



Dear Parent:

Now that your undergraduate has declared Sociology as a major, you probably have questions about what skills and knowledge this major will provide and how that will contribute to your student's future success after graduation. Here is some information that will help answer these questions and assist you in guiding your student through the undergraduate major and on to the next career phase. Sociology majors have chosen a field of study that will provide them with a broad set of specific skills and give them a comprehensive understanding of how individuals are influenced by social, economic, political, educational, and religious institutions and how individuals and groups change these institutions over time. Majoring in sociology will prepare students to pursue a variety of career paths successfully after graduation. The sociology major also provides the skills, concepts, and knowledge that undergraduate students need to go on to graduate school, whether in sociology or in other professional fields.

What is sociology?

Sociology examines how people build institutions and organizations and react to social situations, such as economic inequalities, religious movements, natural disasters, race relations and family structure. A sociologist studies these phenomena with a variety of scientific tools, including collecting and analyzing statistical data and conducting surveys, experiments, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The goal of sociological study is a better understanding of how all parts of society are related.

What skills is my undergraduate learning?

Sociology majors learn skills useful for their future careers. Sociology graduates report that the most valuable skills they gained from their sociology courses were the following: developing evidence-based arguments, evaluating different research methods, writing clear reports, interpreting data, using computer resources to locate information, learning statistical software, understanding tests of significance, working with diverse groups, and identifying ethical issues in research. The sociology curriculum also teaches students a variety of interpersonal skills, such as working in small groups, using leadership skills, and working with people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The skills learned through the sociology curriculum prepare students for the careers they will pursue after graduation. They are skills that are desired by employers, according to recent employer surveys.

What career opportunities will my undergraduate have after graduation?

Sociology majors also expect that a sociology degree will help them successfully enter the labor market and attend graduate school immediately after graduation or later on. The graduate with a sociology major can succeed in a variety of careers without pursuing an additional degree, and more than half of sociology majors go directly into the workforce after graduation, with the remainder either going to graduate school or working and going to graduate school. Further, a recent four-year study of majors, done by the American Sociological Association, shows that nearly all former majors who were not full time graduate students held paid jobs when we interviewed them 18 months after graduation. Recent graduates reported finding jobs as caseworkers, non-profit administrators, managers, paralegals, crime scene technicians, human rights advocates, computer consultants, market researchers, teachers, and survey research assistants. These are job categories that are expected to grow, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Sociology majors also report finding these careers very satisfying, especially when the work is closely related to what they learn as a sociology majors. By four years after graduation, 80 percent of those majors have changed jobs, often staying in the same field. These job changes frequently include promotions, salary increases, better benefits, more responsibilities, and increasingly interesting work.

Will my undergraduate be prepared to pursue further degrees?

Many sociology majors (about half) pursue advanced degrees, directly after undergraduate school or after working for a while. Their degrees are master's or doctoral degrees in sociology, social work, education, psychology, law, business, criminology, health care, public policy, and communications. Many of these degrees lead to job and career advancement. The sociology major leads to these advanced degrees for all types of students, especially those who achieve a higher grade point average in college, regardless of the undergraduate institution they attended or the level of education achieved by their parents. Students who go on to graduate school do so for idealistic reasons as well as to pursue specific career goals.

What can I do to help my undergraduate?

Your undergraduate can use your guidance in planning his or her future wisely. Whether your undergraduate plans to enter the workforce or to pursue graduate studies, he or she should discuss future plans with faculty members or other advisors in order to choose the most relevant courses. If your undergraduate plans to enter the labor market after graduation, encourage participation in internships, community activities, service learning programs, leadership training, and job fairs. Advise your undergraduate to list the research skills that he or she learned as part of the sociology major on their résumés and to discuss these skills during job interviews. These activities and job search skills will result in students using sociological skills and perspectives at work, and will result in greater job satisfaction.

If your undergraduate intends to go on to graduate school, encourage him or her to participate in scholarly networks and in mentorship activities. Scholarly networks, such as sociology clubs, the sociological honor society Alpha Kappa Delta, and attendance at state or regional sociology

meetings help students develop connections with faculty members and teach students how to present their work and interact at scholarly meetings. Whenever possible, students should work on faculty members research projects to expand the range of their research skills and forge relationships that may lead to strong recommendation letters for graduate school. It is also important that you encourage your undergraduate child to maintain a high Grade Point Average in all subjects, especially if he or she plans to go to pursue additional degrees. Without academic success, plans for an additional degree will be more difficult.

One of the things that students love most about the sociology major is applying the scientific tools, concepts, and perspectives that they learn to understanding social issues. You can reinforce enthusiasm for the major by discussing current social issues with your undergraduate. If you ask about the impact of the recession, the most recent presidential election, changes in family structure, or crime, he or she may be able to explain these problems to you from an interesting sociological perspective. Ask about the conceptual and research skills that they have learned. By talking about sociology, you can understand your undergraduate's education and interests and help reinforce what your student is learning both inside and outside the classroom.

As the parent of an undergraduate sociology major, you have the opportunity to influence your child's future. I am so pleased to welcome your student into the profession.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Hillsman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" at the beginning.

Sally T. Hillsman, PhD
Executive Officer
The American Sociological Association