

## 1. KEEPING SMALL DEPARTMENTS AFLOAT ON THE ROILING ACADEMIC HIGH SEAS

- I. Introductions (5-10 minutes)
- A. Name, affiliation, size of department and how that has changed over time
  - B. Pass around a sheet for name/affiliation/e-mail in case you want additional materials.
  - C. On p. 5, write several sentences about what you'd like to get out of this session.
  - D. My goals--by the end of this hour you will have:
    1. made a few connections with colleagues who may be supportive in your role chairing a small department (networking).
    2. been introduced to several resources that might be useful in your position as chair, and help you to strengthen your department.
    3. shared some ideas about strengths of small departments, some of the challenges we face, and successful strategies for chairing a small department.
- II. What are three things a chair can do to strengthen a small department? (15 minutes)
- A. Use the national guidelines for the undergraduate major to strengthen your program. (p. 2)
  - B. Meet with your Dean/Provost/President.
    1. Find out her/his goals and priorities.
    2. Highlight strengths and recent accomplishments of department students and colleagues; give them clear examples they can use when talking with potential students, alumni, Board members and donors.
    3. Think about ways in which your department can do things to support the goals and priorities. (If necessary reconceptualize the us vs. them of faculty and administration)
    4. Follow up on your meeting(s) with an e-mail or meeting including explicit plans for how the department will help move toward some of their goals and priorities.
  - C. Focus upon how sociology prepares pre-medical students for the MCAT. (p. 3)
    1. Make sure your intro. courses cover concepts and information that is on the MCAT.
    2. Meet with department chairs/departments in the natural sciences, pre-med. advisors, and pre-med. students. Develop structures that make this contact a regular activity.
    3. Talk about this work with your Dean/Provost/President.
- III. What are some of the strengths and challenges in a small department, and what are some strategies for using these strengths and facing the challenges successfully? (35 minutes)
- A. Use the worksheet on p. 5 to prepare for our discussion.
  - B. Discussion Using III.A, generate lists and share ideas concerning:
    1. strengths of small departments.
    2. challenges in small departments.
    3. strategies for using these strengths and facing these challenges successfully.
- IV. Conclusions. (5 minutes)

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**Selected Resources that you May Find Useful:**

At the ASA website, under the “Teaching and Learning” tab, then in the subsection for “Department Leaders”, there is a section entitled “Department Leaders’ Toolbox”. Among the resources listed there are:

DeWelde, Kris. Updated 2018. “When Sociology is on the Chopping Block: Demonstrating Departmental Value in the Face of External Threats.” Updated 2018. American Sociological Association

Pike, Diane L., Teresa Ciabattari, Melinda Messineo, Renee A. Monson, Rifat A. Salam, Theodore C. Wagenaar, Jeffrey Chin, Susan J. Ferguson, Margaret Weigers Vitullo, Patrick Archer, Maxine P. Atkinson, Jeanne H. Ballantine, Thomas C. Calhoun, Paula England, Rebecca J. Erickson, Andrea N. Hunt, Kathleen S. Lowney, Suzanne B. Maurer, Mary S. Senter, and Stephen Sweet. 2017. *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

There is also a section entitled “MCAT and Sociology”. Among the resources there is a webinar on the MCAT and Sociology, as well as :

Kain, Edward L. 2012. “Changes in the MCAT Have Implications for Sociology Department Planning” *Footnotes* December 2012.

Olson, Lauren D. 2016. “It's on the MCAT for a Reason.” *Teaching Sociology*, 44(2):72-83.

Another resource:

Weisbuch, Robert. 2016 “Rescuing the Department in Distress.” *Inside Higher Ed* October 10, 2016.

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**National guidelines for the undergraduate major from *The Sociology Major in the Changing Landscape of Higher Education: Curriculum, Careers, and Online Learning* (2017, pp 3-5)**

**“Recommendation 1:** Develop distinct mission statements, specific program goals, and measurable learning outcomes that are made public, especially to students.

**Recommendation 2:** Within the sociology major, include required and elective courses that incorporate essential sociological concepts and competencies, as exemplified in the Sociological Literacy Framework.

**Recommendation 3:** Include required courses in: introductory-level sociology, sociological theory, research methods, statistical analysis, substantive topic areas, and a capstone experience within the sociology major.

**Recommendation 4:** Integrate progressive learning structures within the curriculum via course prerequisites that systematically guide students to engage with increasingly advanced content and activities.

**Recommendation 5:** Provide multiple opportunities within the curriculum for students to engage in empirical inquiry that includes research design, data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analysis.

