

## **CAREERS IN SOCIOLOGY**

an online booklet published by the American Sociological Association

### **Preface**

What can I do with a degree in sociology? This question can be answered in a multitude of ways, as you will discover in this new edition of the American Sociological Association's *Careers in Sociology*. The booklet includes a fresh definition of sociology as a discipline and profession, and profiles of students who talk about how sociology led to their current employment. It also outlines possible career paths and offers tips for how to apply to graduate school.

*Careers in Sociology* reflects the collaboration of a number of sociologists. The original version was prepared by Raymond W. Mack in the 1970s. A subsequent version was written by George K. Hesslink, Pomona College, with contributions from Al Gollin, Newspaper Advertising Bureau, Kiyoshi Ikeda, University of Hawaii, Thomas E. Lasswell, University of Southern California, N.J. Demerath III, University of Massachusetts, John W. Riley, Jr., consultant, Washington, DC, and Matilda White Riley, National Institute of Aging.

The 1991 version was revised by Stephen A. Buff, formerly of the ASA Executive Office and now with the U.S. Department of Commerce, with the assistance of Camille W. Miller, Hollins College, Brian Pendleton, University of Akron; and Lauri Perman, Pennsylvania State University. The 1995 revision was prepared by Janet Mancini Billson, Director of ASA's Academic and Professional Affairs Program (APAP), Simmin J. Terry, APAP Intern (Skidmore College), and Nina Alesci, APAP Program Assistant. The ASA Committee on Employment, chaired by Margot Kempers, Fitchburg State College, reviewed the document. Minor updating occurred in both the second and third printings of the 1995 version.

We hope that both high school and undergraduate students will use *Careers in Sociology* as an introduction to the field. High school guidance counselors and teachers, college and university career counseling personnel, and faculty members should also find the booklet of assistance in guiding students during the important process of selecting a major and discovering how it might relate to a career path.

Sociology continues to grow and diversify during the late 20th century. It is an excellent liberal arts major that will help prepare students for the challenges of the century ahead.

### **Society and Social Life**

Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists investigate the structure of groups, organizations, and societies, and how people interact within these contexts. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob; from organized crime to religious cults; from the divisions of race, gender and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture; and from the sociology of work to the sociology of sports. In fact, few fields have such broad scope and relevance for research, theory, and application of knowledge.

Sociology provides many distinctive perspectives on the world, generating new ideas and critiquing the old. The field also offers a range of research techniques that can be applied to virtually any aspect of social life: street crime and delinquency, corporate downsizing, how people express emotions, welfare or education reform, how families differ and flourish, or problems of peace and war. Because sociology addresses the most challenging issues of our time, it is a rapidly expanding field whose potential is increasingly tapped by those who craft policies and create programs. Sociologists understand social inequality, patterns of behavior, forces for so-

cial change and resistance, and how social systems work. As the following pages convey, sociology is an exciting discipline with expanding opportunities for a wide range of career paths.

This booklet informs undergraduate students of the career opportunities that flow from a baccalaureate (BA/BS), master's (MA/MS), or doctoral (PhD) sociology degree, and includes information on:

- sociology as a discipline and profession
- sociological specialties
- career preparation
- job prospects for the sociology BA
- the common core of sociological careers
- graduate training in sociology
- the current outlook for sociology
- the American Sociological Association (ASA) and its resources.

The booklet also highlights profiles of practicing sociologists and outlines the many benefits of student membership in ASA.

### **Sociology: A World of Opportunities**

Most people who think of themselves as "sociologists" or have the word "sociologist" in their job title, have graduate training, but BAs in sociology apply the sociological perspective to a wide variety of jobs in such sectors as business, the health professions, the criminal justice system, social services, and government.

***What can I do with a BA in sociology?*** As a strong liberal arts major, sociology provides several answers to this important question:

- A BA in sociology is excellent preparation for future graduate work in sociology in order to become a professor, researcher, or applied sociologist.
- The undergraduate degree provides a strong liberal arts preparation for entry level positions throughout the business, social service, and government worlds. Employers look for people with the skills that an undergraduate education in sociology provides.
- Since its subject matter is intrinsically fascinating, sociology offers valuable preparation for careers in journalism, politics, public relations, business, or public administration—fields that involve investigative skills and working with diverse groups.
- Many students choose sociology because they see it as a broad liberal arts base for professions such as law, education, medicine, social work, and counseling. Sociology provides a rich fund of knowledge that directly pertains to each of these fields.

***What can I do with an MA or PhD degree in sociology?*** With advanced degrees, the more likely it is that a job will have the title sociologist, but many opportunities exist—the diversity of sociological careers ranges much further than what you might find under "S" in the Sunday newspaper employment ads. Many jobs outside of academia do not necessarily carry the specific title of sociologist :

- Sociologists become high school teachers or faculty in colleges and universities, advising students, conducting research, and publishing their work. Over 3000 colleges offer sociology courses.
- Sociologists enter the corporate, non-profit, and government worlds as directors of research, policy analysts, consultants, human resource managers, and program managers.
- Practicing sociologists with advanced degrees may be called research analysts, survey researchers, gerontologists, statisticians, urban planners, community developers, criminologists, or demographers.
- Some MA and PhD sociologists obtain specialized training to become counselors, therapists, or program directors in social service agencies.

