

First Generation Sociology Majors Overcome Deficits

Roberta Spalter-Roth, American Sociological Association and George Mason University
Nicole Van Vooren, American Sociological Association
Mary S. Senter, Central Michigan University

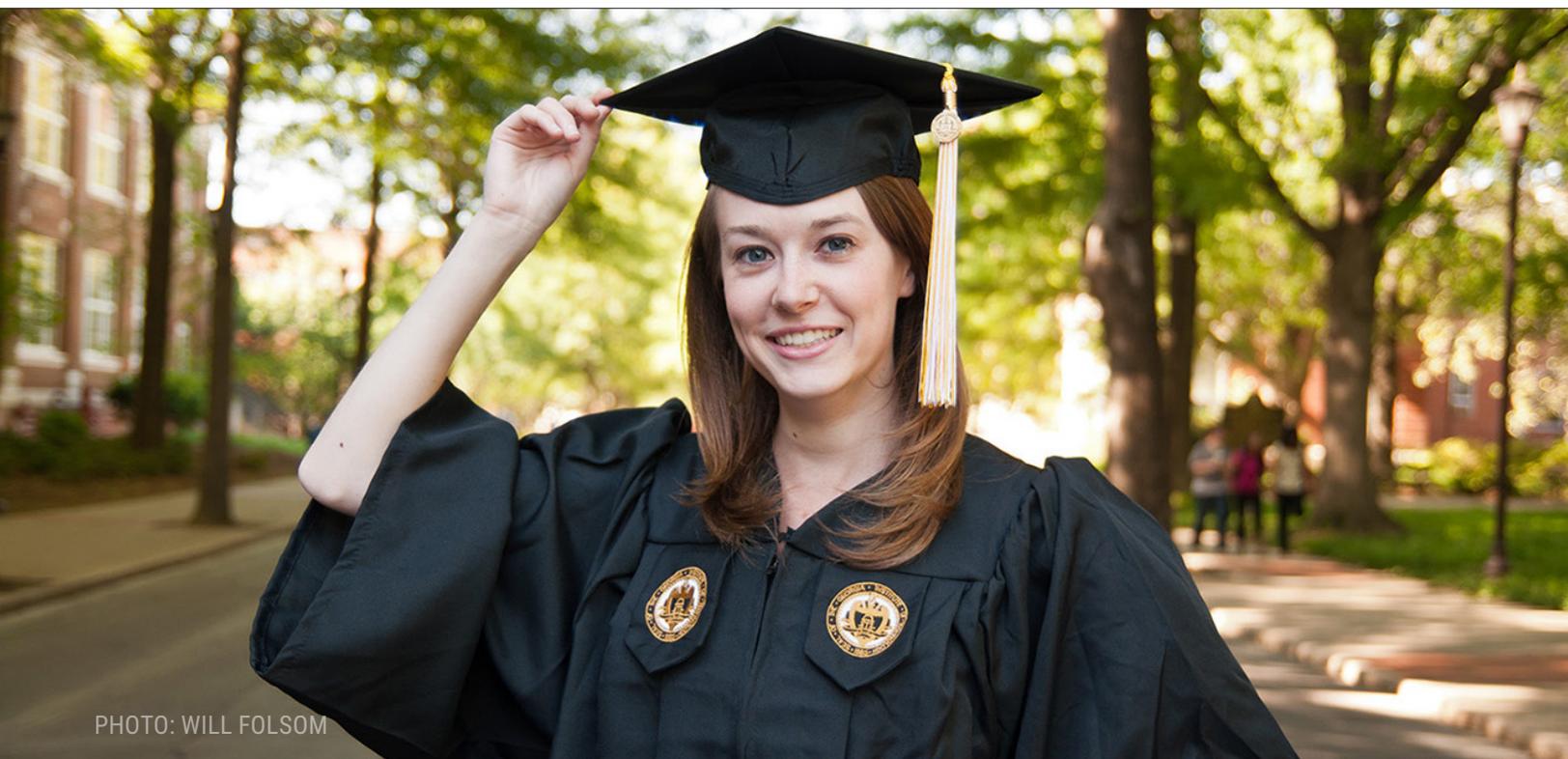


PHOTO: WILL FOLSOM

Somewhere between 40% and 50% of freshmen entering colleges and universities are the first generation of their families, according to a variety of studies.¹ By first generation we mean the children of parents neither of whom obtained a college degree, although they may have earned an associate's degree. As with Pike and Kuh (2005) we will refer to those students whose parents did graduate college as second generation, although many previous generations of their family may have graduated from college. A recent report from *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* (2013) attributes the recent influx of first-generation college students to a number of factors, like the availability of online courses and the

affordability of community colleges.² A series of studies point to the deficits and difficulties that first generation students face when compared to those students whose parents did graduate from college (Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin 1998; Pike and Kuh 2005; Thayer 2000; Tym, McMillon, Barone, and Webster 2005). These deficits include a lack of adequate preparation, limited knowledge of campus life, less understanding of college expectations, and greater likelihood of dropping out. As a result, a disproportionately low number of first generation students graduate in five years with an estimated gap of 15% between first generation students and those whose parents did graduate from college (HERI 2011; Pike and Kuh 2005

The authors would like to thank John M. Kennedy of Indiana University and John W. Curtis of the American Sociological Association for their careful editing and work on this research brief.

¹This figure appears to be relatively constant over two decades (see Choy 2001 for a 1995-1996 estimate).

²<http://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/reference-material/first-generation-college-students-graduation-rates/>

citing Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez 2001). According to at least one study, “These students enter college with less social capital given that their parents and relatives don’t have anybody in their family who really know the ropes of college life” (Arceniega cited in Schmidt 2003).

The lack of social and cultural capital from their parents tends not to be overcome during their college years because they are less likely to develop relationships with faculty and with peers, according to Pike and Kuh (2005). One consequence is that they are less satisfied with their college experience than their second generation peers. These findings suggest that first generation college students’ experiences do not compare favorably with their peers, on some key indicators of college success. According to Pike and Kuh (2005), these differences may be an effect of lower educational objectives and not living on campus.