**Recommendation 6:** Underscore, at all levels of the curriculum, inequality and difference in local, national, and global contexts.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide curricular and co-curricular structures to help students gain knowledge and apply skills that support them in their post-baccalaureate careers.

**Recommendation 8:** Structure the curriculum to recognize explicitly the points of intellectual convergence and divergence between sociology and other fields of inquiry.

**Recommendation 9:** Incorporate multiple pedagogies across the curriculum, including those that support active learning within and beyond the classroom.

**Recommendation 10:** Develop and maintain advising and mentoring processes that support students' decision making in achieving their educational goals, engage students in career planning, and offer guidance on further study in sociology and related fields.

**Recommendation 11:** Support faculty engagement in disciplinary research, the scholarship of teaching and learning, pedagogical innovation, and relevant service.

**Recommendation 12:** Systematically assess program goals and student learning outcomes, choosing assessment tools that respond to institutional context and specific programmatic needs.”

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From “Changes in the MCAT Have Implications for Sociology Department Planning.” *Footnotes*, December, 2012, pp. 3,6

”There are at least six things a department chair can do . . . .

1. **Contact the pre-med advisors on campus.** . . . when visiting with pre-medical advisors on campus collect information on the following questions: . . . What advice do they currently give pre-med students in terms of taking introductory courses? Is a specific course recommended? When in their undergraduate career are they advised to take the course? Have they made, or do they expect to make changes in pre-medical advising in terms of requiring a course in introductory sociology? For the main set of medical schools to which their students apply, is there a list of required courses for admission? If so, does it include an introductory course in sociology?

2. **Collect data about pre-medical students at the institution.** Some useful data include: a) the number of first-year students who identified as pre-med in recent entering cohorts; b) the number of graduating students who apply to medical school; c) the proportion of current pre-med students who already take introductory sociology; and d) when those students took the introductory sociology course in their academic career.

On my campus, a colleague in chemistry provided me with the names of all of the students in the last six years who had taken the MCAT. While this significantly underestimates the total number of students who may enter college thinking that they are going to medical school, it provided a useful starting point. The Registrar's office did an analysis of transcripts to determine what proportion of these students had taken introductory sociology. This analysis suggests that the impact on sociology will likely be larger than on psychology. In all six cohorts, a large majority of students who completed the MCAT exam had taken the introductory psychology course. A significantly smaller proportion had taken introductory sociology. In the most extreme year, 100 percent had taken an introduction to psychology course, while only 25 percent had taken the introduction to sociology course. In the most recent year, the relative proportions were 72 percent and 36 percent. Nationwide, psychology enrollments are among the largest in the social sciences, typically outpacing those in sociology.

3. **Talk with appropriate administrators about resource needs related to these changes.** These conversations should start early in the process and continue as more data are available on changes in the MCAT and their impact.

4. **Examine the content of, as well as the student learning outcomes for, introductory courses.** Do they cover the content/competencies/student learning outcomes needed for the social and behavioral science section of the new MCAT?

5. **Have department discussions about student learning outcomes of introductory sociology and the needs of pre-med students taking the MCAT.** Discuss the range of issues that need to be addressed, including increasing the number and timing of sections of introductory sociology offered as well as coverage of material needed to prepare pre-medical students for their careers. One of the first recommendations found in Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major Updated is that “Departments should gauge the needs and interests of their students, and department goals and practices should, in part, reflect and respond to these needs and interests as well as to the mission of the institution” (McKinney, et al. 2004:ii). The . . . . shift in the MCAT is a perfect example of how the needs of a specific subset of our students in introductory sociology may change.

6. **Talk with appropriate department chairs about the desirability/feasibility of offering introductory sociology specifically for pre-med majors.** Even if no specific sections of introductory sociology are developed, coordination with departments that offer other required courses in the premedical sequence (such as biology and chemistry) is essential. It is important that a significant number of the sections of introductory sociology do not conflict with the timing of other required courses for pre-med students. Hopefully this background and set of suggestions will help departments and programs plan for changes that may have an impact upon enrollments in introductory sociology as the MCAT changes its format in the coming years.”

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**WORKSHEET FOR ROUNDTABLE 1: KEEPING SMALL DEPARTMENTS AFLOAT ON THE  
ROILING ACADEMIC HIGH SEAS**

**Goals for this Session:** In the space below, write a few sentences about what you'd like to get out of this session. We'll go around the table and you can use these written notes as part of introducing yourself.

**Strengths, Challenges, and Strategies:**

Two of the biggest strengths of a small department are:

Two of the biggest challenges faced when chairing a small department are: (You can interpret this as challenges faced by small departments, challenges faced by the chair in a small department, or both)

Two strategies that I have used (or have seen others use) successfully while chairing a small department are: