

# WADSWORTH SOCIOLOGY MODULE

## Careers in Sociology

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### What Is Sociology?

Sociology is a perspective and set of techniques for analyzing social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists pay special attention to the structure of groups, organizations, and societies and to how these structures shape interactions and relationships among people (American Sociological Association 2008). The sociological perspective encourages students to observe and think critically about

their own and other societies and to become more sensitive to behavioral and value differences among people.

### What Do You Do with a Sociology Degree?

If you are a sociology major or are considering declaring a major in sociology, be prepared for your family, friends, and even strangers to ask:



There are many career paths open to sociology majors. The skills majors acquire apply to a variety of occupations.

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“What are you going to do with a degree in sociology?” This question can be challenging to answer because there is no obvious career path for sociology majors as there is for nursing, accounting, business, and some other majors. But sociology majors do have many career options. The skills sociology majors acquire apply to a wide range of jobs. People who major in sociology work in banking, social services, community work, business, health care, customer service, publishing, journalism, public relations, human resources, marketing, survey research, government, and education. In addition, sociology majors go on to graduate school in any number of disciplines and professions, including sociology, law, medicine, business, and education.

Many students share the belief that employers are seeking to hire people with specific majors. Keep in mind that employers are more interested in an applicant’s attitude and the skills he or she brings to the job (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2008). Therefore, once you declare

a major in sociology, like all college students, you must work to focus your career goals and to acquire the skills needed to meet those goals. Simply taking classes and earning a degree is not enough to be competitive in the job market.

In this guide to careers in sociology, we recommend ways to build your resume while in college. After exploring resume-building tips, we consider the various career options open to sociology majors.

### Building a Resume While Pursuing a Degree in Sociology

Here are thirteen tips that show you how to do this:

- **1. List selected sociology courses on your resume.** Include a “related courses” section on your resume where you list four or five carefully chosen sociology and other courses to showcase academic

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College should be considered a time to build a resume. As a sociology major, strive to make connections between the courses you take and career interests. On your resume, be sure to list select sociology courses that you have completed that relate to the job for which you are applying.

interests that relate to the job for which you are applying (see Appendix A for a list of various sociology classes that are offered in sociology programs around the country). Obvious choices include research methods, statistics, and demography.

**Research Methods.** Research methods courses emphasize methods of data collection and analysis. Take at least one research methods course and more if possible. Students who take research methods acquire skills that are particularly valuable in the job market. Those skills include planning a research study, evaluating a program, designing a survey, constructing a questionnaire, interviewing, using census data, selecting samples, and so on. As one indicator of the importance of social research courses, the American Sociological Association (2008) found that most sociology graduates “did not receive enough training in research methods, computer applications, and statistics” which would have given them an incalculable advantage in the job market.

**Statistics.** Taking a statistics course might seem intimidating. Keep the following points in mind: First, most colleges and universities require at least one math course as a general studies requirement. Statistics is often one of several math courses that qualify as a general studies math credit. Second, most employers interested in applicants who have a background in statistics expect knowledge of basic statistics and the ability to apply them.

**Demography.** Demography is the study of population. Demographers understand that population characteristics of any geographic area are shaped by age–sex composition, death, births, and migration. Most organizations have an interest in knowing about the population it serves or targets. Retirement communities, for example, need to know how many people are 55 and older and if that population is expected to increase or decrease. School systems need to know how many children are expected to enroll in kindergarten each year. Likewise, the military needs to know how many

men and women will turn 18 each year and if those numbers are expected to increase or decline.

**Other Career-related Sociology Courses.** Depending on your career goals there are many sociology courses that are appropriate to include on your resume. Examples include Sociology of Aging if you plan to work with older populations; Criminology if you plan to become a police or probation officer; Medical Sociology if you plan to work in a hospital setting; Sociology of Education if you plan to work in the field of education/continuing education; Sociology of the Environment if you plan a career related to environmental education; and Work and Occupations if you plan to work in a human resources department. Urban Sociology will help with community organizing, demography, or government-related work.

■ **2. Take an independent study that advances career goals.** An independent study is a course in which a student studies outside the classroom under the supervision of a professor. Most, if not all, sociology programs offer independent studies open to majors who want to do readings and/or research on a topic in which there are no courses offered, or who want to study a specific sociological topic in depth or at an advanced level. Usually a student approaches a professor with an idea for an independent study and the two work together to draw a plan of study.

■ **3. Do an internship or co-op.** The purpose of internships and co-ops is to provide students with a chance to gain first-hand experience working in an organization that relates to a specific career choice; to explore a specific career option; to strengthen skills and knowledge; and to build a reputation with a potential employer. Co-ops are always paid and involve working full- (40 hours) or part-time (20 hours) for one or more semesters. Internships, on the other hand, can be paid or voluntary and involve working a fewer number of hours, perhaps between five and ten hours a week over the course of a semester. Students





© Christopher Brown

A study abroad experience can enhance your resume. The student pictured chose to study in Egypt for one year. Among other things, he learned Arabic, interacted with the locals, rode a camel, and visited major attractions such as the pyramids.

receive academic credit that, depending on university requirements, can vary from between one and 12 credit hours.

■ **4. Study abroad.** Study abroad programs involve studying outside the United States. Study abroad programs can last one year, a semester, or from one to ten weeks. Study abroad enhances any resume because it gives a person first-hand experience with a foreign culture; tests a person's ability to adapt and respond to unfamiliar situations; enables a person to evaluate their own culture from a foreign perspective; expands a person's worldview; prepares the person to live in a global society; and demonstrates self-motivation, independence, and a willingness to step outside one's comfort zone.

