



Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum

Sociology A/T/M

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The *Shape of ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum: Sociology* will guide the writing of the *Sociology A/T/M* course.
- 1.2 This paper has been prepared in consultation with Dr Bianca Baggjarini of UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy and the deliberations of the Sociology Shape Paper writing panel.
- 1.3 The paper should be read in conjunction with The Shape of the ACT Senior Secondary Curriculum located at:
http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/curriculum/bsss_course_development_consultation

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Sociology Course will be the basis of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in ACT senior secondary schools. It will be useful for and useable by experienced and less experienced teachers.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies is reviewing the Sociology Curriculum in the five-year course development cycle of improvement and renewal.
- 3.2 All courses under development are required to meet Board design specifications and to align with Board requirements for senior secondary curriculum. These specifications align with ACARA course design specifications and provide teachers with flexibility to plan, teach and assess according to the needs and interests of their students.
- 3.3 The Sociology course is to be developed under the Humanities and Social Science Framework located at:
http://www.bsss.act.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/437300/Humanities_and_Social_Sciences_Framework.pdf

The rationale for this framework describes Humanities and Social Sciences:

Humanities and Social Sciences is the study of how people process and document the human experience and their place in it. It seeks to empower students to better understand humankind, society, and culture, and communicate ideas for the future. Humanities and Social Sciences examines what it means to be human and to ask questions about society and its institutions.

By analysing how people have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense of the world, it promotes empathy and understanding. It also requires students to deal critically and logically with what can be subjective, complex, and imperfect information.

Humanities and Social Sciences courses provide a context for the contemporary world and a framework for students to critically and creatively assess possible, probable, and preferred futures for themselves, and the world in which they live. It empowers students to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse and complex and interdependent world.

The study of Humanities and Social Sciences promotes well-rounded, thinking, analytical young citizens equipped for the demands of the 21st Century globalised world.

Courses written under this framework focus on concepts from a discipline or draw ideas from a number of disciplines. The analytical, critical and communication skills taught in the Humanities and Social Sciences will be valuable for future study, work, or profession. (p.5)

Therefore, *Sociology* is to be developed under the *Humanities and Social Science Framework* (HASS) due to the domains studied, the methods that can be ethically used and the epistemological commonalities with other HASS subjects. Sociologist Ron Stones argues that sociologists study

domains in which “the fierce battle around ideas, for hearts and minds of populations” is affected by the study of sociology itself. (Stones, R. 2017, p.2) In short, sociological study of problems changes the problems as the subjects of study are informed and challenged by sociology’s findings. This complicates the nature of sociological studies.

While sociologists use empirical methods to observe and analyse phenomena and data, the data is understood by the applications of a wide variety of theories with different paradigmatic assumptions and modes of analysis to interpret results. These theoreticians compete for hearts and minds but cannot make claims to consistent and absolute laws or paradigms. Further, sociologists cannot subject phenomena to experimentation, only observation. The active and conscious observational subject, observational nature, and lack of a unified paradigm are features characteristic of Social Sciences. Nevertheless, that is not to devalue Sociology. Sociological evidence and data are highly significant and its arguments insightful and useful for understanding and making decisions in our complicated world. Moving the subject to the Humanities and Social Sciences is a recognition of the epistemological basis of its academic practice based on empirical observation and critical analysis similar to other HASS subjects such as Global Studies and History.

3.4 All courses based on this framework should enable students to:

- compare and contrast theories, concepts, and principles
- critically analyse concepts, principles, ideas, and change
- synthesise different interpretations, representations, and perspectives
- evaluate significance of information, processes, and concepts
- apply critical and creative thinking skills
- reflect on own thinking and learning
- communicate creatively and critically in a range of modes for a variety of purposes.

3.5 Concepts from the Humanities and Social Sciences Framework (page 6) build on ACARA’s F-10 Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum:

- identity
- society
- change
- culture
- environment
- relationships
- empathy
- responsibility
- values.

3.6 All courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate should enable students to develop essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners. The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities comprise an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum. While developing all capabilities, in particular, the Sociology course will engage with the capabilities of Creative and Critical Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, Ethical Understanding, and Numeracy.

The General Capability of Critical and Creative Thinking will be developed by Sociology through the critical examination of theories, perspectives, texts, and arguments.

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives, and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking involves students thinking broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours, and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination, and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/critical-and-creative-thinking/>

The General Capability of Intercultural Understanding will be developed by their engagement with diverse perspectives, the meaning and function of culture, subculture and group identity, critical examinations of conflict and collaboration between cultures, and reflecting on their own place within a dynamic and changing world.