Today, sociologists embark upon literally hundreds of career paths. Although teaching and conducting research remains the dominant activity among the thousands of professional sociologists today, other forms of employment are growing both in number and significance. In some sectors, sociologists work closely with economists, political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, social workers, and others, reflecting a growing appreciation of sociology's contributions to interdisciplinary analysis and action.

### **Sociological Specialties: Many Paths to Understanding Society**

As this publication suggests, people with degrees in sociology may enter many careers, and the options are increasing. What is common to all of these careers? Underlying sociological training is the commitment to understand human relationships in every kind of social group.

However, sociologists develop their interests in different ways. They pursue diverse specialty subjects within the field as a whole. Thus, sociologists may specialize in families, adolescence, or children; the urban community; education; health and medicine; aging and the life course; work and occupations; the environment, science, and technology; economics, social inequality, and social class; race relations, ethnicity, and minorities; sex and gender; sports; culture and the arts; politics, the military, peace, and war; crime, delinquency, law, and justice; social change and social movements; and any other area of human organization. College and university courses reflect these interests, as well as research methods and theory building. Some of the most fascinating subjects explored by sociologists include:

**Sex and gender:** Do men and women have different hiring, employment, and promotion experiences? This would be a research question for a sociologist specializing in how sex and gender affect the workplace.

**Medical sociology:** How is AIDS transmitted (and thus prevented) in different subgroups of the population? How has public opinion about AIDS shifted? These are the concerns of medical sociologists.

**Organizations and occupations:** Which management styles increase productivity and worker satisfaction would engage the attention of an organizational sociologist.

**Racial and ethnic minorities:** Do minority children get "tracked" within the public schools? Do minority parents get "cooled out" from participating in and knowing about the informal power structure within schools? Someone specializing in minority relations would explore these questions.

**Family:** Are children of divorced parents more likely to divorce, or to reject marriage themselves? What factors predict whether abused children would fare better in foster care or reunited with their birth family? These would be possible subjects for a family sociologist. Any social phenomenon can be examined through the lens of different sociological standpoints. Indeed, a hallmark of sociological analysis is that it utilizes a variety of interconnected perspectives. Most sociological research and theory seeks to explain prevailing social behavior patterns and how they change over time.

### **ASA Sections: An Opportunity for Involvement and Networking**

ASA has 39 Sections, or special interest groups, within the Association, formed of people who share a common interest in a particular area of sociology.

Sections sponsor sessions during the Annual Meeting and publish a newsletter for their members in order to communicate about special opportunities and activities relevant to that interest. Many have electronic listservs.

Sections offer an excellent opportunity for networking and exchanging information. Sections welcome student involvement and offer special programs, awards, and dues for student members.

The chart below offers a quick look at student membership in selected ASA sections during 1998. Interest in sections can shift over time, however, as sociologists face new challenges in studying and understanding society and social behavior.

The other ASA sections in addition to those listed in the chart include: methodology; sociology of education; sociology of law; theory; social psychology; peace and war; Marxist sociology; sociological practice; population, political economy of the world system; mental health, comparative historical sociology; political sociology; Asia and Asian America; culture; science, knowledge, and technology; sociology and computers; Latino/a sociology; alcohol and drugs; children; rational choice; religion; international migration, race, gender, and class; mathematical sociology; sociology of sexualities; and history of sociology.

### **Career Preparation: Making the Most of an Undergraduate Major**

Success in most careers depends upon both long-term career preparation and short-term responses to changing circumstances. It is virtually impossible for anyone to anticipate fully what lies five years ahead, much less ten, twenty, or thirty years. Yet, because sociology gives students a broad liberal arts preparation, it can be viewed as a solid base for many career paths. In addition, students who have developed a relatively clear idea of their preferred career path can shape their undergraduate curriculum accordingly. Furthermore, basic skills in research design, data analysis, and conceptualization of problems will help BA graduates compete for jobs across all sectors.

**The Liberal Arts Advantage.** A bachelor's degree in sociology provides an excellent liberal arts foundation for embarking on the wide range of career paths that many liberal arts majors pursue. Your undergraduate training in sociology can open a variety of doors in business and the human services. Sociology majors who enter the business world work in sales, marketing, customer relations, or human resources. Those who enter human services work with youths at risk, the elderly, or people experiencing problems related to poverty, substance abuse, or the justice system.

When we ask sociology majors who are already employed outside academic settings to reflect on their education with the wisdom of hindsight, they value most highly their undergraduate courses in social research methods, statistics, and computer skills. These courses help make BA undergraduates marketable, especially in today's highly technical and data-oriented work environment. In addition, sociology majors develop analytical skills and the ability to understand issues within a "macro" or social structural perspective. Learning the process of critical thinking and how to bring evidence to bear in support of an argument is extremely important in a fast-changing job market.

