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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings of a study which surveyed 393 Australian academics and employers concerning their views about essential specialist and generic competencies for sociology graduates. The study designed four questionnaires, one for each professional group psychology, human services, counseling, and sociology and these were completed by 233 academics and 160 psychology, human services, and counseling employers. Tables present ratings for 77 specialist competency elements and 42 generic competency elements. Another table compares mean ratings on 41 competencies of sociology academics, all social science academics, and social science employers. Significant differences were found between sociology and other social science academics on 7 items and between sociology academics and social science employers on 19 items. (Contains 32 references.) (DB)

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DELINEATING COMMON SOCIAL SCIENCE COMPETENCIES

Work in Progress Report

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HOW AUSTRALIAN ACADEMIC SOCIOLOGISTS RATE THE IMPORTANCE OF GENERIC AND SPECIALIST COMPETENCIES

ABSTRACT

As part of a larger Social Science competencies project, Australian academic sociologists were asked to consider which generic and specialists competencies they thought were necessary for sociology graduates to demonstrate on completion of their degrees before entering the work place. This paper describes which specialist competencies were endorsed as necessary by the majority of the academics and which were considered to be less important. Additionally the paper outlines the generic competencies that academics considered to be necessary attributes for their graduates to have and then compares their ratings against those of other Social Science academics and employers. The authors raise some issues about engendering these attributes within the university teaching curricula.

PREAMBLE

While there has now been a decade of competencies identification, training and assessment in industry and TAFE colleges (ANTA, 1993; Gonczi, 1994), more recently universities in Australia have had to address the competencies that industry and the professions require of graduates at entry level to the workplace.

With the advent of government policies regarding the recognition of migrant skills and qualifications in the professions, and the possibility of the competency-based education philosophy entering the universities, many professional bodies around Australia, with the support of NOOSR, have been identifying and documenting competencies and standards for themselves (APS, 1991; Gonczi, Hager & Athanasou, 1993; Hearn, Smith, Southey & Close, 1993).

However, the movement towards competency-based education and training has also generated vigorous debate. As the notion of competencies has entered the professional domain, the debate has increased in momentum (see Anderson, 1992). Universities have been critical of competency-based education on grounds such as: it is a narrow behavioural approach that cannot be applied in complex domains of knowledge; it is reductionist; it de-emphasises striving for excellence; it moves control of assessment away from Universities; it overly shapes the focus of Universities toward vocational education (AVCC, 1993; Gow, 1995a; Wilson, 1992). Perhaps one reason for the fierceness of the debate is the lack of precision in definition of the term competencies and the different practical and ideological implications which are inherent in various definitions (Hearn, Smith, Southey & Close, 1993).

Certainly the authors would in no way confuse the more global term competence (Woodruffe, 1992) or capability (Stephenson, 1996) which is that tacit knowledge and global ability that highly effective people have at their disposal (Gow & Gordon, in press) with individual competencies that people need to display in order to do the job effectively (Woodruffe, 1992).

The definition of competencies used in this study is aligned with that of an attribute as advocated by Goldstein and Prien (see Prien, 1977). A competency is seen as an attribute which consists of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's). Prien defines these categories as follows: *Knowledge (K)* is the foundation on which abilities and skills are built. Knowledge refers to an organised body of knowledge, usually of a factual or procedural nature, which, if applied, makes adequate job performance possible. It should be noted that possession of knowledge does not ensure that it will be used. *Skill (S)* refers to the capability to perform job operations with ease and precision. Most often skills refer to psychomotor-type activities. The specification of a skill usually implies a performance standard that is usually required for effective job operations. *Ability (A)* usually refers to cognitive capabilities necessary to perform a job function. Most often abilities require the application of some knowledge base.

The terms attributes and competencies will be used interchangeably within this paper, because the focus of the surveys were on the attributes that graduates needed to demonstrate on entry to the workplace. That is, they were to be demonstrated at work, not just in university environments.

Generic Competencies

Hearn et al. (1993) posit that there are two subsets of competencies implied in the discussions of professions and professional competence. Firstly there are technical competencies unique to each profession which we will refer to in this paper as specialist competencies. Secondly, there are other competencies which are not technical but which are essential for the application of these technical competencies which we will refer to as generic.