The studies cited above assume a deficit model, focusing on the problems faced by first generation students rather than their strengths and their ability to overcome difficulties. Further, none of these studies examines the experiences of students after they graduate from college to learn if the “deficits” persist for those who did not drop out but rather were able to graduate and obtain their baccalaureate degree.

In contrast to a deficit model that does not examine the factors that result in post-graduate career success, we expect that first generation sociology majors may overcome deficits as they go through college and move into the labor force or graduate school. We suggest that sociology, given its core concepts that focus on understanding inequalities, how social forces impact daily lives, and how social change is brought about, could be especially appealing to first generation students as they attempt to understand their lives. Given the understanding they may gain of how their lives are affected by social forces, they may be able to become more socially integrated and more successful in their post-graduate lives. For example, one sociology graduate stated:

My undergraduate education in sociology gave me so much more than just a degree. It gave me a lens through which I can better understand and work with people, by examining all variables such

as circumstances, income, class, race, politics, economics -you name it. I use my sociological imagination every single day of my life, not only in my work, but constantly in my personal life as well. I certainly would choose sociology over again, and I know that I chose the perfect major for my interests.

This research brief focuses on the pre-and post-graduate experiences of a cohort of first generation sociology majors who graduated from college in 2012 and compares them to a similar cohort of those whose parents did graduate from college (labeled as “second generation”). The study is based on a three-wave longitudinal survey of sociology majors who graduated in the spring of 2012.

Survey Design

The data for this brief comes from the National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded study *Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates*. The home page for the project, can be found at http://www.asanet.org/research/bacc_survey/jobs_for_sociology_majors.cfm. The website includes the IRB application, the three waves of questionnaires, information about sample recruitment, response rates, weighting, study findings, and the resulting research briefs. For the first wave of the project administered in Spring, 2012, the May and August, 2012 graduates from 160 colleges/universities were represented. Completed surveys were returned from 2,695 majors, for a 37% response rate. The third wave of the survey was administered between November, 2013 and January, 2014, approximately 18 months post students’ baccalaureate graduation after they had entered the job market or gone on to graduate school. Third wave surveys were returned from 911 respondents. The purpose of the survey was to track pre and post graduate lives of sociology majors, including the human and social capital they gained and used during the survey period.

A note of caution is necessary in interpreting the study findings because we do not have information on those first generation sociology majors who dropped out prior to graduating. As a result, our findings may reflect the perceptions and outcomes for a biased sample of first generation baccalaureates--“the cream” of the cohort. The data that is the basis for this brief included only those

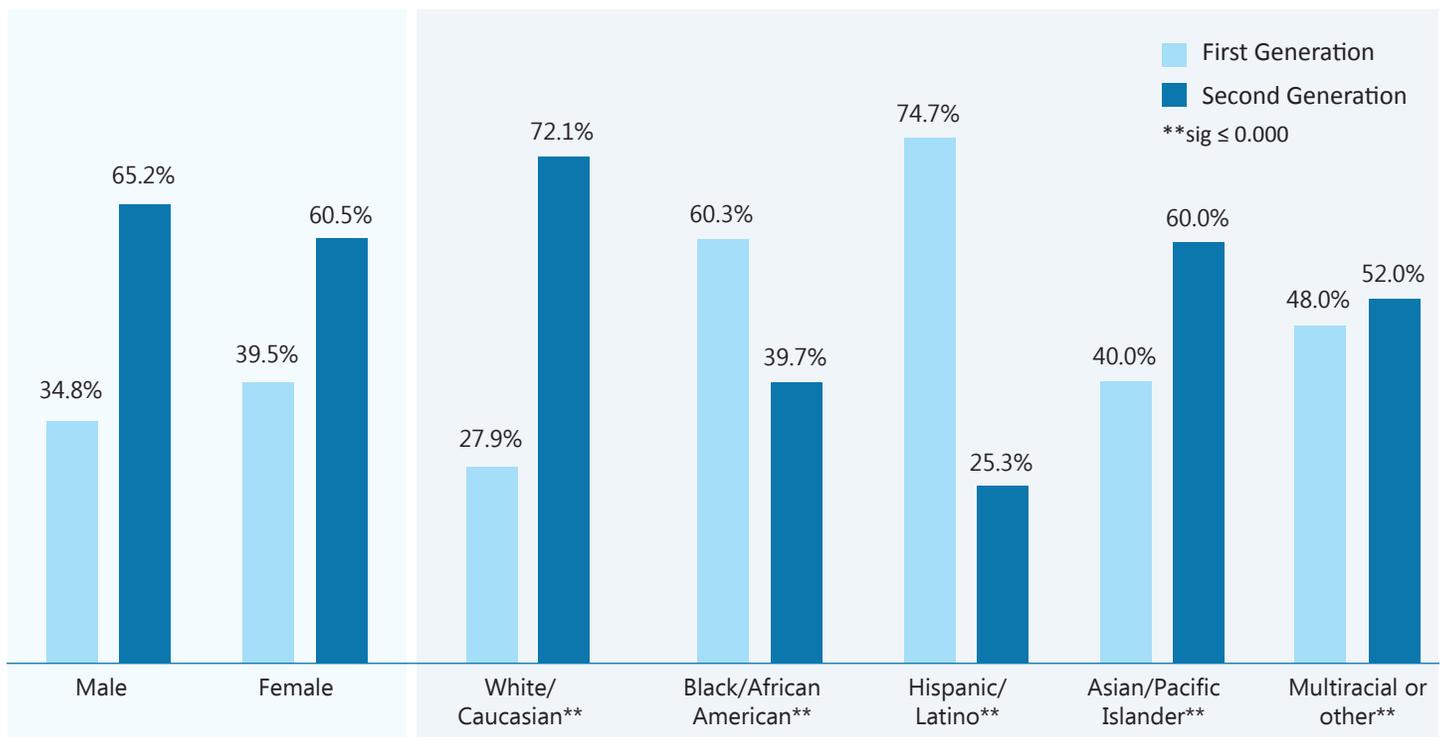
who responded to Wave I and Wave III of the survey. As a result, we expected that there might be biases in terms of the characteristics of who responded to both of these waves. In fact, there were small differences between the first and third wave samples, but not so much as to create major biases in the findings. For example, 42.8 % of first wave respondents, who were surveyed just before graduation, were first generation, while 38.5 % of third wave respondents fell into this category.³ The third wave respondents were more likely to be white, female, and graduates of baccalaureate-only colleges. Nonetheless, these differences were not large. Based on our previous research and that of others, they are to be expected. Nonetheless, the results shown here should be read with caution.

