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THE "INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY SURVEY":
AN INSTRUMENT TO FACILITATE
TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

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Many colleges and universities in recent years have shown an increased interest in the teaching effectiveness of their faculty. College-wide teacher rating instruments have become commonplace in many classrooms, including the introductory sociology classroom. Sociologists often express concern over these college-wide instruments for at least two reasons. First, sociologists have been rated generally by students as poor teachers (Linsky and Straus, 1973). Second, the applicability of these broad instruments to varied courses and circumstances is often questionable (Goldsmid and Wilson, 1980).

Many sociologists do not believe current instruments to be good measures of the effectiveness of sociology instruction. Nevertheless, demands for accountability exist, and may indeed increase as college budgets tighten and enrollments drop. Given both administrative demands and professional needs for assessment, the "Teaching Effectiveness Group" in the Sociology Department at Texas A&M University has developed an "Introductory Sociology Survey." This instrument is designed with two major objectives in mind:

1. to provide information for the use of individual instructors in planning course materials relevant to the experiences of students; and

2. to provide a data base for testing research hypotheses regarding the effects of introductory sociology on student perceptions of the nature and importance of the discipline.

The survey is not another testing device to measure the acquisition of sociological concepts or skills. Rather, this instrument is intended to assess affective goals in teaching introductory sociology. These affective goals are defined as student perceptions of the nature and importance of the discipline of sociology, held at the conclusion of the introductory course.

Many academic sociologists develop hypotheses about their teaching effectiveness, for example, hypotheses concerning the influences of class size, instruction style, or student preconceptions on teaching goals. Such hypotheses are crucial for an informed policy on the part of both the individual instructor and administration. However, as important as such hypotheses are for a rational approach to classroom instruction, they are seldom tested. Hence, many instructors may feel a vague sense of disquietude as administration increases the size of their classes, but most cannot articulate the impact of such policy on their teaching goals. This instrument would provide the data necessary to allow systematic assessment of factors which influence teaching effectiveness, in particular, factors which influence the affective goals of teaching introductory sociology.

The Introductory Survey is administered in two parts. The "main survey" is administered on the first day of class. The "follow-up survey" is administered at the end of the semester. Questions contained in the main and follow-up surveys are delineated on the following pages. A schematic summary of the measured independent and dependent variables is provided in Table 1. Questionnaire items from the main and follow-up surveys are identified respectively by the letters *S* and *F*.¹ In Table 1, indicators for three sets of independent variables, or classroom influences, are identified along with indicators of the two sets of dependent variables, or affective teaching goals.

Student background characteristics, identified as S1-S44, provide information on standard demographic variables and on student values, attitudes, and preconceptions of sociology as

TABLE 1

A Schematic of Independent and Dependent Variables and Their Location in the Introductory Sociology Survey (T1) and Follow-up (T2)

	Location in Introductory Sociology Survey (T1)	Location in Follow-up Survey (T2)
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Student Background Characteristics	S1-S44	
Structural Characteristics	S45-S47	F3, F5
Instruction Related Characteristics	S48	F4, F6
<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
Resulting Perceptions of the Discipline		F7-F14
Resulting Perceptions of Course Importance		F1, F2

a discipline. Such information should be useful to the individual instructor in adapting course materials to the needs and interests of a particular class. This information regarding student background characteristics can also be used to test hypotheses concerning the influence of characteristics such as student preconceptions on affective teaching goals.

Structural characteristics are identified as S45 through S47 (in the main survey) and F3, F5 (in the follow-up). The measured structural characteristics include: reasons for taking the class, expected and received grade, and actual and desired class size. It is hypothesized that class size is a structural variable that will be related to teaching effectiveness among introductory classes. It is also hypothesized that among students within a class, incongruence between expected and received grade will be related to resulting perceptions of course importance. Although additional structural variables can be identified, these measures provide some indication of structural circumstances which may influence affective teaching goals.

Similarly, the instruction related characteristics are not exhaustive, but should allow analysis of the importance of presentation styles and use of relevant examples for affective teaching goals. These instruction-related characteristics are measured by the items S48, F4, and F6. Knowledge of the student, structural, and instruction-related characteristics should provide a base for professional efforts to identify classroom elements which serve to facilitate or inhibit affective goals of teaching introductory sociology.

