

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Careers in Sociology

**How to get the most out of your
Sociology degree.**



The University of Maine Department of Sociology welcomes you into the department and hopes that this booklet will help you to think about possible jobs and careers for which your sociology major will be very useful. Please feel free to talk with your advisor or other Sociology faculty about your career options.

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*The good we secure for
ourselves is precarious and
uncertain until it is secured
for all of us and
incorporated into our
common life.*

-Jane Addams

Careers in Sociology

There are a few majors in the university that prepare people for specific occupations: for example engineering, nursing, business administration and social work. Most university majors, including sociology, do not do this. However, there are certainly many interesting, exciting, well-paid jobs for which you as a sociology major can be hired. You will be hired on the basis of your character and personality, of course, but also for the specific skills that you can bring to the job. Your general university courses will give you some of these skills. Your major in sociology will give you a range of other skills that are very valuable in a wide range of occupations.

This pamphlet discusses the character traits employers seek, the skills you are gaining from your general education, and the skills you will gain as a sociology major. The pamphlet concludes with examples of the types of jobs that sociology majors hold (we only give examples because it would take a much longer pamphlet than this to list all of the jobs for which sociology majors are qualified), a list of useful websites that you can use to explore specific occupations, graduate school options, and finally some advice on strengthening your resume so that your job search can be more effective.

Character traits

You may be frightened when going into a job interview; what you may not realize is that the person interviewing you is also frightened. It costs a great deal to hire and train an employee for any responsible position, and employers are very worried that they will hire a “bad apple”. Employers are afraid of two things: 1) the person they hire might be unreliable; and 2) the person they hire may be difficult for them and their other employees to get along with.

With regard to reliability, one of the most important things that a professor can write about you when writing a letter of recommendation is to say that you attended class regularly, always turned in assignments on time and always did them carefully.

You should make a habit of acting in this way. With regard to learning how to get along with others, you should join one or more extracurricular organizations such as the Sociology Club and participate actively within it. Employers like to see evidence of extracurricular activities, particularly ones in which you have taken a responsible position helping to organize and carry out the organization's activities.

Skills you are gaining as the result of your general university courses

1) The ability to learn

In our rapidly changing world, people have to constantly update their skills. Employers will want to know both that you can be trained for the job for which they are initially hiring you and that you can learn new skills as the job changes and as you advance to more responsible positions.

As a result, you should always take courses that are hard and that will really stretch you. It may be okay to have one course each semester that you regard as an easy one, but you should make certain that you have at least two courses each semester that are really challenging and that will force you to do your best work and develop new abilities.

2) The ability to write clear, logical, and grammatically correct papers

People who cannot communicate clearly are severely handicapped. You may, or may not, be required to write extensively in your first jobs, but as you move up the ladder, writing skills will become more and more important. The university requires that all students take ENG 101 or the equivalent, and in Sociology we require that you take two additional writing intensive courses: an intermediate level English composition or technical writing course, and our research methods course: SOC 390. In addition you will have the opportunity to write papers in a number of your other sociology courses. When you get these papers back, pay close attention to your instructor's comments. These comments give you the opportunity to improve, and you ought to seize them.

3) The ability to do basic mathematics

The university requires that you take two courses in mathematics, and in Sociology we require that one of these courses be in statistics. In fact, it will help your job prospects greatly if you decide to take additional mathematics courses. This applies especially to those of you who dislike mathematics.

Almost all middle- and upper-level positions require that you deal with figures. Occupants of these positions have to keep accounts, understand statistics, determine the most efficient ways of doing tasks, and a host of other activities that involve mathematics.

An ability to do basic mathematics is also important for everyday living. As one example, a sizable proportion of people who have lost their homes because they are required to make mortgage payments they cannot afford are people who have weak mathematical skills. Similarly, a sizable proportion of people who cannot make their credit card payments and who have to file for bankruptcy are people who have weak mathematical skills. It is very easy for unscrupulous lenders to take advantage of such people. Mathematical skills are something that deteriorate if people do not use them. Thus we recommend that you take more math courses than the university's minimal requirements. It almost doesn't matter which courses you take; the main thing is to keep your skills up. You don't have to be good at higher levels of mathematics, but you need to be solid in the basics.

Skills you gain as the result of majoring in sociology

Sociology analyzes social institutions, social inequality, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists pay special attention to the structure of groups, organizations and societies and to how these structures affect relationships among people.

One question some prospective employers may ask you is, "What is sociology?" Ideally, this question will be asked of you in every job interview, and the reason you want this question to be asked is that it will allow you to show some of the specific skills that you have gained as the result of being a sociology major. The

preceding paragraph above is a general one, and you should supplement it with specific examples of what sociologists study. This will give you the opportunity to show the employer that sociologists study topics that are relevant to the job you are seeking. In showing this, you will be showing some of the specific skills that you have gained in your sociology courses. For example, if you are applying for a job in law enforcement, you can follow up the statement above by saying, “For example, sociologists study why crime rates differ in different sections of a city.” If you are applying for a job in a business, you could say, “For example, sociologists study how to create work environments where people of different races can work together harmoniously.”

There are very few jobs that will interest you that are not affected by the larger social environment. By explaining what sociology is, you are also explaining to the prospective employer why sociological knowledge is valuable and why you would be a valuable employee.

Thus, every subject matter course that you take in sociology will provide you with job-related skills. In addition, the sociology major as whole will allow you to gain the following skills.

1. Research and analysis skills – the ability to research a topic

- The ability to formulate empirically testable questions
- The ability to use resources such as libraries and the web to find information
- The ability to synthesize information and ideas
- The ability to write surveys and draw random samples
- The ability to use statistical packages such as SPSS
- The ability to use statistics to analyze quantitative data and draw accurate conclusions
- The ability to conduct interviews
- The ability to analyze qualitative data

2. Effective interpersonal and communication skills – the ability to communicate effectively and clearly both orally and in

writing

- The ability to work effectively in groups
 - The ability to develop one's own ideas and informed opinions while being open to the views of others and the ability to discuss their views respectfully
 - The ability to understand the perspectives of others and to put oneself in the shoes of others
 - The ability to engage in a dialogue with other people rather than talking at them
 - The ability to analyze social situations and to devise strategies to reduce conflict and improve group functioning, allowing you to be a more effective team member or team leader
 - The ability to understand social settings in which people engage in face to face interaction, including differences in power and how identities are assigned, and the ways in which identities are accepted or rejected
- 3. Critical thinking skills** – the ability to analyze issues and tasks and devise effective answers to problems
 - 4. An understanding of diversity** (gender, race and ethnicity, social class, etc.) and the ability to appreciate the potential contributions of people from a wide range of different backgrounds and with widely different characteristics
 - 5. The ability to understand the causes and likely consequences of social trends**
 - 6. An understanding of the processes of globalization**
 - 7. Specialized knowledge from some elective courses**
 - An understanding of the criminal justice system
 - An understanding of historical and contemporary patterns of immigration and immigration policy
 - Knowing how to recognize and understand social inequality in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and other forms of division among people
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- An understanding of the many racial and ethnic groups that make up America's growing and changing population

Using your college experience and your major in sociology to build successful job applications

