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# JOBS, CAREERS & SOCIOLOGICAL SKILLS

## The Early Employment Experiences of 2012 Sociology Majors

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While the United States has been officially out of recession since June, 2009, the unemployment rate hovers around six percent. Recent college graduates have experienced special difficulties, with suggestions that unemployment among this group exceeds eight percent (Shierholz, Davis, and Kimball, 2014). Further, student loan debt now is about one trillion dollars (Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, 2012), and the average debt per borrower from the Class of 2012 is $29,400 (The Project on Student Debt, 2013). In this environment, we would expect students contemplating a sociology major to ask what kinds of careers are common for people who have completed undergraduate degrees in the discipline. What kinds of jobs and what kind of career progress can graduates expect in their first post-baccalaureate years?

In this research brief, we will provide extensive detail on the jobs the national cohort of 2012 sociology graduates have obtained, along with information on the progress of their careers and their job satisfaction. Further, we will explore the kinds of skills learned in sociology programs that graduates find helpful on the job and how these contribute to job satisfaction, and the kinds of skills they wished they would have learned as undergraduates but did not. Elsewhere, we have examined the types of post-graduate jobs held by former sociology majors and whether particular types of jobs would have resulted in the desire to major in sociology again (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Senter 2014).

Data for this brief come from the 2012 Bachelor's and Beyond project funded by the National Science Foundation. The home page for the project, "Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates," can be found at: http://www.asanet.org/research/bacc_survey/jobs_for_sociology_majors.cfm. For the first wave of the project administered in Spring,

2012, May and August, 2012 graduates from 160 colleges/universities were represented. Completed surveys were returned from 2,695 majors (37% response rate). The third wave of the survey was administered between November, 2013 and January, 2014, approximately 18 months after students' baccalaureate graduation. Third wave surveys were returned from 911 respondents.[1] The data are not weighted.

## What Are They Doing?

This brief will, thus, focus on the 575 respondents whom we define as "workers." Fifty-six percent of the sample (N=504) reported that during the week of November 4, 2013 – the reference week – they were working at a paid job or internship only. Another 7.8 percent of the sample (N=71) indicated that they were both working and enrolled in a college or university, but that working was their primary activity.

### Part-time Work

Almost 90 percent of those in the labor force reported that they held full-time positions, while about 12 percent of these respondents (11.6 percent) reported that their job was a temporary position, and 21.6 percent reported that they worked 34 hours or less per week. These 124 part-time workers were asked for the reasons for working fewer than 35 hours during a typical week on the job they held during the reference week. Answers were diverse with 32 stating that they did not need or want to work full time; 18 reporting that they were students; and 15 citing family responsibilities. Among respondents who provided an "other" response (which could be in addition to the responses summarized above), 56 simply said that the job was a part-time job or was limited to less than 40 hours per week, and only 23 reported that full-time work was not available.

### Occupational Categories

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their specific job (regardless of whether their job was full or part-time). They were asked, first, "what category best describes the work you were doing during the week including November 4." Further, they were asked whether they perceived their job to be a career-type job. Table 1 provides the frequencies and percentages of respondents in each of eight self-selected major categories, along with the percentages of respondents who viewed their job as a career-type job.

At least 10 percent of the sample was found in each of four categories. The largest numbers of sociology graduates – more than 20 percent – were employed in social services or as counselors. About one sixth of sociology graduates (16.7 percent) were employed as administrative assistants or in clerical positions. An additional 12.6 percent of graduates worked in a variety of sales and marketing positions, and a similar percentage were employed as teachers (or, in a few cases, as librarians).

### Career-Type Jobs

Overall, almost two-thirds (62 percent) of employees – those we have labelled as in the workforce – saw their job as a career-type job, while 24 percent said it was not. An additional 13 percent of respondents were not sure if their job was or was not a career-type job (data not shown). At least two thirds of respondents who held jobs within five of the major job categories reported that they are in career-type jobs (Table 1). Two of these job categories are among the four largest in terms of number of graduates occupying them – social services/counselors and teachers/librarians. The two categories whose job occupants were most likely to view their jobs as career-type – social science researcher and management-related job – include fewer respondents, although combined they comprise 13 percent of workers under analysis here. Another nine percent of workers were in other professional jobs, and three out of four of these respondents viewed their jobs as career type. Relatively few respondents considered their jobs in sales/marketing, administrative support/clerical, or service occupations to be career-type jobs.