Students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to simultaneously deconstruct and value their own cultures, languages, and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national beliefs and identities are shaped and reshaped over time, and thus the variable and changing nature of culture. Intercultural understanding involves students learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/intercultural-understanding/>

Students in Sociology will engage with the General Capability of Ethical Understanding by engaging with significant ethical questions that divide and unite people and impact on their world locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop ethical understanding as they identify and investigate the nature of ethical concepts, values, and character traits, and understand how reasoning can assist ethical judgement. Ethical understanding involves students building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict, and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others ... As students engage with the elements of Ethical Understanding in an integrated way, they learn to recognise the complexity of many ethical issues. They develop a capacity to make reasoned ethical judgements through the investigation of a range of questions drawn from varied contexts in the curriculum.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/ethical-understanding/>

Students in Sociology will engage with the General Capability of Numeracy by critically analysing quantitative and qualitative data and assessing the generation and manipulation of numerical data by others.

Students become numerate as they develop the knowledge and skills to use mathematics confidently across other learning areas at school and in their lives more broadly. Numeracy encompasses the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that students need to use mathematics in a wide range of situations. It involves students recognising and understanding the role of mathematics in the world and having the dispositions and capacities to use mathematical knowledge and skills purposefully.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/numeracy/>

4. THE CONTEXT OF THE ACT

4.1 Courses of study for the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate:

- provide a variety of pathways, to meet different learning needs and encourage students to complete their secondary education
- enable students to develop the essential capabilities for twenty-first century learners
- empower students as active participants in their own learning
- engage students in contemporary issues relevant to their lives
- foster students' intellectual, social, and ethical development
- nurture students' wellbeing, and physical and spiritual development
- enable effective and respectful participation in a diverse society.

4.2 Each course of study:

- comprises an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions that students develop and use in their learning across the curriculum
- is based on a model of learning that integrates intended student outcomes, pedagogy, and assessment
- outlines teaching strategies which are grounded in learning principles and encompass quality teaching
- promotes intellectual quality, establish a rich learning environment, and generates relevant connections between learning and life experiences
- provides formal assessment and certification of students' achievements.

4.3 In consideration of the ACT context, and in response to contemporary research and literature, a Sociology course should include:

- a student-centred pedagogical approach
- a grounding in current Sociological research and analytical methodologies
- the educational needs of young people with respect to understanding individuals, societies, issues, systems, structures, and processes
- the Humanities and Social Sciences Framework and Achievement Standards
- the needs of different schools and sectors (government and non-government)
- diverse perspectives and theories, including an awareness of their strengths and limitations
- the contestability of cause and effects of issues locally, nationally, and internationally
- an awareness of power, privilege, inequity, social structures, and how these inequalities sustain tensions between structure and agency
- an awareness of the mutually constitutive relationships between individual and society
- the role of the student and their community in local, national, and global issues
- the possible solutions to local, national, and global issues.

5. AIMS OF THE SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM

Sociology is a subject that allows students to engage broadly with the world and develop an understanding of the meaning of their own experiences through a congruent analysis of the experiences of others across time and space. Indeed, Alan France argues that "Sociology is fundamentally concerned with exploring the relationship between individuals and their broader

context and how this interacts to influence social practice and social identity.”(2020, pp.3-4) Thus students will understand how “sociology helps to improve our understanding of why things are as they are and offers the potential to consider how they could be otherwise.”(Germov, J. and Poole, Marilyn, 2019, p.6) As such, this course aims to provide opportunities for deep learning and critical thinking about subjectivity in relation to the world more broadly, allowing for students to engage with myriad empirical case studies, whilst developing tools to both think about and solve local/global problems.

Sociology draws upon both quantitative and qualitative methods used by social scientists from the initial development of the research question, to the particular theories deployed, and finally to the evaluation of the conclusions that can be drawn. An understanding of research design, the varying methodological approaches to social phenomenon, and most importantly the strengths and limitations within each methodological choice in the research design process, is an element in this Sociology course. (Ferguson, S.J, 2016, pp.170-171; Lovekamp, et al, 2017, p.71; Winddance Twine, F, 2016, p.968)

The Sociology course aims to:

- develop an understanding of a range of Sociological theories, including conflict theory, structural functionalism, and symbolic interactionism
- develop an understanding of research methodologies, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches and their respective strengths and limitations
- develop an understanding of the assumptions, philosophical basis, methodology and substantive empirical observations that make up a theory
- cultivate a ‘Sociological Imagination’ and apply those insights to social phenomena while understanding that concepts are ‘essentially contested’
- devise well-reasoned conclusions about causation, processes, and consequences within a range of social contexts
- develop an understanding of the implications of individual agency, power, inequality, privilege, and structures
- develop an understanding of how identities are formed in relation to categories such as class, gender, race, sexual identity, indigeneity, nationality, age, and the impact of intersectionality on these categories
- develop cultural competence and intercultural understanding, supported by the practices of reflexivity, social conscience, empathy, and care
- develop an understanding of the actual and potential roles of individual and collective actors in contributing to social change
- understand how to conduct research, communicate research findings, and collaborate effectively.

6. STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIOLOGY CURRICULUM

With a focus on developing an understanding of the world around them, students study Sociological theories and methodologies. Students will be empowered to pursue their own lines of inquiry and be able to ask and begin to answer questions of interest to them.

While the previous course had prescribed selection of electives, under the Board endorsed design specifications, in this course, teachers will develop Programs of Learning that focus the concepts of the unit on topics, theme or contexts. Their program of learning will be developed in response to contemporary developments, student interest, school context, and teacher expertise. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that there is not significant duplication across units.

RATIONALE

Sociology empowers students to develop an understanding of how subjectivity and society are interconnected, thereby allowing them to better appreciate how their own identities, beliefs, struggles, and experiences are profoundly shaped and reshaped through the interplay between micro and the macro dimensions, across time and space.

Students critically analyse and deploy sociological theories, concepts and methods that variously attempt to explain and understand social change, causes, processes, and consequences of social phenomena.

Students develop analytical and critical thinking skills and learn to question and challenge assumptions about the world around them. Students develop thinking, literacy, communication, and numeracy skills that allow them to evaluate and apply Sociological theories. Students learn to develop research questions and methodologies. Furthermore, they develop skills to communicate effectively and present logical and coherent arguments whilst critically analysing the strengths and limitations of the arguments that ground their own thinking.

Sociological skills, knowledge and understanding empowers students to become engaged, active, reflexive citizens. In understanding a wide range of social phenomena, students develop intercultural understanding and cultural competence.

The study of Sociology provides knowledge, skills and understanding to interpret the world, which can be utilised in a wide range of tertiary and industry pathways.

UNITS

The units have been drafted for discussion as follows:

Constructing Identity

This unit explores the construction of individual identity. Students explore social phenomena, such as socialization, culture, and relationships. They apply and assess sociological theories and methodologies to examine the myriad interactions in society and how individuals can be defined, constrained, and empowered.

Understanding Difference

This unit explores the impact of difference on society, including inequalities based on class, gender, and race, and the intersection of those categories. They explore how difference can lead to debate, social organisation, and the development of ideologies. Students apply and assess sociological theories and methodologies critically to explain the origins and nature of inequality.

Applying Sociology

This unit explores the applications of Sociology to particular contexts, such as crime and justice, politics, or health. Students consider the assumptions and validity of sociological theories, concepts, methodologies, and models used to research and understand relevant case studies.

Structure and Agency

This unit explores the exercise of power by the social institutions and systems that inform the structure of society on a macro level, and in turn influence agency on a micro level. Students apply and assess sociological theories and methodologies to investigate the impact of institutional power on individuals and groups.

Independent Study

An Independent study unit has an important place in senior secondary courses. It is a valuable pedagogical approach that empowers students to make decisions about their own learning. An Independent study unit must be proposed by an individual student for their own study and negotiated with their teacher. An Independent study unit requires the principal's written approval. The program of learning for an Independent study unit must meet all the content descriptions as appears in the course. Pre-requisites for an Independent study unit are that students have completed at least **THREE** standard 1.0 units from a course.

7. CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Incorporating a futures orientation

To equip students to engage in the world in which they live, they need to understand the multiple experiences of the contemporary world. They analyse exercises of power, the functions and effects of culture and society, institutions, and social structures in the lives of people.

Further, in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, ministers note that 'Global integration and international mobility' have heightened the need 'to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship'. The declaration observes that the growing the need for greater environmental awareness, information, and communication technology (ICT) skills and the augmented importance of educational attainment. This was further developed in the Alice Springs Mparntwe Education Declaration which called for students to be "active and informed members of the community who:

- act with moral and ethical integrity
- have empathy for the circumstances of others and work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments
- appreciate and respect Australia's rich social, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity and embrace opportunities to communicate and share knowledge and experiences
- have an understanding of Australia's system of government, its histories, religions and culture
- are committed to national values of democracy, equity, and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life by connecting with their community and contributing to local and national conversations
- understand, acknowledge, and celebrate the diversity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians
- are informed and responsible global and local members of the community who value and celebrate cultural and linguistic differences, and engage in the global community, particularly with our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific regions.