Some of our findings do mirror those of the previously-

cited studies that show deficits and difficulties faced by first generation sociology majors including starting their education at community colleges, where they probably did not live on campus, obtained lower Grade Point Averages (GPAs), and, according to the first wave of the Bachelor’s and Beyond survey, they were less likely to have done research with a faculty member. Yet, there are many similarities between the experiences of first and second generation respondents to this study including participation in a series of on and off campus activities, suggesting that they are integrated into campus life.

In what follows we present the descriptive findings from the survey data set. Since there are many independent variables in the study, we developed a series of scales in order to summarize the results. We then examine whether there are significant differences

FIGURE 1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION STUDENTS



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

³ Other surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement found a higher percentage of seniors who were “first generation” (45%). We do not know if the smaller percentage of sociology seniors is a result of disciplinary differences or is the result of biased response rates in the our Bachelors and Beyond study.

in their post-graduate career success, and if generation is an explanatory variable in any differences.

Demographic Characteristics

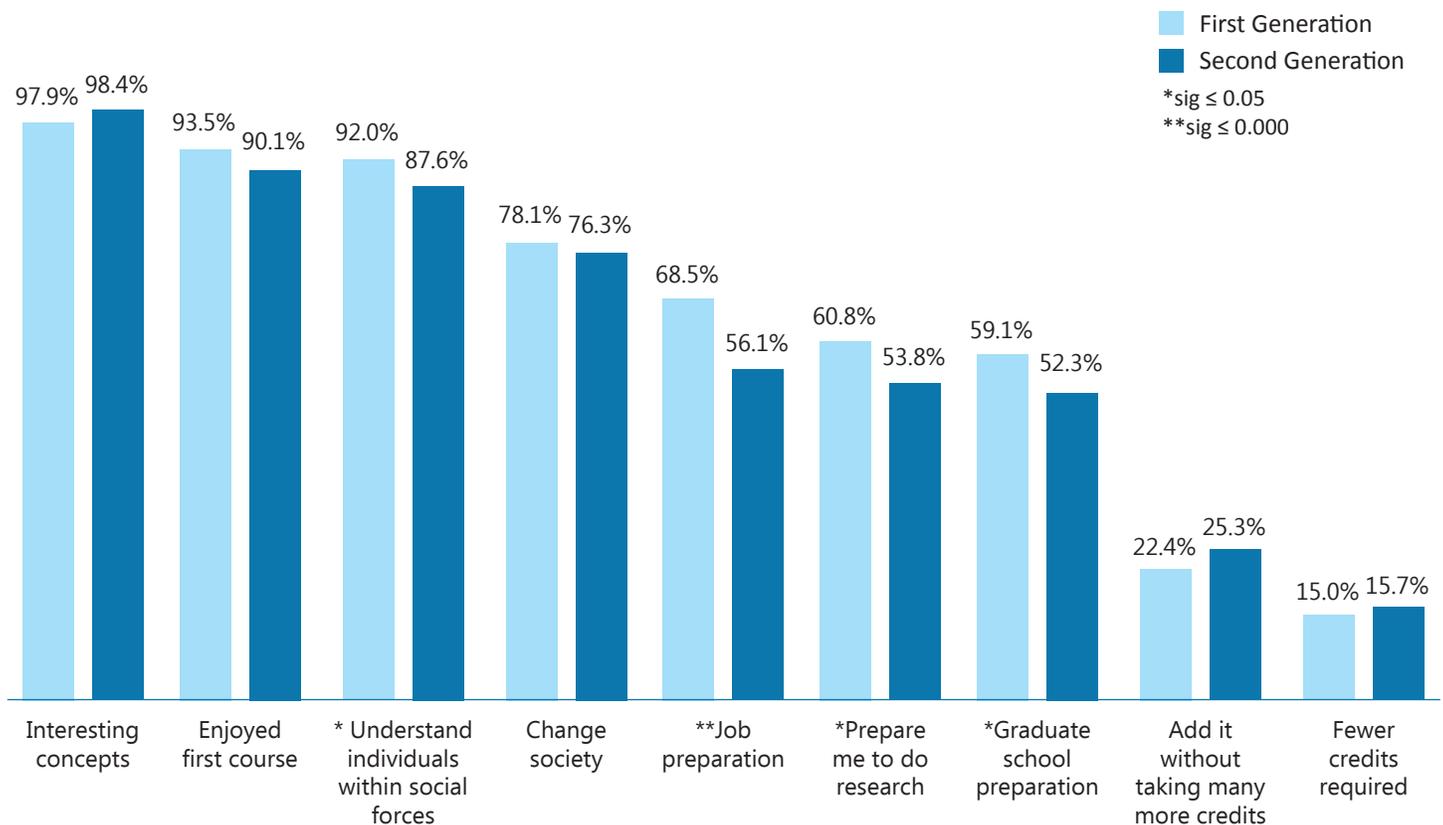
There were no significant differences in the percent of first and second generation respondents that label themselves as men or women (see Figure 1). There were, however, statistically significant differences by race and ethnicity. Black (60.3%) and Hispanic (74.7%) survey respondents were more than twice as likely to be first generation college students than were white respondents (27.9%), with Hispanic respondents the most likely to report having parents who did not graduate from college.