- You may already have some ideas about the areas in which you would like to work (e.g. in health care or in law enforcement). Informational interviews are an excellent way of finding out what it is like to work in these areas and to decide whether they are good ones for you. An informational interview is one where you meet with a person already working in that area to find out what the job is like and what you need to do in order to qualify for it. The Career Center (top floor of the Memorial Union) is an excellent resource. The staff there is very helpful, and they will be happy to help you set up informational interviews and to coach you in how to conduct one.
 - When you have a choice of topics for required papers, choose topics that are related to the areas in which you might like to work. If you do a good job on these papers, save them and mention them in your job interviews. Take copies of the papers with you to interviews so that you can show them to prospective employers.
 - If there are elective courses either in sociology or in other departments that are relevant to areas in which you might like to work, take them and list the courses on your resume.
 - An independent study course is a course in which you work individually with a professor doing research on a topic of your choice. Choose a topic that is relevant to an area in which you would like to work and list the paper on your resume.
 - Do an internship in a relevant organization.
 - Volunteer. Ideally, volunteer in an organization that is relevant to an area in which you would like to work, but if no such organization is available locally, volunteer in any sort of charitable organization. Employers and graduate schools like to see volunteer experience, particularly if you have a letter from a supervisor stating that you did a good job.
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- Join The Sociology Club and take an active role within it. Club membership will help you learn to work with others and to carry out tasks responsibly.
- Become familiar with the Career Center. It is a wonderful source of advise on choosing careers and on finding internships and employment.. The Center will also help you in preparing resumes and conducting informational interviews.
- Go to the Career Fair that our university holds in the spring, and go every year. You do not have to be looking for a job or an internship to find the career fair useful. The fair is also an excellent way of finding out about the types of employment that are available and what you must do to qualify for particular jobs. Before each fair the Career Center holds training sessions to explain how to get the most out of attending the fair. Attend these sessions.
- If you can, study abroad. Because of increasing globalization, it is increasingly important for job seekers to be acquainted with other cultures, and studying abroad is a wonderful way of doing this.
- When you do an excellent paper on any topic, save it. Showing good papers to a prospective employer is an excellent way of showing what you can do.
- Take a course in accounting (BUA 201) and in management and organizations (BUA 325). If you move up to a responsible position in any organization, or if you open up your own small business, you will need to understand basic accounting procedures and how organizations are run.

Sociology constitutes a valuable training for many professions, and graduate schools in law, business, public administration, education, public health, medicine, nursing, social work, counseling and many other professions look favorably upon applicants with majors in sociology.

One particularly good opportunity for University of Maine students is the University of Maine Business College. Training in business is essential for those who want to open their own businesses, work for a business organization or work in the public

sector or not for profit sector (e.g. managing a charity). In all of these cases managerial skills are important, and a graduate degree in management, an MBA, opens many opportunities. The University of Maine Business College has created a program in which a student in any major can get an MBA with one year of additional work beyond the bachelor's degree. A handout explaining this program is available at the Sociology department office (201 Fernald Hall).

Sample Resume

Jane Doe

151 Sociology Street, Bangor, Maine 04401 207-555-5555 JDoe@gmail.com

EDUCATION

(worked a minimum of ten hours per week throughout undergraduate studies)
University of Maine Orono, Maine

B.A. in Sociology May 2013; Crime, Law, Deviance concentration, Minor in Psychology, Accumulative GPA 3.61 (4.0 scale) Dean's List Student

Research projects

The effects of parental supervision upon drug use among rural teenagers
(research project conducted in a class on research methods within sociology)

Assessing the needs of rural communities (research project completed while an intern at the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center)

How gangs are created: a study of gang formation in Portland Maine (Senior thesis project, presented at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference)

Honors and awards

Presidential Academic Achievement Pin – 3.5 or higher GPA

Phi Beta Kappa National Honor Society University of Maine Chapter, April 2013

Alpha Kappa Delta National Honor Society in Sociology, April 2013 University of Maine

All Maine Women Society, Class of 2013

Relevant courses

Crime and Criminal Justice

Deviance and Social Control

Problems of Violence and Terrorism

Law and Society
Quantitative Reasoning in Sociology
Logic of Sociological Inquiry
Principles of Financial Accounting
Principles of Management and Organization
Psychology of Adolescence

WORK EXPERIENCE

Intern, Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center, September 2011 – May 2012
Worked closely with the director of the Center in setting up focus groups in seven rural communities in Maine, discussing community needs. Recruited participants in the groups, attended all meetings and took notes, led discussions within the groups, prepared summary reports and a final report

Research Assistant, Dr. Steven Barkan, September 2012 – May 2013
Compiled police and media records of gang activity in Portland, Maine from 1980-2009. Interviewed gang members on why they joined gangs and, for those that ultimately dropped their memberships, why they left. Interviewed police and probation officers.