It is significant that a Sociological course engages with all these aims and makes the nature of culture, society, conflict, understanding and effective communication the centre of its research and studies. Students undertaking Sociology focus on a course of study that enabled them to engage with and understand their world and the multiple paths that a global world offers them.

An orientation of responsible and informed citizenship, the rise of the knowledge economy, the rich diversity of Australian peoples and their distinctive position within the Asia-Pacific region make an informed understanding the socio-cultural and political processes that contribute to the future a valuable attainment for our students both personally and professionally.

Sociology has a broad and comprehensive foundation from which the implications for Australia can be grasped. With such a foundation that the longevity and richness of Indigenous cultures will be appreciated; the dimensions of our migrant experience and cultural diversity will be intelligible; that our relations with the Asian region will be comprehended; and the distinctive as well as the shared nature of our contemporary experiences of world.

7.2 Sociology curriculum

The Sociology curriculum retains an important place in ACT senior secondary curriculum. The curriculum fosters higher order thinking and the skills of critical and intercultural understanding that equip students to take an active part in democratic discussion of the individuals, various communities', and Australia's place and role in the world. They will better understand the nature, scope, and personal connection to, global issues.

Sociology provides a pathway to tertiary education by developing discipline specific concepts, content, knowledge, and skills. It also develops the capacity for active citizenship that empowers students to become engaged with the broader community.

The Sociology course, in developing student capacity to undertake and understand research methodologies, is consistent with calls from the OECD in the *OECD Learning Framework 2030* that students must take agency in their learning:

Learning requires the activity and initiative of the learner – it requires the learner's agency. Active learning implies a shift from being a passive recipient of knowledge to being an active agent in the learning process. (OECD, 2018, p.2)

In this course students will have the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning on topics of significance to them. Students, in developing knowledge and agency to learn about questions of importance to them, will take the first step in 'being the change they want to see in the world'.

Similarly, Australian Education Services argues in *Global Perspectives: A Framework for Global Education in Australian Schools*, 2008, that "[e]nabling young people to participate in shaping a better future for the world is at the heart of global education".

And further, that

It emphasises the unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirmation of social justice and human rights, building peace and actions for a sustainable future in different times and places. Global education promotes open-mindedness leading to a new thinking about the world and a predisposition to take action for change. Students learn to take responsibility for the actions, respect and value diversity and see themselves as global citizens who can contribute to a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world. (Education Services Australia, 2008)

Therefore, "[h]ow schools respond to growing economic interdependence, cultural divides, new digital opportunities and calls for sustainability will have a significant impact on the well-being of all members of the communities they serve" (OECD, 2018). Assisting students to engage actively and critically in their world is then a vital element in preparing them for their future lives. The Sociology senior secondary course is thus well placed to provide students with opportunities to explore critical issues and develop their ethical and conceptual framework for living in a complex, interconnected and changing world.

7.3 Equity and opportunity

The Sociology courses provides flexibility and choice for teachers and students. The factors that influence this choice include school and community contexts, local community learning opportunities, contemporary and local issues, and available learning resources.

The Sociology courses provides opportunities for students to develop an understanding of aspects of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The course offers the opportunity to view

the globe and its systems and processes from an indigenous perspective and using indigenous theory. (Chen, C. 2012) They include opportunities to analyse and reflect on the commonalities and differences of Australia's experiences of colonisation, resistance to colonisation, the global networks of indigenous campaigning, and adaptation to contemporary global systems.

7.4 Connections to other learning areas

Sociology is an interdisciplinary course. The learning acquired by students in Sociology is interdependent with learning in other areas such as Economics, Politics, Philosophy, Global Studies, History, Geography, the Arts, and English, as Sociology makes texts and data from a range of disciplines objects of study. The curriculum for courses will identify where there are links or opportunities to build cross curriculum learning. The connections arise naturally out of the Sociology curriculum.

7.5 Role of digital technologies

Students and teachers integrate a growing range of online information, tools and applications of diverse origins and perspectives. These include digitised online materials such as historical documents, books, newspapers, images, and items from museum collections, as well as other online resources including databases, reference works and indexes to library holdings.