Undergraduate Experiences

Why did respondents major in sociology? Were there significant differences in reasons for majoring

between first and second generation college students? Relatively few (between about 15% and 25%) majored in sociology for what we have called “convenience” reasons; that is, neither group majored because it required fewer courses or credits (see Figure 2). All sociology majors, regardless of generation, majored because they generally enjoyed their first sociology course (about 90%), were excited by interesting sociological concepts (about 98%), and thought it was important to change society (more than 75%). There were some significant differences, however. First generation students appeared to be more interested in the ability of the sociology major to prepare them for the future and to understand how individuals function in different socio-economic functions. They were significantly more likely to expect that a sociology major would prepare them for a job (68.5% versus 56.1%), or to prepare them to do research (60.8% versus 53.8%), or for graduate school (59.1% versus 52.3%). As with other first generation students,

FIGURE 2 DO FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION STUDENTS MAJOR IN SOCIOLOGY FOR DIFFERENT REASONS?



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

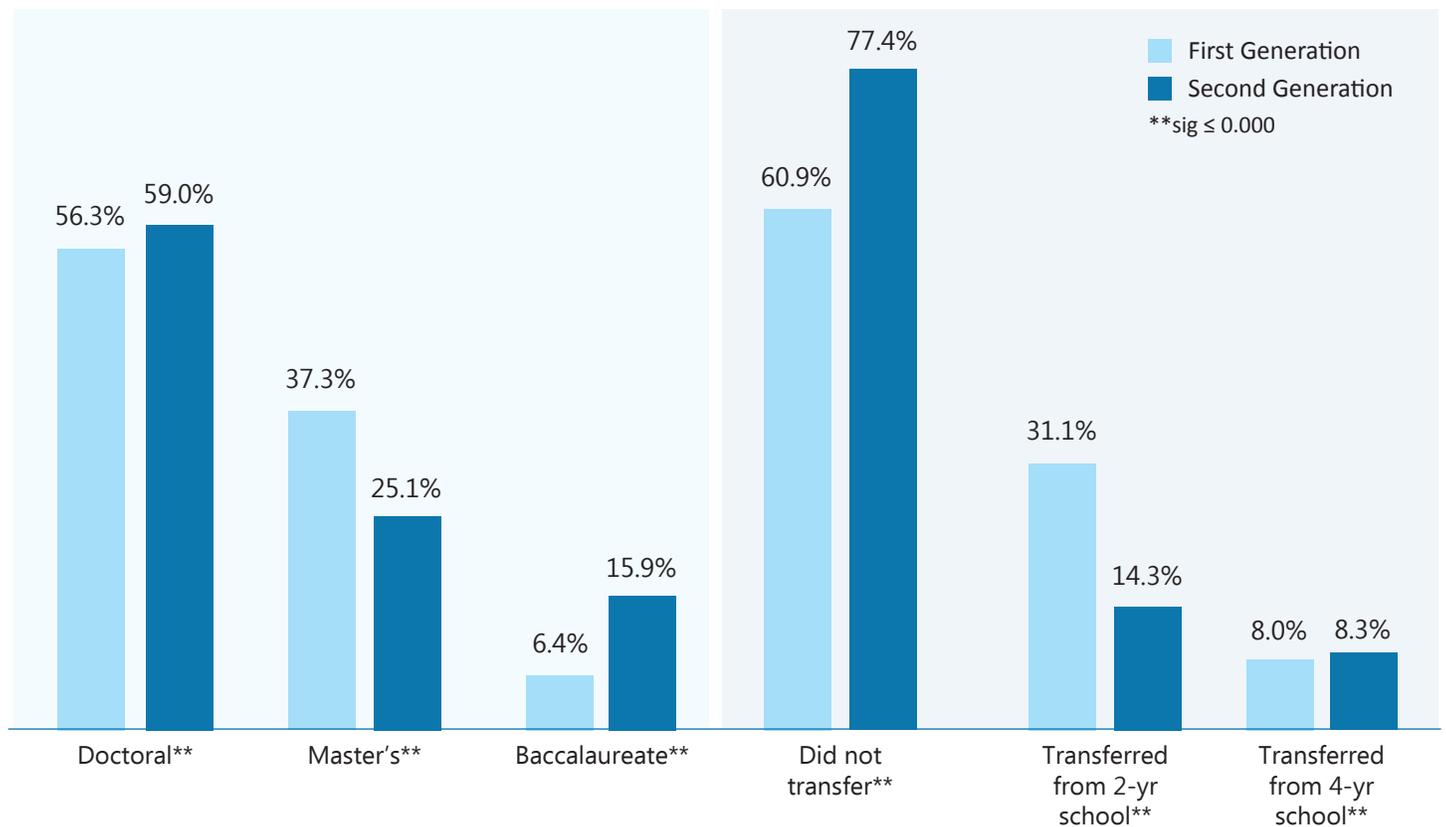
their goal was to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing (Ayala and Stephen 2002).

Further results suggested that first sociology majors had less adequate educational experiences during their undergraduate years than did second generation students. As previously noted, Pike and Kuh (2005) suggested first generation college students might be less integrated into campus life where they could have participated in activities and “learned the ropes” because they were more likely to live off campus. Nearly one-third (31.1%) of first generation respondents transferred from a two year college compared to 14.3% of second generation respondents (see Figure 3). The transfer students may have lived at home during their pre-transfer years, and not learned the ropes of college life. In addition, they are more likely than second generation respondents to attend master’s comprehensive schools that may be closer to home and cost less (37.3% vs. 25.1%), but were less likely to attend

baccalaureate-only schools (6.4% compared to 15.9%). Our previous research suggested that sociology majors attending baccalaureate schools are the most satisfied with the sociology major (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2006).