Bank Teller 2009 – 2012 Rich Bank of Maine Lewiston, Maine
Processed financial transactions accurately and in a timely way. Resolved customer problems and provided current information about products and services. Recognized for accuracy in proof reading procedures, demonstrated trustworthiness and reliability, rehired for four consecutive summers

Waitress 2009 – 2013 Smith's Seafood Restaurant Brewer, Maine
Dealt with customers who demanded quick and efficient service; handled multiple tables of customers making requests at the same time; conversed with customers from diverse backgrounds. Rehired for four consecutive years.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Sociology Club 2010 – 2013
Participated in all meetings
Helped organize discussion groups and movie nights
Helped organize annual "meet the faculty" party
Participated in Sociology Club fundraising efforts
Attended professional sociology conferences
Participated in Sociology Club charity fundraiser through book drive

Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation 2010-2013
Attended steering committee planning meetings for local Race for the Cure
Helped sign up race participants at Bangor Mall
Assisted with set up and tear down for local events including Race for the Cure and Blues for the Cure

What can I do with a Sociology degree?

Here is a guide from the University of Tennessee that shows you the many different areas in which sociologists are qualified to work and suggests strategies to improve your employability.

I. HUMAN SERVICES

AREAS

Counseling	Case Management
Advocacy	Mental Health Services
Programming	Administration

EMPLOYERS

Community service agencies	Advocacy groups
United Way agencies	Private foundations
Hospitals and wellness centers	Halfway houses
Vocational services	Insurance companies
Adoption and child care agencies	
Educational information services	
Federal, state, and local government	
Local branches of national non-profit organizations	
Religiously-affiliated service organizations	
Nursing homes and retirement communities	

STRATEGIES

Gain experience and develop helping skills through volunteer positions. Spend summers working at camps, YMCA's, or other social service agencies. Gain experience working with diverse populations. Develop excellent communication skills. Concentrate course work in an area of interest such as youth, gerontology, or poverty. Learn a second language in order to interact with non-English speakers and increase marketability. Serve as a peer mentor, resident assistant, or other student leader. Earn a master's degree in social work, counseling, or other related field to increase employment opportunities. Most states require licensure or certification for positions involving the direct provision of therapeutic services to clients.

II. CRIMINAL JUSTICE

AREAS

Corrections	Rehabilitation
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Law Enforcement

Judiciary

EMPLOYERS

Correctional institutions
Court systems

Federal, state, and local
government (especially law
enforcement agencies)

STRATEGIES

Gain practical experience via part-time or summer jobs, internships, or volunteer work. Volunteer to work with troubled youth. Obtain a graduate or law degree for advancement. Consider obtaining experience in a branch of the military.

III. EDUCATION

AREAS

Teaching

Research

EMPLOYERS

Public and private schools
Adult education providers

Colleges and universities

STRATEGIES

Obtain certification/licensure to teach grades K-12. Become certified to teach multiple subjects and age groups for increased job opportunities. Earn a graduate degree for post-secondary teaching opportunities. Assist a professor with research. Take extra courses in research and statistics. Develop exceptional written and oral communication skills. Volunteer as a tutor. Secure strong personal recommendations, particularly from professors.

IV. GOVERNMENT

AREAS

Social Statistics
Public Administration
Research
Human Services
Law Enforcement

Demography
Policy Analysis
Program Development
City Planning

EMPLOYERS

Federal, state and local departments and agencies such as: Departments of Agriculture, Education, Interior, Commerce, Defense, Health and Human Services, Drug Enforcement Admini-

stration, Environmental Protection Agency, Housing and Urban Development, Veteran's Administration, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Aging, State and local government, Peace Corps

STRATEGIES

Supplement curriculum with coursework in statistics and social research. Develop exceptional computer, communication, and research skills. Gain work experience via government internships, part-time jobs, or summer work. Develop a specialty such as aging, family, criminal justice, or healthcare. Learn the federal state and local job application process. Obtain a graduate degree for advanced positions. Consider beginning a career with the government by joining the military or the Peace Corps.

V. SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

AREAS

Research	Data Analysis
Demography	Market Research
Information Sourcing	

EMPLOYERS

Universities	Government agencies
Research institutes	Non-profit agencies
Community organizations	Private industries
Advertising and marketing firms	Consulting organizations
Information brokers	Public opinion research polls
Newspapers, magazines, news agencies	

STRATEGIES

Develop exceptional quantitative, statistical, and writing skills. Learn to use statistics software packages as well as database, spreadsheet, and desktop publishing programs. Volunteer to help a professor with a research project. Obtain an advanced degree in sociology for research administration positions. Earn certification in applied social research by The American Sociological Association. Network with professionals working in areas of interest. Gain experience working on teams.

VI. ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

EMPLOYERS

Waste management firms	Health agencies
Local planning agencies	Environmental periodicals
Federal government	Consulting firms
Private industry	
Regional, state, and local agencies	
Environmental advocacy groups	

STRATEGIES

Enhance curriculum with courses in ecology, environmental science, and statistics. Join environment-related student organizations. Volunteer to work on environmental clean-up projects. Find a related internship, part-time, or summer job. Obtain a graduate degree for advancement.

VII. BUSINESS

AREAS

Recruiting	Management
Sales	Marketing
Public Relations	Office Administration
Human Resources: Training and Development,	

EMPLOYERS

Insurance firms	Retail stores
Banks	Staffing agencies
Manufacturing companies	Service industries
Non-profit organizations	Healthcare organizations

STRATEGIES

Earn a minor in business or supplement curriculum with courses in general business, accounting, and finance. Gain business experience through part-time jobs, summer work, and internships. Develop excellent computer skills. Learn to use software applications such as spreadsheets, databases, and word processing. Hone written and oral communication skills. Join related professional associations. Seek leadership roles in student organizations.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Many transferable skills such as analytical, organizational, research,

interpersonal, computer, leadership, teamwork, and oral/written communication are associated with the sociology degree.

Internships, part-time jobs, summer jobs, and/or volunteer experiences are critical.

An undergraduate degree is sufficient for many entry-level positions in business, industry, and government; however, a graduate degree is likely to be more desirable in a competitive market. An undergraduate degree in sociology is great preparation for graduate or professional education in sociology, law, counseling, psychology, social work, medicine, education, college student personnel, higher education administration, and other related fields. You should research prerequisites for graduate or professional programs of interest.

To enhance graduate or professional school opportunities, maintain a high grade point average, secure strong faculty recommendations, join student or professional organizations, and gain relevant experience outside of the classroom through work, internship, volunteer, and research opportunities.

A Ph.D. is required for teaching at the four-year university level. For human or social service positions, gain experience with a population of interest (i.e., children, college students, elderly adults) and develop multicultural sensitivity and understanding. Talk with professionals working in areas of interest.

Going on to graduate school

There are two paths to going on to a higher degree in sociology. If you want to teach at the college or university level, you will need a Ph.D., and your advisor in sociology will be happy to discuss this career path with you. If you want to work for a company or a government agency or a not for profit organization, you will want to get a master's degree in applied sociology. Applied sociologists do marketing research, educational research, organizational consulting, organizational development, program development and policy analysis. The Sociology Department has a list of graduate programs in applied sociology that you can consult.

Job Titles for BA Recipients

As examples of the many different types of occupations that sociologists are well qualified to hold, we list here some of the jobs that UMaine graduates have held.

RESEARCH

social research assistant
survey research technician
data analyst
market researcher
interviewer
statistician
public survey worker
census research assistant
demographer assistant
criminology assistant
consumer researcher

EDUCATION

teacher
student personnel worker
affirmative action assistant
admissions counselor
alumni relations worker
college placement worker
extension service specialist
public health educator

COMMUNITY & SOCIAL SERVICES

fund raising assistant/director
child care worker
caseworker/aide
environmental organizer
community organizer
youth outreach worker
family planning worker
substance abuse counselor
occupational/career counselor
hospital administrator
medical records worker
community aid homeless/housing worker
case manager
child development technician
public administration assistant
recreation worker
public assistance worker

resident planning aide
group home worker
rehabilitation program worker
public health supervisor
rural health outreach worker
housing coordinator

