Research Reports

Organizational Change in the Social Studies: Mini-Course Subject Options

John Guenther and Patricia Hansen

Numerous proposals have been made for the innovation and renovation of social studies programs. Yet the basic character of high school social studies appears to have changed little as a result of the decade of ferment and upheaval witnessed by the field during the 1960's. Until recently, with minor exceptions, it was possible to predict the pattern of social studies courses that would be found in the nation's high schools. This pattern of one-semester and full-year courses centered on a common set of offerings, reflected the persistent assumption that all students needed the same content over the same period of time, with limited electives being reserved for selected junior and senior students who had "completed" the regular curriculum.

Alternatives to the "traditional pattern" have been proposed. In the April 1973 issue of *The Clearing House*,[1] one such proposal was presented as a promising alternative: the restructuring of traditional-length courses into a series of mini-courses that are more accommodating to student needs and interests. The rationale for mini-courses was outlined at that time, accompanied by the results of a survey of all Kansas high schools with operational mini-course programs. The 107 high school principals with mini-course programs, who responded to the survey, indicated that mini-courses:

1. Provide more options, greater flexibility, and more varied experiences for students;
2. Provide for better utilization of staff strengths and interests;
3. Make it easier for students to work in their areas of interest and need—thus, helping to individualize instruction;
4. Revitalize student interest in certain subject areas, particularly the language arts and social studies;
5. Make it possible to offer more contemporary courses in various areas and to add depth and comprehensiveness to the curriculum;
6. Aid the failing student and lessen pupil-teacher conflicts.[2]

The advent of the mini-course has resulted in a significant organizational change for the social studies. It should be mentioned, however, that for purposes of this article, organizational change refers only to a restructuring of the length of social studies courses. Nothing is implied about the concept or skill focus of mini-courses in contrast with traditional length courses.

More specifically, the purpose of this article is to report:

1. The status of traditional length and mini-course social studies programs in the public high schools of Kansas
2. The social studies subject areas most affected by the adoption of mini-courses in high schools of different enrollment classifications
3. The most frequently offered mini-courses in American history and government
4. The social studies mini-course programs in selected high schools.

To secure the data for the study, the authors examined high school organizational reports and sets of course descriptions provided by participating Kansas high schools. All Kansas public high schools are required to submit copies of their schedules to the Kansas State Department of Education. An examination of the class schedules determined the schools that were offering less-than-a-semester length courses. In addition, all high schools with social studies mini-course programs were asked to send the authors a copy of their course descriptions. As expected, not all schools had course descriptions available, nor were all sets of course descriptions received complete enough to be of use. The authors used the 40 sets of course descriptions that were most descriptive of the mini-courses being offered by the partici-

Table 1. One Semester and Full Year Social Studies Course Offerings 1975-76 School Year

Subject	No. of Teachers	No. of High Schools	Percentage of High Schools *	Subject	No. of Teachers	No. of High Schools	Percentage of High Schools *
American History	451	260	.71	Intro/Soc. Studies	9	9	.02
American Government	337	260	.71	Intro/Geography	9	9	.02
Intro/Psych.	269	241	.66	European History	9	9	.02
Non-American History	200	185	.50	Western Civ.	9	9	.02
Intro/Sociology	166	153	.42	Western/Non-Western Area Studies	8	8	.02
Current Affairs	86	68	.19	Anthropology	7	7	.02
World Geography	59	55	.15	Indian Study/Govt.	7	7	.02
Prin./Economics	54	50	.14	Family Living	7	5	.01
Inter. Relations	41	37	.10	Prob. U.S. Dem.	6	5	.01
Ethnic Studies	26	15	.04	U.S. Geography	4	4	.01
Citizenship	24	22	.06	African History	4	3	.01
American Studies	23	13	.04	Ind. Study/ World History	4	3	.01
Econ/Consumer	22	19	.05	Law Education	3	3	.01
Intro/Pol. Sci.	14	11	.03	Intro/Philosophy	3	3	.01
Comp. Economics	13	13	.04	Economic Geography	2	2	.01
Kansas History	13	13	.04	Latin Amer. History	2	2	.01
Civics	13	10	.03	Kansas Geography	1	1	.00
Humanities	13	8	.02	Asian History	1	1	.00
Econ. Hist./U.S.	11	10	.03				
Ind. Study/U.S. History	11	8	.02				

* Percentage of 367 Kansas public high schools

pating schools.

