scholars. The second was negative binomial regression analysis to find who is more likely to be an active participant of the teaching and learning network.

Network Analysis. The network under study is an affiliation network. This means that relationships between individuals are identified based on a set of overlapping memberships (affiliations) in teaching and learning activities. Two individuals are connected when they participate in at least one activity together. Two activities are connected if any one individual participates in both of them. A visual representation of this network and a summary of its characteristics were obtained in UCINET, a widely-used type of network software.

Multivariate Regression. We analyze the pattern of participation in the teaching and learning network using negative binomial regression because our dependent variable is a count, but the observations are over-dispersed with respect to Poisson regression, that is, the dependent variable's variance exceeds sample mean. Standard errors are adjusted for clustering on departments because faculty members in the sample can come from the same departments.

FINDINGS

Is there a teaching and learning network based on activities? What is its structure?

Our examination of faculty's involvement in teaching and learning activities shows that in 2008 there is a relatively small teaching and learning network composed of faculty members who participate in at

Table 1 Participation in Teaching and Learning Activities by Total Number of Activities.

Total Number of Activities	All Faculty (Percent)	Entire Teaching and Learning Network (Percent)	Production of Knowledge Network (Percent)
No Activities	73.3	--	--
One Activity	16.9	63.5	76.0
Two Activities	6.7	24.9	14.8
Three Activities	1.9	7.2	5.3
Four or More Activities	1.2	4.4	3.8
TOTAL N	5,445	1,453	338

Source: ASA Research and Development Department, *Teaching Alone? Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks*, 2010.

least one activity, with a relatively small core of faculty who participate in three or more teaching and learning activities (Table 1). The teaching and learning network consists of 1,453 individuals who participated in at least 1 of 10 teaching and learning activities. All of these individuals are part of our larger sample of 5,445 academics. Almost three-quarters of faculty members in our sample do not get involved in teaching and learning activities (Figure 2). These are the faculty members who are

most likely to teach alone without support materials and networks.

In 2008, the last year of production of TRC materials, the teaching and learning network does not appear to be a tightly-knit set of connections among faculty members. Nor does it have a large core that holds the network together. For the 1,453 faculty who participate in teaching and learning activities (Figure 3), the average number of activities is only 1.6 out of 10. Almost two-thirds of faculty members in the network are involved in only one activity. As Figure 3 shows, the majority of these activities are conducted by faculty members in master's and baccalaureate schools. Faculty members from Research I institutions are

most likely to participate in writing articles and in making presentations, but they participate less in these activities than faculty from master's and baccalaureate schools.

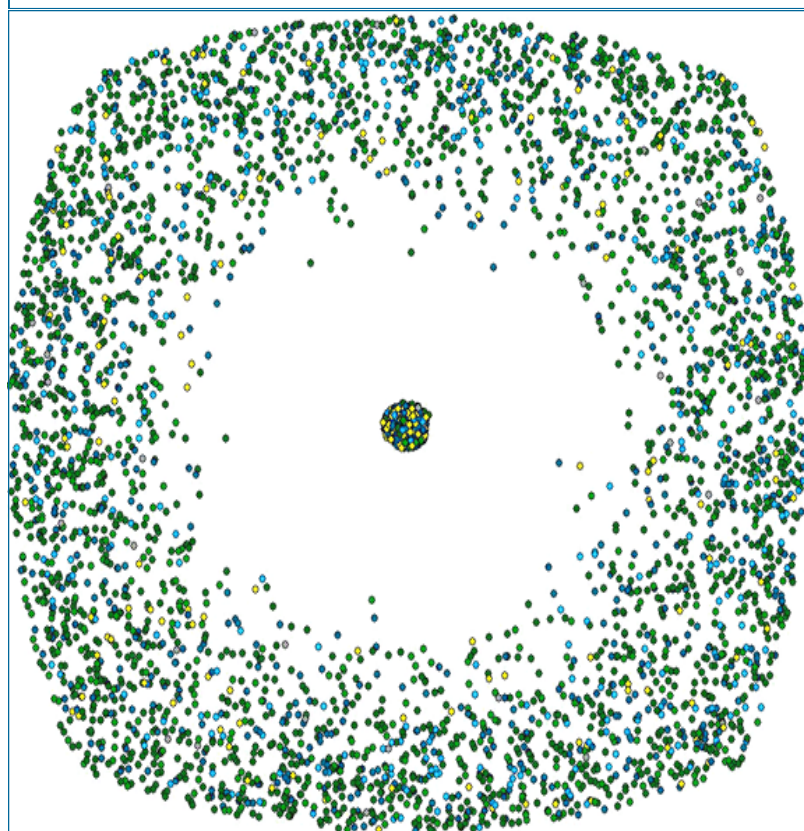
In what teaching and learning activities do network members participate?