■ **5. Choose a course that requires a class project.** Learn which professors use class projects as vehicles for teaching the subject matter of a sociology course. For example, students who

are part of a class project that uses census data to determine the size of the 55 and older population and then estimates the size of that population 10 and 20 years from now for a retirement center can declare that a sociology degree involves learning skills that allow them to make population projections. Likewise, sociology students who use GIS and Excel software to help a local police department sift through data on 300,000+ police runs to identify the top 10 locations involving juveniles to which police units have been called over a five-



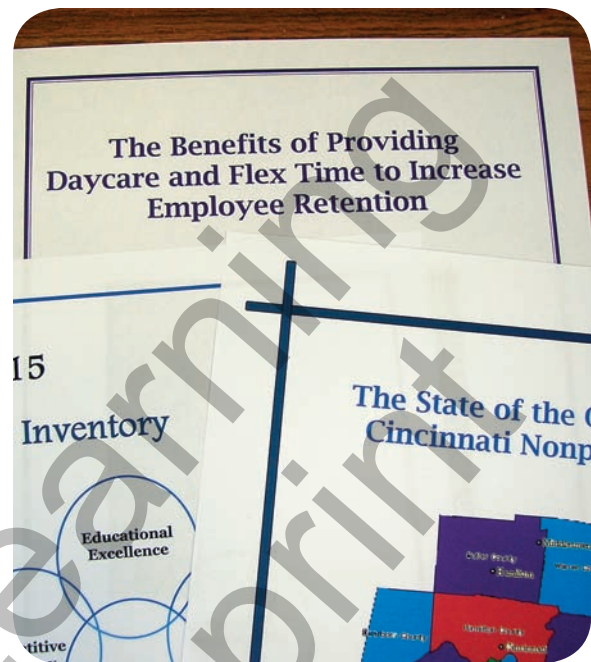
Photographs by the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO)

A class project is an excellent way to learn how to apply sociological concepts and theories to frame an analysis and to use the methods of social research to gather data. One method of gathering data is face-to-face interviewing.

year period can say that they possess the computer and analytical skills to assess the conditions (abandoned lots, the presence of a pay phone, a liquor store on the corner) attracting juveniles to those locations and to devise strategies to alleviate trouble.

■ **6. Join the sociology club.** The sociology club offers its members a variety of opportunities including the chance to work on projects, to socialize with other majors, and to learn about events involving sociologists, such as professional meetings. Generally, sociology clubs take on at least one community outreach project each year. One example of such a project included a sociology club partnering with a neighborhood association in its quest to learn how residents think about their neighborhood, what changes they would like to see, and if they were willing to take action to implement those changes. The club agreed to conduct in-depth interviews with residents in their homes. The students also wrote a report highlighting the findings and presented it at the neighborhood association monthly meeting. If there is not a Sociology Club at your educational institution, consider talking with the departmental faculty to start one.

■ **7. Make the most of research papers.** When you write a research paper for a sociology course, think about its potential usefulness beyond that course. If you know your career goals, write a paper that relates to the population you hope to work with in the future. Imagine that you are enrolled in a Work and Occupations course and you have been assigned to write a paper about how a specific occupation shapes family life. If your goal is to eventually work for the United States Military as an Outreach Coordinator (a civilian position), write a paper about military life emphasizing opportunities and stresses to service members and their families associated with overseas deployment. Or if you plan to work for a retail company, perhaps you might consider writing a paper on benefits of providing daycare and flex-



If possible write papers for sociology classes that relate to career interests. Employers often ask applicants to demonstrate a pre-existing interest in an area that relates to the position to which one is applying.

time to sales clerks to boost employee retention. Keep major papers and projects that relate to your area of focus. This will serve as a great resource when interviewing for jobs after graduation and/or when applying to graduate schools.

■ **8. Work with a sociology professor.** Professors do more than just teach classes. Their jobs require them to do academic research, community outreach, and university service. Ideally you should approach a professor after you have taken at least one class and earned an A or B. Ask the professor to keep you in mind if he or she needs help with their research, needs a student member to serve on a committee, or is looking for someone to assist with a community outreach project. Students can often help with teaching (as teaching assistants) or can serve as tutors to those struggling in lower-level sociology courses.





Photo Courtesy of U.S. Army

Sociology professors often recruit majors to assist them with research projects, to serve on committees, and to participate in community outreach. Such experiences make excellent resume items.



U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Adam Hernandez

College can be a time to learn about your community and its needs. Many colleges offer opportunities for students to volunteer in the surrounding community and sometimes beyond.

## Large Learning Reprint

■ **9. Choose a minor or concentration that further enhances career goals.** In addition to declaring a major, most colleges and universities require students to choose a minor or area of concentration in a field outside their major. The minimum number of credit hours for minors and concentrations vary by program. There are dozens, perhaps even a hundred or more choices, including International Studies, Criminal Justice, Management, Sports Marketing, Geography, Environmental Studies, Organizational Leadership, Mass Media, Social Work, and Journalism to name but a few.

■ **10. Volunteer.** A volunteer is someone who chooses to give time to a cause in the community. Usually a person contacts a nonprofit or other organization such as a school or church and offers their time and skills toward realizing a goal; it might involve feeding the homeless, mentoring a student defined as at-risk, or running errands for home-bound residents. If you are looking for such an opportunity, visit the website Volunteer Match at <http://www.volunteermatch.org>.

■ **11. Attend job/career fairs.** Most colleges and universities hold career fairs at least once a year. Even if you are early into your college career you should attend the job fair, if only to educate yourself about employment opportunities in the area (and sometimes outside the area). Mention to company representatives that you are a sociology major. Be sure to pick up information about the company and available jobs. If you are about to graduate, bring copies of your resume to leave with company representatives.

■ **12. Become a student member of a sociological association or society.** Sociological associations are professional organizations, regional, national, or international in scope, and well respected. Noting such membership on a resume will put an individual at an advantage. Most sociological associations offer students low-cost membership and minimal registration fees to attend annual meetings. Sometimes sociology departments may sponsor your membership if you are an active member or officer of the Sociology Club or have consistently helped the department in other ways. Don't be afraid to ask for sponsorship if cost is an issue.

Sociological associations typically offer student members the opportunity to apply for travel grants to offset the cost of traveling to meetings. The associations also sponsor special sessions in which student members can present research papers. Sometimes associations recognize the best student papers by offering financial awards to first, second, and third place submissions. Some of the major professional associations open to sociologists are (see Appendix B for complete list):

**American Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$18

<http://www.asanet.org>

**Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS)**

Student Membership: \$14–\$51

<http://www.socwomen.org>

**Mid-South Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$20

<http://www.midsouthsoc.org>

**Association of Black Sociologists**

Student Membership: \$25

<http://www.blacksociologists.org>



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Jimmy Serena Jr.

