

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT SURVEY
RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES

1

*Changes in Technology, Courses,
and Resources*

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR DEPARTMENT?
THE AY 2011-2012 DEPARTMENT SURVEY

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OVERVIEW

This research brief, based on data from the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Academic Year 2012-2013 Department Survey, examines changes that have occurred in sociology classrooms. We examine changes such as online courses, in-class technology, new courses, and whether departments have gained resources to bring about these changes. There may be a number of explanations for these changes. First, they may be the result of efforts to improve student outcomes while saving costs (Kerwin, as cited in Parry 2013). Second, they may result from motives to increase the scope and content of sociology courses to compete with vocationally-oriented majors and to recruit additional students. Third, they may be part of an effort to recruit and retain students by making these major users of technology more comfortable and stronger participants in the classroom. All three of these issues are discussed and debated within the discipline.

New Technology in Institutions of Higher Education

Perhaps the most hotly debated of these issues, followed in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, is whether student outcomes are better if they are exposed to in-person courses or online courses. A recent study by the U.S. Department of Education (Means et al. 2010) suggests that students taking a course online do as well if not slightly better than those in the more traditional classroom. However there is not uniform agreement on the benefits of online courses. For example, a small study of community college students suggests that they do not take "harder courses" online and feel that they learn more in face-to-face classes (Schnoebelen 2013). Another commenter disputes the value of online learning above classroom teaching by regular faculty, noting that most online courses are taught by adjunct faculty who are marginal to departmental goals and curricula. He questions whether they produce high-quality

dialogue and creative teaching (Donoghue 2011). Another critic notes that the courses that do exist are scattered and helter-skelter, not forming coherent curriculum, and that we do not know much about them, including who is teaching them, and what students have access to them. Most recently, the faculty at Duke University's undergraduate college voted against online credit courses on the grounds that students paying the high tuition rates at Duke should not have to watch recorded lectures rather than the "responsiveness of a professor who teaches to the passions and curiosities of students" (Kolowich 2013). Presidents of universities and colleges have reservations about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), although foundation and university boards appear to support them. According to Jaschick (2013), a recent Inside Higher Education/Gallup Poll shows that only small minorities of college presidents strongly believe that they will improve the learning of all students (3%), solve colleges' financial challenges (2%), or cut what students spend on higher education (8%). In addition, there are questions as to whether online courses—and especially MOOCs—will benefit graduate education at the master's and doctorate level (Patton 2013). Although MOOCs appear to be a growing part of teaching and learning, there appears to be much skepticism about their value.

Along with online courses, sociology departments are employing a range of in-class technology including clickers, white and black boards, and games. In general, the evaluation of these devices by those outside of sociology is positive. Ryan (2012) suggests that in-class technology can serve a variety of pedagogical purposes including conducting primary source research, organizing work, and learning in groups. Games in the classroom are described as a means of rethinking classroom structure and as sites for collaboration and "playful" learning (Salter 2011). In discussing what in-class technology would result in an ideal classroom, Williams (2010) points to interactive white boards, to which he admits that he is addicted, for displaying and projecting information. Williams' article also enumerates

the positive factors of using clickers (wireless handheld devices) in the classroom. Another article lauds the use of clickers and suggests that the use of these devices allows for independent responses, especially from those who are too unsure to verbalize their responses in class. Students can talk about differences in responses, but if there are few differences faculty members can move on with the next question. Clickers are thought to be useful in gaining more background information from students that they might not want to verbalize publically. However, at this point clickers are best for multiple choice questions (Shieh 2009).

The Market for Majors and Courses

Many analysts of higher education have discussed the growth of the “market model” in academia (Brint et al. [forthcoming]; Collis 2002; Donoghue 2008; Gumport 2002; Powell and Smith 2002; Slaughter 2002; Slaughter and Rhodes 2004), suggesting that there could be several types of market signals, including the labor market driven, donor driven, and student driven, to which higher educational institutions respond. Brint et al. find that it is the student market that is most salient in driving curriculum. If students are “voting with their feet,” most of the growth is in vocationally-oriented departments such as financial management, health administration, environmental engineering, computer and information science, public administration and policy, and criminal justice. In contrast, the number of students in the social sciences has remained stable. The authors hypothesize further that less prestigious colleges will be least likely to be able to insulate themselves from market models. Given the limited growth in sociology (which remained flat between 2008 and 2010), there are more questions from students and parents as to what students can do with a sociology degree and whether these jobs will allow them to pay back their student loans. In light of those questions, sociology programs may be under increasing pressure to develop courses that seem to boost the possibility of success in the job market and to be competitive with more professionally-

and vocationally-oriented majors or what Brint (2002) calls the “practical arts.” However, there are debates within the discipline as to whether departments should become more “vocationally-oriented” and become better career advisors in order to aid students in obtaining jobs that will reflect what they have learned as a sociology major (Spalter-Roth et al. 2010).