Table 2 shows that 9 out of 10 network members are not producers of teaching and learning materials.

Instead they engage in consumption activities such as subscribing to *Teaching Sociology*. This is the most frequent activity (7 out of 10 network members subscribe to the journal), followed by membership in the Teaching and Learning section (3 out of 10), and purchase of TRC teaching and learning materials (1 in 4). Fewer than one-quarter engage in activities related to the production of teaching and learning knowledge such as editing and contributing to teaching materials for the former TRC and publishing and presenting research on teaching and learning, working on ASA Teaching and Learning section's committees or in the ASA Department Resources Group (DRG).

Subscribing to *Teaching Sociology* is the most central activity in the teaching and learning network (Table 2), based on closeness centrality. Closeness centrality reflects how close a node (a person or an ac-

Figure 2 Faculty's Involvement in Teaching and Learning Activities

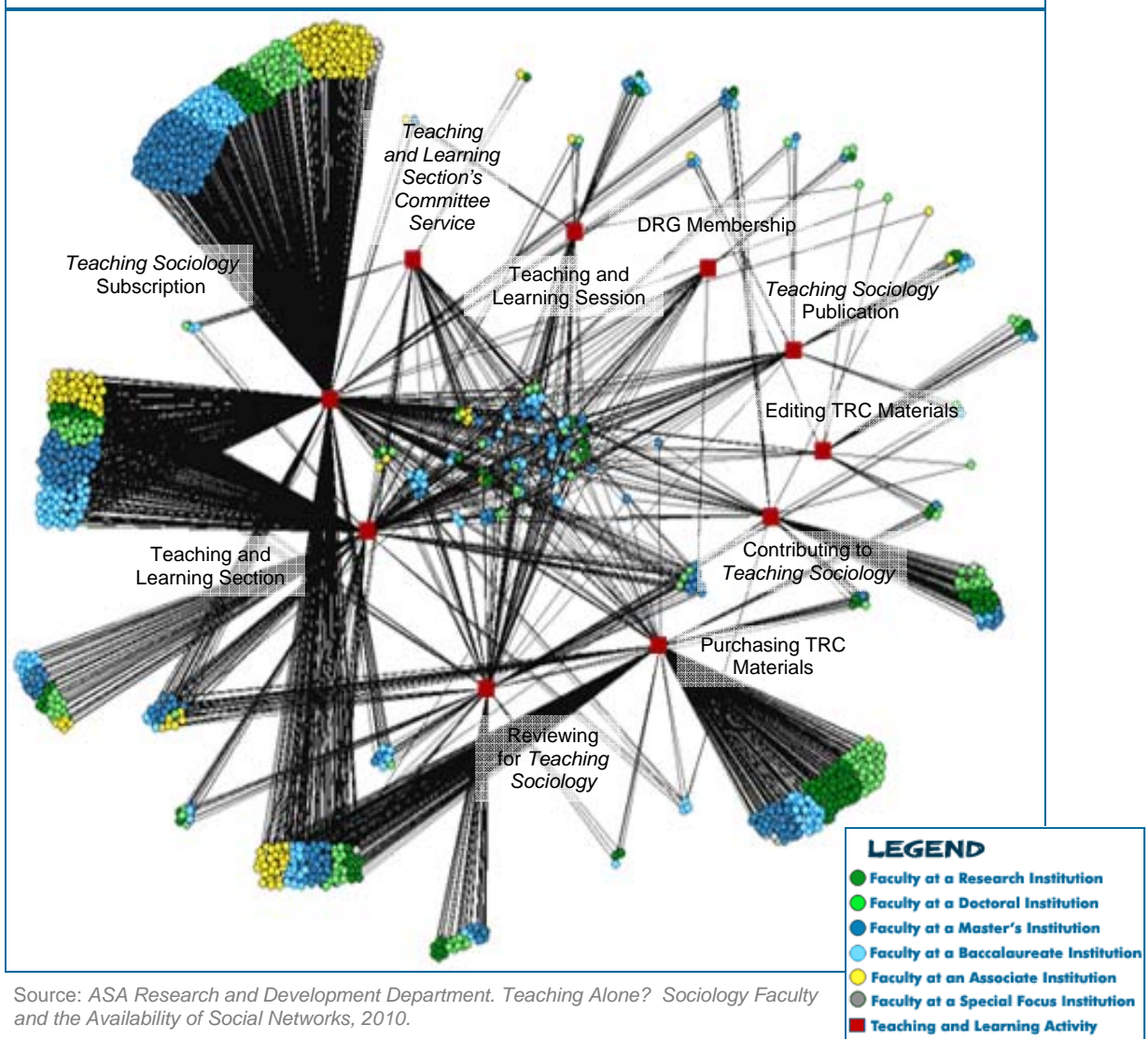


Source: ASA Research and Development Department. *Teaching Alone? Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks*, 2010.

LEGEND

- Faculty at a Research Institution
- Faculty at a Doctoral Institution
- Faculty at a Master's Institution
- Faculty at a Baccalaureate Institution
- Faculty at an Associate Institution
- Faculty at a Special Focus Institution
- Teaching and Learning Activity

Figure 3 Network of Faculty Involved in Teaching and Learning Activities (N=1,453).



Source: ASA Research and Development Department. *Teaching Alone? Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks*, 2010.