Attending a career fair is a good way to learn more about the vast variety of job opportunities available to sociology majors. Introducing yourself to a potential employer as a sociology major can help build confidence in your choice of majors as many employers welcome applications from those who study sociology.

■ **13. Make the most of your employment history.** Often students dismiss the jobs that they hold while in college as not that important for advancing career goals and present them as such. They might say something like: “I have only been a waitress.” Actually, being a waitress involves a number of important skills that can enhance a resume. Consider that a waitress or waiter:

- deals with customers who demand quick and efficient service
- handles multiple tables of customers making requests at the same time
- recommends/sells items to increase the amount of the bill
- converses with customers from diverse backgrounds

These skills can apply to the career tracks discussed in the following section. It really does not matter what kind of job you hold while in college. What does matter is that you can articulate how the job relates to the one for which you are applying.

## Six Career Paths for Sociology Majors

Let’s consider six broad career tracks that sociology majors may choose to follow:

- nonprofit
- government
- business
- education/continuing education
- graduate school
- self-employment

For each of the six tracks, we give an overview of the career path, consider a relevant job advertisement, and profile a sociology major who prepared for that track.

### ■ TRACK 1. Nonprofits

**Overview.** More than 12 million Americans work in the nonprofit sector. That represents about 1 in every 10 jobs. There are 1.4 million nonprofit organizations in the United States registered with

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Any employment experience can contribute to your resume as long as you communicate how the experience relates to the job to which you are applying. A waiter or waitress, for example, must deal with a variety of personalities among customers who demand and expect quick and efficient service.





A sample of job titles of interest to sociology majors seeking careers in the nonprofit sector include

- Visitor Research Coordinator (for an art museum),
- Disaster Services Emergency Response Specialist (for the Red Cross),
- Fundraising Database Specialist (for Alzheimer's Association),
- Resource Analyst (for American Cancer Society),
- Volunteer Services Director (for a food bank), and
- Program Coordinator (for youth mentoring programs).

To search for a job in the nonprofit sector, go to Career Builder at <http://www.careerbuilder.com>.

### ***Profile of a Sociology Major Applying for a Job as Communications Associate in the Nonprofit Sector***

As long as sociology major Benjamin Smith can remember he was interested in the environment. After taking a Sociology of the Environment course, he declared sociology as his major and chose to minor in Environmental Studies. He did an internship with the Center for Applied Ecology in which he performed an environmental site assessment and worked on other smaller-scale environmental projects. As an intern Ben worked hard to submit reports that were outstanding in design and content. The Center took notice and adopted his report as the model for all interns to follow. Ben also took two research methods classes and a statistics course. The methods classes required proficiency in

### **Sample Job Advertisement: Nonprofit Sector**

**JOB TITLE:** Communications Associate

**EMPLOYER:**

Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, "one of the largest ecological programs in the world. More important than its size, however, is the quality of its output. Books and articles authored by Cary Institute ecologists influence scientists and policy makers. Cary Institute-generated curricula are building essential bridges between ecological thinking and classroom instruction. Conferences and workshops held onsite encourage dialogue and information exchange"

**DUTIES:**

Write engaging material that promotes Cary Institute research, programs, and offerings to a range of information consumers (media, students, donors, scientists, policymakers, staff, and the interested public). Connect the Cary Institute with media outlets by assisting with press releases and press relations. Ensure that core content on the Cary Institute website is timely and accurate; perform updates as needed (either directly or through a contracted web maintenance firm). Work collaboratively with staff to oversee and improve our web presence. Perform other tasks as assigned.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Bachelor's degree plus at least 2–3 years of writing experience. Science and/or news writing a plus. Strong writing, editing, and web production skills. Proficient in MS Office, Photoshop, Adobe Acrobat, FTP, content management systems, and web editing software (HTML knowledge a plus).

- **Figure 1** Notice that the Cary Institute is not asking for a communications or public relations major. Rather it is seeking applicants who hold a bachelor's degree in any field and who are able to demonstrate that they possess specific skills related to writing, web production, and software.

a variety of software including Word, PowerPoint, Photoshop, Adobe Acrobat, and Front Page (a software for creating Web sites). Whenever possible, Ben wrote research papers that related to his interest in the environment. As one example, he surveyed U.S. and foreign-born college students to learn how culture shapes attitudes toward the environment and personal efforts to conserve energy. He presented the paper at a sociological meeting. Ben was a member of the sociology club for three years and managed the club's website, which included a quarterly newsletter.

### ■ TRACK 2. Government

**Overview.** The federal government employs more than 1.8 million civilian employees. In fact, the government is the nation's largest single employer. To work for the federal government you do not have to live in Washington, D.C. Nine out of 10 federal employees work outside the D.C. area. There are hundreds of government agencies with thousands of civilian job titles that sociology majors can fill. Some examples include:

- Outreach Program Coordinator for the Department of Army,
- Social Science Analyst for the Government Accountability Office,

- Pretrial Services Officer for the Federal Courts,
- Survey Statistician for U.S. Bureau of the Census,
- Outdoor Recreation Planner for U.S. National Park Services,
- Outdoor Compliance Officer for the Department of Agriculture, and
- Intelligence Research Specialist for the Department of Homeland Security.

To search for federal government jobs, use the USA Jobs website at <http://www.usajobs.gov>.

### **Profile of a Sociology Major Applying for Partnership Specialist in the Government Sector**

Carla Applet is a sociology major with a second major in anthropology. Carla was chosen as the 2008 Outstanding Graduating Senior in Sociology and she made the Dean's List every semester. In her junior year Carla did an internship with Urban Appalachian Council. Specifically she researched and designed a brochure describing the Appalachian community and recommended high quality Internet Web sites that provided specialized information on this community. The Council distributed the brochure to those attending its workshops and to other interested parties. In her



Courtesy of U.S. Office of Personnel Management

The federal government supports a website that announces job openings within hundreds of its agencies including the Bureau of the Census, Department of Homeland Security, and National Park Services. That resource can be found at <http://www.usajobs.gov>.



senior year Carla took a second internship with the city of Newport in which she handled requests for information from city residents. When this internship ended, the city manager asked Carla to stay on and do special projects indefinitely or at least while she was exploring career options. Carla also took an Applied Social Research Methods course in which the class conducted a major research project known as *The State of the Greater Cincinnati Non-profits*, a profile of 10,000 nonprofit organizations.