Some preliminary Australian research regarding generic competencies for professionals has been conducted by Charalambous (1990), Hearn, Charalambous and Smith (1991), Gow (1993) and Hearn et al (1993). The wider literature provides evidence that communication skills, interpersonal skills and abilities, problem-solving, decision-making and leadership are competencies that are common across professions as indeed written and oral communication skills, problem-solving skills also are (see Gow, 1993; Mayer, 1992).

Brown (1984) and Roll (1998) outline skills that sociology graduates have that are essential for non-academic careers. Many of these skills relate to the generic competencies that are mentioned above and are those that nearly all graduates would require who go on to work in organisational settings (Gow, 1995b). For instance, the generic skills that Roll lists for sociology graduates include: communication skills and problem-solving skills, two of the seven key competencies identified by Mayer (1992).

Brown's study found that 315 respondents Ability to write concisely, organise thoughts and information and to listen effectively and being self-motivated were ranked the highest on the most essential skills that sociologists need in their careers in applied or clinical psychology.

In 1982, Huber was already far ahead of other professionals' initiatives in identifying the skills that sociology graduates had to offer in the work place. Huber listed a wide range of both generic and specialist skills, but maintained that fundamentally these were covered under three types of skills: self-management skills, functional skills and work content skills. He emphasised that graduates should stress their functional skills such as interpersonal, communication and analytic skills to prospective employers.

Specialist Competencies

Specialist competencies are those attributes which, while a percentage of them may be shared in some ways with certain other disciplines (see paper by Gow, Litchfield, Sheehan & Fox, 1998 on common social science competencies), are specific to the performance of a distinct profession. For example, Hearn et al. (1993) highlight practice management skills as competencies that are shared with other professions. They maintain that having professional responsibility and a professional attitude towards ethics would also be considered important for all professions. However, only a psychologist is licensed to interpret restricted psychological tests and thus test interpretation is a specialist skill that psychologists are trained in.

In the Western world, psychologists, human service workers, social workers and human service employers have attempted to delineate the workplace competencies that their professional workers need to demonstrate. Indeed sociologists in the USA have striven to mark out what it is that sociologists do that makes them employable (Roll, 1998).

Sociology Professional Competencies

Sociology, according to Eshleman (1989) "is the study of social life and the social causes and consequences of human behaviour" (p.2). Earlier Parsons (1959) had said that sociology was widely seen as a scientific discipline which was primarily "dedicated to the advancement and transmission of empirical knowledge in its field and secondarily to the communication of such knowledge to non-members and its utilisation in practical affairs" (p. 547 in Eshleman, 1989, p. 4). Thus to earlier sociologists, their special task was to advance and transmit knowledge about human behaviour. Allbrow (in Watts, 1998) comments that "sociology tends to be defined by its teachers as an academic discipline" and therefore its syllabus construction is teacher-led. Eshleman (1989) however maintains that the research and data analysis skills taught in sociology help students to think critically about the social world and their place in it, and teaches them problem solving skills both at the personal and organisational level.

Watts et al. (1983) had noted that sociology has never guaranteed employment to baccalaureate (Bachelor degree) students in the USA. Graduate destination is a particularly important issue in Australia with students; they undertake courses that lead to jobs. Watts analyses the drop in demand during the period from 1972 to 1983 - a drop of 36.5% in course enrolments and 82.5 % in majors. He rightly goes on to point out that students seek disciplines that provide them with marketable skills, for example, accounting, information systems, etc. He emphasises that sociologists' deficiencies in communication training and lack of knowledge of non-academic life are a barrier to employment.

Becker (1987) says sociology is a science with many collective aspects to it. DeMartini (1987) maintains that, in spite of the changes in sociology, there is still a common core to sociology and once these KSAs are found then the teaching curriculum can be addressed. Simon (1987) continues the debate by pushing that research methods, should be the core of a sociology curriculum and therefore sociology departments should do research training. Eshleman (1989) maintains that the essence of sociological teaching is in the research and data analysis skills and development of problem solving skills at both the personal and organisational levels.