[1] *The second wave survey was administered between mid-December, 2012 and the end of January, 2013. The response rate for the second wave was just over 41 percent of those who had previously answered. Respondents who completed only the first wave or both the first and second wave surveys were invited to complete the third wave survey.*

## Job Descriptions

While the respondents' placement of their jobs into broad job categories is useful, they were also asked two open-ended questions – their job title and their description of "the kind of work you were doing during the week of November 4." Table 2 provides illustrative responses to these qualitative questions for the four largest job categories.

These descriptions suggest that the general categories suppress the variety and the levels of responsibility even in what respondents consider non-career jobs. The examples given here (e.g. by clerical workers) indicate that at

**TABLE 1.** Distribution of Respondents' Job Categories and Percent in Career-Type Jobs.

| Job Category | N | % in Job Type | % in Career-type Job |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social Services/Counselors | 123 | 21.9 | 77.9 |
| Admin. Support/Clerical | 94 | 16.7 | 42.4 |
| Sales/Marketing | 71 | 12.6 | 47.8 |
| Teachers/Librarians | 66 | 11.7 | 66.7 |
| Service Occupations (waitresses, police, cooks) | 52 | 9.3 | 26.5 |
| Other Professional (inc. Prgm. Assistant, IT, PR) | 50 | 8.9 | 75.5 |
| Management-related | 43 | 7.7 | 83.7 |
| Social Science Researcher | 30 | 5.3 | 90.0 |
| Other | 33 | 5.9 | 60.6 |
| Total w/job category info. | 562 | 100.0 | 62.2* |
| No info. on job category | 13 | | |

** Based on N=553*

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

## **TABLE 2.** Examples of Job Titles and Work Descriptions by Major Job Category

### Social Services/Counselors

**Domestic Violence Victims Advocate**

"I work as an advocate for victims of domestic violence in a public assistance office."

**Residential Crisis Counselor**

"Counselor for homeless and runaway youth in a shelter."

**Justice and Peace Liaison**

"I was hired by the diocese to heighten awareness of social justice issues at the parish level."

**Teen Court Case Manager**

"Case manager for first-time juvenile offenders participating in alternative program to traditional juvenile court."

### Sales and Marketing

**Account Executive**

"I sell survey software – specifically I sell 360 feedback software."

**Social Media/Marketing Analyst**

"Assessed the performance of social media strategies as they relate to traffic growth, reader engagement, SEO, sales, and marketing. Created quantitative analyses using advanced Excel, Omniture, Google Analytics, and Wordpress."

**Events and Marketing Coordinator**

"I plan the events and do all marketing and communication for the mentoring and career services office..."

**Marketing Associate**

"Outreaching to hospital executives in order to schedule sales meetings for healthcare performance technologies."

### Admin. Support/Clerical

**Office Manager**

"Budget management, general accounting, supervision of other employees."

**HR Assistant**

"Provide support within different parts of Human Resources (including recruiting, benefits, payroll, and director of HR)."

**Executive Assistant and Externship Outreach Coordinator**

"Assisting the CEO of the institution, along with assisting the Externship/Internship department."

**Analyst**

"Coordinating levels of management, facilitating communication between department, financial forecasting."

### Teacher/Librarian

**Elementary School Teacher**

"I am a Kindergarten teacher: I instruct students in the Spanish language."

**EFL Teacher**

"I'm an English as a Foreign Language teacher in [Latin America] at a technical college..."

**High School Special Education Teacher**

"I am a high school special education teacher who supports approximately 120 10-12th students who receive special education services (...) in their English classes..."

**Assistant Site Manager**

"I manage a before and after school program for elementary students that includes activities, lessons and enrichment.