To support herself though college, Carla opened a business that offered local artists gallery space and opportunities to sell their artworks and crafts. This business was viewed by many as enriching the community. Now that Carla has graduated and is seeking to work in a job related to sociology, she has not abandoned her business and the local artists who have come to depend on it. Carla's parents have agreed to take over operations.

### Sample Job Advertisement: Government Sector

**JOB TITLE:** Partnership Specialist

**EMPLOYER:**

U.S. Bureau of the Census, the leading source of quality data about the American people and the U.S. economy. The Census Bureau conducts a variety of censuses and surveys, not just the once-a-decade census for which it is most famous. Every month, quarter, and year it conducts surveys with households and businesses. It uses a workforce of trained federal employees to conduct those surveys by telephone, in person, or by mail. The surveys the Census Bureau conducts provide information about social and economic conditions in the country, including employment, housing, manufacturing, trade, and many other topics (Adapted from U.S. Bureau of the Census 2008).

**DUTIES:**

The Partnership Specialist is responsible for developing partnerships with state, local, and tribal governments; community-based organizations, faith-based groups; schools; media outlets; businesses; and other grassroots entities in communities within the regional office area. The Partnership Specialist also provides support to census field operations such as Recruitment, Be Counted, Questionnaire Assistance Centers, Non-Response Follow-Up, and others. The Partnership Specialist will work under the supervision of a Partnership Coordinator. The incumbent will conduct research, analyze the regional office area, and assist in the development of the regional plan for the PDS Program for the census.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

Bachelor's degree in any area with superior academic achievement. Work experience in providing instructions or coaching others in athletic, leisure, or community activities, helping customers, clients, or members of the public who were hostile or upset, handling customer complaints, or providing instructions to customers or the public either in writing or by telephone.

● **Figure 2** Notice that the Census Bureau is seeking applicants for this position with a degree in any area and with a proven record of high academic achievement. The job description indicates that research experience is important and the qualifications emphasize leadership and customer service-related experience.

### ■ TRACK 3. Business

**Overview.** Businesses are privately-owned enterprises that provide goods and services to consumers. In the business world, profit is the measure of success. By definition, a business exists to generate wealth for owners and/or stockholders. Businesses can be classified according to the activity they undertake to generate revenue. Many sociology majors seek positions within a Department of Human Resources office of a business. Examples of different sectors in the business track include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Service—businesses that provide intangible products such as entertainment, food, recreation opportunities, and transportation.
- Financial—businesses including banks, savings and loans, and mortgage companies that lend, invest, and manage money or capital.
- Information—businesses that specialize in intellectual property such as movie studios, publishers, and software companies.

#### **Profile of a Sociology Major Applying for Operations Management Specialist in the Business Sector**

Tim Moss is a sociology major and history minor. He worked at UPS while going to college. Tim was attracted to the company because it contributed \$3,000 per year toward college tuition. He was hired by UPS as a loader on the twilight sort. After one year he was promoted to part-time supervisor. His experience as a supervisor taught him how to effectively manage individuals from very diverse backgrounds, balance multiple tasks, and complete them in a timely manner. In addition, he also learned how to manage and resolve conflict, be decisive in his actions, and think critically when solving problems and managing various situations. In addition to balancing work and a full course load, Tim was able to complete two campus-based leadership programs: Emerging Leaders and the Lead Program. He presented research he did for a sociology class on the effects of adding fluoride to public drinking water at a sociology conference. Tim took two research methods classes and participated in a study in which he and other sociology majors evaluated the effectiveness of a federally funded abstinence education program for middle and high school students.

When Tim interviewed for the UPS job he was able to convey that the sociological perspective allowed him to appreciate and admire the tremendous role UPS assumes in connecting people around the globe. Tim also recognized the importance of the UPS policy of inviting people of all social and economic backgrounds to join the company as loaders and then providing financial incentives, promotions, and other support to anyone who works hard and shows initiative.

### ■ TRACK 4. Education/Continuing Education

**Overview.** While sociology majors cannot teach primary or secondary school without a teaching certificate, they can look for jobs in university settings or in the field of continuing education. Continuing education is a broad term that applies to programs in which people enroll for personal enrichment (music appreciation), to learn job-related information and skills (computer training), acquire information about how to do something (invest in the stock market), or cope with a particular condition (cancer) or situation (joblessness). The programs may be delivered in a classroom, over the Internet, at a job site, at a public library, in a hospital, or in a client's home. Examples of relevant job titles include:

- Training and Assessment Coordinator
- Education Coordinator
- School Community Coordinator
- School Grant Administrator

#### **Profile of a Sociology Major Applying for School Community Coordinator in the Education Sector**

Scott Johnson is a sociology major with a minor in English. As a result of taking a Juvenile Delinquency course, Scott developed an interest in neighborhood youth centers and the academic choices minority youth make. In his senior year Scott applied for and received a \$2,000 university research grant to study and compare two youth centers, one located in Ohio serving a predominantly African-American population; the other in Arizona serving a predominantly Hispanic population. Scott interviewed youth in both centers to learn how the center impacted their lives and supported their

educational aspirations. In addition, Scott did an internship with a Cincinnati-based youth center in which he helped to plan and organize a conference for youth service coordinators/directors to convene in Cincinnati to share strategies and insights. Scott was also very involved with a project known as Freedom Focused Service Learning in which he

mentored and tutored middle school-age students who were reading below grade level.

#### ■ TRACK 5. Graduate School

**Overview.** A graduate program extends schooling beyond the bachelor's degree. Graduate degrees

### Sample Job Advertisement: Business Sector

**JOB TITLE:** Operations Management Specialist

**EMPLOYER:**

UPS, a transportation company that delivers and picks up more than 14.1 million packages per day serving eight million customers in 200 countries. According to its Web site, most employees begin their career at UPS as part-time Package Handlers in the Package Operations division. UPS actively promotes employees from within, and because of UPS's commitment to continuing education and training, the part-time Package Handler position can be the gateway to many potential career paths within the United Parcel Service. Tuition assistance up to \$3,000 per year and other benefits such as preferred pricing on Dell computers is also provided at some locations to permanent, part-time Package Handlers.