Changes in Available Resources

During the early years of the Great Recession and its aftermath, sociology departments faced losses in faculty, increases in teaching loads, and uncertainty about the future. Some schools in need of new faculty were not authorized to conduct searches, while others found their positions frozen and searches already underway cancelled (Spalter-Roth et al. 2009). The median number of courses taught by faculty members increased by 1.33 since 2001 (Spalter-Roth and Scelza 2009). In their own words, department chairs registered the following complaints. For example:

“Too many students, too few resources.”

“We have nearly doubled in size with the influx of education majors choosing sociology as their second major. We have not had an increase in faculty...”

“We face increasing demand to offer more courses with fewer faculty.”

“Too high a ratio of majors to FTE faculty.”

“Looming retirements and uncertainty about position replacement.”

These findings suggest that sociology departments saw a decline in resources to design new courses and develop online technology.

The purpose of this research brief is to learn whether sociology departments have incorporated online courses, in-class technology, vocationally oriented classes, and to what extent they have the resources to do so. The findings

suggest that, on average, in AY 2012-2013, sociology departments had fewer resources although they designed new courses and developed online technology.

SURVEY DESIGN AND METHODS

Locating the Universe and Survey Design

What's Happening in Your Department? is an ASA study based on a survey of the universe of chairs of stand-alone academic sociology departments and joint departments or divisions that awarded at least one Bachelor's degree in sociology during the 2010-2011 academic year. The master list of academic departments was developed using the National Center for Educational Statistics 2010-2011 *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Completions Survey*. To maintain quality control and to ensure that all relevant departments were included in the master database, the IPEDS data were cross-checked with ASA's internal database of academic sociology departments, and non-matching records were examined to determine whether they were to be included in the survey database. Sociology departments whose points of contact were missing or incomplete were searched for online to obtain the email and mailing address of the appropriate individual(s). This resulted in a total of 1,037 valid records.¹ During the survey administration, it was determined that 12 departments were invalid because they either no longer were stand-alone departments or were improperly recorded as such in the IPEDS database, or were duplicated in the original master list. This resulted in an adjusted master list of 1,025 records.

The survey instrument was designed in early 2012 by the ASA Department of Research on the Discipline and Profession in collaboration with the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Indiana University. Many of the survey questions were comparable to the 2002 and 2007 ASA Department Surveys, along with new questions on use of new technology, new courses, and changes in department resources. These new questions were responses to concerns expressed by academic department chairs' attending events for them at regional and national sociology meetings. The resulting survey consisted of six sections and 30 primary questions with skip patterns and sub-questions where appropriate. The six sections included questions about changes in department resources, assessment of student learning and career preparation, department structure for undergraduate degrees, subfields offered for undergraduate degrees, graduate programs, and faculty characteristics. Qualitative responses were permitted where applicable or necessary. The online survey was set up so that more than one member of the department could respond to the section about which he/she knew the most.

To ensure quality control and to obtain critical feedback for finalizing the instrument, the survey—which was administered entirely online—was pilot tested by ASA senior staff with experience in academic sociology departments, and adjustments to the instrument were made accordingly.

Survey Administration and Response Rates

The survey was exclusively web based, and was administered by the CSR. To increase response rates, all department chair contacts in our master database were sent a hardcopy

¹In several instances during administration of the survey, contacts who were identified in our database as department chairs replied to inform us that they no longer held their position as chair (e.g., due to recent retirement). For those persons, we either conducted a search for the new chair/appropriate contact and distributed an email invitation to that person, or the former chair provided us with information that allowed us to send a survey invitation to the appropriate contact.

pre-notification letter signed by ASA Executive Officer Sally T. Hillsman on June 5, 2012, alerting them that they would be receiving an email invitation to participate in the survey. The survey was launched on June 28, 2012 through an email invitation also sent on behalf of Sally Hillsman. Email recipients were provided with a unique survey login identification number to access the online survey. All email invitations and follow-up reminders included an opt-out link for those who did not wish to receive further communications about the survey, and potential respondents were notified that participation was voluntary. Six follow-up email reminders were sent to non-respondents during the course of the survey (including one on behalf of then ASA President Erik Olin Wright), in addition to a postcard reminder that was sent to them early in September 2012. The survey was closed on December 28, 2012.