Although this study attempts to identify and analyze contemporary developments in one area of proposed social studies curriculum reform, the results are not intended to be widely generalizable to social studies programs across the nation. The purpose here is merely to report that changes and directions are being operationalized in one selected locality as an indication of social studies program reorganization.

Traditional Course Offerings

Before analyzing existing social studies mini-course programs, it is considered of value to examine the current traditional length courses still offered in Kansas public high schools.

As indicated in Table 1, American history and government are the two most frequently offered one-semester or full-year social studies courses. It is worthwhile to note that psychology and non-American history are the only two additional courses offered in a majority of Kansas high schools.

A study completed in 1961-62 [3] reported that only 26 percent of the high schools at that time were offering courses in psychology. Sociology courses were part of the social studies programs in only 14 percent of the high schools; non-American history courses were offered in 66 percent of the schools. A trend toward psychology and sociology and away from non-American history is evident in the data.

Although an examination of course offerings does not indicate the quality of social studies instruction or programs, or the use of new methods and materials, it does give a gross measure of the general subject areas and content considered most important to the state's social studies educators. It should be mentioned, however, that one unit of American history and one-half unit of government are required for high school graduation in Kansas.

Mini-Course Programs

A more complete indication of the subject preferences of social studies teachers is provided through an examination of mini-course programs. The decision to offer a greater variety of courses, increase program flexibility, and give students more subject options means, in effect, that a school faculty must determine the subject areas and content most appropriate to their students' needs and interests. Although, as indicated earlier in this article, of the numerous advantages professed for mini-courses, the ability to attend to student needs and interests must be considered of paramount importance. There is no evidence, of

course, that would indicate that "needs" are being more readily met through mini-course organizations than through traditional means.

Before discussing the specific courses that have been developed, however, it is considered valuable to examine the general status of social studies mini-course programs in all Kansas public high schools. Until recently, of course, virtually all programs consisted entirely of one-semester or full-year courses.

Table 2. Social Studies Mini-Course Programs by High School Enrollment

School Enrollment	No. of Kansas High Schools	No. with Mini-Courses in Social Studies	Percentage with Mini-Courses in Social Studies
Less than 100	77	7	.09
100-199	105	23	.22
200-299	68	27	.40
300-399	25	10	.40
400-499	23	14	.61
500-599	13	7	.54
600-699	12	9	.75
700-799	4	1	.25
800-899	3	1	.25
900-999	2	1	.50
1000+	34	13	.38
Totals	367	113	.31

As indicated in Table 2, 113 Kansas public high schools (31 percent) have developed social studies mini-course programs in one or more subject areas. While the enrollment of the high school obviously has an effect on the existence of mini-course programs, even a few of the smallest schools have developed programs. In the opinion of the authors, a carefully conceived mini-course program, even in the smallest of schools, provides more subject options for students than was thought possible before. Certainly enrollment and staff size are restricting factors, but through more flexibility in scheduling and the removal of grade-level restrictions, course options are possible.

Mini-Course Subject Areas

The mini-course programs that have been developed in the 113 schools reflect, in general, the same subject orientation as the traditional length courses. Mini-courses are most prevalent in American history (74), government (72), sociology (34), psychology (28) and non-American history (27). In contrast to the traditional offerings, sociology ranks third in the number of programs.

Schools in two of the lowest enrollment classifications (100-199, 200-299) have the greatest percentage of all mini-course programs. Refer to Table 2 for the total number of schools in each enrollment classification.

Mini-Course Programs—40 Selected Schools

To gain more specific information regarding the mini-course programs, the principals of all 113 high schools were asked to send to the authors a copy of their social studies course descriptions. The 40 high schools with the most complete sets of course descriptions were selected for the next part of the study.

