

# What Can I Do With a Bachelors in Sociology? A National Survey of Seniors Majoring in Sociology

Protocol Statement for ASA's IRB Review  
(submitted November 22, 2004)

For a long time, sociology majors and their parents, have asked what bachelor's-level graduates can do with a degree in sociology. The purpose of this study of senior sociology majors and very recent graduates is to find out. Roberta Spalter-Roth, PhD, Research Director of the American Sociological Association (ASA)—the professional membership organization of 14,000 sociologists—is the Principal Investigator of the study. William Erskine, ASA Research Associate is providing the statistical and technical help on the survey. ASA has sub-contracted to the Indiana University Center for Survey Research (CSR) to conduct the survey proper and provide ASA with the results for analysis. The National Science Foundation (NSF) has provided funding to the ASA for this purpose.

Spalter-Roth conducted a workshop about the BA and Beyond Survey at a meeting for chairs of sociology departments held during ASA's annual meeting in August 2004. Chairs were provided with an overview of the kinds of questions that were to be asked on the assessment survey and a task and time line for the completion of the first phase of the survey. Of the many chairs who volunteered to be part of an Advisory Committee to the survey, 10 were chosen who represent different types of departments (varying by size, highest degree offered, and region of the country, and public or private).

The Research Team refined the assessment survey instrument with the help of the Advisory Committee. The survey asks majors or recent graduates about why they chose sociology as a major, what skills and concepts they learned, what activities they participated in, and what they intend to do after graduation. It asks a number of background questions to determine if there are significant differences among groups as they vary by gender, marital status, race, ethnicity, and parents' background. The survey will be pre-tested by undergraduate majors in research methods courses taught by members of the Advisory Committee. Based on undergraduates' comments, the assessment survey will be refined one more time. Individuals will be provided with a consent form to sign as part of the on-line survey and can decide not to participate.

This survey provides no risks for individual respondents because questions are, for the most part, limited to their assessment of the programs that they majored in and what they expect to do in the near future. The assessment information provided by senior majors will be used to improve department curricula, activities, and services. Although the aggregated data will provide useful for sociology departments and programs, the survey is entirely voluntary and no individual should feel any pressure to complete it. The ASA is currently in the process of asking for human subjects approval to conduct this assessment survey from its Institutional Review Board (The Western Institution Review Board).

Based on the advice of the Advisory Committee we have decided to draw a stratified quota sample rather than a stratified random sample as suggested in the proposal to

NSF. Out of the universe of degree-granting sociology departments, we expect to select randomly 20 PhD-granting departments, 20 Master's degree granting departments, and 40 BA-granting departments to represent the share of graduating seniors from each type of institution of higher education. We will ask chairs if they are interested in participating in the study and if they will be able to provide us with a list of senior majors and their e-mail contacts within a few weeks (in numbers of cases they will require approval from their own campus IRBs). If this is not possible, we will move on to another school of the same type. Given the short turnaround time of this study (with aggregated information for the chairs' workshop in August 2005), we plan to have a list of volunteer departments (recruited through ASA's newsletter and department affiliates list) to substitute for the selected departments.

Once we select the sample departments we will send them letters further clarifying what we expect from them (a list of majors and recent graduate who graduated or who will graduate in December 2004, May 2005 and August 2005 and their current e-mail addresses) and what they can expect from us (including the results that they can expect). We will send several reminders to encourage participation.

Once the lists of student names and e-mails are provided to ASA, they will be invited to participate in the online survey hosted by Indiana University's Center for Survey Research (CRC). They will receive two reminders to encourage their participation.

The CSR is responsible for data collection. To protect student responses, the CSR computing environment requires a high level of computer and data security. Indiana University provides an initial level of security, and the CSR computing staff use industry standard best practices as our security procedures. Each workstation is updated daily with virus protection software. The CSR network is scanned daily for needed security packs and patches. The security server deploys all needed Microsoft security patches each night. Once each week, all workstations receive a complete scan for possible security problems. We have experienced minimal disruption due to viruses or worms. The computing staff has designed a number of processes for preventing intrusions or data loss on the various servers. User IDs and passwords tightly control access to the servers. Access to directories on the file servers is restricted to only those employees who need to use them. Security processes similar to those run on the workstations are used to prevent, detect, and repair security problems on the servers. Firewalls are used to detect and prevent unauthorized intrusions. The files on the servers are backed up each night, and complete system backups are done weekly. The file and Web servers use RAID 5 technology to insure that a disk failure will not cause any loss of data. The servers have uninterruptible power supplies. The server room is on a separate lock from other doors in the building, and there is a motion alarm in the room. The CSR uses 128 bit public key encryption and digital certificates to ensure the security of survey and other sensitive data that are transmitted across the Internet. The digital certificate was issued by VeriSign and is used by the survey respondent's browser to authenticate the CSR's website before transmitting data. The data are encrypted using public key encryption before they are sent over the Internet. Through the use of these protocols, the data are transmitted using the SSL. The security procedures used by the CSR are equal or surpass the requirements for transmitting confidential information.

Once the confidential information provided by respondents is transmitted to ASA, it will be transferred to a freestanding computer (not attached to the internet) in a locked room for the purposes of data analysis. Access to this data will be limited to the PI and the Research Associate analyzing the data via SPSS software. Although ASA also provides a high level of

data and computer security, with many of the same best practices as used by SRC, a stand-alone computer in a locked office will provide even more security from hackers or potential thieves. The SPSS data file will be transferred to a computer disk at the end of each workday, which will be stored in a locked drawer to which the PI and the Research Associate have the key.

No individual-level data will be shared with departments or the schools from which respondents graduate. Rather, college and university departments will be provided with grouped or aggregated data for all of their majors and recent graduates. The ASA Research Department will provide this sort of grouped data in the form of pre-formatted reports to chairs of departments so they can compare the views of their majors with those of similar type schools or with national information (derived from aggregating all the responses). Aggregated results will be published in a monograph for department chairs. Individual names will not be included in any publication of results, only aggregate responses by type of school (e.g. PhD-granting, MA-granting, BA-granting).

Next year, and the year after, we hope to survey this cohort again in order to find out about the early post-graduate years of sociology majors. A separate IRB application will be made for these next phases of the analysis.