Altogether, 645 valid responses out of a potential 1,025 were received, for a final response rate of approximately 63%—a 3% increase compared to the 2007 survey. The majority of responding departments consisted of Masters degree-granting institutions—based on 2010 institutional classifications (“Carnegie Codes”) from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching—at 42.3%, followed by Baccalaureate-only institutions at 28.2%, Research institutions at 23.7%, and Doctoral institutions at 5.7%. The largest increase in responses was among Research Institutions (23.7% in 2012 compared to 17.3% in 2007). The largest decrease was among Doctoral institutions (5.7% in 2012 compared to 10.2% in 2007). Although unlikely, the small changes in Carnegie institutional classifications over the five-year period might explain the differences in the number of responses by Research and Doctoral institutions. We did not weight these data because the response rate by type of institution (as categorized by Carnegie Codes) generally corresponded with the percentage of each type of institution in the universe.²

FINDINGS

As we will see, some sociology departments are using at least several of these technological developments whereas others are using none. The explanation for this variance may be the time involved in setting up these courses and implementing of new technologies and new courses that meet high standards for student learning and do not result in the loss of tenure-track or tenured faculty. Not all departments have the resources to implement these changes, even if faculty members agree that they are important.

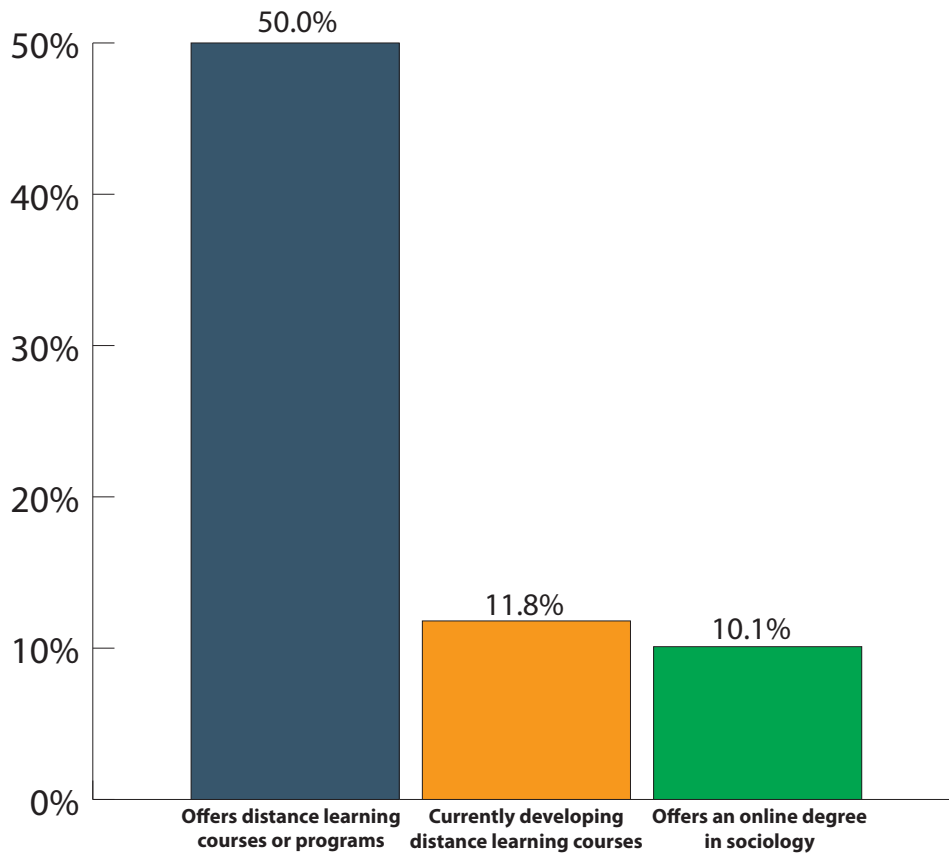
Findings about Online Courses or Distance Learning

The responses to the AY 2012-2013 Department Survey indicate that half of sociology departments (50.0%) offer at least one distance learning course in sociology. An additional 11.8% responded that they were developing such a course, and about the same percentage of departments reported that their departments offered an online degree in sociology (see Figure 1). We do not know whether these courses are completely conducted online, whether they are MOOCs, or whether they are what is referred to as “hybrid” courses, partly done in classrooms with faculty members and partly done online. Nor are we sure of the direction in which sociology departments are headed. In talking about the college of the future, Parry (2010) asks whether the hybrid learning model will become the “new normal” or will more and more students take all online courses via MOOCs. Given the limited number of questions we asked on the Department Survey, we are not clear what “the new normal” is or will be.