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

least some respondents in non-career jobs have important responsibilities. Given the diversity of job categories, job titles, and job descriptions, it is not surprising that sociology graduates worked in a wide variety of employment settings. Table 3 provides a percentage distribution to summarize graduates' types of employers, along with the percentages of workers in each employment sector who considered their job a career-type job.

The largest numbers of sociology graduates (43.3 percent) were employed by private, for-profit companies. About one in four graduates (25.4 percent) worked for a private, not-for-profit, tax exempt, or charitable organization, and almost one quarter worked for the government at the local, state, or federal level. More than 70 percent of respondents who worked for a non-for-profit organization or for the government reported that their job was a career-type job as opposed to 54 percent of those who worked for for-profit companies. This finding suggests that for many for-profit companies might be employers of the last resort.

Twenty-five percent of all employed sociology graduates noted that their employer was an educational institution, with 42 percent of these 134 graduates indicating that their institution was a preschool or K-12 institution; 34 percent describing their employer as a 2- or 4-year university, college, technical institute, or a medical school

**TABLE 3.** Distribution of Employment Settings and Percent of Career-Type Jobs in these Settings

| Employer Type | N | % | % in Career-type Job |
|---|---|---|---|
| Private for-profit company | 242 | 43.3 | 53.6 |
| Private non-profit, tax exempt, or charitable organization | 142 | 25.4 | 73.2 |
| Local govt, (e.g., city, county) | 63 | 11.3 | 71.0 |
| State government | 56 | 10.0 | 75.0 |
| Other | 28 | 5.0 | 32.0 |
| U.S. govt, as a civilian employee | 12 | 2.1 | 66.7 |
| Self-employed | 11 | 2.0 | 36.4 |
| U.S. military | 5 | 0.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 559 | 100.0 | |

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

(including an affiliated hospital); 13 percent reported working for a university-affiliated research institute; and 11 percent indicating "other." In fact, 26 percent of graduates employed by private, not for-profit, tax exempt, or charitable organizations reported that their employer was an educational institution, along with 57 percent of graduates who worked for local government and 70 percent of those employed by state government. Looking at graduates with all types of employers, slightly more of those working at educational institutions (65%) reported their jobs as "career-level" compared to those working at non-educational institutions (60%).

## Have They Seen Progress in Careers?

While these sociology graduates have had only so much time to progress in their careers, two sorts of questions provide insight into the ways in which this cohort of graduates have experienced career advancement. First, graduates were asked whether the job they held during the reference week was the only job they have had since graduating with their bachelor's degree in sociology. Forty two percent of the group said "yes." The remaining 328 respondents (58 percent) indicated all of the reasons they have changed jobs. Table 4 provides the percentages of these respondents who indicated each reason for the job change, recognizing that the percentages in the table will not equal 100 because respondents could indicate one or more reasons for changing jobs

**TABLE 4.** Reasons for Job Changes, for Those Who Changed Jobs Since Graduation: Percentage Distributions

% for those who changed jobs: Combination of those who indicated one or multiple reasons for job change (N=328)

| | |
|---|---|
| Better job | 71.3 % |
| Relocation | 25.3 % |
| Layoff | 7.9 % |
| Other | 25.9 % |

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

The vast majority of respondents who changed jobs did so for a better job (71.3 percent). Job changes occasioned by layoffs were relatively uncommon, with about eight percent (7.9%) of those who changed jobs providing this as their only explanation for a job change or as one of multiple explanations. Regardless of whether respondents selected one reason or many, about one quarter of job changers (25.3%) reported that they relocated.

A second set of questions focused even more directly on job enhancement. Respondents were asked to indicate which of 11 positive changes they had experienced in their post-graduation employment (across all jobs). Table 5 provides the percentages of the 575 workers who had experienced each of these changes since graduation, with the most likely changes appearing first. The table also presents the percent of respondents experiencing and not experiencing each change who think of their job as a career-type job. We argue that respondents who have experienced job enhancement are more likely than those who have not to view their job as part of a career path. What is notable in the table is the high percentage of recent graduates who experienced positive changes. In fact, four types of job enhancements were enjoyed by more than one half of respondents – an increased level of responsibility, a salary increase, an increased degree of independence on the job, and an increased role in helping people.