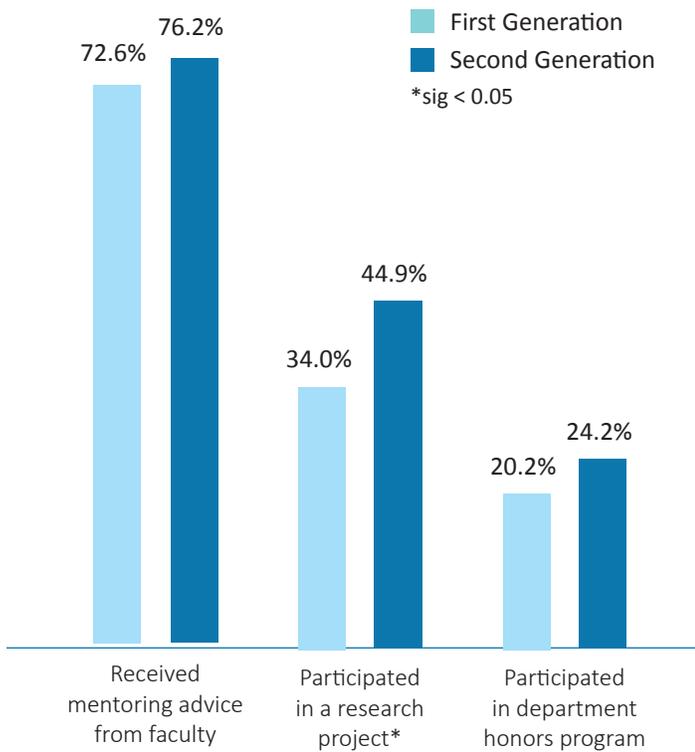
During their college years, first generation respondents earned statistically significantly lower GPAs than their second generation counterparts (with a median of 3.3 compared to 3.7). Nonetheless first generation students, as a whole, graduated with better than a B average. A possible explanation for these lower GPAs may be the lack of encouragement by faculty members. First generation students were significantly less likely to have done research with a faculty member while an undergraduate compared to second generation students (see Figure 4). They were somewhat less likely to have had a faculty mentor while an undergraduate, although the difference was not significant with about three-quarters of both groups having had this experience

FIGURE 3 INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION STUDENTS



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

FIGURE 4 EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AMONG FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION STUDENTS



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

(72.6% of first generation respondents compared to 76.2% of second generation). These findings suggest that some educational deficits may exist, but they might be remedied by additional faculty engagement.

Out of Class Activities

Although there were some significant differences in the educational experiences between first and second generation sociology graduates, there were fewer statistically significant differences in out-of-class experiences. These experiences probably contributed to their social capital and civic education. For example, there was no significant difference in whether they worked with an advocacy group while undergraduates, though they were somewhat less likely to do so (see Table 1). First generation students were, however, significantly less likely to participate in internships (49.5% compared to 60.6%), a form of social capital that

TABLE 1 PARTICIPATION IN OUT-OF-CLASS ACTIVITIES

		First Generation	Not First Generation
Worked with an advocacy group	Yes	51.4%	55.7%
	No	48.6%	44.3%
Participated in an internship*	Yes	49.5%	60.6%
	No	50.5%	39.4%
Participated in a sociology club	Yes	31.5%	30.1%
	No	68.5%	69.9%
Attended local, regional or national sociology meeting	Yes	15.0%	15.9%
	No	85.0%	84.1%
Participated in study groups	Yes	79.1%	82.0%
	No	20.9%	18.0%

*sig ≤ 0.05

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

might especially benefit them in searching for jobs.

However, it may be difficult for first generation students to complete an unpaid internship as opposed to working at a paid job. Although they were less likely to participate in sociology honors programs, there was no significant difference in whether they belonged to a sociology club (31.5% of first generation compared to 30.1% of second generation). There was no significant difference in whether or not they attended state, regional, or national sociology meetings, although only about 15% did so. And, like their second generation counterparts, about eight out of 10 participated in out-of-class study groups (79.1% of first generation compared to 82.0% of second generation). These findings suggest that sociology first generation students appeared to be integrated into a number of extra-curricular activities, with the exception of internships, despite claims by previously cited researchers, examining college students as a whole.

Integration and Social Capital

To determine whether these educational experiences and out-of-class activities were correlated with each other, we conducted factor analyses on the variables discussed above. The analysis resulted in a number of scales that replaced individual variables to be used in later regression models.

As noted, Pike and Kuh (2005) emphasized the lack of social integration of first generation students into campus life. In the descriptive analysis, we found mixed results based on the measures of integration that treated each item response individually. To further examine the differences between first and second generations, we used factor analysis to see if these activities formed meaningful scales.

The first scale was created by what we refer to as “practical activities”. These activities included participating in internships, advocacy groups, service learning and volunteer activities. There were no significant differences in overall participation, with most sociology majors having reported that they participated in at least one of these activities, although first generation students were somewhat less likely to participate in any activities (14.1% versus 10.2%) (data not shown).

A second scale focused on academic activities and included participating in independent studies, sociology clubs, honors programs, and attendance at sociology annual meetings. Here again, there were no significant differences in participation between the two groups, although first generation respondents were less likely to participate in these activities than their peers (37.8% compared to 42.8%). Finally, both groups participated at the same rate in group activities that were measured by a third scale, which included participation in study groups and group projects.

The Use of Social Capital in Job Search

In previous research, we examined two types of social capital that could lead to post-baccalaureate success. The first was the use of career-development resources including whether or not the students saw a career advisor, participated in career fairs, or took part in leadership

development programs (Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, Senter, and Kisielewski 2013; Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, and Senter 2013). A second form of social capital was described as the kind of ties (weak, strong, or no ties) respondents used in their job searches. These ties were based on scales from the second wave of the survey that asked respondents who they called upon for help in these searches. In a previous brief using second wave data, we found that weak ties, including the use of internships, faculty members, capstone courses, and career services, resulted in greater likelihood of obtaining a career level position after college compared to strong ties (family and friends) or no (impersonal) ties (see Spalter-Roth, Van Vooren, Kisielewski, and Senter 2013).

Here, first generation graduates were less likely than second generation graduates to use any ties to search for jobs. This may be an example of their not knowing the ropes and not having family members who can pass on social and cultural capital as Arceniega cited in Schmidt (2003) claims. It should be noted, however, that second generation students who went into the workforce did not overwhelmingly use these ties and connections either. The sociology graduates who replied to the Wave III survey were less likely to use strong or weak ties than Wave II respondents in their job search, perhaps because many did not change jobs and may not have searched for new jobs.

