

BOR Academic Advisory Committee for Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work
“The Value of a Sociology Graduate”¹
November, 2013

As a broad theory-building social science, an undergraduate degree in sociology provides students with the information, technical, and analytic skills and the global perspective one needs to navigate the 21st century successfully and succeed in many careers and graduate and professional school programs.

1. What is Sociology?

Sociology is the scientific study of social life in which the goal is to understand how all parts of society are related. It is the exploration of social change and a lens on the complexity of the causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociology examines how people build institutions and organizations and how they react to social situations, such as natural disasters, social and economic inequalities, religious movements, family structure, and race relations. Sociologists study social phenomena with a variety of scientific tools, including collecting and analyzing statistical data, conducting surveys, experiments, and focus group as well as through in-depth interviews and participant observation.

2. How Does Undergraduate Training in Sociology Benefit Students?

An undergraduate education in sociology provides students with the opportunity to learn cognitive and analytical skills that can benefit them in their careers and throughout their lives. In addition to learning about various subject matter including crime; education; religion; social movements; social psychology; and more.

Students in sociology learn the following skills that may help them in their careers:

- Higher-order critical thinking skills and practical, analytical, problem-solving skills.
- Making evidence-based arguments.
- Evaluating empirical research and different research methods.
- Writing clear reports.
- Making effective presentations.
- Interpreting data and various statistics.
- Using computer and web resources to locate information.
- Using statistical software.
- Working with diverse groups.
- Identifying ethical issues in research.
- The ability to work well with others in small groups.
- Leadership skills.
- A global perspective and understanding.
- Working with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Understanding how people function as and work in groups.

¹ Much of this document has been adapted (with permission) from American Sociological Association Materials including *Sociology: A 21st Century Major*; *21st Century Careers with an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology* and a letter written by Sally T. Hillsman, Executive Officer of the ASA, to parents of students who have decided to major in sociology. Follow this URL to link to these sources: <http://www.asanet.org/>.

As with other arts and sciences education, training in sociology develops communications, critical thinking, and writing skills that students will use throughout their careers whether they proceed to graduate school or enter the workforce upon graduation.

3. How do Sociology Graduates Benefit the State of Georgia?

There are intellectual benefits to the state of Georgia from having increased numbers of graduates in sociology, including a resource pool of persons who are skilled in knowledge-based policy and decision-making and possess an understanding of the importance of a wider context than is typically considered for making and understanding decisions. Because sociology promotes a life-long love of learning, graduates do not remain stagnant but continue to learn both informally and formally so that they will continue to participate in and make decisions that benefit the community. An education in sociology also provides students with career opportunities that enrich the communities within which students live and, as a consequence, the entire state of Georgia.

According to the American Sociological Association's study of recent sociology graduates, students in sociology work in a range of positions including the following: managers, paralegals, non-profit administrators, crime scene technicians, human rights advocates, market researchers, teachers, survey research assistants, and computer consultants. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that these job categories are expected to continue to grow.

Through their work in various fields, sociology graduates contribute to the economic strength of our state. Earning a bachelor's degree in sociology improves salary prospects. According to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce,² the median salary of a college graduate with a bachelor's degree in sociology is \$45,000. This compares favorably to those earning bachelor's degrees in other liberal arts fields. Furthermore, according to the Georgetown University study, 34% of college students who complete a bachelor's degree in sociology go on to earn a graduate degree in sociology or another field, thus building on the training in sociology at the undergraduate level and further increasing their knowledge, skills, and pay in ways that benefit Georgia.

4. Conclusion.

An undergraduate education in sociology opens and trains students' minds to critical thinking and to understanding human behavior beyond individualistic understandings while, at the same time, helping students gain important skills in reasoning, assessment, and communication for the 21st century. Those earning degrees in sociology are prepared for a vast array of occupations and for further study in a host of fields. Sociology graduates contribute to the state of Georgia and beyond not only by their economic benefit as taxpayers but by using their critical thinking and assessment skills to improve their lives, the places they work, and our society. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Georgian who earned his degree in sociology said that "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education." An education in sociology helps one to develop the ability to think critically and intensively, and thus, develop character.

² Carnevale, Anthony P., Jeff Strohl, and Michelle Melton. 2011. "What's it Worth? The Economic Value of College Majors." <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/whatsitworth-complete.pdf>.