To highlight further these job enhancements, we created an index by counting the total number of positive changes on the job (of 11) experienced by respondents. We found that 57 percent of respondents had experienced five or more of these 11 positive changes, and about one third experienced eight or more of them. Only 15 percent of respondents had seen none of these positive job

enhancements since graduation.

As seen in Table 5, respondents who reported that they have experienced positive change on the job are more likely than those who have not experienced job enhancement to view their job as a career-type job. At least 70 percent of those who experienced each of the 11 job enhancements reported that they held a career-type job. This compares to between 41 and 58 percent of respondents who did not experience the job enhancement who reported that they held a career-type job. Further,

**TABLE 5.** Experiences of Job Enhancement and Impact on Career-Type Jobs

| | % in All Jobs | % with Enhancement in Career-type Job | % without Enhancement in Career-type Job |
|---|---|---|---|
| Increased level of responsibility | 64.0 | 73.0** | 40.9 |
| Salary increase | 63.1 | 72.4** | 42.9 |
| Increased degree of independence | 57.4 | 76.0** | 42.0 |
| Increased role in helping people | 50.4 | 73.1** | 50.2 |
| More intellectual challenge | 47.1 | 79.6** | 45.6 |
| Better opportunities for advancement | 44.2 | 81.1** | 46.2 |
| Greater contribution to society | 43.8 | 77.4** | 49.5 |
| Better co-workers | 43.0 | 71.7* | 54.6 |
| Increase in job security | 41.7 | 76.7** | 51.1 |
| Increase in benefits | 39.5 | 75.2** | 53.2 |
| Better location | 33.0 | 70.4* | 58.0 |

** Statistically significant difference in the likelihood of being in a career-type job between those who experienced the job enhancement and those who did not at $p < .05$.*

*** Statistically significant difference in the likelihood of being in a career-type job between those who experienced the job enhancement and those who did not at $p < .01$.*

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

relatively few respondents who experienced each positive job change – in each case less than 20 percent – indicated that they held a non-career job, with the remaining 9-11 percent of respondents with each job enhancement reporting that they are not sure if their job was a career-type one (data not shown).

## Are they satisfied on the job?

Next, we explore the factors that are associated with high overall job satisfaction. Table 6 provides data on the percent of graduates who are "very satisfied" overall with their job in each of eight major job categories and the category "other." Three other response categories were provided, with the most negative being "very dissatisfied."

**TABLE 6.** Percent "Very Satisfied" Overall with Job, by Job Category

| Job Category | % "Very Satisfied" with Job |
|---|---|
| Social Services, Counselors | 50.4 |
| Management-related | 45.2 |
| Teachers/Librarians | 37.5 |
| Other professional (including program assistant, IT, PR) | 37.5 |
| Social Science Researcher | 36.7 |
| Other | 31.2 |
| Admin. Support/Clerical | 30.8 |
| Sales/Marketing | 24.3 |
| Service Occupations (waitresses, police, cooks) | 23.9 |
| Total | 36.5 |

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

Sociology graduates who worked in social services/counseling were most likely to report that they were very satisfied with their jobs. And, while the rank order differs, the five job categories with the highest percentage of respondents reporting career-type jobs (Table 1) are the five job categories with the highest percentages of very satisfied respondents. And, consistent with what we have reported above, sociology graduates in service occupations, sales/marketing, and administrative support/clerical jobs were least likely to be very satisfied with their jobs.

In addition to rating their level of overall job satisfaction, respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with 11 specific aspects of their job; these are the same 11 dimensions of job enhancements since graduation presented in Table 5. Table 7 is organized so that overall satisfaction is presented first followed by the specific aspects of the job with the highest "very satisfied" ratings in descending order. In addition, the table contrasts the satisfaction levels of those in career-type jobs with those not in career-type jobs, the logic being that those in career-type jobs are more likely than those in non-career jobs to be very satisfied overall and with specific aspects of their employment situation.