Others, in face of declining enrolments in sociology classes, and fewer jobs for sociologists (Ruggiero & Weston, 1986; Watson, 1982) have made a case that sociologists have unique discipline attributes which can contribute to work organisations and to the international community, as well as academia.

The discipline specific knowledge that Roll claims belong to Sociology and is therefore highly marketable include for example: having an understanding of types of basic social structure, having a range of explanations for how those social structures are created etc, appreciating the basic social processes, and being able to see how sociological theories and concepts apply to the real world.

Watts (1998) is much more detailed when it comes to specifying the creative, problem-solving and reflective practice skills that social science graduates need, and categorises five skills and capacities of academic craftsmanship, three presentation skills, three technical skills, five social skills, three theoretical skills, six conceptual capacities and seven life experience development capacities.

The American Sociological Association in its Code of Ethics (July 1996), mandates the professional competencies that sociologists must adhere to, for example: recognising limitations of one's own expertise, need for ongoing education, having integrity, demonstrating professional and scientific responsibility, showing respect for people's rights, dignity, diversity and welfare, demonstrating social responsibility, adhering to professional and scientific standards, resolving conflicts between ethics and the law; recognising one's boundaries of competence, maintaining competence, representing competence fairly and accurately, delegating to and supervising subordinates, not being involved in discriminatory practices or exploitation, adhering to responsibilities of employment, engaging in fair employment practices, avoiding conflicts of interest, maintaining a high level of public communication, ensuring confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, complying with ethical rules of research, planning, implementing and reporting research appropriately, and behaving ethically as a consultant.

Hence there has already been some attempt to identify both generic and specialists KSA's for sociologists in the past, both in the USA and in Australia.

The Focus of this Study

The findings reported here relate firstly to generic and then specialist competencies as viewed by sociology academics. Finally, in order to provide what may be useful comparisons between what sociology academics and other social science employers consider to be important attributes that graduates need on entry to the workplace, the generic skills data is utilised for these comparisons.

METHOD

Questionnaire Design and Construction

As part of a larger survey on the professional groups (psychology, human service, counselling and sociology), two types of survey packages were distributed, one for academics and one for employers. However in the sociology professional groups, only academic participants were obtained as no employers of sociologists, outside of universities, could be identified or located.

Lists of competencies and professional standards for psychology, counselling, human services and sociology professions were gleaned from the literature and numerous professional and research sources. These lists were then analysed, synthesised and refined, resulting in streamlined lists of generic competencies, common social science competencies and spccific (specialist) competencies for each professional group. The focus question in the questionnaires was "to what extent do you consider the following knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for 3 year trained sociologists to demonstrate on entry to the work force". The recipients were asked to rate the competencies on a 1 to 10 scale with 1 meaning "not at all necessary" and 10 meaning "absolutely necessary".

Four questionnaires were designed – one for each professional group – Psychology, Human Service, Counselling and Sociology. These questionnaires contained a demographic page surveying age, gender, number of years in present position, work status (full-time or part-time), state residency status, professional qualifications and job title. Academic questionnaires surveyed respondents' involvement in lecturing students. Employer questionnaires also contained questions to assess size of organisation (number of employees), employer category (private, public, self-employed, etc), supervision level and experience in supervising or managing.

However, each questionnaire contained approximately one fifth of all the available competencies. There were five splices of the total sociology list of competencies. Thus a single sociology questionnaire consisted of one splice of the overall competencies that had been compiled from courses or extrapolated from other identified social science competencies. The different splices ensured that no overload occurred and later analysis confirmed that there were no differences between the splices.

Sample

Academics. Questionnaires were mailed to 1509 academics throughout Australia, of which the sociologists numbered 396. These sample groups were obtained from the Australian Directory of Academics, University Web pages, The Directory of Postgraduate Study and phone contact. A follow-up reminder was sent via e-mail.

A total of 332 academic questionnaires were returned, giving a total response rate of 22.0%. These consisted of 183 psychology academics (24.43%), 74 sociology academics (18.7%), 43 human service academics (18.9%), and 32 counselling academics (23.4%).