Consequently, as a sociology BA, you have a competitive advantage in today's information society. The solid base you receive in understanding social change—as well as in research design, data analysis, statistics, theory, and sociological concepts—enables you to compete for support positions (such as program, administrative, or research assistant) in research, policy analysis, program evaluation, and countless other social science endeavors.

The well-educated sociology BA graduate acquires a sense of history, other cultures and times; the interconnectedness of social life; and different frameworks of thought. He or she is proficient at gathering information and putting it into perspective. Sociological training helps students bring breadth and depth of understanding to the workplace. A sociology graduate learns to think abstractly, formulate problems, ask appropriate questions, search for answers, analyze situations and data, organize material, write well, and make oral presentations that help others develop insight and make decisions. Sociology BA graduates have an advantage in understanding human behavior on three levels:

- how individuals behave in organizations, families, and communities
- the ways in which these social units function as groups
- the wider social, political, and economic contexts in which decisions are made and in which groups function.

**Linking to Other Majors and Minors.** You can amplify the power of your sociology major by taking a multidisciplinary approach. Employment analysts predict that the most successful people in the 21st century will be those who have been exposed to a wide variety of disciplines and have taken the time to study in some depth outside their field.

You can begin the process of multiplying your perspectives as an undergraduate major in sociology by planning a double major with criminal justice, economics, English, anthropology, a second language, political science, or education. Or, you can take a minor or concentration in computer science, business management, marketing, human services, law and society, social work, or pre-law—just to name a few possibilities. Work with your advisor to develop an integrated set of courses that will provide depth in one or more areas.

**The Value of an Internship and Service Learning.** Internships during or just after the undergraduate years offer invaluable experience that can bring to life the sociological concepts and theories you study in books and in the classroom. You can sample potential careers, build your resume, and learn new skills during a well-chosen internship experience. Participation in an internship affords an excellent way to explore career options and help determine what aspects of sociology interest you.

A wide range of internships is available to sociology graduates. Whether you enjoy working with families or learning more about statistical methods to track population growth, you can find an organization that will give you the opportunity to gain experience while you work toward

their goals. Many agencies and institutions offer internships, and many colleges will provide college credits for internship experience. While some internships provide remuneration, many are unpaid. Remember that an internship will help pave the way to subsequent employment opportunities, so working without pay may well be worth your investment of time and energy in the long run. Data show that sociology students who take part in internships find it much easier to find employment later.

Courses that included service learning – volunteer work that is connected to the course topic – are also valuable for career testing and practical experience in applying sociological concepts, methods, and theories.

### **Staff Administrator in a Public Assistance Agency**

**Education:** Through his undergraduate studies, William became interested in using his knowledge to serve people. William saw his BA in sociology as a tool for providing services to people in need in a large metropolitan area. With the help of his professors, he found an internship in an inner-city shelter for the homeless; after two semesters helping conduct a count of the area's homeless population, William decided to apply for a job with the city's Department of Human Services.

**Current Position:** William works as a program coordinator, drawing on his internship experiences and his undergraduate sociology courses in the family, social stratification, communities, and group dynamics.

**Responsibilities:** William's work includes routine processing of reports and legal forms, as well as extensive contact with clients and direct engagement with the problems of the poor, disabled, homeless, elderly, and minorities. He combines his efforts with other employees; using his knowledge of how human services and welfare systems work, he often acts as a trouble shooter by providing help to clients who might otherwise "fall between the cracks."

**Benefits:** William's job requires him to maintain contacts with other public and private agencies that affect the lives of the poor. For example, one of his friends from college now works on the staff of a large community mental health center, and another is involved in supervising rehabilitation for state penitentiary inmates. Like William, they are using their sociology BAs as a foundation for social service positions. All three receive satisfaction from being able to experience day-to-day accomplishments in helping others.

William's salary is commensurate with the wage scales of public sector employees generally. He could progress through Civil Service channels to a career of relative security. However, he is considering going back to school to earn a graduate degree, which would help him compete for administrative positions.

*In order to develop an internship, ask yourself these questions:*

- "What are my talents, skills, interests, and areas of knowledge?"
- "In what areas would I like to grow?"
- "What are my strongest assets?"
- "How can I make a meaningful contribution in a relatively short time?"

When you address these questions and are ready to search for an internship that will benefit both you and your "employer," the following strategies may help:

- Volunteer your time and skills to an employer on a temporary or part-time basis in order to establish initial contact and lay the foundation for future work.
- Contact your cooperative education, internship and/or service learning coordinator on campus for a listing of organizations that accept interns and for general advice on how to find an internship and derive the most benefit from it.
- Contact your college or university sociology department for advice on internships. Organizations might send internship announcements to them and your professors may have contacts in the community. Sometimes college course credit can be arranged with the department.
- Contact by letter and follow-up telephone call several nonprofit organizations, corporations, businesses, and government or educational agencies in the geographic location that interests you—the broader the net, the more likely someone will offer you an internship.
- Write to the National Society for Experiential Education for the National Directory of Internships (latest edition). This publication lists opportunities in 75 fields of interest, by state, type of organization, and specific organizations. NSIEE, 3509 Haworth Drive, Suite 207, Raleigh, NC 27609-7229.
- Join the American Sociological Association for information and networking opportunities at the national, regional, and state levels.

