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Guest Editors' Introduction

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This issue is quite possibly the first of any journal that is exclusively devoted to examining the teaching of sociology in community colleges. Its appearance comes at a fortuitous time for community colleges, for during the Obama administration they have received unprecedented attention (Vitullo and Spalter-Roth, this issue). For example, a community college educator and former chancellor Martha J Kanter was appointed by President Obama as Under Secretary of Education and the President initiated a community college based Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) grant program for displaced workers that has resulted in $1.5 billion being channeled to community colleges throughout the nation during its first 3 years of existence. Concurrently, a number of influential studies asserting the importance of community colleges for the nation's economic growth and workforce development have been issued during the past few years (AACU 2012; AACC 2012; Century Foundation 2013).

A number of research-based initiatives have united the previous siloes of social scientific research and community college policy. For example, Achieving the Dream (http://www.achievingthedream.org), initiated by the Lumina Foundation in collaboration with other funders and policy-based organizations in 2004 and discussed by Morest, has played an integral role in transforming institutional practices by analyzing structural impediments to student achievement. The Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University (http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu), initiated with a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, has sponsored a plethora of research on all facets of community colleges. Jobs for the Future (JFF) has also been an active player in the birth of research on community colleges by focusing on a range of topics related to state higher education policy and practices such as middle colleges that have spurred academic achievement by students previously thought to be incorrigible. While offering critiques of established practices, these initiatives have recognized the importance of community colleges in the lives of millions.

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This collection of articles strengthens the connection between sociological research and community college practice. There have been a number of structural accounts of community colleges, ranging from their alleged "cooling-out" purpose in the sorting and selection of individuals for occupational pathways (Clark 1960) to the vocational role of community colleges in higher education (Brint and Karabel 1989). Often community colleges assume a "contradictory" role as bastions of democracy through their open admissions process while at the same time having a marginal position within the status hierarchy of American higher education (Dougherty 1994).

The marginalization of faculty in community colleges has been a finding of previous research (Grubb 1999; Levin et al. 2011). These colleagues work in a segment that is viewed as the bottom of the higher education hierarchy, that eschews selective admissions practices and that saddles them with high teaching loads while providing little support for professional disciplinary development. In these circumstances, the extent to which sociology faculty at community colleges have credentials in the discipline and identify with the larger profession is critical for assuring the quality of what's being taught. A central issue concerns the "stickiness" of the relationship between sociology instructors and the larger profession. For instance, to what extent do they attend meetings of their regional and national associations? Have they received rigorous training in sociology through terminal graduate programs or are they teaching of out of field or with little preparation beyond the mastery of an introduction textbook? Do they take advantage of professional development and other resources provided through professional associations?

McCormick (1982) referenced this issue some 30 years ago and offered a sanguine assessment about the then current state of affairs. He noted that while the American Sociological Association (ASA) has expanded the availability of professional development through its teaching resource initiative among others, few community college faculty were taking advantage of these services. Their tenuous connection to the profession often is due to their contingent status as well as to the lack of resources available through their existing contractual provisions. Also this may reflect, to some extent, the marginalization of community college faculty within the context of a professional association (ASA) that is dominated by faculty from Research One institutions.

Rowell (2010) addressed this quandary head-on in her Presidential Address to the North Central Sociological Association in which she examined the disconnect between community college faculty and their national professional association. As the academic marketplace for sociology professors has stagnated, teaching in a community college has become more commonplace for it represents one of the few growth sectors in higher education. Over the past 20 years, through the creation of a number of task forces and initiatives such as the Community College Faculty Breakfast, the American Sociological Association has increasingly recognized the importance of the community college professoriate (Vitullo and New Task Force on Community College Sociologists 2012), most recently by creating a task force to systematically examine sociologists based in community colleges. This task force, of which we are co-chairs, is charged with gathering empirical data on the faculty who teach sociology at community colleges. We will collect information on both ASA members and non-members at community colleges in order to better understand their characteristics, credentials, professional identity, professional goals, and professional development needs, as well as their working conditions and the structural arrangements that impact sociological curricula. Based on those findings, our Task Force will then develop a series of

recommendations to the ASA Council regarding appropriate and effective strategies for supporting sociology faculty in community colleges (see ASA *Footnotes,* April 2012).

Besides offering an analysis of internal structural factors that impact the working conditions of community college faculty, a number of the papers in this issue can best be thought of as continuing an ethnographic, interactionist research tradition within a community college context, similar to that of Howard London (1978) and Shaw (1999). Underscoring much of the analysis presented is how the very act of professionalization, which is a dynamic process whereby a group self-constitutes and affirms its expertise by regulating inclusion through some type of credentialing process (Larson 1979), is bifurcated for community college faculty in that they are often viewed as marginal players within a peer group that is dominated by research intensive institutions. While this can be a disheartening process, it can also—as Kapitulik discusses–be liberating for it restores a purposeful dimension for seeking employment as a community college sociologist, namely being part of a collective effort that's guided by social justice and social change. In fact, the "scholarship of teaching" (Boyer 1990) is now actively encouraged by ASA through TRAILS: Teaching Resources and Innovation Library for Sociology http://trails.asanet.org/Pages/default.aspx and their Section on Teaching and Learning (www2.aasnet.org/sectionteach).