Employers. Questionnaires were forwarded, throughout Queensland, to 664 employers. Overall, 151 employer questionnaires were returned, giving a total response rate of 22.7%. This consisted of 55 psychology employers/supervisors (21.4%), 81 human service employers/supervisors (26.6%), and 32 counselling employers/supervisors (31.1%).

As there were no identified employers of sociologists outside of university settings, a shadow employer group (taken from the pooling of other social science groups, in this case, psychologists, human service workers and counsellors) was constructed for comparison purposes.

Data preparation

Questionnaires with a majority of questions unanswered were deleted from further analysis. This left the sample consisting of: 123 Psychology academics, 22 Counselling academics, 34 Human Services academics, 54 Sociology academics, 51 Psychology employers, 31 Counselling employers, and 78 Human Services employers.

Due to the non-normal distribution of the variables, the project team set a cut off point of 5 on the 1 to 10 scale. That meant that only those items that rated 5 and above appear in the following analyses.

Because there were 5 splices within each overall competency list (this ensured no one person received all of the list and was thereby fatigued or annoyed), t tests were performed between the splices for each of 6 common items (present in every splice in all questionnaires) to check for possible differences between splices. No significant differences were found between the splices, although there were significant differences between the groups and between the disciplines as could be expected.

RESULTS

Table 1 outlines the elements of specialist competencies rated by Australian sociology academics that were considered to be necessary for graduates to demonstrate on entry to the workplace. In Tables 1 and 3, the presentation of the items are ordered from highest to lowest to highlight the most necessary attributes and in Tables 2 and 4, the presentation of the items are ordered from lowest to highest to highlight the less necessary attributes.

Table 1
Elements of Professional Competency Rated by Australian Sociology Academics as Most Necessary

Most Necessary Competency Elements	*Mean*
Ensuring approaches to clients are consistent with any legal, ethical and organisational policies and procedures	9.57
Demonstrating ability to gather useful information when conducting research	9.10
Displaying ability to apply sociological knowledge	8.90
Demonstrating ability to identify research problems	8.82
Demonstrating awareness of own values/beliefs	8.74
Maintaining effective relationships with people of similar and different culture	8.73
Demonstrating a commitment to the dignity, value and uniqueness of individuals, social units, communities and cultures	8.68
Behaving in responsible and autonomous fashion	8.67
Demonstrating knowledge and understanding of all stages of social research	8.50
Demonstrating ability to prepare research plans	8.46
Conducting research projects according to ethical requirements of relevant organisations	8.46
Demonstrating ability to locate own values in social, economic and political contexts	8.43
Demonstrating commitment to anti-discriminatory practice	8.42
Demonstrating a commitment to the principles of Natural Justice	8.42
Gathering and evaluating data	8.31
Identifying research problems	8.29
Promoting social justice	8.29
Demonstrating awareness of client world-view	8.23
Demonstrating ability to conduct research investigations	8.18
Recognising boundaries of service provision	8.04
Demonstrating commitment to lifelong learning	8.04
Recognising own limitations in abilities and referring client to another staff member or specialist when required	8.00
Demonstrating ability to report research findings	7.98
Defining the problem	7.94

Most Necessary Competency Elements	Mean
Representing the interests of clients	7.89
Determining strategies	7.78
Practicing in a professional and accountable manner	7.77
Interpreting and assessing the impact of legislation, policies and regulations	7.74
Communicating effectively and appropriately	7.73
Demonstrating an awareness of colleagues needs and wishes and how they may impact on clients	7.71
Demonstrating ability to design research investigations	7.70
Evaluating research findings	7.70
Demonstrating awareness of own impact on clients and colleagues	7.66
Contributing to the accountability of organisational functions and services	7.58
Reviewing and analysing existing social policy	7.58
Consulting with stakeholders when conducting research	7.57
Maintaining and updating knowledge base	7.53
Managing professional activities	7.51
Keeping up with knowledge and to practice developments	7.49
Appraising research and communicating information to wider audiences	7.43
Investigating identified issues relevant to the delivery of service	7.25
Demonstrating commitment to enhancing the self-determination of individuals, social units, communities and cultures	7.22
Applying knowledge to community	7.21
Enhancing organisational image	7.15
Communicating information about relevant sociological services to potential clients	7.07
Seeking the adoption of improved social policies and legislation	7.07
Encouraging participation and minimising dependence in the professional relationship	7.00
Determining ownership of research material	7.00

Table 2, on the other hand, emphases the elements of professional competency that were considered to be less necessary. It is important to note that nearly all professional and generic competencies were rated as important, but some were rated significantly higher than others as shown in Tables 1 and 3.

