Examining the question of graduate education in sociology raises issues about the way we perceive our discipline and its future. Multiple theoretical perspectives and applied vs. basic interests need not fractionate the discipline if we orient ourselves to those skills which comprise the essence of sociological work; and the idea of a disciplinary core will be more easily operationalized if we construct graduate curricula with these skills in mind. How we practice our discipline will be a far more significant determinant of both its future and the content of graduate training than our normative pronouncements about what ought to be.

Examining and reexamining the teaching of sociology at the graduate level is a favorite pastime of faculty. Our department (rather typical, I suspect) takes up the question of the graduate curriculum about every four years. At present students design their own graduate programs with the aid of an advisory committee consisting of four or more faculty. We used to have a much more structured program of required courses for all students. I suspect we may be moving in the direction of more structure, although these things are hard to predict. My pessimist colleagues often interpret the cycle of changes as evidence of the discipline's lack of direction. Their optimist counterparts view these changes as positive, mid-course corrections in the development and improvement of our graduate program. Some (realists?) marvel at how sociology endures despite these perennial attempts at curriculum change.

Why do we engage in this academic ritual? The reasons certainly do not lie in the unique personalities of sociologists who happen to be grouped in this department or another. Indeed, the fact that *The American Sociologist* should choose this topic for its (second) inaugural issue suggests the ritual is widely shared. It is

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I wish to thank John Wardwell for his comments on an earlier draft. Joseph R. DeMartini is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Washington State University who has research interests in the area of knowledge use. His recent publications, both with Les Whitbeck, include "Knowledge Use as Knowledge Creation" in *Knowledge* (1986), and "Sources of Knowledge for Practice" in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* (forthcoming). Address correspondence to the Department of Sociology, Washington State University, Pullman WA 99164-4020.
a part of how we do sociology in the academic context. Examining the graduate program is a way of examining our professional identities and it tells us much about how we see ourselves and the discipline we profess.

Self-Revelations

This examination often leads to two similar conclusions both of which I shall challenge. The first contends the discipline has become so fractured and specialized that we are pulled in various and conflicting directions. (For three views see the recent papers by Wallerstein, Coleman, and Collins, 1986.) A second points to what has been described as a growing schism in the discipline between basic and applied sociology. I view the first conclusion as a misinterpretation of some factual trends. I view the second as a case of misplaced emphasis.

With reference to the first conclusion, there are today many more sociological specialties than 30 years ago. There is less agreement on a dominant conceptual framework than when Parsons was writing and graduate students were trying to understand him. It is taken for granted that we are not a cumulative discipline in 1986. But were we ever? Is not the malaise we suffer more a change in perception than a change in the discipline's course of development? What differentiates 1956 from 1986 is the decline in our belief that we have identified the conceptual umbrella under which we can build our sociological enterprise.

The discipline has not lost direction. Rather, sociologists have come to recognize the many courses available to them. I side with Collins who views the presence of work in a variety of specialties as an opportunity for synthesis and eventual theory development. If the goal and process of synthesis motivate the doing of sociology, then growth in specialty areas should provide opportunity for the discipline rather than distraction or misdirection.

The second conclusion presents a message like the first, and it, too, can be badly misleading. Whether applied sociology in graduate (and undergraduate) education is the curriculum question of the decade. There are a plethora of definitions and distinctions available for departments wishing to incorporate the applied dimension. There is also much debate over applied work and whether students should be trained to do it wearing the professional name tag of sociologist. Proponents argue for the establishment of applied curricula as a legitimate branch of the discipline. Opponents argue that applied work is simply not sociology and has no place in the graduate curriculum.

This debate, however, is less identified with disciplinary substance than professional goals and recognition. Applied sociology differs from "not applied sociology" in the amount of control exercised by the sociologist and—in most cases—the work environment in which the sociologist functions. What is sociological about applied sociology differs little from more familiar definitions of the discipline, i.e., conceptual frameworks and methodological skills oriented to the formation of research questions, their empirical investigation, and an analytical treatment of data in terms of these questions.