The table indicates that satisfaction levels of respondents were highest in terms of location, co-workers, degree of independence, and helping people. They were less satisfied with the material aspects of their jobs including benefits, opportunities for advancement, and salary. Overall, 37 percent of graduates were very satisfied and another 41 percent were somewhat satisfied with their jobs.

As expected, respondents in career-type jobs were more likely to be highly satisfied overall (52 percent) than respondents who were not in career-type jobs (7 percent). This general finding holds when one focuses on specific aspects of respondents' jobs. The distinctions are marked in some cases: 53 percent of those in a career-type job reported being very satisfied with their contribution to

society as opposed to only 11 percent of those not in a career-type job, and 59 percent of graduates in career-type jobs reported being very satisfied with their ability to help people in contrast to only 21 percent of those in other jobs. The relatively high percentages of graduates expressing high satisfaction with their ability to help people and to contribute to society is worth noting, given the high percentages of majors who noted in the first wave of the survey that they chose sociology majors for these reasons (Spalter-Roth, VanVooren, Kisielewski, and Senter 2012). Those in non-career jobs reported more satisfaction with specific items than with their job, overall. The satisfaction levels of the two groups of respondents were closest on salary.

**TABLE 7.** Overall and Specific Job Satisfaction: All Employees and for Those in and Not in Career-type Jobs

| | % Very Satisfied | % Very Satisfied -- Those in Career Jobs | % Very Satisfied -- Those NOT in Career Jobs |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall satisfaction** | **36.5** | **52.1** | **6.8** |
| Location | 55.9 | 62.7 | 43.5 |
| Co-workers | 49.5 | 56.8 | 38.2 |
| Degree of independence | 48.8 | 59.7 | 28.8 |
| Helping people | 47.4 | 58.5 | 20.6 |
| Job security | 42.5 | 51.3 | 25.0 |
| Contribution to society | 39.8 | 53.0 | 10.6 |
| Level of responsibility | 38.5 | 50.0 | 18.2 |
| Benefits | 34.6 | 45.5 | 16.0 |
| Intellectual challenge | 26.4 | 37.8 | 3.8 |
| Opportunities for advancement | 24.5 | 34.0 | 8.3 |
| Salary | 16.9 | 20.8 | 10.6 |

*All relationships are statistically significant (chi-square test including the category "not sure" whether a career-type job , p=.000)*

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

## Are They Using Their Skills on the Job?

Respondents were asked two sorts of questions about the extent to which they use concepts and skills learned in their undergraduate sociology program on the job. The first series of questions is whether or not they used basic sociological concepts and skills that are a central focus of the sociology curriculum (Tables 8 and 9). The second set of questions focuses on specific, practical skills presumably learned in their sociology courses (see Table 10).

Basic Concepts and Skills. Each statement in the series used this same format—in particular, "To help me in my job, I use what I've learned in my sociology undergraduate program about" each of nine specific concepts or skills and "other aspects." Elsewhere we examined the skills that people use on the job and whether they would major again (Spalter-Roth et al. 2014). Here, Table 8 provides percentage distributions to summarize responses

**TABLE 8.** Concepts and Skills Learned as Sociology Majors and Used on the Job: Percentage Distributions

| *To help me with my job, I use what I've learned about ...* | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diversity | 55.2 | 28.1 | 7.4 | 9.3 |
| Social institutions and their impact on individuals | 49.9 | 31.1 | 9.4 | 9.6 |
| Groups and teams | 49.6 | 37.0 | 6.9 | 6.5 |
| Social problems | 47.5 | 26.4 | 12.9 | 13.1 |
| Alt. or critical perspectives | 41.1 | 31.1 | 15.2 | 12.6 |
| Sociological imagination | 33.8 | 34.9 | 14.7 | 16.5 |
| Soc. concepts and theories | 26.2 | 38.4 | 15.9 | 19.4 |
| Data analysis | 22.3 | 34.8 | 18.0 | 25.0 |
| Other aspects | 19.5 | 39.8 | 20.3 | 20.5 |
| Research design | 13.6 | 27.1 | 26.4 | 32.9 |

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

to these questions, with the table organized so that the most used concept/skill appears first.