Table 2
Elements of Professional Competency Rated by Australian Sociology Academics as Less Necessary

Less Necessary Competency Elements	*Mean*
Displaying knowledge of the major methods of sociological investigation and techniques of measurement	5.55
Facilitating Social Action	5.85
Exploring nature of the service required	6.17
Modelling high standards of performance	6.19
Providing direction in individual, group, organisational and community change	6.31
Establishing professional relationships	6.33
Negotiating service contract	6.36
Marketing and promoting policies	6.41
Evaluating impact of services	6.44
Identifying career opportunities in the profession and develop new applications of sociological knowledge	6.52
Developing/planning preventative or remedial services	6.54
Developing and implementing a plan for using results of research and scholarship	6.58
Supervising research being undertaken	6.60
Contributing to the development and revision of policy and legislation	6.70
Demonstrating awareness of own impact on clients and colleagues	6.71
Advocating for appropriate policy development	6.73
Updating discipline knowledge	6.74
Identifying future directions in policy and services	6.75
Implementing preventative and/or remedial service	6.76
Keeping up with current legislative provisions and requirements in practice	6.77
Clarifying roles and responsibilities in consultation with other team members	6.79
Monitoring the implementation of policy	6.79
Developing effective leadership role in the workplace	6.81
Adopting independent or team approach as appropriate	6.84
Seeking and using supervision for professional development, support and organisational accountability	6.84
Accepting and initiating supervision of projects or people as appropriate	6.87

Less Necessary Competency Elements	Mean
Developing policy materials and proposals	6.93
Implementing ongoing evaluation	6.96
Demonstrating awareness and ability to use own attributes appropriately	6.99

The generic competencies considered necessary for graduates to demonstrate on entry to the workplace are then depicted in Table 3, followed in Table 4 by those rated as less necessary.

Table 3
Elements of Generic Competency Rated by Australian Sociology Academics as Most Necessary

Most Necessary Generic Competency Elements	Mean
Presenting Information	8.43
Analysing and Editing Information	8.34
Demonstrating Problem-Solving Skills and Abilities	8.34
Identifying Information Requirements	8.23
Gathering and Recording Information	7.97
Establishing Positive Working Relationships with Relevant People	7.81
Demonstrating Awareness of Organisational Structures, Roles and Goals	7.68
Using Feedback to Review Communication	7.63
Managing Workload Efficiently and Effectively	7.55
Working with Others	7.52
Communicating in a Range of Contexts	7.45
Demonstrating Self-Awareness	7.44
Demonstrating Self-Management	7.44
Demonstrating Understanding of, and Ability to Work With, Differing Roles and Responsibilities of Group Members	7.42
Supporting Group Members of Work Teams	7.38
Utilising Networks	7.32
Organising and Maintaining Own Work Performance	7.30
Participating in Team Meetings	7.28

Most Necessary Generic Competency Elements	Mean
Demonstrating Ability to Be Self-Promoting	7.25
Implementing Organisation's Processes in Own Workplace	7.25
Demonstrating Effective Communication Skills	7.24
Establishing Relationships with Work Groups	7.22
Identifying Purpose of Work Groups	7.18
Following Instructions in the Workplace	7.13
Undertaking Work Activities According to a Plan	7.11
Developing Performance in Response to Self-Reflection and Feedback from Others	7.11
Participating in Training and Development	7.09
Managing Own Work Functions and Tasks	7.06

Table 4
Elements of Generic Competency Rated by Australian Sociology Academics as Less Necessary

