Identification of main fields or areas of a discipline in the form of main concepts used in it, is an essential step in designing an information retrieval tool. Most of the existing general classification schemes were designed by one or two individuals, mostly by their individual experience and expertise. Full comprehension of all the subjects in the universe of documentary knowledge and mapping these subjects and their individual concepts according to their discipline-specific significance, is not possible for one or a few individuals. Even depending on one or a few specialists in a field, does not provide a balanced picture of the main concepts of a discipline according to their relative significance. Under the circumstances, the only other alternative is to take the views of a maximum number of practicing professionals in the field, and consolidate their views for identifying the most significant concepts in that discipline.

With this objective, this research study was undertaken to identify some of the main concepts, and the terms used for them, by sociologists, and to examine how far, bibliographic information retrieval tools, used in libraries and information centres, have been able to provide them in their schedules. For this, identification of the main concepts of sociology, that are dealt, discussed, taught and written about, by sociologists, was necessary, and after giving due consideration to various alternative sources, terms used in the chapter headings of the sociology textbooks were adjudged to be the best source. It was also felt necessary that the sample should be a satisfactory representative of the universe of sociology textbooks, and the period coverage also should span as maximum as possible. Hence, 100 introductory textbooks of sociology covering the period 1939 to 1990 have been considered, for the present study.

Concepts and the terms representing them, have been identified out of 87 books, that were found relevant, out of 100 books initially selected. All the concepts, dealt in the form of terms used in the chapter headings, by at least 3 authors, have
been identified and treated as the main concepts of sociology. The number of authors using a chapter heading for a concept and the total proportion of these books used for a concept, has been quantified and treated as the relative significance given to that concept, by all the authors. The concepts identified in this way, have been arranged under 10 broad categories and each main concept placed in relation to other concepts, on the basis of its definition, explanation, and usage in some subject-dictionaries. Broader, narrower, and related terms used for a concept, by all the textbook authors, in the form of division of a book into sections and chapters has also been considered for relative placement. Finally, some bibliographic information retrieval tools have been evaluated for the provision in them, for these main concepts. The study implies that the concepts, based on the opinion of a large number of practicing professionals are certainly significant, and can be treated as the main concepts, from the subject-specific point of view, as such, these need to be provided in all types of information retrieval tools pertaining to sociology. The method deserves to be applied for identifying the main concepts of other social sciences also.

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The basic data for this study was collected from a number of institutions in Shillong, and prominent among them are: North-Eastern Hill University, Sacred Heart Theological College, State Central Library, St. Anthony's College, ICSSR Regional Centre, Shillong, and CIEFL, Shillong. I thank the librarians and other staff of all the institutions for their kind cooperation.

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