The table makes clear that many graduates strongly or somewhat agreed that the basic sociological concepts and skills that are part of the sociology curriculum helped them on their jobs. As we found with the relationship to whether graduates would major again (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren and Senter 2014), sociological concepts appeared to be more useful than data analysis skills. The findings here are similar. Respondents were less likely to strongly agree that they use data analysis and research design on the job. Nonetheless, Table 8 shows that more than one half of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that they used nine of the ten concepts/skills (with data

**TABLE 9.** Percent Very Satisfied with Job and Percent in Career-type Job by Extent of Agreement That Skills Learned in Undergraduate Program Are Helpful on the Job

| | % VERY SATISFIED | | % IN CAREER-TYPE JOB | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree skill helpful | Strongly disagree skill helpful | Strongly agree skill helpful | Strongly disagree skill helpful |
| Data Analysis | 50.4 | 22.4 | 78.3 | 30.4 |
| Research Design | 49.3 | 21.8 | 82.2 | 34.7 |
| Concepts and Theories | 52.8 | 14.4 | 79.6 | 29.5 |
| Sociological Imagination | 55.0 | 18.0 | 75.8 | 29.2 |
| Diversity | 46.1 | 16.0 | 73.2 | 30.0 |
| Groups and teams | 46.8 | 11.8 | 73.4 | 28.6 |
| Social institutions and their impact on individuals | 47.8 | 11.5 | 75.9 | 28.8 |
| Social problems | 46.5 | 14.1 | 75.9 | 31.0 |
| Alt. or critical perspectives | 48.6 | 16.2 | 76.6 | 26.5 |
| Other aspects | 57.3 | 19.6 | 80.4 | 42.2 |

*All relationships are statistically significant (chi-square test, p=.000),*
*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

analysis and research design) under analysis here. In fact, about one half of graduates strongly agreed that they used what they have learned about diversity, about social institutions and their impact on individuals, about groups and teams, and about social problems to help them on their job.

But are respondents who find that basic sociological concepts and skills help them on the job more satisfied with their jobs than those who do not? And, are employees who find these skills helpful more likely to be in career-type jobs? Table 9 provides the data to answer these questions. The table presents the contrast – for each of 10 concepts/skills – between those who "strongly agree" and those who "strongly disagree" that "to help me in my job, I use what I've learned in my sociology undergraduate program."

The major conclusion from Table 9 is that respondents who strongly agreed that they used their sociological skills on the job were in every instance more likely to be very satisfied with their job than respondents who strongly disagreed that they use those skills. Similarly, respondents who strongly agreed that they use those skills on the job were in every case more likely to report that they are in a career-type job. For example, about one half of respondents who strongly agreed that they used data analysis learned as undergraduates to help them on the job were very satisfied with their job, and more than three quarters of respondents who strongly agreed that they used this skill were in career-type jobs. By contrast, only 22 percent of respondents who strongly disagreed that data analysis is helpful on the job were very satisfied, and only 30 percent who strongly disagreed that this skill is helpful were in career-type jobs.

Practical Skills. a second set of questions explored whether employees have specifically used practical sociological skills on their current jobs. These practical skills have the potential to link sociological analysis and methods to the heart of the job. Respondents were asked to indicate which ones of a set of skills "is something you have done on the job since you've had it." Table 10 provides those skills employed on the job by at least one third of respondents, arranged so that the activity most likely to have been done is listed first and the one least likely to have been done is last.