Structural Factors in the Teaching of Sociology

An important development within community colleges is the focus on degree and certificate completion. Much of the research performed by entities such as the Community College Research Center and Jobs for the Future focuses on intra and extra-institutional processes that either impede or facilitate completion of a certificate or degree. A focus of the "completion movement" is the ability of students to complete "gateway courses," which are typically identified as introductory, college-level courses where success is viewed as a predictor that a student will ultimately attain a degree or certificate. Here, "Introduction to Sociology" and comparable courses such as "Social Problems" or "Sociology of Family" (depending on whether a college requires Intro. as a prerequisite) have emerged as such "gateways," given the preponderance of students who enroll in them to complete a general education or elective requirement. It is therefore critical to look at the content of such courses, and to realize that that the completion of a foundational sociology course involves high stakes.

Better discusses the importance of linking the teaching of sociology to the life experiences of students. She notes the diverse and rich life-worlds that students bring to the classroom, along with the elaborate "stock of knowledge" that they employ. The same can be said for Haskie's discussion of teaching Navajo students at Dine College. In keeping with C. Wright Mill's (1959) concept of the "sociological imagination," defined as the intersection of "history" and "biography," this pedagogical technique can be quite powerful. However, as Rowell and This demonstrate, concepts such as the "sociological imagination" often do not appear in community college sociology courses. Rowell and This also note substantial regional variation in what is typically offered at community colleges, with states that have cosmopolitan populations offering courses that reflect greater diversity relative to other states. This, we think, represents a

possible place for ASA to suggest a more universal model for what should be taught in community college sociology courses.

Two other important variables come into play regarding how the structure of community colleges impacts sociology curricula: 1) the tension between vocational versus liberal arts curricula, and 2) whether a community college offers baccalaureate programs. Kapitulik points out that, while the expansive mission of the community colleges should be able to encompass both vocational and liberal arts programs, new programs are skewed towards instrumental workforce needs. Consequently, Kapitulik voices concern that the importance of "soft skills"is being denigrated, even though these represent a sphere of knowledge that is germane to sociological analysis.

Students

As the authors in this issue suggest, there are various attributes of community college students that are particularly advantageous for the teaching of sociology. Community colleges are in the vanguard of major demographic shifts that are occurring in the United States, whereby the current majority population – whites – are predicted to become a minority by 2043 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2012). In comparison to baccalaureate institutions, community colleges have historically enrolled a disproportionate percentage of minority, first-generation, immigrant, and low-income students (Morest). While it is understandable that there has been much concern regarding what constitutes an adequate "general education" for these students, the current issue focuses on how sociology can provide the ideal nexus for creating a meaningful "liberal education" for these students.

Better describes how she incorporates the everyday life concerns of her students into the teaching of sociology. Utilizing the precepts of public sociology (Levinson), Better explains how a discussion of social inequality provides an effective touch point to galvanize students who, while having experienced the "hidden injuries of class" (Cobb and Sennett 1972), lack an understanding of the structural reasons for their deprivation. Similarly, in course of teaching sociology Better discusses how she utilizes the current controversial New York City policing strategy of "stop and frisk," which has disproportionately affected the minority students who comprise the majority of her course, in order to illustrate the structural origins of interpersonal actions. Finally, Better and Morest speak about the importance of creating social cohesion through learning communities as an effective pedagogical strategy for teaching sociology in the community college.

Faculty

Although experiencing higher teaching loads than their baccalaureate counterparts, community college faculty enjoy a degree of relative autonomy not typically found in other occupational settings. Unfortunately, due to the large number of students taught during a given semester, community college sociologist often experience a need to compromise their yearning for a personalized, interactive classroom environment (Kapitulik).

Another factor that characterizes much of the teaching of sociology in community colleges is the part-time, contingent status of many community college faculty. As Vitullo and Spalter-Roth discuss, more than 25 % of community college faculty who belong to ASA are part-time, compared to only 4 % of ASA members in baccalaureate institutions. Nevertheless, the importance of ASA for the professional development of sociologists is underscored by the 25 % of community college ASA members who belong to the Teaching and Learning Section of ASA, and by the rate at which they subscribe to Trails, ASA's Teaching Resources and Innovation Library for Sociology—a rate which exceeds that of graduate faculty.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this issue, the teaching of sociology in community colleges is a vibrant endeavor. Although its full transformative potential may be hindered by high teaching loads, a large proportion of itinerant faculty, and relatively scarce resources for professional development, it constitutes an important site for further sociological research. In the future, we look forward to reporting on the outcome of the ASA Task Force on the Teaching of Sociology in Community Colleges that we are co-chairing, for this should yield some further insights into the "promise" of how community college sociologists can enhance the life chances of millions of Americans through the power of their pedagogy.

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