You can amplify the power of your sociology major by taking a multidisciplinary approach. Employment analysts predict that the most successful people in the 21st century will be those who have been exposed to a wide variety of disciplines and have taken the time to study in some depth outside their field.

### **Job Prospects for the BA Graduate**

Given the breadth, adaptability and utility of sociology, employment opportunities abound for BA graduates. You can secure entry level positions in many of the areas previously mentioned in defining the scope of sociology. The following list of possibilities is only illustrative—many other paths may be open to you. Employment sectors include:

- *social services*—in rehabilitation, case management, group work with youth or the elderly, recreation, or administration
- *community work*—in fund-raising for social service organizations, non-profits, child-care or community development agencies, or environmental groups
- *corrections*—in probation, parole, or other criminal justice work
- *business*—in advertising, marketing and consumer research, insurance, real estate, personnel work, training, or sales
- *college settings*—in admissions, alumni relations, or placement offices
- *health services*—in family planning, substance abuse, rehabilitation counseling, health planning, hospital admissions, and insurance companies

- *publishing, journalism, and public relations*—in writing, research, and editing
- *government services*—in federal, state, and local government jobs in such areas as transportation, housing, agriculture, and labor
- *teaching*—in elementary and secondary schools, in conjunction with appropriate teacher certification.

## **Human Resources Manager in a Small Manufacturing Firm**

**Education:** Carlos received a BA in sociology at a state university in the Arizona. He took a wide range of courses in sociology, social psychology, and business, and studied the sociology of minority groups and race relations.

**Current position:** Carlos was drawn to the business world where he wanted to apply his sociological insights. He started as an entry-level assistant in the Human Resources Department of a small company, but after five years Carlos moved up to H.R. Manager, a position with considerable influence over the company's personnel policies. He is involved with strategies and programs for hiring, training, promoting, and managing an increasingly diverse workforce.

**Benefits:** At first, Carlos earned an average entry-level salary but also had access to in-service training, which helped him advance to a managerial position. He enjoys on-site athletic facilities and good medical benefits. Ultimately, Carlos may be promoted to an even higher position within the firm or seek advancement by joining another company. He enjoys contributing his insights into the complicated issues of gender and cultural diversity in the workplace.

Some advantages accrue to entering the work force with a BA. Employers are often willing to train BA graduates in the specific skills and knowledge required for their workplace, so you could begin a good career by rising through the ranks. Many organizations might also invest in additional education or training for promising employees.

*Obtaining work experience before applying to graduate school might improve your chances of acceptance and make further education more meaningful. An entry level job might also help you sharpen your interests and decide future directions—continuing to climb the career ladder, changing fields, or furthering your education.*

## **Graduate Training in Sociology**

Many undergraduate sociology majors pursue graduate training in sociology in preparation for academic and practice careers in the discipline. A master's degree or doctorate will be essential for higher education teaching and advanced research or applied careers. Others choose graduate work in other fields such as social work, education, public health, business administration, and urban planning, not to mention law, medicine, and divinity school.

**MA vs. PhD Degrees.** The Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) is typically the highest degree awarded in sociology. The Master's degree may be either an MA (Master of Arts) or an MS (Master of Science). The master's degree, which takes from one to three years, can either be a step toward the PhD or an end in itself. It generally signifies sophisticated knowledge of the field's perspectives and methods, but does not necessarily indicate that any original research has been conducted. In some cases a thesis is not required or may be replaced by a practicum



or other applied experience. For those seeking to enter the applied world of research and program management, a master's degree in sociology may be excellent preparation. The PhD requires at least four or five years of study beyond the BA and signifies competence for original research and scholarship as evidenced by the completion of a significant research study called a "dissertation." This degree prepares individuals for careers in academic and applied settings.

For many positions within public agencies and the private sector, a master's degree suffices. For community college teaching, a master's degree may be acceptable, but a doctorate opens more doors. Teaching and research at the university level and high-level employment with good promotion prospects in non-academic research institutes, think tanks, private industry, and government agencies usually require a PhD.

Most graduate schools that offer the PhD also offer a master's degree as part of the program. However, some universities offer the master's only, and a few are exclusively devoted to the PhD. While many PhD students receive fellowships or use private means to study full-time, some must work part-time to support themselves. Fortunately, teaching or research assistantships often form part of the learning experience in exchange for a stipend or a tuition waiver.

New graduate students usually begin with courses quite similar in content to their undergraduate courses, although the work is more demanding and sophisticated.

**Courses and Dissertations.** Graduate courses typically focus on basic theoretical issues, a wide range of research methods, and statistics. Many entering PhD students who did not major in sociology as undergraduates will find this work new to them. A year or so of courses usually culminates in an examination or major paper, and perhaps the awarding of an MA or MS. Training then shifts to doing sociology and more interactive learning. Lecture courses give way to seminars as advanced students begin to conduct individual research in developing areas of specialization. At this point, the student is typically ready for some type of qualifying examination for the doctorate.