Of the 321 chairs that responded that their departments had undertaken at least one online or

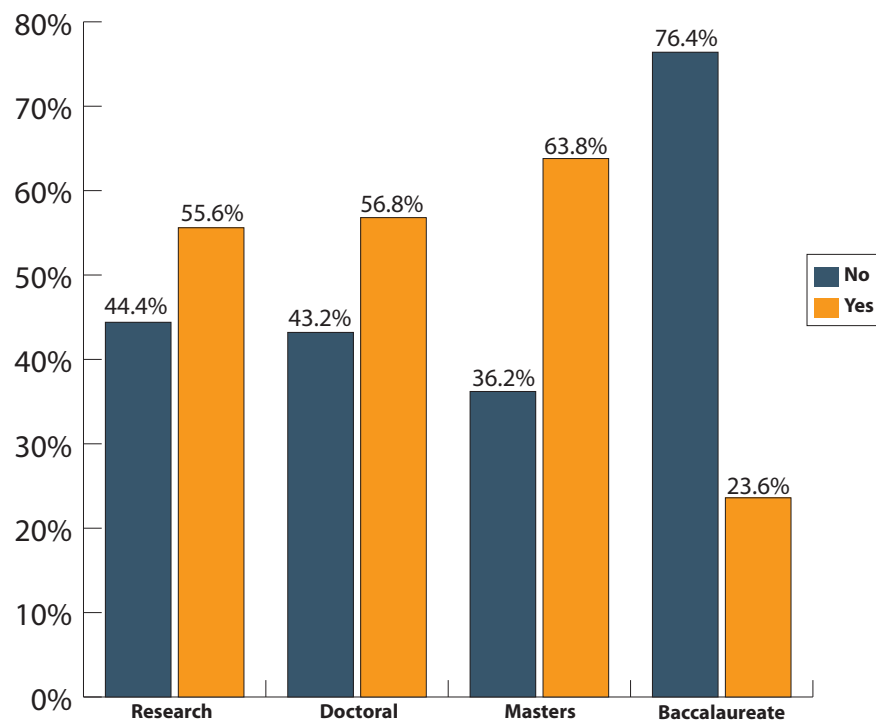
²There was a small under-representation of Research 1 institutions of about 5%.

Figure 1. Online Courses and Degree Offerings: 2012.



Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

Figure 2. Online Course Offerings by Type of School: 2012.



Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

distance learning course, masters' comprehensive institutions were the most likely to have done so (see Figure 2). Fully 63.8% of all master's programs are teaching online courses compared to 55.6% of all research institutions and 23.6% of baccalaureate-only institutions. These differences are statistically significant. The decrease in public funding may explain the growth of online courses at master's departments, many of which have students already in the labor force that cannot attend school full-time. Yet, even at baccalaureate-only institutions, technology—in tandem with innovations in pedagogy and the changing characteristics of students and their increasing use of online technology—is bringing about changes (Nshyba 2013).

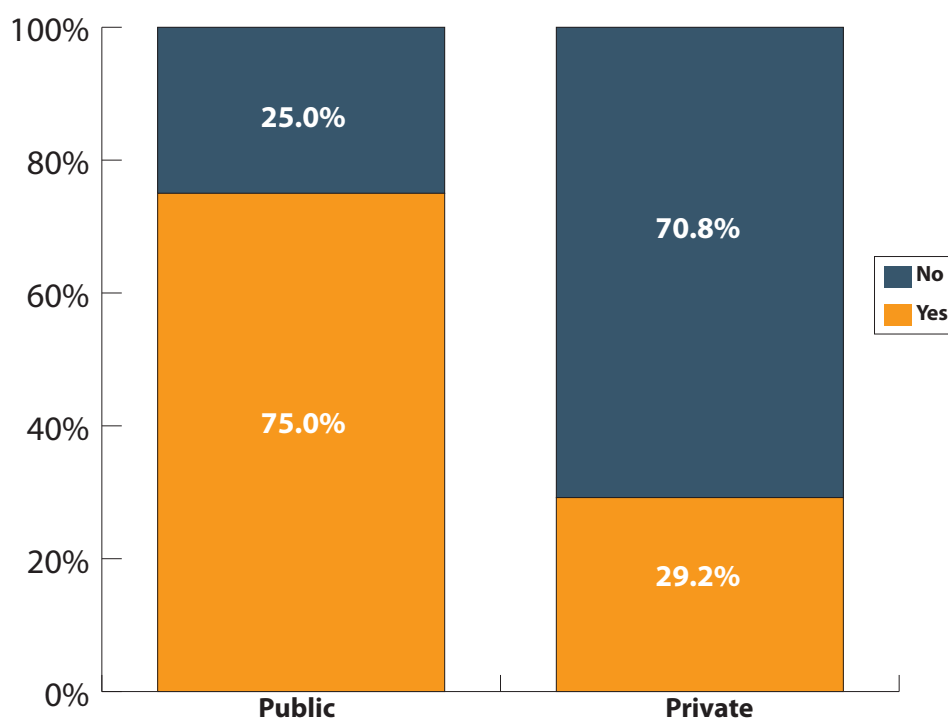
Of the small number of departments that responded that they are developing online or distance learning courses, master's comprehensive institutions were once again the most likely to respond that they were doing so (21.0% compared to 9.2% of research universities). Here again, differences were statistically significant.