tivity) is to all other nodes in the network (Wasserman and Faust 1994). The centrality score is the inverse average distance between a node and all other nodes in the network. Nodes with higher scores have shorter communication paths to the others and are more productive in passing on information through the network.

Subscription is not only the most frequent activity; it also has the highest number of overlaps with other teaching and learning activities. Almost 9 out of 10 faculty members that engage in two or more activities subscribe to *Teaching Sociology* as one of them. The most frequent overlap is between two activities—subscribing to *Teaching Sociology* and joining the Teaching and Learning section (6 out of 10 faculty members engage in both of these activities). The least frequent overlap in this network is between production-oriented activities, which are also the least central activities. In 2008, fewer than six percent of all faculty mem-

bers in the network engage in two or more activities related to production of teaching and learning knowledge.

The core of the network consists of 169 faculty members who participate in three or more activities, which is about one ninth of the entire network. Core members participate in almost three times more activities than non-core members (Table 3). They are also almost three times less likely to work at Research I universities and more likely to work at master's and baccalaureate schools than non-core members. Practically all core members are involved in consumption activities. Four out of five core members are also involved in production activities, compared to one out of six non-core members. Core members dominate coordinating groups such as DRG and ASA Teaching and Learning Section's committees and make up the majority of teaching and learning scholars (*Teaching Sociology* authors or co-authors, re-

Table 2 Participation in Teaching and Learning Activities by Type of Activity.