The final PhD requirement, the dissertation, must be an original piece of scholarship. It can take many forms and be relatively brief or very long. The dissertation should make a substantial contribution to existing scientific knowledge. Most departments require a formal proposal that must be approved by a faculty committee. This same committee often presides over the student's oral defense of the dissertation once it is completed, a ritual that marks the end of the student's training and the beginning of a career as an autonomous scholar.

**Choosing a Graduate School.** Over 250 universities in the U.S. offer PhDs and/or master's degrees. Universities differ greatly in their strengths and weaknesses, the nature and structure of their curriculum, costs, faculty specializations, and special programs and opportunities for students.

Some graduate programs specialize in preparing students for applied careers in business, government, or social service. They may feature student internships in agency offices rather than traditional teaching or research assistantships. Others emphasize preparation for the professorial life. Departments continue to differ on requirements regarding language proficiency and statistical skills; whether they require a Master's degree en route to the PhD; and, if so, whether a Master's thesis is required or course work alone is sufficient. Some departments will be strong in your particular area of interest, and others will be weak.

Fortunately, you have a key resource for making your choice. ASA publishes the Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology, which contains critical information on degrees awarded,

rosters of individual faculty and their interests, special programs, tuition and fees, the availability of fellowships and assistantships, deadlines for applications, and the names, addresses, and telephone numbers to contact for further information and application forms. College libraries should have a copy of the Guide. One can also be ordered directly from the ASA Executive Office (ext. 389).

Consult with others as you develop a list of schools to which you want to apply. Undergraduate sociology teachers who know your strengths, weaknesses, and special interests may be able to guide you through this complex process toward a realistic choice. Most sociology teachers have friends and colleagues in various departments around the country (or otherwise know the strengths of different departments). Even if they do not know anyone personally in a particular department, they should be able to help you make an informed decision. Also, make sure that you are exploring several options. Many departments have homepages which allow you to get a snapshot of departments, their faculty, their curriculum, and their specialty areas.

### **Sociologist in a Health Center**

**Education:** Mark earned his PhD in sociology after working as an Emergency Medical Technician throughout college. In graduate school he took courses in medical sociology, the sociology of mental health and illness, and sociology of health policy.

**Current position:** Mark holds a faculty and research position in a state-supported Health Science Center that includes schools of nursing, medicine, dentistry, public health, and allied health professions. He and other social scientists form a unit in the Department of Community Health. Mark's responsibilities include teaching future physicians, nurses, planners, and other health workers about the sociological aspects of health care organizations.

**Responsibilities:** Mark also consults with health agencies, providing data about the population groups to be served and about sociological aspects of the distribution of disease and illness. He conducts research on how patients with heart disease fare in their family and work settings after release from the hospital.

**Benefits:** Mark is well paid, better than most academics in the social sciences, and enjoys working with health professionals and providing them with fresh perspectives on how to improve medical services in a rapidly-changing market.

Early in your senior year or in the year before entering graduate school, you should begin to make contact with the schools you wish to consider. Most departments require you to fill out an application form, including a personal statement on why you want to pursue graduate work, why you chose sociology and that particular school. In addition, you will probably be asked to supply a transcript of your undergraduate record and several letters of reference. Many departments require applicants to take the nationally administered Graduate Record Examinations--a battery of exams on verbal and quantitative skills, and a subject exam in sociology. Because these examinations are administered on a fixed schedule in designated locations, you must apply to take them several months in advance; your college should have all the appropriate information and forms; they are also offered in computer-assisted formats.

Finally, take advantage of the opportunity to visit the departments you consider. Departments differ in specialties, availability of direct support, tone, style and environment. You are considering not just a set of courses, but a larger learning context and a town and region in which you

may be living for the next several years. Therefore, if at all possible, you should try to visit the department in person or at least request all materials available to potential applicants.

## **Sociological Careers Open to MAs and PhDs Teaching, Research, and Practice**

Three activities form the common core of most sociological work--teaching, research, and practice. MA and PhD graduates, especially professors, may engage in all three simultaneously or at different times in their careers. BA graduates usually work in research or in applied settings in which the sociological perspective adds valued insights.

**Teaching:** Despite the broad applicability of sociology at the BA level, a substantial majority of graduate-level sociologists teach, whether in high schools, two-year colleges, four-year colleges, or universities. Sociology is a rewarding field to convey to others. It combines the importance of social relevance with the rigor of a scientific discipline.

### **Faculty Member in a Liberal Arts College**

**Current position:** While finishing her doctoral thesis, Joanna successfully competed for a position on the faculty of a small liberal arts college. After five years of high performance, Joanna has been promoted to Associate Professor with tenure, which serves as a safeguard of academic freedom.

**Responsibilities:** Joanna teaches introduction to sociology, social problems, and the sociology of sex and gender. Occasionally she teaches during the summer for additional pay. She helps students make choices among career goals, works with students and faculty on campus-wide projects, and is active in community programs that serve the homeless. Since college programs emphasize general education, Joanna works with faculty members from other disciplines.

**Benefits:** Joanna knows that her salary may be slightly lower than that of her colleagues in universities or in some state institutions, but life in this college town is relatively inexpensive. Most importantly, she is doing what she really enjoys--working closely and informally with college students.

