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. 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 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.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Location in Introductory Sociology Survey (T1)</th>
<th>Location in Follow-up Survey (T2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Background Characteristics</td>
<td>S1-S44</td>
<td>F3, F5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Characteristics</td>
<td>S45-S47</td>
<td>F4, F6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction Related Characteristics</td>
<td>S48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resulting Perceptions of the Discipline</td>
<td>F7-F14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resulting Perceptions of Course Importance</td>
<td>F1, F2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

REFERENCES

Linsky, Arnold S. and Murray A. Straus

Goldsmid, Charles A. and Everett K. Wilson
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 your 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) __________________________
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:

   ___ accounting          ___ math
   ___ agricultural economics ___ military science
   ___ anthropology        ___ physical education (PE)
   ___ business management ___ physics
   ___ education           ___ political science
   ___ engineering         ___ poultry science
   ___ general studies     ___ psychology
   ___ geology             ___ sociology
   ___ history             ___ wildlife/fisheries

35. One prominent sociologist you hear people talking about is

__________________________________________________________________________

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

   ___ Yes, because ___________________________________________
   ___ No, because ___________________________________________
   ___ Do not know ____________________________________________

37. Sociology is scientific.

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

38. Sociology deals with difficult subject matter.

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

39. Sociology is useful.

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

40. Sociology is objective.

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

41. Sociology is different from common sense.

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

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

10. Sociology is important:
    ___ strongly agree  ___ undecided
        ___ agree somewhat  ___ disagree somewhat
        ___ strongly disagree

11. Sociology is useful:___