Public versus Private Institutions

A report, "State U. Online" by Rachel Fishman, cited in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Huckabee 2013), claims that private universities are ahead of public universities in terms of the development and use of online education efforts. In contrast, the results of this ASA survey found the opposite to be the case in responding sociology departments (see Figure 3).

A higher percentage of departments at private schools responded to the AY 2012-2013 Department Survey (54.1% versus 45.9% of "public" schools). Yet, we find that the percentage of public schools was almost three times as likely to respond that their department offered distance or online courses. This finding was statistically significant (75.0% of public institutions responded "yes" compared to 29.2% of private institutions). The difference may be explained by several factors including pressure on state universities to reduce costs, private institutions include many small baccalaureate schools that do not develop

Figure 3. Online Course Offerings by Public/Private Institution: 2012.



Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

these kind of courses because they have fewer resources in terms of IT personnel and faculty who have the time to develop online courses (given relatively high course loads), or because face-to-face contact with faculty members is considered the strength of these schools.

In addition, the percentage of the small number of institutions that are developing online courses is higher at public institutions compared to private ones (21.1% versus 9.3%), and the difference is statistically significant. The difference between departments at public and at private institutions that offer online degrees is not statistically significant, although the percentage at public institutions is almost twice as large as departments at private institutions (11.7% compared to 6.7%).

Findings about Technology in the Classroom

Over the past several decades, there has been an increased emphasis on the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning at all

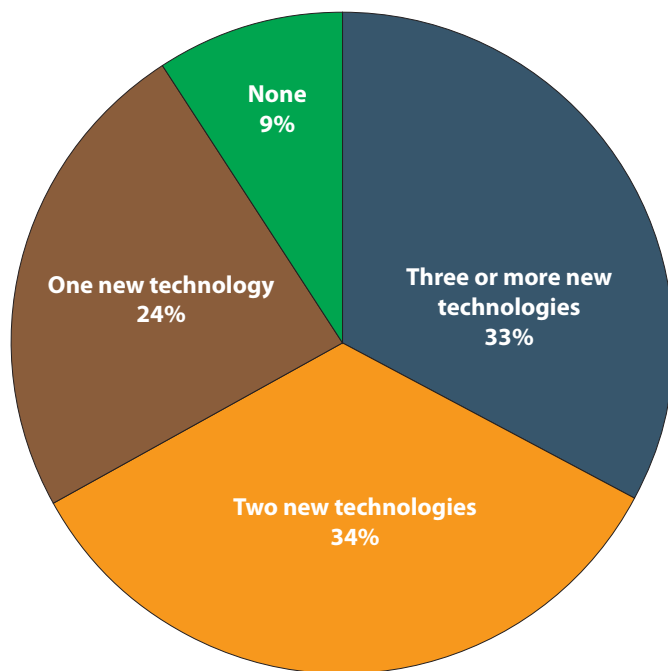


Figure 4. Number of New Types of Technology Used in the Classroom: 2012.

Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

levels of institutions of higher education. Increasingly, the optimal learning context has come to be seen as an inquiry-based process that involves active participation by students (Evans et al. 2005; Paino et al. 2012). As a result of this teaching and learning movement, there is increasing pressure for faculty members across disciplines to move away from the traditional lecture approach. Part of this movement to new teaching and learning methods may be the increased use of technology in the classroom. Ryan (2012) suggests that in-class technology can serve a variety of pedagogical purposes including conducting primary source research, organizing work, and learning in groups.

Based on the questions asked on the AY 2012-2013 ASA Department Survey, we cannot answer whether the use of in-class technology such as clickers, interactive whiteboards, discussion boards, social networking sites, or online games increases inquiry-based learning and active participation by students. However, we find that only 9% of responding departments are using none of these techniques, with 24% using one, 34.1% using two, and an additional 21.8% using at least three techniques (see Figure 4). The most widely used technology is discussion boards, with 82.8% of responding departments agreeing that they use this technology, followed by more than half (61.7%) that use social networking sites. A substantially smaller percent of responding departments uses the other technologies that were listed in the survey, with fewer than 30% using interactive white boards or online games.