Sociology is not only taught to future sociologists and to undergraduate students as part of their liberal arts education. It also forms an important part of pre-professional programs in law, education, business, medicine, engineering, social work, and nursing. In addition to the standard college and university courses, sociology courses are popular with adult and continuing education programs and are increasingly prominent in the nation's high schools.

Teaching sociology differs across settings. A general introduction for high school students requires different skills than does a course for college seniors. These differ from leading an advanced research seminar for doctoral students. For many, teaching represents a desirable occupation with considerable job security and the satisfaction of facilitating learning for students who are struggling with the most intriguing issues that sociology addresses. What is most important is that you include preparation for teaching as part of your graduate work – avail yourself of any seminars, workshops, or discussions on the campus – in the department or at the institution's teaching center – to develop expertise and practice in teaching, including the preparation of a teaching portfolio.

## Teaching Sociology in a Community College

**Current position:** Frank discovered how much he enjoys teaching when he served as a teaching assistant in graduate school, and eagerly accepted a community college position upon receiving his MA degree. He is a member of the Social Science Department, where his colleagues include other sociologists, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, and psychologists. This interdisciplinary environment, and the opportunity to teach first generation college students appeal to him.

**Responsibilities:** Frank teaches five classes per semester in crime and deviance. His other responsibilities include preparing for courses, serving on college committees, and advising students. Meanwhile, Frank must also devote time to reading so that he can keep abreast of new developments in his field.

**Benefits:** Since Frank is a member of a union which represents all community college teachers, his salary is quite competitive. After several years of satisfactory service, Frank should receive tenure. He is building a solid retirement pension and receives comprehensive medical coverage.

**Research:** Sociology graduates can conduct research in a variety of employment settings, whether in a university; a public agency at the federal, state, or local level; a business or industrial firm; a research institute; or a non-profit or advocacy sector organization. Some self-employed sociologists researchers direct their own research and consulting firms.

Research follows teaching as the most common career option within sociology. Note, however, that one does not necessarily have to make a choice between teaching and research. Many teaching positions, particularly in universities and four-year colleges, require and support research activities. Institutions vary according to whether they place greater emphasis on research or on teaching as the primary route to advancement. Some institutions place more emphasis on teaching, and many are attempting to achieve an optimum balance between research and teaching. When you investigate an institution, be sure to examine its mission statement and faculty handbook. Furthermore, as you will see in the section on "Sociological Practice," many sociologists conduct research outside of academic settings.

## Staff Member of a Research Institute

**Education:** While completing a BA in sociology, Mary Anne found that she especially enjoyed courses in research methods, statistics, and urban sociology. After college, Mary Anne joined a large, private research institute that conducts sociological studies for government agencies, businesses, and political groups. Many studies focus on urban and metropolitan problems. Mary Anne began the job with a BA in sociology. Since joining the institute, she has taken three graduate courses toward an MA degree in Applied Sociology. Her employer pays for the courses and gives her a flexible schedule two days a week so she can fit classes in during the early evening.

**Current position:** During her first several years, Mary Anne was a "research assistant," but she is now an "associate project director" with more responsibility for developing new research projects as well as supervising the research process.

She has developed a keen sense of how clients' problems can be addressed. She writes research proposals and follows them through from discussion and revision to funding. She feels confident that her research contributes to the resolution of complex issues such as metropolitan government and urban revitalization.

**Benefits:** Mary Anne's salary now ranks above average for those in her graduating class. With success in obtaining contracts and advising clients, her income will probably increase considerably. Mary Anne may stay here, move to another research firm, or consider starting her own agency.

*As many research specializations exist as there are content areas and methods of sociological inquiry. Methods range from field work and intrusive interviews to questionnaires and surveys; from working with census materials to analysis of historical documents; and from real life social experiments to laboratory simulations.*

"Evaluation research" is especially important in shaping social policy and programs. Here the investigator uses a variety of sociological methods to assess the impacts of a particular policy or program. Ideally, such evaluation involves careful research designed before a policy trial goes into effect. It may also involve surveys of individuals directly or indirectly affected by a program, or organizational analyses of a policy's implications for changes in the agency responsible. Frequently, evaluation research may be focused on the conduct and organization of the program itself in an attempt to explore unintended and unanticipated consequences of a social policy. Evaluation research is a response to the recognition that it is not enough to launch new policies or programs and hope for the best; they must be continually assessed to see if they are functioning as intended.

Enjoyment of research and writing is essential if one seeks a career in the more advanced academic settings. In these institutions, research as well as teaching is expected. As the profiles throughout this booklet indicate, other kinds of jobs also feature sociological research and some of them are exclusively research positions. In fact, the number of full-time researchers whose jobs require no teaching at all is increasing fairly rapidly.

### **Research Director in a Telecommunications Firm**

**Education:** As an undergraduate, Jim took a few courses in business and computer science to supplement his major in sociology. He especially liked working with the computers that sociologists use extensively in their research. Jim also became fascinated with the social impacts of computerization. In graduate school, he focused on courses in the sociology of science and technology, demography, and organizational analysis. He completed his MA thesis on future organizations and the computer revolution.

