

Handout – Nonacademic Careers in Sociology

Note that the some information below is applicable to nonacademic and academic careers.

1997 Employment of Recent Doctorate Recipients by Sector

	Academic	Business/ Industry	Government	Other
Sociology	83%	6%	4%	6%

Numbers do not add to 100 due to rounding error.

From The ASA's "Careers in Sociology"

(See <http://www.asanet.org/student/career/homepage.html> for a full table of contents.)

"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.

From The ASA's "Prospects for the MA/PhD Sociology Graduate"

(See <http://www.asanet.org/pubs/brochures/businessroles.html> for full text.)

Sociological Roles Relating to Business, Industry, and Work

Sociologists with an M.A. or Ph.D. combine their advanced training in research methods, statistics, and theory with a substantive focus in such specialties as organizational sociology, sociology of work and occupations, sociology of labor, or medical sociology. They follow three major career paths that often overlap:

Teaching in college or university settings

Working in corporate and industrial organizations

Consulting to business and industry

Practitioner Roles

Organizational Researcher in Industry, Government, or other Service Organization

Divisional Staff Position

Independent Consultant

Trainer or Field Employee

Manager

Owner

In *applied settings*, sociology practitioners work in research departments in corporations and participate in organizational analysis and development. They engage in research and strategic planning in corporate departments of human resources, industrial relations, public relations, and marketing. Some are supervisors, managers, and directors of large organizations. Others establish their own consulting and research companies or serve as staff researchers in private research firms and think tanks.

The practitioner's life is appealing to those who like the challenge of applying knowledge to everyday problems, and seeing immediate outcomes of their work.

Monetary rewards are usually generous, especially at the top of the career ladder. Opportunities for decision-making increase as one's responsibility and experiences broaden. Practitioners often adhere to an established work schedule, work cooperatively as part of a team, and work in bureaucracies. They blend research skills and substantive area knowledge into a powerful combination. For example:

A sociologist serving as vice president for research in a large insurance company applies both methodological expertise and understanding of ethnicity and gender in developing staff training programs and employee benefit packages.

A sociologist specializing in urban and community research consults for a multinational corporation developing new towns.

A sociologist in a large advertising company supervises marketing research operations and organizational development workshops.

From the Bureau of Labor Statistics

(Note. The following text was taken from the BLS web, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos054.htm>. While this text applies to social scientists more generally, note that sociologists are among what the BLS considers social scientists. I've bold-faced some of the more relevant passages.)

EMPLOYMENT

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Social scientists held about 15,000 jobs in 2000. Many worked as researchers, administrators, and counselors for a wide range of employers, including Federal, State, and local governments, educational institutions, social service agencies, research and testing services, and management consulting firms. Other employers include international organizations, associations, museums, and historical societies.

Many additional individuals with training in a social science discipline teach in colleges and universities, and in secondary and elementary schools. (For more information, see [teachers—postsecondary](#) and [teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary](#) elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) The proportion of social scientists that teach varies by specialty—for example, the academic world usually is a more important source of jobs for graduates in history than for graduates in the other fields of study.

TRAINING, OTHER QUALIFICATIONS, AND ADVANCEMENT

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Educational attainment of social scientists is among the highest of all occupations. The Ph.D. or equivalent degree is a minimum requirement for most positions in colleges and universities and **is important for advancement to many top-level nonacademic research and administrative posts.** Graduates with master's degrees in applied specialties usually have better professional opportunities outside of colleges and universities, although the situation varies by field. Graduates with a master's degree in a social science may qualify for teaching positions in community colleges. Bachelor's degree holders have limited opportunities and in most social science occupations do not qualify for "professional" positions. The bachelor's degree does, however, provide a suitable background for many different kinds of entry-level jobs, such as research assistant, administrative aide, or management or sales trainee. With the addition of sufficient education courses, social science graduates also can qualify for teaching positions in secondary and elementary schools.

Training in statistics and mathematics is essential for many social scientists. Mathematical and quantitative research methods increasingly are used in geography, political science, and other fields. **The ability to use computers for research purposes is mandatory in most disciplines.**

Depending on their jobs, **social scientists may need a wide range of personal characteristics.** Because they constantly seek new information about people, things, and ideas, **intellectual curiosity and creativity are fundamental personal traits.** The **ability to think logically and methodically is important** to a political scientist comparing, for example, the merits of various forms of government. **Objectivity, open-mindedness, and systematic work habits are**

important in all kinds of social science research. Perseverance is essential for an anthropologist, who might spend years accumulating artifacts from an ancient civilization. **Excellent written and oral communication skills are essential for all these professionals.**

JOB OUTLOOK

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Overall **employment of social scientists is expected to [grow about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations through 2010. Prospects are best for those with advanced degrees, and usually are better in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and archaeology, which offer more opportunities in nonacademic settings.**

Government agencies, social service organizations, marketing, research and consulting firms, and a wide range of businesses seek social science graduates, although often in jobs with titles unrelated to their academic discipline. Social scientists will face stiff competition for academic positions. However, the growing importance and popularity of social science subjects in secondary schools is strengthening the demand for social science teachers at that level.

Candidates seeking positions as social scientists can expect to encounter competition in many areas of social science. Some social science graduates, however, will find good employment opportunities in areas outside traditional social science, often in related jobs that require good research, communication, and quantitative skills.

EARNINGS

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Median annual earnings of all other social scientists (excluding economists, psychologists, and urban and regional planners) were \$48,330 in 2000. Anthropologists and archeologists had median annual earnings of \$36,040; geographers, \$46,690; historians, \$39,860; political scientists, \$81,040; and **sociologists, \$45,670.**

In the Federal Government, social scientists with a bachelor's degree and no experience could start at \$21,900 or \$27,200 a year in 2001, depending on their college records. Those with a master's degree could start at \$33,300, and those with a Ph.D. degree could begin at \$40,200, while some individuals with experience and an advanced degree could start at \$48,200. Beginning salaries were slightly higher in selected areas of the country where the prevailing local pay level was higher

Some Useful Links from The Chronicle of Higher Education

Beyond the Ivory Tower

What you should know about nonacademic careers for Ph.D.'s.

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/archive/advice/beyond.htm>

Sociology Jobs (both academic and nonacademic)

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/10/300/8500/>