**DUTIES:**

Supervises daily activities of drivers and package handlers to ensure that all assigned duties are accomplished safely and timely.

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Customer service skills (internal/external)
- Phone etiquette
- Ability to work varying shifts, additional hours and/or overtime depending on service needs
- Multi-tasking skills
- Perform general office tasks such as paperwork, typing, and/or use of a computer, filing, calculating, and use of telephone
- Good cognitive reasoning skills
- Self motivation
- Microsoft Office knowledge (i.e., Excel, Word)
- Work cooperatively in a diverse work environment
- Ability to direct the work of the other employees effectively
- Verification and submittal of timecards
- Perform other functions that may be assigned

● **Figure 3** Notice that UPS is looking for someone with a set of skills. It is up to the applicant to convince the employer that he or she has acquired these skills.



include the master's, doctorate, and professional degrees (law and medicine). To be accepted into a graduate program, applicants may be required to take a standardized test, the best known being the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), and Law School

Admission Test (LSAT). Some graduate programs set a minimum score that applicants must achieve to be admitted. Graduate programs require applicants to submit letters of recommendation written by their undergraduate professors and other people in a position to assess their potential for doing well in graduate school. Graduate programs

### Sample Job Advertisement: Education/Continuing Education Sector

**JOB TITLE:** School Community Coordinator

**EMPLOYER:**

Cincinnati Public Schools, a school system that employs 5,000 people (2,500 of which are teachers) serving over 35,000 students attending primary, middle, and high schools. The school system offers many education options and programs including Montessori, college-prep, and small neighborhood schools.

**DESCRIPTION:**

The Cincinnati Public Schools invites applications for the position of School Community Coordinator. This position will serve as Linkage Coordinator at Aiken College and Career High School by creating and sustaining programs and opportunities designed to close the achievement gap and increase the graduation rate for African-American male students at the school.

**DUTIES:**

- Organize workshops for parents and at-risk students
- Establish graduation action teams, student-led focus groups and mentoring programs
- Provide staff development sessions that provide cultural competency skills to enable teacher and school staff to reach students academically
- Organize and sustain after school activities
- Organize businesses, corporations, and organizations to provide shadowing, internships, and field trip experiences
- Provide summer transition academic and character building experiences

**QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Bachelor's degree in social work, communications, or other related field
- Experience working in a community service role

● **Figure 4** Note that Cincinnati Public Schools is seeking someone with a bachelor's degree. While the ad mentions social work and communications as degrees of interest, the ad invites applicants from other related fields for which sociology clearly qualifies. The CPS is especially interested in someone who has worked in community service and with at-risk youth.



U.S. Air Force photo

The field of education, especially continuing education, holds many opportunities for sociology majors. People who work in this field lead discussion groups, arrange hands-on learning sessions, and compile educational resources on topics related to almost any information need.

also require that applicants submit personal statements describing the reason they want to attend graduate school and a narrative describing their academic history, personal and research interests, and other relevant experiences. Many graduate programs offer scholarships and fellowships that include tuition and a monthly stipend in return for teaching or research.

Sociology majors are qualified to pursue graduate study in many fields including social work, counseling, education, public health, business, urban planning, communications, law, medicine, and divinity school. Of course an obvious choice open to sociology majors is to apply to one of the 250 masters or Ph.D. programs in sociology offered by colleges and universities across the United States. A *Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology* is available through the American Sociological Association at <http://www.asanet.org>.

### **Profile of Sociology Major Applying to Law School**

Richard Santos was born in the Dominican Republic (DR). His father is a native of the Dominican Republic and his mother is American. Richard's parents met when his father was pursuing a graduate degree in the United States. Richard lived in the DR for the first 18 years of his life and then



Photographs by the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO)

Many graduate programs offer scholarships and fellowships that include tuition and a monthly stipend in return for teaching or research.

moved with his family to Kentucky (his mother's home state) after he graduated from high school. Richard is fluent in both English and Spanish. Richard chose to attend a Kentucky college, but after one year transferred to a New York technical college. This time away clarified his interest in sociology and he returned home to the Kentucky college declaring a major in sociology and a concentration in anthropology. In the last two years of his academic career Richard maintained a 3.75 grade point average while working at least 30 hours per week, marrying, and starting a family of his own.

Remarkably, Richard's college career involved more than just attending classes. He did a co-op with a local bank in which he focused on establishing business and community relationships with Hispanic clients and community. He gravitated toward sociology classes that focused on criminology (i.e., *Police and Society*) and law (i.e., *Sociology of Law*). He took several research methods classes. Richard participated in the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project, a program that helps college students identify and fund projects that address needs in the surrounding community. He was a member of Making Place Matter, a campus-wide committee that recommended ways that the university can contribute to the quality of community life.

Richard also worked as a research assistant to a sociology professor. The professor was so impressed with his work that she asked him to write 16 film reviews to be included in an Instructor's Manual that accompanies her textbook. The reviews he wrote described how films such as *The Fog of War*, *Super Size Me*, *Control Room*, and *Hotel Rwanda* could be used to illustrate important sociological topics. In his senior year of college, Richard was awarded a scholarship from the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, a national organization.

#### ■ TRACK 6. Self-Employment

**Overview.** Self-employment is another career option. Obviously people who are self-employed work for themselves, not for another person or organization. Almost 19 million people in the United States are self-employed. About 75 percent of small businesses consist of a self-employed indi-

vidual who has no employees. The self-employed include those who are in business for themselves or work as independent contractors (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2008). Keep in mind that the self-employed include college graduates of every academic major. In fact, 20 percent have a bachelor's degree and another 17 percent have a graduate degree (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2006). Examples of the self-employed included proofreaders, photo researchers, web publishers, video producers, market research interviewers, shop owners, landscapers, tutors, and couriers.