JUSTICE SYSTEM

corrections officer
corrections staffer
criminal investigator
juvenile court worker
parole officer
police officer
police department staffer
special agent
correctional counselor
state trooper
rehabilitation counselor

BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

sales representative
sales manager advertising staffer
consumer relations staffer
graining assistant
insurance agent
banker
human resources manager
production manager
labor relations staffer
administrative assistant
planning assistant
quality control manager
merchandiser/purchaser
computer analyst
data entry manager
publishing staffer

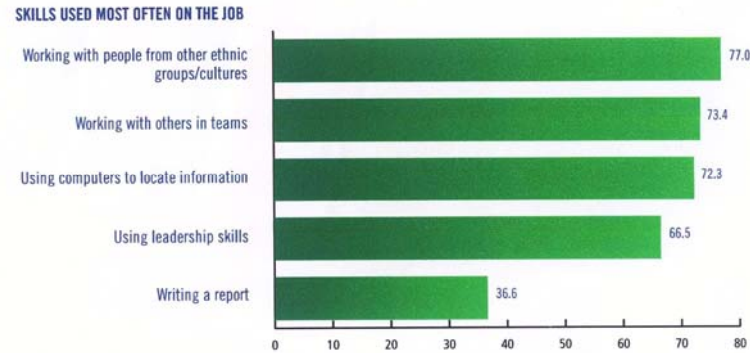
GOVERNMENT

affirmative action worker
employee specialist
foreign service officer
human rights officer

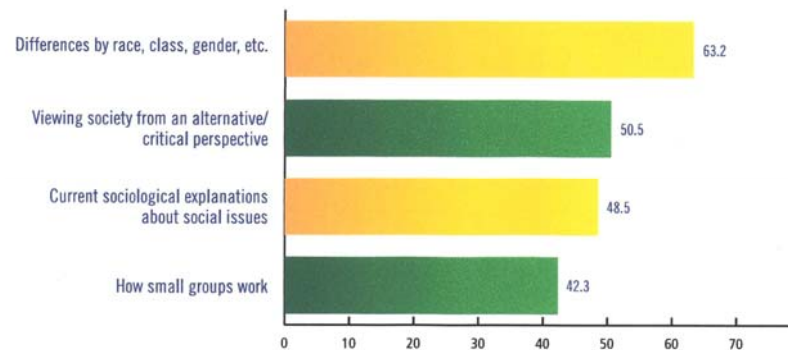
Government jobs continued: urban planner
international worker information officer
personnel coordinator legislative aide
program supervisor peace corps volunteer
special agent

Sociological Concepts Used on the Job (percent responding 'all the time')

The American Sociological Association did a survey of recent sociology graduates, asking them what were the most important job-related skills they learned in their sociology classes. Here are some of the results:



Sociological Concepts Used on the Job (percent responding 'very useful')



Source: ASA Research and Development Department, What Can I Do With a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology? Wave III

Useful Websites

www.essential.org/links.html

An abundant list of links associated with non-profit organizations and information related to social change and criminal development.

www.criminology.fsu.edu/p/cjl-main.php

A great site that has various resources and information for those interested in criminal justice.

www.nassembly.org/

A collection of information provided by the National Assembly of Health & Human Service Organizations.

www.uncw.edu/stuaff/career/majors/sociology.htm

A link that provides information on sociology careers, the skills required, and links to job postings related to sociology.

www.asanet.org/employment/careers.cfm

ASA Job Bank. Preparation for Careers. Careers in sociology.

www.nonprofitcareer.com

Non-profit career network, post and submit resumes online.

www.idealist.org

Non-profit and career network.

www.hhs.gov/careers/index.html

U.S. Department of Human Services website with internship and job listings for sociology majors.

www.aacsnet.org/wp/

Society for Applied Sociology website devoted to careers in sociological practice or applied sociology. Also has a list of applied sociology programs in the U.S.

www.sociologycommission.org

Up-to-date list of accredited applied and clinical sociological programs.

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