New Courses

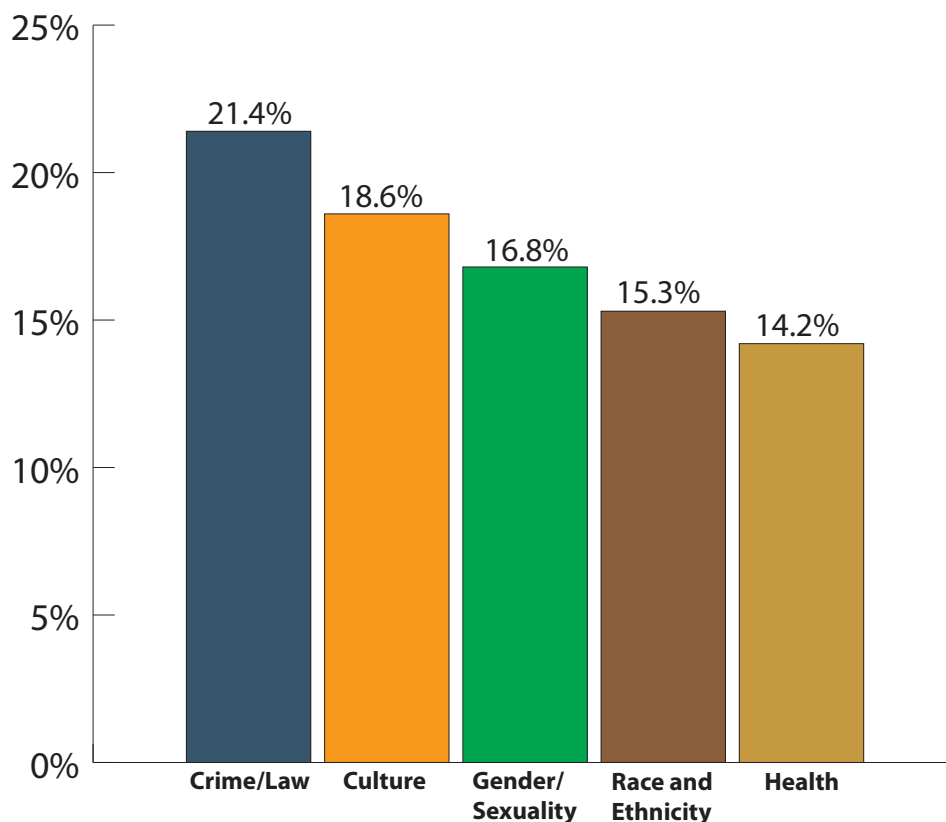
The overwhelming majority of responding departments (85.2%) developed new courses in the past three years. There are no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of creating new courses by type of institution as

ordered by Carnegie code. Some of these new courses may teach the skills and concepts that, if translated and listed on resumes, can improve the likelihood of obtaining jobs that reflect the skills that are learned by sociology majors, and ultimately result in job satisfaction (Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2008). These courses may be on-line, hybrid, or face-to-face in classrooms. At this point we do not have more information about the format of these classes. Among the top-five new courses listed below, most appear to be student-driven, although some appear to be more vocationally oriented and some are more theoretically or conceptually oriented (see Figure 5). The largest percent of new courses are in criminology and criminal justice (21.4%). This subfield may be student driven because of their views of high employer demand and exposure to these types of occupations in the media. The growth of this subfield is not surprising given the relatively high number of combined sociology and criminology departments as well as the large number

of sociology majors specializing in this subfield. Several departments reported that criminology was a new major; for example, one of these departments offered seven new courses in this subfield. However, department chairs suggest that there may be a cost to the sociology major when subfields or new majors are developed. As one department chair noted, a major problem in his or her department was "A decrease in sociology majors when a criminal justice major began." This is a common observation by sociology department chairs.

The second largest percent of new course is the study of culture (18.6%) including courses such as culture, media, and society; cultural area studies; culture and globalization; collective memory and identity; knowledge, music and society; and sociology of culture. These courses may well be student driven since it has the largest number of student members among all of the ASA sections (Scelza and Spalter-Roth 2011). It is probably

Figure 5. Top-Five New Courses Offered: 2012.



Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

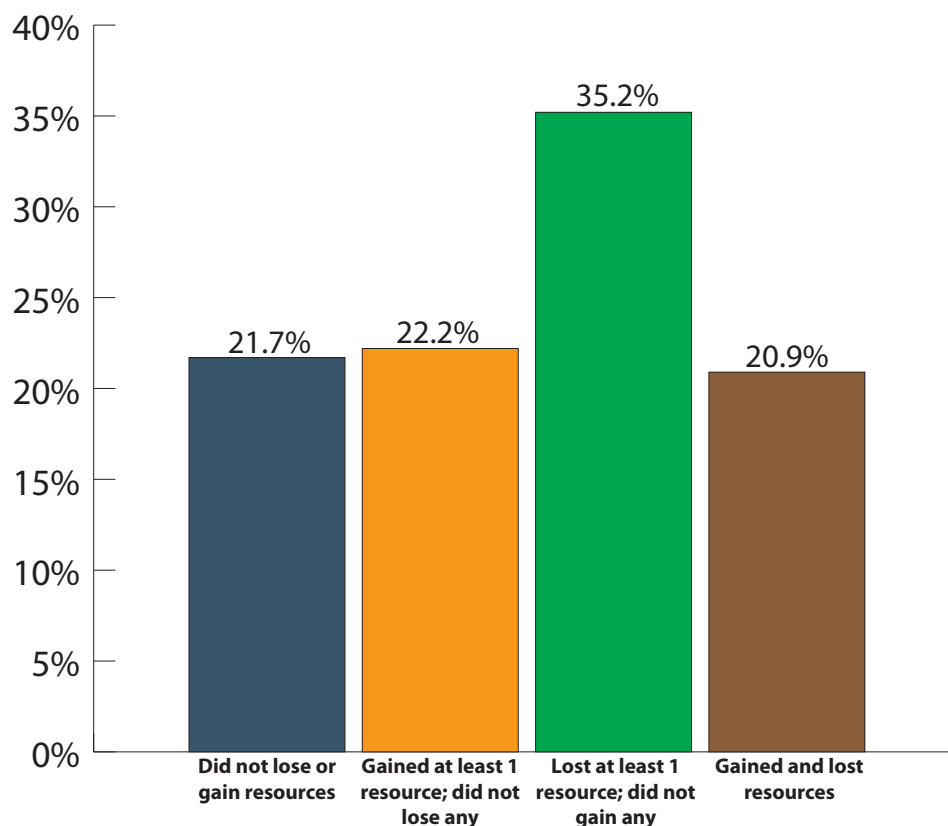
the case that culture courses are more likely to be theoretical or conceptual in nature than they are to be vocationally oriented (i.e., designed to meet employer demand).

The third largest percent of new courses is in the field of gender and sexuality (16.8%), including courses such as men and masculinities; gender and the body; women in the labor force; LGBTQ; sex trafficking; feminist theory; gender and human rights; and gender and development theory. Here again this curriculum may be student driven, encouraged by the women's movement (Slaughter 2002). Sex and Gender is the second largest ASA section for student members. Closely following are new courses in race and ethnicity—a core area in sociology. This course may also be student driven as race, class, and gender is the third largest student section and race and ethnicity is the seventh largest. Courses on race and ethnicity may be especially useful for employers interested in creating a diverse workforce or for employers with largely minority clients.

Unlike the theoretically-oriented courses discussed above, one new kind of course is in health-related topics. This type of course may be more vocationally oriented than subfields such as culture or sex and gender, and can lead directly to occupations requiring a baccalaureate or a master's degree. A specialty in health can lead to occupations such as health educators, medical and health service managers, healthcare social workers, mental health counselors, and occupational health and safety specialists (see the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Outlook 2012).

New courses about food such as food and culture; food and environment; food and family structure; food and development; and food and the economy are also growing. These courses could be either vocationally or conceptually oriented. Likewise, there is a growth in courses related to globalization—as independent courses or as segments of other courses.

Figure 6. Resources Gained and Lost: 2012.



Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

Findings about Resources for Upgrading Technology

Elsewhere we have noted that there was an 8.4% decline in the share of state tax revenues that were allocated to higher education (Kisielewski and Spalter-Roth 2013) and that this cutback could result in a decline in department resources. For example, cutbacks could affect the hiring of research assistants, faculty travel budgets, increased hardware and software, along with the loss of faculty lines, especially in public institutions. The findings show that the largest percentage of departments lost at least one resource but did not gain any new resources (35.2%; see Figure 6). Relatively equal numbers of reporting departments neither lost or gained resources (21.7%), or gained at least one resource and did not lose any (22.2%), or gained at least one resource and lost at least one resource (20.9%). Thus, the largest percentage of departments appears to be somewhat worse off than they were three years ago (35.2%) compared to the 22.2% of departments that gained at least one resource but did not lose any.

Specifically, Table 1 shows that departments experienced the following gains or losses in the past three years, on average.