Type of Activity	Entire Teaching and Learning Network		Production of Knowledge Network	
	% of Faculty Engaged in Activities	Activity's Closeness Centrality Score	% of Faculty Engaged in Activities	Activity's Closeness Centrality Score
CONSUMPTION ACTIVITIES	90.1	--	57.4	--
Subscription to <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	69.5	0.6	45.6	--
Membership in Teaching and Learning Section	30.0	0.4	39.4	--
Purchasing Teaching and Learning Materials	25.1	0.4	13.0	--
PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ACTIVITIES:	23.3	--	100.0	--
Editing Teaching and Learning Materials	1.7	0.3	7.4	0.4
Contributing to Teaching and Learning Materials	7.4	0.4	31.7	0.4
Serving on Teaching and Learning Section Committees	3.7	0.3	15.7	0.4
Membership in Department Resources Group	2.4	0.3	10.4	0.4
Reviewer for <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	10.1	0.4	43.5	0.5
Published in <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	3.6	0.3	15.4	0.4
Presentation in Teaching and Learning Section's Session	3.2	0.3	13.6	0.4
TOTAL N	1,453		338	

Table 3 Comparison of Core and non-Core Members of the Teaching and Learning Network.

	Core Members	Non-Core Members
PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES:		
Mean Number of Activities	3.7	1.3
Participation in Consumption Activities	99.4%	88.9%
% Participating in Production Activities	78.1%	16.0%
TYPE OF INSTITUTION:		
Research I Institutions	7.7%	18.1%
Master's and Baccalaureate Institutions	60.1%	46.9%
SHARE AMONG:		
Editors of Teaching and Learning Materials	24.0%	76.0%
Contributors to Teaching and Learning Materials	20.6%	79.4%
Teaching and Learning Section Committees	88.7%	11.3%
Department Resources Group	88.6%	11.4%
Reviewers for <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	57.1%	42.9%
Published in <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	63.5%	36.5%
Presenters in Teaching and Learning Section's Sessions	60.9%	39.1%
TOTAL N	169	1284

Source (Tables 2 and 3): ASA Research and Development Department. *Teaching Alone? Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks*, 2010.

viewers, and ASA Teaching and Learning section session presenters), while the consumption of the teaching and learning materials is dominated by non-core members.

What is the Network Structure of Producers of Teaching and Learning Knowledge?

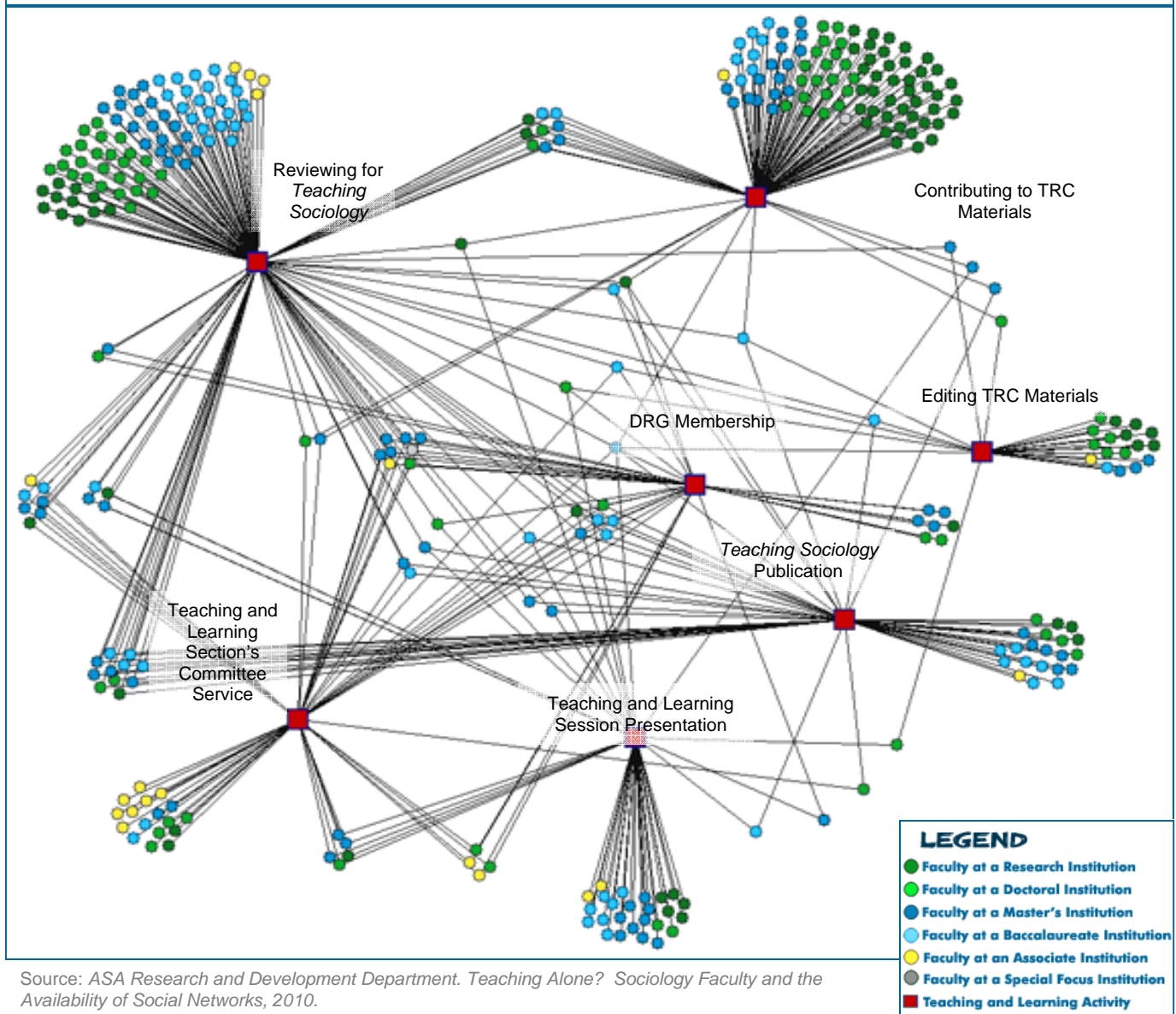
A closer look at the scholars actively involved in the production of teaching and learning knowledge in 2008 reveals a network consisting of 338 faculty members (Figure 4) with majority of producers (about three-quarters) involved in just one activity. In this network of knowledge production, the most central activities are reviewing for *Teaching Sociology* and contributing to the syllabi sets teaching and learning materials, based on closeness centrality. The core of the production network consists of just 13 people who are engaged in four or more activities. All 13 are full-time faculty from sociology departments. Only four of them are employed at research or doctoral institutions, while the rest are employed at master's and baccalaureate institutions (none from community colleges). Seven top activists are from the Midwest and none are from the West. All 13 served as reviewers for *Teaching Sociology*; all but one published an article in this journal; all but two are members of the DRG, and eight of them served on the ASA Teaching and Learning section's committees.

What are the individual and institutional characteristics of participants in the network?

The regression analysis shows who are significantly more engaged in teaching and learning activities (Figure 5). We find that women, on average, get involved in more teaching and learning activities, while racial/ethnic minorities, early career faculty, and faculty members with PhDs get involved in fewer teaching and learning activities.

Analysis of institutional characteristics shows that faculty from all other types of institutions are more engaged in consuming and producing teaching and learning

Figure 4 Network of Production of Teaching and Learning Knowledge (N=338)