**Current Position:** Jim moved from a California university town to Chicago where he took his first job as a research assistant in a market research firm and, after six months, became an analyst of the market for PC software. He broadened his knowledge of telecommunication products and applied his sociological research skills to studying markets for office telephone systems, cellular (car) phones, and cable TV. While he learned a great deal about the products, his real expertise concerns demographic characteristics (age, sex, class and ethnic background)

as they affect the attitudes of people to whom these products are marketed. He is a pioneer in studying the social impact of the new "information highway."

**The sociological advantage:** Jim's knowledge of demography and organizational change helped him stand out from other market researchers who have less depth in these areas. After only eight years in the field, Jim is sure this background and perspective helped give him the competitive edge to be selected as Director of Research for a newly-created telecommunications firm.

**Sociological Practice:** Given the usefulness of their methods and perspectives, sociologists have developed many career paths that take research into the realm of intervention or "sociological practice." This broad category refers to positions that involve "applied" or "clinical" sociology--using sociology to affect positive change among individuals, families, organizations, communities, and societies.

*Sociological practice is the application of sociological knowledge-- concepts, methods, theories, predictions, evidence, and insights --to understanding immediate problems and their solutions. This work is "client-driven" meaning that the work is designed to solve a specific situation posed by the employer, rather than "discipline-driven" to add to the knowledge base of the field of sociology, although applied work can and does make those contributions.*

Some sociological practitioners ("clinical sociologists") have expertise in counseling individuals and families. Others ("applied sociologists") use sociological knowledge and research methods to effect larger-scale change, for example by conducting social and environmental impact assessments, evaluating programs, facilitating organizational development, mediating and resolving conflicts, or revamping social policies. All these approaches have one thing in common: They help individuals, groups, organizations, or governments to identify problems and their deeper causes, and to suggest strategies for solution.

*The application of sociological knowledge is key to careers in the fields of policy making and administration, government, business, social services, and industry.*

**Policy-Making and Administration.** Opportunities exist for sociologists who can use their basic sociological training to help others make more informed policy decisions and administer programs more effectively and imaginatively. This career option has broadened in recent years. Sociologists in this area may not teach in an academic setting, but often find themselves explaining the critical elements of research design, methods, and data analysis to non-social scientists. A solid research and theory background leads to this kind of position.

Although a skilled policy administrator might not conduct his or her own research, he or she would be expected to read the research literature, design useful research projects that others will conduct, cooperate with full-time staff researchers or outside consultants, and apply the developing knowledge of sociology and the social sciences to problems that involve housing, transportation, education, control of the AIDS epidemic, corporate downsizing, health, welfare, law enforcement, or other major issues.

Sociologists have the opportunity to incorporate sociological knowledge into planning and policy-making in areas dominated by other professions. For example, in the mental and physical health fields, sociologists serve with planning boards and health services agencies; they play similar roles in education, law enforcement, and government. Sociologists have contributed their knowledge effectively in many other areas as well.

## **Planning Officer in a State Department of Planning and Development**

**Education:** Paula earned a PhD in sociology with specialization in population and demography, urban sociology, and economic sociology.

**Current position:** Paula has worked for five years in the State Department of Planning and Development and has now risen to Assistant Director in the Office of Long-Range Forecasting. Her position involves considerable sociological knowledge and skill, especially in projecting population shifts into and out of the state's major urban areas, especially the inner cities.

**Responsibilities:** Paula not only commissions research on her own, but she keeps up with the growing research literature. While she does relatively little research herself, Paula's work is particularly important since she keeps informed about relevant studies on the socio-economic problems of inner city neighborhoods and prepares frequent reports and analyses based on new findings. She serves as a bridge to outside research experts working on contracts with the department. In addition, Paula has taken on administrative responsibility for a growing staff that works under her supervision. Her work directly affects how much funding the state provides to urban governments.

**Benefits:** In addition to making a good living, Paula finds satisfaction in contributing insights to critical decisions concerning the state's future urban growth and its strategies for cooperating with local governments.

This type of career involves working closely with producers as well as consumers of research, ultimately as a supervisor, administrator, or staff specialist. As with any occupation, it is unlikely that younger persons will be hired directly into such high level positions. Typically, they work their way up from lower-level staff positions. It is not uncommon for recent sociology graduates to be hired as staff members in a government agency and then follow a career which involves increased policy influence and administrative responsibility. Competent administration often involves good sociological principles, although few administrative positions formally require sociological training.

**Other Opportunities in Government.** In government settings, many sociologists conduct research and evaluation projects, others manage programs, and some are engaged in policy analysis or problem solving for their agency. Although specific areas of expertise vary, sociologists command an arsenal of skills, knowledge, and experience that can be put to good use at all levels of a complex government. They are employed in such Federal agencies as the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Aging, National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Drug Abuse, Bureau of the Census, the Department of Agriculture, the General Accounting Office, the National Science Foundation, Housing and Urban Development, the Peace Corps, or the Centers for Disease Control--among many others. Some work at non-governmental organizations such as The World Bank, the National Academy of Sciences, the Social Science Research Council, Children's Defense Fund, Common Cause, and a wide range of professional and public interest associations. At the state level, many are engaged in urban planning, health planning, criminal justice, education, and social service administration.