Table 3. Social Studies Mini-Course Programs by Subject Area

	SUBJECT AREAS															
School Enrollment	American History		Government		Psychology		World History		Sociology		Economics		Geography		Totals	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f*	%**
Less than 100	4	.57	4	.57	1	.14	1	.14	1	.14	0	.00	1	.14	7	.06
100–199	11	.48	15	.65	7	.30	4	.17	6	.26	3	.13	0	.00	23	.20
200–299	21	.78	17	.63	5	.19	5	.19	9	.33	2	.07	1	.04	27	.24
300–399	8	.80	9	.90	5	.50	5	.50	5	.50	2	.20	2	.20	10	.09
400–499	10	.71	8	.57	5	.36	1	.07	5	.36	4	.29	0	.00	14	.12
500–599	6	.86	5	.71	3	.43	3	.43	4	.57	2	.29	0	.00	7	.06
600–699	7	.78	6	.67	2	.22	4	.44	3	.33	1	.11	2	.22	9	.08
700–799	1	1.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	.01
800–899	1	1.00	1	1.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	.01
900–999	0	.00	1	1.00	0	.00	1	1.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	.01
1000+	5	.38	6	.46	0	.00	3	.23	1	.08	5	.38	1	.08	13	.12
Totals	74	.65	72	.64	28	.25	27	.24	34	.30	19	.17	7	.06	113	100±

* Frequency of high schools in enrollment classification with social studies mini-course programs.
** Percentage of high schools (113) with social studies mini-course programs in all enrollment classifications.

Table 4. Social Studies Mini-Course Offerings in 40 Selected Schools

Subject	Mini-Course Programs * f	%	Courses ** f	%	Average	Range	Retention of Traditional Length Courses **** f	%
American History	36	.90	360	.37	10	2-22	12	.33
Government	30	.75	183	.19	6.1	1-20	6	.20
World History	26	.65	141	.14	5.4	1-12	6	.23
Psychology	21	.53	74	.08	3.5	1-8	6	.29
Sociology	21	.53	79	.08	3.8	1-8	3	.14
Minorities	14	.35	18	.02	1.3	1-4	1	.07
Current Problems	13	.33	19	.02	1.5	1-4	0	.00
Geography	13	.33	27	.03	2.1	1-5	1	.08
Economics	10	.25	26	.03	2.6	1-5	2	.20
International Relations	10	.25	19	.02	1.9	1-5	0	.00
Anthropology	8	.20	15	.02	1.9	1-6	2	.25
Other	11	.28	16	.02	1.5	1-4	1	.09
Totals			997	100±	24.4***	2-26		

* In the 40 selected schools.
** Number of courses offered in the subject area and percent of the total number of mini-courses.
*** Average number of courses in the 40 schools.
**** Frequency and percent of schools that name both mini and traditional length courses in each subject area.

Table 4 shows the number of mini-course programs and courses offered in each subject area. In addition, the range and average number of courses offered by the 40 schools are indicated.

A total of 977 social studies mini-courses are being offered by the 40 high schools. There are 360 American history mini-courses being offered; this represents 37 percent of all social studies mini-courses and is an average of 10 courses per school. The range of American history courses is from 2-22. The average number of social studies mini-courses offered by each school was 24.4.

While psychology is the third most frequently offered traditional-length course (Table 1), it is a distant fifth in the total offerings of the 40 selected schools. Non-American history, decreasing in frequency as a traditional-length course, has an average of 5.4 courses in the 26 schools with mini-course programs in the subject area.

Although not indicated in Table 4, there is an obvious relationship between the retention of traditional-length courses and the number of mini-courses offered in a subject area. Retaining a traditional-length course, particularly in a small school, greatly reduces the range of mini-course offerings.

There are significant differences in the total range of social studies mini-course offerings in schools of different enrollment classifications. The greatest total number of offerings (66) is in a school with 648 students. One school with an enrollment of only 204 students offers 40 different courses; another school with 381 students has 51 mini-course options.

American History Mini-Courses

American history and government, the subject areas with the most extensive offerings, were analyzed to determine the most popular courses in 40 selected schools. Additional course descriptions were selected in order to bring the total in each subject area to 40 schools.