First generation respondents were significantly less likely than second generation graduates to use faculty members in job searches (see Table 2). Only about 13-17% of sociology majors used internships for the purpose of job search, and those who were first generation were slightly less likely to do so, but the difference was not significant. First generation graduates were significantly less likely to use friends or classmates to help them with their job search (22.0% versus 31.7%). They were also significantly less likely to use previous employers or colleagues (21.0% compared to 28.2%). Rather than using close, personal ties (like family or friends), they were more likely than second generation respondents to use employment agencies (8.8% compared to 12.6%), but less likely to send unsolicited resumes, though these differences were not significant. Finally, they were less likely to use job advertisements listed on websites such as Craigslist (34.1% vs. 39.2%), although, here again, the difference was not significant.

TABLE 2 JOB SEARCH METHODS USED BY FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION RESPONDENTS

	Used Job Search Method?	First Generation	Second Generation
Employer or colleague	Yes	21.0%	28.2%
	No	79.0%	71.8%
Internship	Yes	12.6%	17.2%
	No	87.4%	82.8%
Faculty*	Yes	10.7%	20.4%
	No	89.3%	79.6%
Friend or classmate*	Yes	22.0%	31.7%
	No	78.0%	68.3%
Family member*	Yes	16.4%	27.6%
	No	83.6%	72.4%
Job ad	Yes	34.1%	39.2%
	No	65.9%	60.8%
Unsolicited resume	Yes	15.0%	20.4%
	No	85.0%	79.6%
Employment agency	Yes	12.6%	8.8%
	No	87.4%	91.2%

*sig ≤ 0.05

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

When we developed scales of weak, strong, and no ties, using data on various strategies used in the job search, we found that first generation students were significantly less likely to call upon weak ties, such as faculty members, although the majority of neither group (73.4% of first generation students, and 63.6% of their peers) did not do so. Our previous research from Wave II found that strong ties were not as beneficial as weak ties for finding career-level positions (Spalter-Roth et al. 2013). Here again, we found that first generation graduates were

significantly less likely to call upon these individuals to find jobs than their second generation peers. First generation students were probably less likely to have family members or friends who have contacts to obtain career-level positions. Finally, we examined those who used impersonal ties (that we have referred to as “no ties”). These included employment agencies, on-line job ads, and unsolicited resumes. The differences in use of impersonal ties were not statistically significant.

Success in the World of Work

As noted, Wave III of this study was conducted 18 months after the sociology majors had graduated. The majority of both first and second generation students were in the labor force, with 56.6% of first generation graduates and 58.9% of second generation working at a paid job or paid internship.⁴ An additional 28.3% of first generation graduates and 25.4% of second generation graduates were both working and going to graduate school. First generation graduates were less likely to attend graduate school than second generation respondents (8.0% compared to 11.2%). None of these differences were statistically significant, however.

Next, we compared the labor force experiences of first and second generation graduates, principally their occupations, their views of whether they had career-level jobs, and their career advancement. Our purpose was to seek evidence as to whether first generation baccalaureates appeared to overcome undergraduate deficits.

Job Characteristics

Eighteen months after graduation, we found occupational differences between first and second generation students, though these were not significant. First generation students were less likely to be social science researchers, more likely to be in social services and more likely to be in clerical positions (See Figure 5). Perhaps they were more desirous of helping others like themselves or perhaps they did not have the ties they needed to move beyond administrative and clerical positions. In addition to their job category, we asked these former sociology majors whether or not they had career level jobs 18 months after

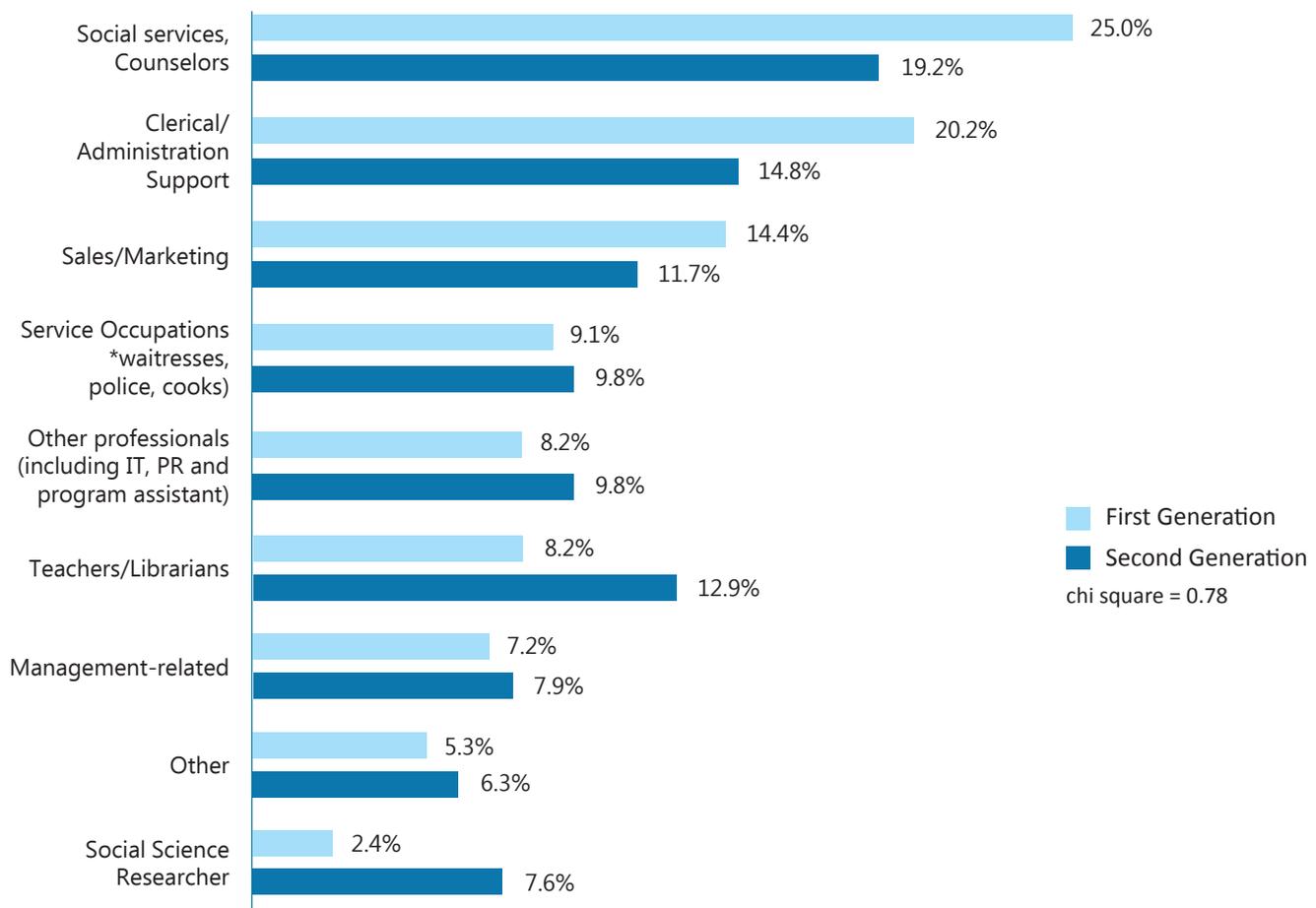
³ Internships are assumed to be unpaid.