If sociology majors acquire skills in the methods of sociological research, they may consider working as a consultant. This involves contracting with businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations that need data collected and analyzed or that need reports written. A word of caution: It does require time to build up a clientele and a reputation.

#### **Profile of a Sociology Major Who Is Self-Employed as a Research Consultant**

Megan Manning's college career can be described as transformational in that her academic status changed over the years from probationary to being on the honors list. Upon graduation her overall grade point average was a 3.2; and in her major, it was a 3.8. Megan maintains that deciding to major in sociology marked the beginning of this transformation. Specifically, after Megan declared a major in sociology, she enrolled in a project-based course that set her on the path toward becoming self-employed as a research consultant. The sociology professor who taught this course gave the 11 students enrolled the option of submitting an essay to be included in her textbook. The professor indicated that any student who accepted the offer should plan to revise the essay at least six times in order to achieve publishable quality. At least seven students expressed interest but only one student completed the task. Of course, that student was Megan. In fact, Megan's performance was so strong that the professor came to notice her as someone with whom she wanted to work beyond the classroom.

Megan asked this professor if she had any projects for which she needed an assistant. Megan worked on several projects, two of which are listed





Photographs by the U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office (PIO)

Some sociology majors acquire the skills to become self-employed as paid consultants. These students take several research methods classes and gain experience working with professors on research projects.

here. One project was the *State of the Greater Cincinnati Nonprofit Sector Report*. Megan played an important role in creating a first-of-its-kind database containing information on each of the 10,000 local nonprofit organizations in the Greater Cincinnati area. She managed the creation of this database, which included hiring and supervising 21 students entering data and checking the quality of data they entered. To appreciate the size of the nonprofit database Megan managed, consider that it involved 650,000 cells of data. Megan also helped analyze the data, create a PowerPoint presentation, and write the report.

Megan also assisted this professor with a second project known as the Children Inc. Service Learning Project. Children Inc., a nonprofit agency, trains middle and elementary school teachers to integrate service learning projects into the curriculum. Among other things, Megan helped to create three online surveys—one for teachers, one for students, and one for community partners—to fill out upon completion of service learning projects to determine whether key learning and service outcomes had been achieved. She also created a fourth on-line survey that allowed teachers to rate their

satisfaction with training and other resources Children Inc. made available to help them successfully carry out their service learning project.

Through word of mouth, Megan has secured five of six research-related jobs in which she makes an income that is competitive to wages paid to recent college graduates. These jobs include continuing her work with monitoring and evaluating Children Inc.'s service learning program and securing a contract with Kentucky Child Now to document mental health services offered through six school-based health centers. The work with Kentucky Child Now involves creating web-based surveys for evaluating mental health status of students and collecting data to show the effects of these services on academic success. Megan is also planning to apply for graduate school in the field of Public Administration.

### The Successful Sociology Major

Obviously, the six sociology majors profiled above did the things they needed to do to acquire skills that qualified them for many kinds of jobs. In other words, they made the most of their sociol-

ogy major and time in college. In contrast to these six, consider the profile of a student typical of someone who makes little effort to build a resume while in college. Let's call this student Lee. Lee is about two weeks away from graduating from college. He is in a panic because he believes there are no jobs for sociology majors and, as a result, regrets his decision to major in the subject. The truth is that Lee's career as a college student was unremarkable. He did not attend class on a regular basis, he handed in many assignments late, and he took courses from the least demanding professors. He waited until the last semester to take Social Research Methods, the most skill-based of the sociology courses, and earned a C in that course. While in college, Lee was not involved in any projects or extracurricular activities. He has difficulty explaining why he majored in sociology and he has not developed a specialized interest in a subfield of sociology such as criminology, medical sociology, or environmental sociology. Lee finds himself in this spot because he took no steps to build a resume while in college.

It is important that sociology majors, like students in all majors, make the most of their college experience. If your approach in college is to take the least demanding courses and professors, to be uninvolved in project-related and extracurricular activities, and to never develop an academic interest, then you will have a difficult time convincing potential employers that your college degree adds to your value as an employee.

### Explaining Sociology to an Employer

Because sociology is not connected with a specific job title (such as an accountant), sociology majors must be able to explain to potential employers the usefulness of the courses and degree. When employers ask, "Why did you major in sociology?" or "Why did you take sociology classes?" the reply must be convincing. Responses such as "I like people," "Sociology is about people, and I want to work with people" are too vague and will lead to puzzled looks and responses such as "So what can you do with that kind of degree?" Replies should

point to the distinctive aspects of the sociological perspective.

Sociology is a discipline that looks beyond the individual to study human behavior as affected by social interaction in the context of groups, organizations, and societies. The sociological perspective, with its focus on interaction and social structure, informs decision-making. This approach is valuable because most work-related tasks and issues revolve around successfully coordinating interactions among employees, clients, consumers, suppliers, and other interested parties within the structure of that organization. In particular, a degree offers the following distinct analytical skills:

- To identify and project population trends, including those of birth, death, migration, marriage, divorce, and family size.
- To appreciate and consider viewpoints other than your own.
- To use the methods of social research to recognize and provide useful information.
- To collect information via interviews, questionnaires, observation, case studies, secondary data analysis, content analysis, and to analyze the results.
- To avoid using superficial knowledge or personal bias as a basis for making decisions and recommendations that affect others.
- To bring knowledge of culture—norms, values, beliefs—and how these shape people's choices, responses, and abilities in society.

### What Attracts Sociology Majors to the Discipline?

In 2005, the American Sociological Association surveyed a sample of sociology majors to learn why they chose to major in that subject. The reasons centered around four themes that the ASA labeled Idealists, Careerists, First Attraction, and Flexible and Convenient.

**Idealists** were attracted to the major because they thought it would help them change society, understand their life, or understand the



© Image Source Black/Jupiter Images

During a job interview, you can be sure that the employer is going to ask you why you chose to major in sociology and how it relates to the job for which you are interviewing. This career guide prepares you to answer these important questions.

connection between biography and sociology. **Careerists** were attracted to the major because they thought it would prepare them for a career in social work or a specific service occupation. Most sociology majors are not careerists as only 20 percent of respondents chose to major in the field because of its career possibilities. Instead most majors can be classified as “**First Attraction**.” The most important reason for deciding to major in sociology was an attraction to the discipline ignited upon taking the first course. A final category includes those students who thought the course offerings were scheduled at times that fit their schedule (**Flexible and Convenient**). See ● Table 1 for the average starting salary of sociology majors relative to other majors in the liberal arts.