## Staff Member of a Federal Agency

**Education:** After graduating from a small predominantly Black college in the South, Linda received a fellowship for graduate work at a private university in the North. She progressed quickly, choosing to specialize in the sociology of education, a subject which fascinated her. While completing her PhD thesis, she spent summers working for a Senator who supports national education reform.

**Current position:** Linda has only recently joined the staff of the U.S. Department of Education where she serves as a Social Science Analyst. Her division focuses on key issues in minority education--recruitment, financial support, mentoring, and career development.

**Responsibilities:** In her new job, Linda conducts research on the access of minority students to higher education. Her findings will be presented to Congress as education reform proceeds. She supervises two assistants.

**Benefits:** Linda's salary is determined by the U.S. Civil Service scale, which provides her with a reasonable and stable income, and excellent benefits including pension, medical coverage, and vacations.

Because government sociologists face complex problems that require complex solutions, they must be able to produce good data and place it into a broader context. Skills in survey and evaluation research and special knowledge in such areas as health sociology, aging, criminal justice, demography, and the family enable the sociologist to understand (and sometimes shape) current or proposed government programs that affect vast numbers of people. Some special programs afford students an opportunity to gain government experience:

The Federal Cooperative Education Program allows students of many disciplines, including sociology, to alternate full-time college study with full-time employment in a Federal agency. Many agencies that attract sociologists participate in this program. Contact the Office of Personnel Management in Washington, D.C., the agency personnel office, or your college placement office.

The Presidential Management Internship Program (PMI) offers Federal employment to students upon completion of their graduate program. Sociology majors are eligible under this program. It offers rewarding entry-level positions that provide exposure to a wide range of public management issues. This program also provides substantial opportunities for career development, on-the-job training, and job rotation to expand skills and knowledge. For more information, contact the Office of Personnel Management or your career placement office.

**Opportunities in Business.** Many sociologists with BA degrees enter the private sector, working primarily in sales, human resources, and management. Corporations employ full-time (or hire as consultants) those with advanced degrees, especially in the fields of marketing, advertising, telecommunications, and insurance. Businesses especially benefit from sociologists who specialize in demography--the study of population--and market research--the study of the needs, preferences, and life-styles of potential clients or customers. Many sociologists work in public opinion or market research, producing findings of interest to leaders in politics, communications, and advertising. Industrial or corporate sociologists--experts on productivity, work relations, minorities and women in the work force, linking technology to the organization, corporate cultures and organizational development--constitute another specialized group.



Sociologists in the corporate world command an arsenal of skills and knowledge that help solve a wide range of business problems, increase job satisfaction, serve consumers better, and make companies more profitable. These include:

- using demography and forecasting to plan for the future;
- using training techniques to deal with organizational change;
- finding out what consumers want through market analysis and focus groups;
- increasing productivity and efficiency through team-building and work reorganization.

## **Adapting to Change**

Where students once thought in terms of one career, now an increasingly complex technological and global economy often requires people to pursue a series of careers. Most young adults will explore more than one option before settling on a clear path, and older students may find themselves re-tooling with sociology after a successful career in another field. A liberal arts education and a major in sociology provide the flexibility necessary in today's employment market. Graduate work in sociology can help others shift gears mid-career.

Solid training in sociology at the undergraduate or graduate levels forms a foundation for flexible career development. The better your training and the more skills you have acquired, the better you will be able to take advantage of new opportunities. Sociology offers a rich source of conceptual frameworks into which the most pressing issues of our times can be placed, and a powerful set of methodological tools with which to study them.

## **Sociology: Looking at the Future**

The future appears bright for sociology. The next century may be the most exciting and critical period in the field's history. People increasingly realize that we must renew attempts to understand, ameliorate, or solve problems in the United States and around the world--problems that affect individuals, like alcoholism or unemployment, and problems that affect societies, like ethnic conflict or environmental pollution. Some of the best employment prospects may be in policy research and administration, in clinical and applied sociological practice, as well as in the traditional areas of teaching and basic research.

During the last part of this century, the demand for college professors should increase because of high rates of retirement among "baby boom" faculty and the predicted growth in college student populations in the late 1990s. Internationalization of both higher education and the profession of sociology will also lead to new opportunities inside academia and in applied settings.

There are increasing opportunities in what Jeremy Rifkin calls "the third sector," the careers serving a post-industrial economy. Sociology is ideal preparation, both in its general liberal arts underpinning, as well as in the skills sociology hones particularly well: the ability to take in the big picture, the ability to bring multiple sources of information and data to bear on a problem, the ability to take the role of the other, and the ability to communicate to different audiences.

All this makes for an optimistic employment picture for sociology graduates. Because of its appeal as a career that is intrinsically fascinating and allows one to contribute to the common good, many talented people are drawn to sociology. The field remains exciting and competitive.

*If you would like more information about embarking on the job search, or other opportunities in sociology, send for ASA's list of career materials.*