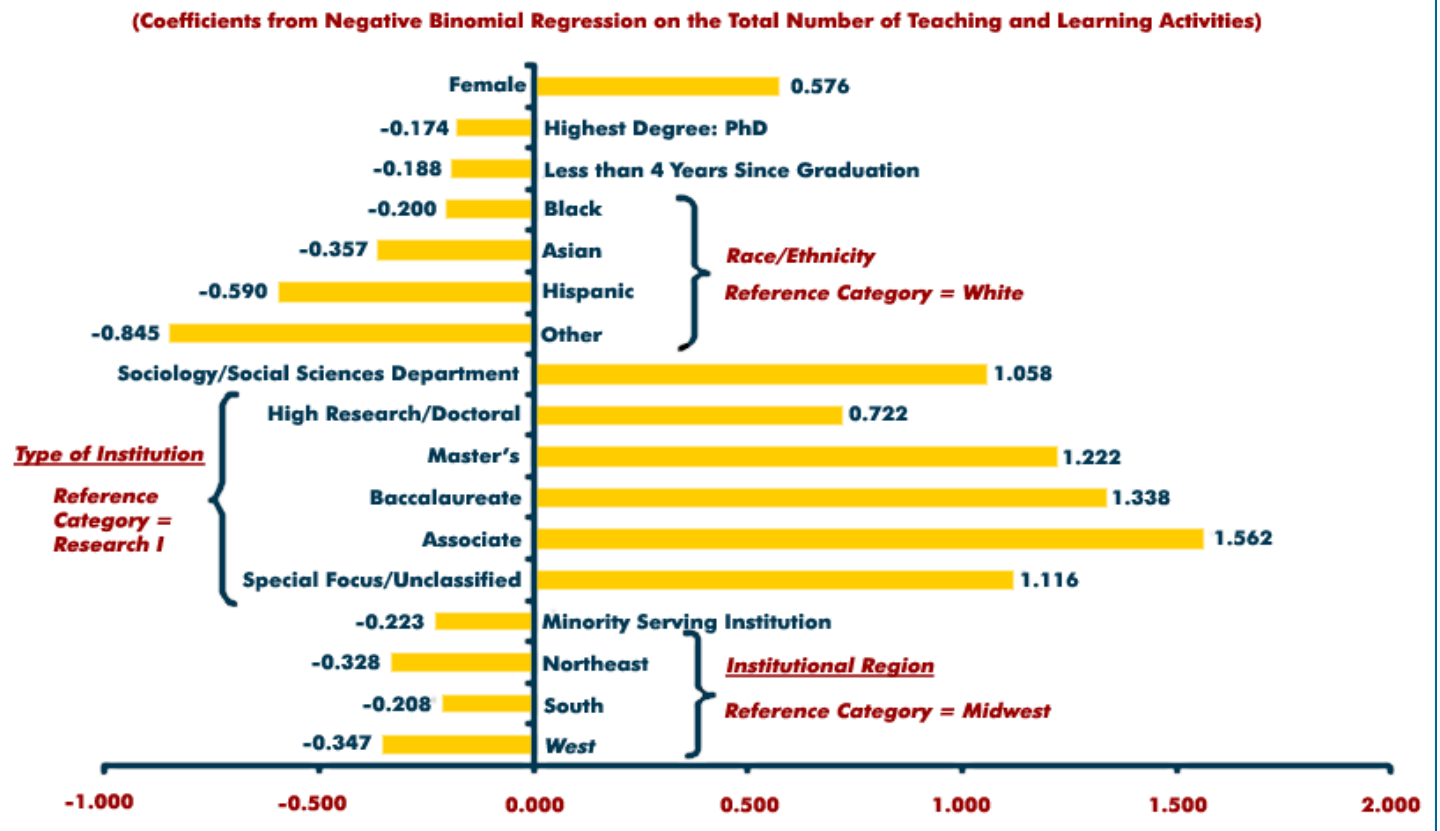
Source: ASA Research and Development Department. *Teaching Alone? Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks*, 2010.

activities faculty from Research I universities. Faculty members from Research I institutions are most likely to participate in writing articles and in making presentations, but overall they tend to participate in fewer activities than faculty from master's and baccalaureate schools. Faculty members from minority-serving institutions participate in significantly fewer teaching and learning activities than faculty from other institutions. We find significant regional differences in involvement with teaching and learning: faculty from universities and colleges located in the Midwest participate in more activities than faculty from any other region. Not surprisingly, faculty from sociology and social sciences departments are more involved in both networks than faculty from other types of departments/schools. These different participation levels can be seen in the network diagrams as well as Figure 5.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This first phase of the study shows that 3 out of 4 faculty members who belong to ASA can be described as teaching alone because they do not gain social capital in the form of resources or contacts from a teaching and learning affiliation network. Network activities include consuming information and producing cutting edge knowledge. The 2008 networks that we saw represented in the diagrams are not a densely connected set of participants. The majority of those who do participate engage in a single consumption activity—subscribing to *Teaching Sociology*. A smaller network of sociology faculty members produce teaching and learning knowledge, but even here most participants engage in only one activity. Both networks have low density with small cores of faculty who link individuals to one another.