### The Letter of Recommendation

Most college students do not realize that someday they may need to ask one of their professors to write them a letter of recommendation to give to an employer when they apply for a job. Many students do not know they need three to five such

letters of recommendation when applying to graduate school. If you needed such a letter, who would you ask? What would the professor say about you in that letter? Keep in mind that what a professor writes about you is directly related to what you do as a student, both inside and outside the classroom.

A good letter of recommendation (● Figure 5) should

- state how the professor has come to know you and for how long (as a student, an advisee, and/or a research assistant).
- demonstrate that the professor has established more than a passing acquaintance with you as a student. The letter needs to show that the writer knows you as a person and is very familiar with your research interests and other academic and school-related activities.
- be personalized. The letter should specify the qualities and activities that make you unique among students. The letter should not be generic such that it includes statements that could apply to any student (i.e., “Mary is a very good student who attends class regularly”).



● **Table 1**  
Average Starting Salary of Majors Considered Part of the Liberal Arts

Major	Average Starting Salary
Political Science/Government	\$35,261
History	\$35,092
Foreign Language	\$34,057
Liberal Arts and Sciences	\$32,169
Sociology	\$32,161
English	\$31,924
Psychology	\$31,857
Other humanities	\$31,345

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007).

- provide concrete examples of academic and other school activities that demonstrate you have acquired specific skills.
  - address any aspect of the student's career that may appear problematic to an outsider (i.e., taking 10 years to graduate from college, a low grade point average).
- have taken more than one course with the professor and you should have done something that sets you apart in some way from other students (you earned one of the highest grades in a class on an assignment, you have worked with the professor on a research project, or you are an *active* member of the sociology club).

Don't be shy about approaching a professor for a letter of recommendation. A professor's job involves writing letters of recommendation. The important question is "How do you establish a relationship with a professor such that he or she is in a position to write a good letter of recommendation for you?" As a rule of thumb, you should

Remember that writing a thoughtful and effective letter takes time. Ideally you should give the professor at least two weeks notice. In addition, when asking for the letter, make an appointment to explain the job or graduate program for which you are applying. That way the professor can write a letter tailored to your career needs and aspirations.

**Sample Letter of Recommendation from Sociology Professor  
to Accompany Student's Application to Graduate School**

I am happy to have the opportunity to write this letter in support of Megan Manning's application to the Master's of Public Administration program. I believe I am in a good position to comment on Megan's potential to succeed in graduate school because she has taken three courses and two independent study/research classes from me.

When I think of Megan several things come to mind that set her apart from most students that I have worked with over the years. First, her academic history is interesting in that she has taken 10 years to graduate from college. This is not because she is someone who procrastinates. The 10-year time span reflects her struggle to find meaning in college, and upon finding that meaning, to find a way to attend school full-time while juggling job and family life. As Megan approaches graduation, I find myself reflecting on the personal and financial sacrifices she has made without complaint to complete college. Had I not asked Megan, I would have never known of this steady and determined 10-year venture.

Second, from my perspective, Megan's college career is one that has been transformative. Megan's academic status has changed over the years from probationary to honors list. Currently her overall grade point average is a 3.2; in her major, it is 3.8. As her G.P.A. suggests, Megan is the ideal student. She is extremely reliable; she never misses scheduled class meetings. Her written assignments are outstanding in every way. She goes above and beyond what is necessary, even to earn an A. As one telling example, I gave the 11 students enrolled in Applied Social Research the option of submitting an essay to be included in my textbook, *Sociology: A Global Perspective*. I indicated that they may have to write the essay five or six times to achieve publishable-level quality and that I was willing to work with anyone willing to give that level of effort. At least seven students expressed interest but only one student completed the task. Of course, that student was Megan Manning. In fact, Megan's performance was so strong that I came to "notice" her as someone with whom I wanted to work with beyond the classroom.

Megan has assisted me in a number of campus activities. Among other things, she has collaborated with me to carry out the campus-wide Get Out the Vote campaign. The tasks associated with this project include creating websites, organizing forums, planning events, administering surveys, analyzing data, and writing reports. I cannot imagine pulling off this project without her assistance and collaboration. In fact, as I write this letter, I am reminded that someday Megan will move on, and I can already imagine how much I will miss her.

In closing I hope that I have conveyed my admiration for Megan Manning as a person and a student. I believe that she will make an excellent addition to your department and I recommend her without hesitation. I have no doubt that she will be among the top in her class and that she will make a significant contribution to her field of study. If you have questions, feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail.

● Figure 5

## Helpful Career Resources

The U.S. Department of Labor Statistics offers a number of valuable resources to help with career planning and job search.

- Occupational Outlook Handbook*, available in print and online at <http://www.bls.gov/oco>. The *Handbook* describes more than 300 occupations, many of which relate to sociology and other liberal arts. The *Handbook* explains job duties, education and training requirements, earnings, and job prospects.
- “Helping charity work: Paid jobs in charitable nonprofits,” <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2001/summer/art02.pdf>
- “Policy analysts: Shaping society through research and problem-solving,” <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2007/spring/art03.pdf>
- “Career myths and how to debunk them,” <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2005/fall/art01.pdf>
- “Informational interviewing: Get the inside scoop on careers,” <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf>
- “Internships: Previewing a profession,” <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2006/summer/art02.pdf>
- “Résumés, applications, and cover letters,” <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/1999/summer/art01.pdf>

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- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2007. Characteristics of Business Owners. <http://www.census.gov/csd/sbo>.

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## APPENDIX A

This is a sample of course titles offered by sociology programs across the United States. Many will be offered at your school. The list shows the breadth of sociology. Keep in mind that sociologists study any topic. Sociology is distinguished from other disciplines, not by the topics it investigates but by the perspective it brings to that topic.