graduation. Overall, more than half (58.9%) agreed that they considered their job to be “career-level.” Career-level jobs tended to be professional and managerial positions (see Senter et al. 2015). First generation students were less likely to think that they held career-level jobs, but the difference between these groups was only marginally significant.

Each group may have different views of what constitutes a career-level job, or there may be strong differences in the types of jobs they held within similar occupational categories. Given these possibilities, we did not find any statistically significant differences between first and second generation in the percentage reporting that their social service and counseling jobs were career level — 78.4% for first generation versus 77.0% for second generation

(see Table 3). There were also no significant differences between the generations regarding whether research positions were considered career-level. However, very few first generation students held this type of position, even though they were more likely to major in order to learn research skills. While both groups saw social service positions as career-type jobs, about half considered sales and marketing positions as career-level, and fewer than half considered clerical and administrative support positions as career level (45.0% for first generation versus 40.4% for second generation). The smallest percentage of either group saw service occupations as career-level (27.8% for first generation versus 24.1% for second generation). There were large differences in two occupational categories, however. Those first generation students in teaching and library science were less likely to

FIGURE 5 TYPES OF JOBS AMONG FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION RESPONDENTS



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

TABLE 3 TYPE OF CAREER LEVEL JOB AMONG FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION STUDENTS

Career Level Job	First generation within career job	Second generation within career job
Social Services, Counselors	78.4%	77.0%
Clerical/Administrative Support	45.0%	40.4%
Management-related	80.0%	88.0%
Teachers/Librarians	58.8%	68.3%
Service Occupations (waitresses, police, cooks)	27.8%	24.1%
Sales/Marketing	50.0%	45.7%
Social Science Researcher	80.0%	91.7%
Other professional (including IT, PR and program asst)	58.8%	83.3%
Other	90.9%	45.0%

chi square ≤ 0.000

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

see these occupations as career-level, compared to those who were second generation (58.8% versus 68.3%). It is not clear why this is the case. The largest gap was in what we labeled as “other professional, including IT, PR, and program assistants” with first generation respondents much less likely to label these positions as career-level. These differences could be explained by the differences in actual job tasks, salaries, autonomy, and responsibility, as noted.

Yet, even those positions that graduates did not consider to be career-level, appeared to have important responsibilities. For example, graduates described their jobs as follows:

Work in office of human resources for a large state university; Provide support to employees regarding benefits enrollment and administration; Provide administrative support and direct assistance to employees.

Teaching English language learning workshops with English Language pre-service teachers at Brazilian federal university, coordinating two university outreach projects for English language learning to at-risk youth in after-school programs, exploring popular education practices of Brazil.

Public health research at a government consulting firm. Work on workforce development, nutrition and other health related projects. I have project management related tasks.

The results were mixed as to which generation was more satisfied with their jobs. First generation graduates were more likely to be somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their jobs (16.5% vs. 8.5%), but, on the contrary, they were more likely to be very satisfied (40.0% vs. 33.6%). These differences in satisfaction were not statistically significant.

On-the-Job Advancement

Respondents were asked several questions regarding whether they had experienced specific job advancements (for example, salary, benefits, independence and responsibilities) since graduation. In general, both first and second generation sociology graduates experienced job advances, with each group experiencing an average of 6 of the 12 advancements on the job (with no significant differences). The greatest job advances experienced by both groups were increases in salary and responsibilities, with about three-quarters reporting these career advances (see Table 4). More than half experienced job advancement, greater intellectual challenge, and providing more help to the people with whom they came into contact. First generation graduates were somewhat more likely to agree that they increased the amount of help they provided to people, perhaps because they are more likely to be in social service positions. Almost half reported having better colleagues and making greater social contributions compared to when they started working after graduation. Respondents were least likely to move to a better job location, with first generation graduates less likely to do so than those whose parents had graduated college (34.8% compared to 39.9%). There were no statistically significant differences between first and second generation students in the mean number of advancements and promotions (6.2 for each).

TABLE 4 INDICATORS OF JOB ADVANCEMENT FOR FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS

Career Advancement	First Generation	Second Generation
Salary Increase	71.3%	77.1%
Benefits Increase	43.6%	47.1%
Increase in Job Security	51.4%	48.4%
Better Location	34.8%	39.9%
Opportunities for Advancement	54.7%	52.9%
Greater Intellectual Challenge	56.9%	56.9%
Increased Responsibility	76.8%	76.5%
Increased Independence	64.6%	69.3%
Better Colleagues	50.8%	52.3%
Greater Social Contribution	53%	51.6%
More Help to People	60.8%	60.1%

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

Satisfaction

Previous research, cited above, suggested that first generation students were less likely to be satisfied with their college experience. In contrast we found no significant difference in whether they would definitely choose to major in sociology again, once they graduated, compared to their second generation peers (57.0% vs. 53.0%) (data not shown). This finding suggests that sociology can be an academic major that results in relative career success for first generation college students, especially when they agree that they have mastered sociological concepts and skills. The concepts that teach students to place their experiences in historical context, to understand how social forces affect daily life, and to understand differences among population groups may provide the perceptions and skills that help them understand how their organizations work and advance in their careers as a result.