**TABLE 10:** Skills That are Part of the Job: Percentage Distributions

| Skills | % |
|---|---|
| Organizational skills (including leadership) | 85.9 |
| Work with people who differ in race, ethnicity, gender or class | 83.8 |
| Work with others in teams | 81.9 |
| Use computer resources to locate information | 69.4 |
| Gather information to make evidence-based arguments | 47.5 |
| Summarize information in tables or graphs | 42.3 |
| Write a report | 37.6 |
| Make presentations using software such as PowerPoint | 36.0 |
| Search for existing statistics | 35.1 |

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

The percentage distributions themselves suggest three clusters of practical experiences. First, at least 80 percent of workers in the sample reported using the relationship skills that are the focus of major discussions in the sociology curriculum. These include organizational skills, working with people who differ in race, ethnicity, gender or class, and working in teams. Second, the empirical foundations of the discipline are realized on the job by the 42 to 69 percent of sociology graduates who reported having used computer resources to locate information, having gathered information to make evidence-based arguments, and having summarized information in tables or graphs and by the 35 percent of workers who have

searched for existing statistics. Third, the importance of communications skills is highlighted by the 36-38 percent of respondents who reported having made presentations using software such as PowerPoint and having written a report.

What skills do they wish they had but do not?

What did graduates think that they were missing – the skills that real-world experience, post-graduation, led them to wish they had mastered as undergraduates? Former majors were queried about those skills that were not part of their undergraduate program that they think would have been useful. They were asked: "Given your experiences since graduating with your undergraduate degree, are there particular skills or topics that you wish you had learned while taking sociology courses, either for a job or for graduate school?" Three hundred and eleven "workers" provided an open-ended response to this question, which was coded into eight specific categories and "other." Table 11 provides the code categories, as well as the frequency and percentage distributions of responses based on N = 311, for those categories that include at least 10 percent of responses. Any one response could be coded into one or two categories.

The largest number of graduates who provided a response either wrote in the equivalent of "no additional skills" or provided a positive comment about their program. Examples of these comments when asked about particular skills or topics "that you wish you had learned" include:

*I loved every part of the curriculum for getting a BA in Sociology.*

*No, I feel that my experience with my coursework leading up to my graduate degree prepared me academically and intellectually to be an effective and contributing member of society in a way where I feel as though I am making a difference.*

*No. I think the skills I learned during my undergrad career have helped me immensely in my post-college life. I have*

**TABLE 11:** Skills They Wished They Would Have Learned: Code Categories, Frequency and Percentage Distribution

| Code category | Number (1st and 2nd mention) | % (based on N=311) |
|---|---|---|
| Positive comments or no additional skills | 83 | 26.7 |
| Job information/ internship/application | 69 | 22.2 |
| Specific course or content | 61 | 19.6 |
| Research/methods/statistics/ statistical software | 53 | 17.0 |

*SOURCE: American Sociological Association. Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates, 2012, Wave III.*

*learned that interpersonal, communication, presentation, and organizational skills are highly coveted by prospective employers - other role-based skills/knowledge can be learned on the job!*

For respondents mentioning specific skills they wish they would have learned, the largest number focused on the need for more information related to jobs, including the desire for more internships or applied experiences. The following comments are illustrative of those included in this category.

*How and where to find Sociology related careers.*

*I wish I was pushed harder by my teachers and advisors to do an internship and gain experience outside my college work.*

*I wish my adviser was better at connecting me with opportunities in the desired field I wish to enter.*

Almost as many respondents mentioned a specific course that they wished they would have taken as undergraduates or mentioned a specific content area they wished they would have mastered. The range of these responses was wide and included:

*Criminal justice-related skills*

*Critical race theory*

*Social work*

*Technology and society.*

The only other category that includes more than 10 percent of the responses provided focuses on research, methods, and statistics. Graduates' comments coded in this category include:

*I wish I perfected data analysis, statistics and research methods. I also wish I took more courses in economics.*

*Being able to use different computer programs for analyzing data, other than SPSS. Also, being able to conduct more research projects and actually getting out into the field and conducting more interviews and more ethnographic studies. Although I have been able to learn a lot in my courses, I would like for the program to be longer in order to spend more time on projects and be able to get more experience in such projects.*

*I wish I had learned a statistical software program. I also wish there was more focus on quantitative analysis rather than qualitative.*

Note as well that additional comments did not explicitly mention statistical software (such as SPSS), but focused, more generally, on the desire for more computer skills (such as Excel). Perhaps in their job search or on the job they saw that a wider array of career-type opportunities were available to those with research and computer skills compared to the kinds of jobs that they had obtained.