Less Necessary Competency Elements	Mean
Identifying the Need for Networks	6.25
Promoting and Disseminating Information	6.39
Following Workplace Procedures for Hazard Identification and Risk Control	6.43
Developing and Maintaining Appropriate Networks	6.48
Recognising and Responding to the Physical and Psychological Needs of Oneself in the Workplace	6.60
Using Mathematical Ideas and Techniques	6.63
Using Technology	6.71
Managing Inter-Personal Conflict in the Workplace	6.79
Planning Work Activities	6.81
Contributing to Team Commitment in Work Groups	6.85
Supporting Group Objectives When Working in Teams	6.91
Managing Change in the Workplace	6.94
Planning and Preparing Information for Communication	6.95

Because there were no employer groups to make comparisons with, the means of the other social science employer groups were utilised and the differences and similarities are set out in Table 5. Additionally comparisons were made with other social science academics on the generic skills which were included in all the professional groups' surveys. The competencies in Table 5 are the same items as in Tables 3 and 4, and are in the same order in the first part of the table as depicted in Table 3, but the order used in Table 4 has been reversed in Table 5 for sequencing purposes.

Table 5
Comparison of Generic Sociology and Social Science Academics and Employers

Item	Competency	Mean Sociology Academics	Mean Social Science Academics	Mean Social Science Employers
1	Presenting Information	8.43	8.20*	8.26
2	Analysing and Editing Information	8.34	8.07	7.63*
3	Demonstrating Problem-Solving Skills and Abilities	8.34	7.95*	7.93*
4	Identifying Information Requirements	8.23	8.38	8.17
5	Gathering and Recording Information	7.97	8.14	8.14
6	Establishing Positive Working Relationships with Relevant People	7.81	8.41	8.68*
7	Demonstrating Awareness of Organisational Structures, Roles and Goals	7.68	7.36	7.62
8	Using Feedback to Review Communication	7.63	7.23*	7.65
9	Managing Workload Efficiently and Effectively	7.55	8.14	8.28
10	Working with Others	7.52	7.68	7.92*
11	Communicating in a Range of Contexts	7.45	6.90	6.83
12	Demonstrating Self-Awareness	7.44	7.87*	8.16*
13	Demonstrating Self-Management	7.44	8.06*	8.18**
14	Demonstrating Understanding of, and Ability to Work With, Differing Roles and Responsibilities of Group Members	7.42	7.05	7.37
15	Supporting Group Members of Work Teams	7.38	7.23	7.44
16	Utilising Networks	7.32	7.24	7.85

Item	Competency	Mean Sociology Academics	Mean Social Science Academics	Mean Social Science Employers
17	Organising and Maintaining Own Work Performance	7.30	7.87	7.80*
18	Participating in Team Meetings	7.28	7.32	7.94
19	Demonstrating Ability to Be Self-Promoting	7.25	7.36	7.30
20	Implementing Organisation's Processes in Own Workplace	7.25	7.36	7.92
21	Demonstrating Effective Communication Skills	7.24	7.90*	7.92*
22	Establishing Relationships with Work Groups	7.22	6.90	7.24
23	Identifying Purpose of Work Groups	7.18	7.06	7.62
24	Following Instructions in the Workplace	7.13	7.48	8.11*
25	Undertaking Work Activities According to a Plan	7.11	7.60	7.96*
26	Developing Performance in Response to Self-Reflection and Feedback from Others	7.11	7.98*	7.90*
27	Participating in Training and Development	7.09	7.41	7.48
28	Managing Own Work Functions and Tasks	7.06	7.66	8.03**
29	Planning and Preparing Information for Communication	6.95	7.27	7.24
30	Managing Change in the Workplace	6.94	7.53	7.62*
31	Supporting Group Objectives When Working in Teams	6.91	7.00	7.45
32	Contributing to Team Commitment in Work Groups	6.85	7.31	7.49
33	Planning Work Activities	6.81	6.99	7.19
34	Managing Inter-Personal Conflict in the Workplace	6.79	7.00	7.68**
35	Using Technology	6.71	7.16	8.03
36	Using Mathematical Ideas and Techniques	6.63	7.00	5.65