Introduction to Sociology  
 Social Research  
 Sociological Theory  
 Sociology Senior Seminar  
 Sociology of Corrections  
 Police and Society  
 Social Organization  
 Marriage and the Family  
 Sociology of Environment  
 Sociology of Religion  
 Sociology of Law  
 Sociology of Education  
 Race and Ethnic Relations  
 World Patterns of Race and Ethnicity  
 Social Stratification  
 Popular Culture  
 Women and Men in Society  
 Political Sociology  
 Juvenile Delinquency  
 Sociology of Aging  
 Latin American Societies  
 Social Psychology  
 Sociology of Work and Occupations  
 Population  
 Urban Society  
 Current Social Issues  
 Criminology  
 Collective Behavior  
 Women and Crime  
 Sociology of Firearms  
 Technology and Society  
 Elite Deviance

Deviance and Social Control  
 Community Corrections  
 Sociology of Medicine  
 Social Construction of Sexuality  
 Sex, Gender, and Society  
 Drugs and U.S. Society  
 Perspectives on Violence  
 Death and Dying  
 Self and Society  
 Global Human Ecology  
 Hazards, Disasters, and Society  
 Gay and Lesbian Communities  
 Information, Images, and Inequality  
 Animals and Society  
 Sport and Play in Society  
 AIDS in the U.S.  
 Sociology of Music  
 Ads, Ears, and Consumer Culture  
 Asian-American Experience  
 Cultural Functions  
 Crowd Behavior and Social Movements  
 Small Groups  
 Society and Mental Illness  
 Bioethics and Sociology  
 Diversity in Alternative Families  
 Life Span Transitions: The Retirement Years  
 Probation and Parole  
 Sociological Considerations for Jury Consultants  
 Social Aspects of Substance Abuse  
 Sociology of Planning  
 Sociology of Mental Health

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## APPENDIX B

### *Professional Associations Open to Sociologists*

**American Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$18

<http://www.asanet.org>**Mid-South Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$20

<http://www.midsouthsoc.org>**Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS)**

Student Membership: \$14–\$51

<http://www.socwomen.org>**Association of Black Sociologists**

Student Membership: \$25

<http://www.blacksociologists.org>**Eastern Sociological Society (ESS)**

Student Membership: \$30

<http://www.essnet.org>**Southwestern Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$23

<http://www.sssaonline.org/sociology.html>**Midwest Sociological Society (MSS)**

Student Membership: \$21

<http://www.themss.org>**North Central Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$25

<http://www.ncsanet.org>**Southern Sociological Society**

Student Membership: \$25

<http://www.msstate.edu/org/sss>**Pacific Sociological Association**

Student Membership: \$15

<http://www.pacificsoc.org>**Association for Applied and  
Clinical Sociology**

Student Membership: \$35

<http://www.aasnet.org>

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## APPENDIX C

## Sample Resume

555 Street Drive  
City Falls, KY 99999  
(513) 999-9999

**Megan Manning**  
*manning@email.com*

## Education

Northern Kentucky University – 2008 Graduate  
B.S. in Sociology (major) and Anthropology (Minor)  
Sociology GPA: 3.8; Cumulative GPA: 3.2

This resume item relates to a project the student worked on in conjunction with a research methods class.

## Relevant Experience

Research Assistant for Greater Cincinnati Nonprofit Sector Report (in conjunction with Social Research Class)

- Collaborated with research team to identify a strategy for gathering data on 10,000 local nonprofit agencies
- Entered data from IRS tax forms filed by nonprofit agencies
- Assisted in analysis and write-up of data, as well as coding
- Interviewed nonprofit leaders and conducted on-site visits to agencies
- Reviewed existing reports on the state of nonprofits from around the United States for ideas on how to profile Northern Kentucky Greater Cincinnati nonprofits
- Presented preliminary findings to a group of nonprofit leaders to obtain constructive feedback about how to structure final report
- Participated in Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement & Nonprofit Development press conference

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## Awards

- Who's Who in Sociology 2007
- Outstanding Graduating Senior in Sociology 2008

Be sure to list any awards received while in college.

## Relevant Courses

- Demography, Social Research, Applied Social Research, Statistics

Research Methods and Demography bring skills that are relevant to almost any job.

## Computer Software

- Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, Outlook, SPSS

List software skills picked up in a research methods or other class.



**Other Employment** ←

This section makes the most of various jobs the student held while in college.

**Lens Crafters, 2005–2007**

Lead Lab Technician

- Produced quality eyewear within one hour time constraints
- Trained employees on optical machinery
- Assisted customers with eyewear needs
- Responsible for making the work schedule for 8 lab employees
- Ordered store supplies, working within the allotted budget

**Delta Airlines 2003–2005**

Customer Service Representative

- Assisted clients with airline reservations and various travel needs
- Earned high ratings from clients for exceeding performance expectations
- Met and exceeded expected sales of airline tickets

This item is related to a student research and presentation.

**Publications/Presentations** ←

“Fluoride in Toothpaste, Public Water Supplies, and Bottled Water: Are These Safe, Effective Ways and Economical Ways of Preventing Tooth Decay?” at Celebration of Student Research and Creativity (April 12, 2006) Northern Kentucky University

**Service/Volunteer** ←

Service and volunteer activities can include President of the Sociology Club.

2007–present

2004–present

2002–2004

President, Sociology Club  
Volunteer, American Heart Association, Cincinnati, OH  
Volunteer, Flying Pig Marathon, Cincinnati, OH

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Note: It does not take much effort to build a resume over the four or more years you attend college. Students have to write research papers. Why not choose to present it at a professional meeting? Why not choose a topic for the research paper that relates to career interests? Taking an independent study or working on a research project with a professor is no more work than taking a traditional classroom-based course. The key is to make the most of assignments and take advantage of opportunities to experience learning beyond the classroom. Get involved in at least one extracurricular activity. Approaching college as a time to build your resume will make the college experience more meaningful and will give you a competitive advantage in whatever you decide to do after college. You do not want to look back on your college career and recall it as a time you gave little or no extra effort to learning.

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**Wadsworth Sociology Module: Careers in Sociology**  
Joan Ferrante

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