The affective teaching goals are conceptualized in Table 1 as the dependent variables of: (1) resulting perceptions of the discipline and (2) resulting perceptions of course importance. These two goals are analytically distinct in that one involves the nature of sociology as a discipline, while the other involves perceptions of course importance. Both of these variables may be central to life long opinions about the profession of sociology as well as to more immediate decisions about additional courses. These variables are operationally defined as questions F7-F14 and F1-F2.

By hypothesizing relationships between the sets of independent and dependent variables, the instructor as researcher may use this instrument to test a large number of postulates about the effectiveness of teaching. Our belief is that use of this instrument will provide systematic data to help sociologists evaluate and improve teaching effectiveness in Introductory Sociology.

FOOTNOTE

1. Data from these surveys can be analyzed at both the aggregate and individual levels. Individual level data can be obtained, while allowing anonymity, by the use of random numbers given to each student to identify the main and follow-up surveys. At A&M we simply ask students to record the last three digits of a seven digit ID number on both questionnaires.

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INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to improve the effectiveness of undergraduate teaching. Please be candid in your responses.

I. Information About You and Your Family.

1. Sex: ___ Male ___ Female
2. Age: ___
3. Marital Status: ___ Married ___ Unmarried
4. College Classification:
 ___ Freshman ___ Junior
 ___ Sophomore ___ Senior
 ___ Other
5. Ethnic Group:
 ___ Oriental ___ White/Caucasian
 ___ Black/Negro ___ Mexican-American/Chicano
 ___ Other (Specify) _____
6. Are you presently employed?
 ___ No ___ Yes, for ___ hours per week
7. Major _____
8. How many credit hours are you registered for this semester? _____
9. Do you plan to finish work for a bachelor's degree?
 ___ Yes ___ No ___ Don't know
10. What do you plan to do when you graduate?
 ___ Work/get a job ___ Go to graduate school
 ___ Other (Specify) _____

11. How many total years of school did your mother complete?

- Less than 5 years
- Elementary school only (8 years)
- Some high school (9-11 years)
- Finished high school (12 years)
- Some college (13-15 years)
- A college degree (16 years)
- An advanced professional degree such as Ph.D., M.D., D.V.M.

12. How many total years of school did you father complete?

- Less than 5 years
- Elementary school only (8 years)
- Some high school (9-11 years)
- Finished high school (12 years)
- Some college (13-15 years)
- A college degree (16 years)
- An advanced professional degree such as Ph.D., M.D., D.V.M.

13. What is/was your mother's occupation? _____

14. What is/was your father's occupation? _____

15. Which social class would you say you belong to?

- Lower class Middle class
- Working class Upper class
- Don't know

16. What occupation do you intend to pursue? _____

17. Where did you live while attending high school? _____

_____ (city or town/county) (state)

18. How many students were in your high school
graduating class? _____

19. What is your religious preference? _____

20. Do you live:

- On campus Off campus

21. What types of clubs/organizations do you belong to: (Check
all that apply)?

- Military Academic/professional
- Sorority/Fraternity Hobby
- Church-affiliated Nationality Group
- Political Farm organization
- Sports Literary or Art Group
- Youth Groups Other (Specify) _____

22. On average, how many hours of day do you spend:

- watching TV
- reading non-text books
- listening to music
- reading newspaper and periodicals
- sleeping
- studying
- hanging around with friends

Some statements concerning attitudes are presented below. Please check the one response that best describes your attitude.

II. *Your General Attitudes and Opinions*

23. Getting money and material things out of life are very important to me.

- strongly agree undecided
 agree disagree
 strongly disagree

24. Getting ahead is one of the most important things in life.

- strongly agree undecided
 agree disagree
 strongly disagree

25. It is important to own material things, such as a house, car, or clothing, which are at least as good as those of my neighbors and friends.