- Between the AY 2001-2002 and AY 2006-2007 Department Surveys, all types of responding departments, except research universities, reported losing full-time faculty members. These losses were prior to the Great Recession of 2008. However, in the past three years, after the worst of the Great Recession, responding departments appeared to have both gained and lost full-time faculty at the same rate, on average (27.1% of departments report gaining new faculty while 24.7% reported losing full-time faculty members). The largest share of departments (48.2%) neither gained nor lost the number of full-time faculty slots. However, there were statistically significant differences between types of departments. Departments at research institutions were the most likely to report losing full-time faculty lines (37.1%), but they were also the most likely to report gaining them as well (32.1%). Departments at baccalaureate institutions were the least likely to report losing full-time faculty lines (12.4%) but were also the least likely to report gaining them as well (23.7%). On average, departments at both doctoral and master's institutions lost and gained approximately the same percentage of full-time faculty (29% at doctoral institutions and 25% at master's institutions).
- The vast majority of departments (92.5%) still had a major at the end of this three-year period. Only 5.7% of reporting departments gained a sociology major while an even smaller percent lost the major (1.8%).
- Many reporting sociology departments (63%) have stand-alone master's programs. Of the departments offering a freestanding master's program, over half (53%) offer an applied, a professional, or a clinical track (Spalter-Roth and Scelza 2009). The percent of reporting departments that either gained or lost a master's program was less than 2.0%.
- Only 6.6% of responding sociology departments offer Ph.D. degrees. Here again, only a tiny percentage either gained or lost this degree, with only seven responding departments answering that they had instituted a new Ph.D. program, and only three responding that they had lost their Ph.D. program.
- More than 80% of responding departments added new courses as part of the sociology major, as previously noted. These new courses may be part of a new subfield offered to students. Although 80% of departments neither gained nor lost a new subfield, the majority of the remaining departments reported developing a new subfield in the past three years (15.4% compared to 4.6% who lost a subfield).

- About 80% of responding departments neither gained nor lost research assistants during the past three years; more than twice as many of the remaining departments reported gaining assistants compared to those departments reporting a loss in the number of assistants (13.2% compared to 6.0%).
- Many faculty members report the loss of travel monies. Yet, we find the majority of responding departments reported that they neither gained nor lost travel monies, with about the same percentage reporting gains as opposed to reporting losses (21.2% compared to 22.6%).
- Although we have seen that about 80% of responding departments report using at least one type of in-class technology, only 25.4% answered positively that they had gained new computer laboratories or other new technology in the past few years. The disparity could be explained by the fact that relatively few departments were able to obtain new computer laboratories or that they had this technology and others for over three years.
- Office space has always been a contested issue in departments with faculty members frequent-

ly required to double up. Almost two-thirds of responding departments neither gained nor lost office space. There was about double the number of departments seeing a decrease in the amount of space to which they had a claim (20.7% compared to 10.2%).

CONCLUSIONS

In this research brief we have examined changes that departments made in terms of increased use of online courses, in-class technology, new courses, and the resources to implement these changes. We find that departments responding to the AY 2012-2013 Department Survey lost somewhat more resources than they gained. This probably means that bringing about major changes to department curricula and the way courses are taught is difficult financially. We have seen that about half of departments have at least one online or distance learning course, although only about 10% offer an online major. Not all departments and faculty members who have developed these online courses necessarily support this method of teaching and learning, but may be under financial and student pressure to do so. An additional survey module would need to be undertaken to find out more about the characteristics of technology use in sociology departments, and the reasons for developing these courses.

A more general question is whether the increase in technology and the development of new sociology courses result in bringing the discipline closer to being a “practical art” (Brint 2002). Further, will these changes boost the possibility of success of sociology graduates in the job market compared to professionally- and vocationally-oriented majors? Do sociology departments want to see such changes?

Table 1. Resources Gained, Lost, or Unchanged: 2012.

Resources	Gained	Lost	Neither
Full-time faculty lines	27.1%	24.7%	48.2%
Computer lab or other new technology for students	25.4	4.9	69.6
Travel monies	21.2	22.6	56.2
Office space	20.7	10.2	69.1
Sociology subfield	15.4	4.6	80.0
Graduate and/or undergraduate assistants	13.6	6.0	80.4
Sociology major	5.7	1.8	92.5
Master's program	1.4	1.8	96.8
PhD Program	1.3	0.5	98.2
Other	6.4	8.3	85.3

Source: Academic Year 2011-2012 Department Survey, American Sociological Association.

Alternatively, will they resist a market model and continue to remain conceptually and theoretically oriented without engaging in activities to promote sociology majors' post-graduation employment? Research on this topic finds that more than half of responding sociology majors want to experience both conceptual and vocational learning as part of their major, and almost 60% go directly into the labor market (Senter et al. 2013). These findings from the 2012 ASA *Bachelor's and Beyond* survey suggest that at least some curricular changes should focus on both the labor market and skills needed for the labor market.

In a following research brief based on the Department Survey, we will continue to examine gains and losses by type of institutions including full-time faculty, course loads, changes in the number of graduate and undergraduate students, and types of assessment, among others. In addition, we will ask department chairs whether they are interested in answering an additional module about the use of online courses and in-class technology.

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