Item	Competency	Mean Sociology Academics	Mean Social Science Academics	Mean Social Science Employers
37	Recognising and Responding to the Physical and Psychological Needs of Oneself in the Workplace	6.60	7.30	8.16*
38	Developing and Maintaining Appropriate Networks	6.48	6.99	7.58**
39	Following Workplace Procedures for Hazard Identification and Risk Control	6.43	6.64	8.04*
40	Promoting and Disseminating Information	6.39	7.09	7.46*
41	Identifying the Need for Networks	6.25	6.97	7.38*

* = $p < .01$
** = $p < .001$

As can be seen from Table 5, there were significant differences between sociology academics and other social science academics on 7 of the 41 items and significant differences between sociology academics and other social science employers on 19 of the 41 items.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION AND TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

This study has attempted to delineate many of the specialist attributes (knowledge, skills and abilities) that academic sociologists believe to be important for sociology graduates to demonstrate on entry to the workplace. At first glance, these attributes cover a wide range of domains such as research and evaluation, applying knowledge (as advocated by Parsons [1959, in Eshleman, 1989]) as being core skills that sociology graduates should promote, to social units, communities and cultures), social justice, and professional and ethical behaviours. Certainly these are reflected in the ASA's code of ethics, Huber's (1982) article and Roll's recent internet article (1998).

The attributes that were at the lower end of those specialist attributes that weren't considered to be as necessary (remembering that any scores under the 50% cut off point on the 1 to 10 scale were not included) appear to be those that relate to service provision, social action, and advocacy, being active in policy development and legislation, although it could be the nature of the action that may fall outside the sociologist's realm, rather than actual policy creation.

Academic sociologists rated 26 generic attributes above the benchmark, that is, at 7 or above on the 1 to 10 scale. These generic skills match those outlined by Roll (1998), Brown (1984) and Watts (1998).

Differences between academics. The fact that there were not many differences in generic skills between the academic sociologists and the pooled social science academics is comforting perhaps, although it is interesting to note that sociology academics rated "Presenting information" (item 1), "Problem solving" (item 3) and "Using feedback to review communication" (item 8) above the means for the pooled social science academics. This outcome confirms that advocacy of such skills as being very important competencies to engender in sociology students.

The other differences lay in items 12, 13, 21, and 26. Further analyses would need to be undertaken to see where the differences lie between those disciplines. For instance, item 26 (Developing performance in response to self-reflection and feedback from others) could be seen to be more important for counsellors than scientists. Although it would depend on the type of communication needed for the task. Similarly with item 12 (Demonstrating self-awareness) and item 21 (Demonstrating effective communication skills), which may be seen to be more important for professionals who work directly with individual clients and groups in a "helper" role.

The Differences Between Academics and Employers

There were significant differences between academic sociologists and the pool of social science employers on items 2, 3 and 11 where the sociology academics rated the competencies more highly and on items, 6, 10, 12, 13, 17, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30, 34, 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 where the sociology academics rated the competencies lower than employers. While Rolls relates skills to academic life for example, it may be equally or more important to ensure that each KSA is related to the world of work.

It should also be kept in mind that in some sets of items there were fewer items within the element set than others; this would make it more difficult to obtain significance (see for example, item 16 and 36 which may have been significant, if they had had larger numbers of items in the subset.

The lack of a direct employer group makes it difficult to suggest which of the generic and professional skills academic sociologists would endeavour to engender in their students. Suppose we take for the moment the competencies that academic sociologists believe are very important for sociology graduates to demonstrate on entry to the workplace, it may be a simple matter of taking the next step and asking sociology teachers to what extent currently are these competencies taught and assessed within the existing curriculum at different levels. Focus groups could then explore which are the most effective ways that sociology teachers have found in engendering these skills in their students.

This study attempted to provide further evidence of the attributes that academic sociologists believe are important for graduates to bring to the workforce. Their views about generic competencies were validated in some measure by comparisons with social science employers, although there were some slight differences on the perceived value of certain attributes. As such, it may be a useful document for both sociology teachers and students and can be utilised as a discussion paper in classrooms.

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