- strongly agree undecided
 agree disagree
 strongly disagree

26. In your opinion, do most of the things that happen in people's lives result from their own doing?

- strongly agree undecided
 agree disagree
 strongly disagree

27. How would you describe your *political* views?

- very liberal middle of the road
 liberal conservative
 very conservative

28. In general, do you feel you have control over the things that happen in your life?

- always sometimes
 usually rarely
 never

Briefly explain your response _____

29. How important is religion to you in conducting your everyday life?

- always important occasionally important
 usually important seldom important
 never important

III. *Your Experiences, Attitudes, and Perceptions About the Social World.*

30. Please rank five of the following items which you value most: friends, family, money, religion, cars, clothes, education, helping people, entertainment, sports, job, health, happiness, freedom, love, looks.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

31. Are there other things you value which are not included in the above list?

- No Yes (Specify) _____

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32. In your opinion, who should have the responsibility for helping the (50 million) poor and disadvantaged people in this country?

33. In your opinion, what happens in society is the result of:

34. Using a scale of numbers (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) from 5 for *very difficult* to 1 for *very easy*, please evaluate each of the following fields of study:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> math |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agricultural economics | <input type="checkbox"/> military science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anthropology | <input type="checkbox"/> physical education (PE) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> business management | <input type="checkbox"/> physics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> political science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> poultry science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> general studies | <input type="checkbox"/> psychology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> geology | <input type="checkbox"/> sociology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> history | <input type="checkbox"/> wildlife/fisheries |

35. One prominent sociologist you hear people talking about is

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36. Do you feel the material of this course could be of importance in your life?

- Yes, because _____
- No, because _____
- Do not know _____

Some statements concerning sociology are presented below. Please check the response that best describes your opinion of what sociology is.

37. Sociology is scientific.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agree somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree somewhat |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree |

38. Sociology deals with difficult subject matter.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agree somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree somewhat |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree |

39. Sociology is useful.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agree somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree somewhat |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree |

40. Sociology is objective.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agree somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree somewhat |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree |

41. Sociology is different from common sense.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strongly agree | <input type="checkbox"/> don't know |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agree somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> disagree somewhat |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> strongly disagree |

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42. Sociology can help me better understand my social world.

- strongly agree don't know
- agree somewhat disagree somewhat
- strongly disagree

43. Sociology is not an academic branch of social work.

- strongly agree don't know
- agree somewhat disagree somewhat
- strongly disagree

44. Did you take a sociology course in high school?

- Yes No

45. What are your reasons for taking this introductory sociology course?

46. What grade do you expect to make in this course? _____

47. What size class would you prefer for your introductory sociology course?

- less than 15 51 - 80
- 15 - 30 more than 80
- 31 - 50 don't know

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48. Please rank the following styles of presentation of class material from 1 for the style you generally find most useful to 7 for the style you generally find least useful.

- lecture by professor
- class discussion between professor and members of the class
- activities within the classroom (group discussion, group work, etc.)
- field trips
- films
- guest speakers
- student presentations

FOLLOW-UP INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY SURVEY

This is a follow-up to the survey designed to improve the effectiveness of undergraduate teaching which you took at the beginning of the semester. Please be candid in your response.

1. Do you plan to take additional sociology courses?

Yes

No

Undecided

2. Do you feel the material of this course has been or could be of importance to you?

Yes, because _____

No, because _____

Do not know _____

3. What grade do you expect to make in this course? _____

4. Does your instructor use examples which you find relevant to your life?

often seldom

sometimes never

5. What is the actual size of your Introductory Sociology class? _____

less than 15 51 - 80

15 - 30 more than 80

31 - 50 don't know

6. Please rank the styles of presentation of class material listed below from 1 for the most frequently employed by your instructor, to 7 for the least frequently employed in your class.

lecture by professor

class discussion between professor and members of the class

activities within the classroom (group discussion, workgroups, etc.)

field trips

films or simulation/games

guest speakers

student presentations

Some statements concerning sociology are presented below. Please check the response that best describes your opinion of what sociology is.

7. Sociology is scientific:

strongly agree undecided

agree somewhat disagree somewhat

strongly disagree

8. Sociology deals with difficult subject matter:

strongly agree undecided

agree somewhat disagree somewhat

strongly disagree

9. Sociology is useful:

strongly agree undecided

agree somewhat disagree somewhat

strongly disagree