## Conclusions and Discussion

Eighteen months after graduation, sociology majors from the Class of 2012 were employed in a wide variety of occupations and employment settings. The largest numbers had jobs in social service and counseling, and almost 80 percent of graduates viewed this type of job as a career-type position. Further, one half of these graduates were "very satisfied" with their job.

Looking across all positions occupied by sociology graduates, we find that 62 percent viewed their positions as career-type jobs. While satisfaction levels were highest for those in career-type jobs, overall job satisfaction was strong for all employed respondents. Almost four out of five employees reported that they were very or somewhat satisfied with their position.

Sociology graduates found the concepts and skills they learned in their undergraduate programs were useful on the job. More than one half of respondents in all types of jobs strongly or somewhat agreed that – to help them on the job – they used nine of the ten concepts/skills (including "other") under analysis here. Sociology graduates who reported using their sociological toolkit on the job were also more likely to report that they were in career-type jobs and were more likely to report being very satisfied with their jobs.

Perhaps most important for the reputation of the sociology major, more than one half of sociology graduates reported having experienced four kinds of job enhancements since graduation, and – looking cumulatively

across all changes – 57 percent of respondents have experienced five or more of these 11 positive changes including increased responsibility, more independence, greater intellectual challenges, more opportunities for advancement, and even raises in salaries. This evidence should be broadcast to improve the reputation of the sociology major.

These findings have implications for sociology departments and faculty. Faculty appear to have socialized undergraduates to love sociological concepts. It is important for faculty members to highlight the ways in which conceptual and methodological skills can be used effectively in the job market. Given that about one half of sociology majors are first-generation college students (Senter, Van Vooren, and Spalter-Roth, 2013), faculty members should not assume that the link between what is learned in the classroom and what is used on the job will be obvious for students.

Second, while sociology majors were employed in a wide variety of settings and many were satisfied with their jobs and have experienced advances in their careers, there remains a group of students who were dissatisfied with their employment and believed that their position would not lead them to where they want to be in the next five years. For these students in particular, but also for the benefit of all students, departments need to help link majors with career resources. Previously we have shown that less than 30 percent of undergraduate majors were satisfied with the career advising that they obtained (Senter, Van Vooren, and Spalter-Roth 2013). To improve the level of satisfaction, departments could cultivate links to the career services units on their campus and link their department or program websites to those of departments that have been especially successful in creating career-oriented sites for undergraduates (see the appendix of Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Senter 2013 for suggestions). Further, while the data provided here are from a national sample of majors, departments should consider maintaining links to their own alumni in a variety of ways. Alumni surveys (perhaps using some of the questions from this project and available for download at: http://www.asanet.org/research/bacc_survey/jobs_for_sociology_majors.cfm) will provide data on what a department's particular graduates are doing; such data might prove especially compelling to your students and their parents. Further, by maintaining ties to your alumni, you may find potential speakers and panelists for events that you wish to host for your current undergraduate majors.

Third, departments should consider the ways in which their undergraduate curriculum might best serve the career needs of students, without in any way detracting from sociological substance and rigor. When asked about what was missing in their undergraduate program, the largest number of employed respondents in our sample talked about the need for more information related to jobs, including the desire for more internships or applied experiences. Department faculty might want to discuss whether an internship program or a pro-seminar could be added to the curriculum, or whether a capstone course could devote (more) attention to career issues. Further, more than one in six respondents who articulated additional skills that they wished they had learned focused on research methods, data analysis, and statistics. More than 40 percent of all employed sociology graduates told us that their jobs have involved using computer resources to locate information, gathering information to make evidence-based arguments, and summarizing information in tables or graphs. While a relatively small number of graduates worked as social science researchers so early in their careers, the kinds of skills learned in methods and statistics courses proved valuable to students-as-employees. This information, communicated to today's undergraduates, might serve to motivate them to take such courses seriously and to do well in them.

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