Figure 5 Who Participates in Teaching and Learning Activities?



Note: Variables not significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed test) and controls for missing data are not shown.

Source: ASA Research and Development Department. *Teaching Alone? Sociology Faculty and the Availability of Social Networks*, 2010.

We did find significant differences between those who do and do not participate in the network. As we expected, those who are professionally older participate in more activities. Those who are at the center of the knowledge production network are seasoned faculty members with histories of participation. Those who teach at Research I universities are less likely than those in master's or baccalaureate schools to participate in network activities, probably because their institutions do not reward them for teaching as much as they reward them for obtaining grants, doing research, and publishing. The most typical network participant is a tenured white woman with a master's degree from a sociology department employed at a teaching-oriented college or university in the Midwest.

In the second phase of the study we will investigate the changes that occur in size, structure, and characteristics of the 2008 teaching and learning network as a result of the first year of implementation of the new interactive teaching and learning digital library (TRAILS). We ask, are the early users of this new technology already participants in the teaching and learning network, are they central to this network, or are they marginal? Does the use of this new system diffuse through the current teaching and

learning network or go beyond it? Do individuals who subscribe to TRAILS have the same demographic characteristics as those who purchase TRC materials? Are they from the same institutions of higher education or does the scope of the network increase across a broader array of institutions and departments? Compared to the current network, in which the average number of activities is 1.6 out of 10, will TRAILS subscribers both consume and produce teaching and learning knowledge at a higher rate? As a result, will fewer faculty members be teaching alone? The answers to these questions will shed light on the relationship between network structure and the diffusion of a teaching and learning innovation. In the final phase of the project we will begin to implement a series of strategies, such as providing subscription rates for entire departments rather than individuals, or providing free subscriptions to departments in under-resourced institutions through regional sociology organizations. We will find whether these interventions are necessary to increase the size and scope of the teaching and learning network across a broader array of people and institutions.

Appendix Variables Collected by Source of Information.

Variables	Source of Information
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	
Gender	ASA Membership Database
Race/Ethnicity	ASA Membership Database
Highest Degree Received	ASA Membership Database
Professional Age	ASA Membership Database
INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
Historically Black College/University	ASA Membership Database: 2005 Carnegie Codes
Type of Institution	ASA Membership Database: 2005 Carnegie Codes
Region	ASA Membership Database: 2005 Carnegie Codes
DEPARTMENT CHARACTERISTICS	
Departmental Affiliate	ASA List of Department Affiliates
Sociology/Social Science Focus	ASA Membership Database
Participation in Teaching and Learning Activities	
Subscription to <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	ASA Membership Database
Membership in Teaching and Learning Section	ASA Membership Database
Purchasing Teaching and Learning Materials from TRC	ASA List of TRC Editors
Editing Teaching and Learning Materials	ASA List of TRC Contributors
Serving on Teaching and Learning Section's Committees	ASA Lists of Teaching and Learning Section's Committee Members
Membership in DRG	ASA List of DRG Members
Reviewer for <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	<i>Teaching Sociology</i>, 2008, Vol. 36, Issue 4, Pp. 412-415; <i>Teaching Sociology</i>, 2009, Vol. 37, Issue 4, Pp. 436-438
Published in <i>Teaching Sociology</i>	<i>Teaching Sociology</i>, 2008, Vol. 36, Issue 4, Pp. 416-421
Presented in Teaching and Learning Section's Sessions	2008 Annual Meeting Program

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AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

As the national organization for sociologists, the American Sociological Association, through its Executive Office, is well positioned to provide a unique set of services to its members and to promote the vitality, visibility, and diversity of the discipline. Working at the national and international levels, the Association aims to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.

ASA RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The ASA Research and Development Department is responsible for developing and disseminating knowledge on sociology both as a discipline and a profession by collecting primary and secondary data, by building and maintaining databases, and disseminating findings in a variety of formats so that members of the profession to benefit can use them for research, policy, and planning purposes.

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