Further, digital platforms are also a primary means of socialisation in the contemporary world and the analysis of digital communities, digital cultures, and digital networks of action, should be a significant topic of study in any program of study.

7.6 Clarity of curriculum

The curriculum is substantial and flexible. It is sufficiently rich and descriptive to guide teachers with limited experience but avoid excessive prescription that would hamper experienced teachers from exercising their skills. The curriculum document is expressed clearly in terms that are accessible to a new teacher, while allowing all teachers to enhance it with their interests and expertise.

7.7 Breadth and depth of study

Content descriptions specify the knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to learn and that teachers are expected to teach. Teachers are required to develop a program of learning that allows students to demonstrate all the content descriptions.

A program of learning is what a college provides to implement the course for a subject meeting students' needs and interests. It is at the discretion of the teacher to emphasis some content descriptions over others. The teacher may teach additional (not listed) content if it meets the specific unit goals providing that it does not duplicate content in other units.

7.8 The nature of the learner

The courses address the needs of diverse learners and cater for Tertiary (T), Accredited (A) and Modified (M) levels of study.

7.9 General capabilities

Skills and understanding related to personal and social capability, literacy and ICT are further developed and used in Sociology, as are thinking skills and creativity. In addition, capabilities such as self-management, teamwork, intercultural understanding, ethical awareness, and social competence are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area.

7.10 Cross curriculum perspectives

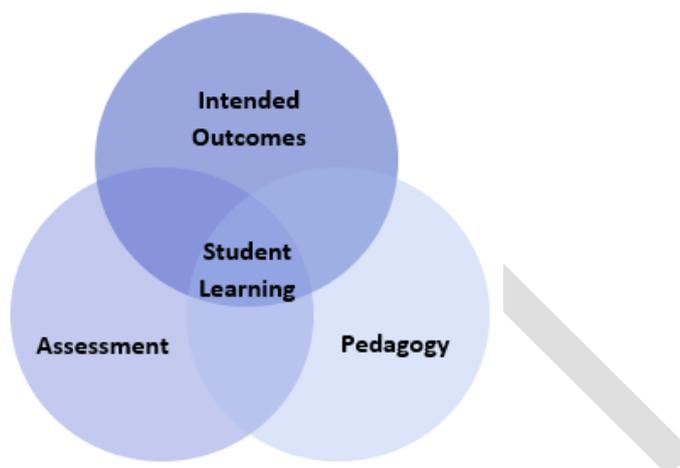
Each of these perspectives, Indigenous education, sustainability, and Australia's links with Asia, are represented in the courses in ways appropriate to that area. Curriculum documents are explicit as to how the perspectives are dealt with in each course and how links can be made between learning areas. These perspectives mitigate against the tendency for eurocentrism in Sociology. (Alvares, C. 2011)

8. PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT

The underpinning beliefs and learning principles for the development of ACT Board of Senior Secondary School curriculum as are follows:

8.1 Underpinning beliefs

- All students are able to learn
- Learning is a partnership between students and teachers
- Teachers are responsible for advancing student learning.



8.2 Learning Principles

1. Learning builds on existing knowledge, understandings, and skills.
(Prior knowledge)
2. When learning is organised around major concepts, principles, and significant real-world issues, within and across disciplines, it helps students make connections and build knowledge structures.
(Deep knowledge and connectedness)
3. Learning is facilitated when students actively monitor their own learning and consciously develop ways of organising and applying knowledge within and across contexts.
(Metacognition)
4. Learners' sense of self and motivation to learn affects learning.
(Self-concept)
5. Learning needs to take place in a context of high expectations.
(High expectations)
6. Learners learn in different ways and at different rates.
(Individual differences)
7. Different cultural environments, including the use of language, shape learners' understandings and the way they learn.
(Socio-cultural effects)
8. Learning is a social and collaborative function as well as an individual one.
(Collaborative learning)
9. Learning is strengthened when learning outcomes and criteria for judging learning are made explicit and when students receive frequent feedback on their progress.
(Explicit expectations and feedback).

9. CONCLUSION

The *Sociology* course is to be developed under the *Humanities and Social Sciences Framework*. The study of Humanities and Social Sciences promotes critical and creative thinking and intercultural understanding, equipping young citizens for the demands, challenges, and distinct opportunities of the 21st Century. The *Sociology* course equips students to analyse the structures, relationship dynamics and socio-cultural networks that connect them to personal, local, national, and global issues and the problems and opportunities that face the contemporary world.

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