Regression Analysis

The cross-tabulation analysis results did not show significant differences between first and second generation students in terms of their career advancement, suggesting that those first generation sociology majors who graduated with a baccalaureate degree made up deficits that they experienced as undergraduate majors. To further test this hypothesis, we conducted an OLS regression analysis with the sum of career advancements as the dependent variable. We included the scales we developed for activities participated in and social capital, respondents' GPAs, types of schools attended, gender, race and ethnicity, and whether or not the respondent was a first generation student. None of these independent variables proved to be significant in the models. The regression itself was not significant, again suggesting that any deficits experienced as undergraduates (including social capital used in job search) did not prevent first generation students from experiencing career advancement once they graduated.

Summary and Conclusion

About half of entering freshman, regardless of major, were the first generation in their families to go to college. A series of studies highlight the deficits and difficulties that first generation students faced when compared to those students whose parents did graduate college. This deficit model includes the lack of adequate preparation, limited knowledge of campus life, less understanding of college expectations, and greater likelihood of dropping out. As a result, a disproportionately low number of first generation students graduated in five years. Some of our findings, focusing on sociology majors, did mirror those of the previously-cited studies. They suggested difficulties faced by first generation sociology majors including starting their education at community colleges, where they probably do not live on campus, earning lower GPAs, being less likely to have done research with a faculty member, and less likely to call on weak or strong ties when searching for jobs. Yet, we found many similarities between the activities in which first and second generation sociology majors participated, suggesting that they were integrated into campus life.

Most important, none of the studies cited examined the

experiences of students after they graduated from college to learn if the “deficits” persisted for those who were able to graduate and obtain their baccalaureate degree. In contrast, our research examined factors that led to post-graduate career success and found that first generation students who major in sociology may overcome deficits as they go through college and move into the labor force or graduate school. We suggest that sociology (given its core concepts that focus on understanding inequalities, how social forces impact daily lives, and how social change is brought about) could be especially appealing to first generation students as they attempt to understand their lives. Given the understanding they may gain about how their lives are affected by social forces, they may be able to become more socially integrated and more successful in their post-graduate life. As another graduate commented that she was:

...well-prepared for both my graduate studies and my work experience - strong critical thinking skills, great confidence in my writing abilities, and a better understanding of the “Real world.”

What can faculty and departments do to increase college integration and enhance post-graduate success? We have several suggestions:

1. Sometimes it is useful for faculty to share some of their own stories -- if they are first generation. Students may then feel more comfortable approaching them.
2. Faculty need to realize that it is difficult for some students to communicate one-on-one with faculty. This may result from their lack of cultural and social capital. It is simply not “good enough” to say: “I have office hours. See me if you have questions. Or, see me if you want additional research experiences.”
3. Departments need to realize that it is very difficult for some students to enroll in internships. They may want to consider ways of creating similar experiences (e.g., service learning) within classes OR create special “development funds” (if they have some kind of fund-raising arm at their institution) to set aside monies to help students who need

to earnings participate in internship programs.

References

- Ayala, Connie, and Al Striplen. 2002. *A Career introduction Model for First-Generation College Freshmen Students* (ERIC ED469996).
- Choy, Susan P. 2001. *Students Whose Parents Did Not Go To College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment* (NCES 2001-126). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001126.pdf>.
- Pike, Gary R. and George D. Kuh. 2005. “First- and Second- Generation College Students: A comparison of Their Engagement and Intellectual Development” article from the *Journal of Higher Education* (Vol 76:3).
- Nunez, Ane-Marie and Stephanie Cuccaro-Alamin. 1998. *First-Generation Students: Undergraduates Whose Parents Never Enrolled in Postsecondary Education*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.
- Schmidt, Peter. 2003. *Academe’s Hispanic Future: The nation’s largest minority group faces big obstacles in higher education, and colleges struggle to find the right ways to help*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, v. 50, Issue 14 (28 November): A8. <http://chronicle.com>
- Senter, Mary S., Roberta Spalter-Roth, and Nicole Van Vooren. 2015. *Jobs, Careers, and Sociological Skills. The Early Employment Experiences of 2012 Sociology Majors*. Washington, DC: The American Sociological Association. http://www.asanet.org/documents/research/pdfs/Early_Employment.pdf
- Spalter-Roth, Roberta and William J. Erskine 2006. *What Can I Do with a Sociology Major?: A National Survey of Seniors majoring in Sociology*. Washington, D.c. The American Sociological Association.
- Spalter-Roth, Roberta, Nicole Van Vooren, and Mary S. Senter. 2013. *Social Capital for Sociology Majors: Applied Activities and Peer Networks*. Washington, DC: The American Sociological Association, http://www.asanet.org/documents/research/pdfs/Bach_Beyond4_Social_Capital.pdf
- Spalter-Roth, Roberta, Nicole Van Vooren, Michael Kisielewski, and Mary S. Senter (2013). *Strong Ties, Weak Ties, or No Ties: What Helped Sociology Majors Find Career-Level Jobs?* Washington, DC: The American Sociological Association, http://www.asanet.org/documents/research/pdfs/Bach_Beyond5_Social_Capital.pdf
- Thayer, Paul B. 2000. *Retention of Students from First Generation and Low Income Backgrounds* (ERIC ED446633). Opportunity Outlook (May), 2-8.
- Tym, Carmen, Robin McMillion, Sandra Barone, Jeff Webster (2005). *First- Generation College Students: A Literature Review*. Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation.



American Sociological Association

1430 K Street, NW Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

www.asanet.org