Table 5. American History Mini-Courses

Subject	f*	%	Subject	f*	%
Civil War	29	72.5	Kansas History	8	20.0
Recent U.S.	26	65.0	World War I	8	20.0
American West	25	62.5	World War II	8	20.0
Colonies	23	57.5	Black History	8	20.0
Revolution	17	42.5	Great Men	7	17.5
World War I & II	14	35.0	Diplomatic History	7	17.5
American Indian	13	32.5	Depression	6	15.0
20's & 30's	13	25.0	Review	6	15.0
Indian/Urban	10	25.0	Discovery/ Exploration	5	12.5
Minorities	9	22.5			
Indian Study	9	22.5			

* Frequency and percent of 40 selected schools with American History mini-course programs.

As indicated in Table 5, the American Civil War is the most popular subject for American history mini-courses. Courses focusing on recent American history, the West, and the colonial period are also offered in a majority of the 40 schools studied. The majority of the schools do offer a course on the world wars, but not in combination. Also of interest is that only a

minority of the schools (12.5 percent) are offering a course related to the discovery and exploration of the United States. In comparison with Table 1, it is evident that as schools develop mini-course programs, they are more likely to institute independent study courses for their students.

Government Mini-Courses

Although it is assumed that the content of any mini-course will not be mutually exclusive of all other offerings, the information included in Table 6 indicates the general subject areas of the most frequently offered government mini-courses.

Table 6. Government Mini-Courses

Subject	*f**	*%*	*Subject*	*f**	*%*
State/Local	28	70.0	Intro/Govt.	9	22.5
Presidency	19	47.5	Civil Rights	8	20.0
Constitution	17	42.5	Supreme Court	5	12.5
Youth Law	16	40.0	Govt. Finances	5	12.5
Comparative Govts.	15	37.5	Ism's	5	12.5
Legislature	14	35.0	Voting/Elections	4	10.0
Continuing Political Issues	14	35.0	Branches/Govt.	4	10.0
Judiciary	12	30.0	Indian Study	4	10.0
Political Parties	12	30.0	Criminology	3	7.5
International Relations	11	27.5	City Govt.	2	5.0

* Frequency and percent of 40 selected schools with mini-course programs in government.

A specific course in state and local government, offered by 28 of the 40 schools, is the most consistent mini-course offering in government. No one other single course is offered in a majority of the schools surveyed. Students are generally given approximately 50 percent fewer course options in government than in American history.

The most significant results of the study reported in this article are as follows:

1. There is a trend toward more courses in psychology and sociology.

2. Thirty-one percent (113) of the public high schools in Kansas have developed mini-course programs in one or more areas of the social studies.

3. The enrollment of the high school does have some relationship to the existence of social studies mini-course programs. Even the smallest of schools, however, has established programs.

4. The largest number of mini-course programs has been established in American history (74) and government (71).

5. The greatest percentage of the mini-course programs is in the high school enrollment classifications of 100-199 and 200-299 students.

6. Forty selected high schools were offering a total of 977 social studies mini-courses. The greatest number of courses (360) were in American history.

7. The 40 schools were offering an average of 24.4 social studies mini-courses. The number of courses offered ranged from 2-66.

8. The American Civil War, Recent American History, the American West, and the Colonies were the most frequently offered American history mini-courses.

9. The most frequently offered government courses were State and Local Government, The Presidency, The Constitution, and Youth and the Law.

It is hoped that the results of this study will be of assistance to those schools contemplating the establishment of social studies mini-course programs. The decision to develop mini-courses is, in the opinion of the authors, an opportune time to consider the total range of needed changes in social studies programs.

[1] John Guenther and Robert Ridgway. "Mini-Courses: Promising Alternative in the Social Studies." *The Clearing House* 47(8):486-89; April 1973.

[2] John Guenther and Robert Ridgway. "Mini-Courses: One Way To Provide More Humanistic School Programs." *NASSP Bulletin* 60(399):12-15; April 1976.

[3] Eldon E. Snyder. "Offerings and Enrollments in the Secondary School Social Sciences in Kansas 1961-62." *The Emporia State Research Studies* 12(1):1-32; September 1963.



John Guenther (left) is Associate Professor; Patricia Hansen (right) is Instructor of Curriculum and Instruction; both at The University of Kansas, Lawrence.

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