Findings From ASA Surveys of Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD Recipients: Implications for Departments in a Jobless Recovery

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Overview

- **Purpose**: Results from studies about sociologists’ participation in the non-academic job market.

- **List of surveys used**
  - “What Can I Do with a Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology?”
    - 3 year longitudinal survey starting in 2005
  - “What Can I do with a Master’s Degree in Sociology?”
    - 3 year longitudinal survey starting in 2006
  - “Beyond the Ivory Tower: Professionalism, Skills Match in Sociology” (non-academic PhD survey)
    - One-time survey, 2006
Students are particularly satisfied with the quality of teaching, their ability to see faculty outside of class, the availability of technology, the availability of courses they need to graduate, and the interaction with fellow majors. Students at baccalaureate schools are the most satisfied with these aspects of their major (about 80 percent).
Majors who intend to go into the workforce directly after graduation are most likely to participate in activities outside the classroom that expose them to the workforce. Majors who go on to graduate school participate in sociology clubs or are mentored by faculty through working on research projects, as well as other scholarly activities.

The highest percentage of responding senior majors report that they will list their ability to use statistical packages in the social sciences on their resumes (with 4 out of 10 strongly agreeing that they will list this skill), yet, this is the same skill that these majors were least likely to strongly agree that they learned. These results suggest a mismatch between vocational skills used in job searches and the conceptual and methodological skills learned as part of the sociology curriculum.
During their senior year, nearly a quarter of students planned on attending graduate school after graduation, yet only 13.1% ended up doing so as of 2007. A large majority of students reported working while not enrolled in a graduate program 2 years after graduation.
Two-years after graduation, about one-quarter of former majors employed full-time are in social service and counseling occupations, most in non-profit organizations dealing with a variety of social problems they explored as part of the major.


Table 1. Types of Occupations of Sociology Bachelor's Degree Recipients: 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Services, Counselors, Psychologists</td>
<td>Oversee AIDS outreach team</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>Scheduler for State Representative</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Handle employment and labor relations</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Planning and developing marketing strategies</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Crime scene technician</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers, Librarians</td>
<td>Provide reference, research, and database searching</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science, Researchers</td>
<td>Research climate change policies</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others Professionals</td>
<td>Website design</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those who communicated their sociological skill set to potential employers in interviews and/or on resumes were more likely to use them on the job, which led to increased satisfaction in jobs that were closely related to sociology.
There are significant differences between applied and traditional master’s programs. The greatest differences are that applied programs are significantly more likely to offer an internship program and to offer online courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master’s Program Characteristics</th>
<th>Departments Offering a Professional, Applied, or Clinical Track</th>
<th>Departments Without a Professional, Applied, or Clinical Track</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s thesis required</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-thesis option</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship required</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an external advisory board</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members have</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-academic professional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority of candidates</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>received their BAs from the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers online master's courses</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes freestanding master’s programs only.

Source: ASA 2009 Survey of Graduate Directors
The study of master’s students show less overall satisfaction with their programs than baccalaureate students (less than 13% compared to more than 2/3). Along with baccalaureate students, master’s students are similarly not satisfied with career preparation.
Even though 2/3 of jobs require technical skills including computer, organizational, and report-writing skills, master’s graduates report that “people skills” are the most widely used skills in their jobs.
Figure 8. What Do Working Sociology Master's Grads Wished They Had Learned? (in percents)

- **Grant writing**: 57.6%
- **Career counseling**: 32.3%
- **Internships**: 29.0%
- **Field specialization**: 18.9%
- **Graphics packages**: 17.1%
- **Stat packages**: 16.6%

Source: ASA Research Development Department, *What Can I Do With a Master's Degree in Sociology?* 2009

The majority of master’s graduates wished they had learned grant-writing skills.
The majority of master’s graduates were attending graduate school during the 2009 short follow-up survey. The 40% who were working in full time jobs clustered into 3 types of occupations: Research, Program Coordination and Management and Case Work/Counseling.
The largest group (36%) of PhD sociologists are in applied, research, and policy positions in the private, not for profit sector and another 32% are working in the government sector.
Applied and public sociology PhD sociologists work on a wide variety of topics, with close to 1/3 working on health issues.
Applied and public sociology PhD sociologists think that the best training they received was in research design and statistical analysis.
Applied and public sociology PhDs think that more training is needed in preparing visual presentations, grant writing and program evaluation.

Figure 13. PhD Respondent Recommendations for Improving Graduate School Curriculum (Percentage of Respondents)

- Information about non-academic careers and reduce snobbery: 18.3%
- Various methods of applied or evaluation research (biostatistics, experimental design, advanced modeling, demographic methods, ethnography): 16.4%
- Mentoring and networking (outside of academy): Internships, working with clients: 15.1%
- Communications: Writing for lay public, data presentation: 12.3%
- Project and business management: 9.6%
- Interdisciplinary courses and collaborations: 7.3%
- Policy orientation (legislative process, policy analysis and development): 7.3%
- Grant writing: 5.9%
- Sectoral and topical issues (e.g., health, education, housing, transportation, global trade): 4.1%
- Theoretical grounding: 1.8%
- Organizational dynamics: 1.8%


Applied and public PhD sociologists want more career information and less snobbery.
Suggestions for a “Jobless Recovery”

- Understand that a large majority of baccalaureate and master’s graduates go into the paid labor market rather than to graduate school. The majority of those who go on to graduate school do not go on in sociology.

- Departments need to learn how to guide students to focus on careers that use their sociological skills without becoming career counselors. ASA’s Launching Majors into Satisfying Careers [http://e-noah.net/asa/asashoponlineservice/ProductDetails.aspx?productId=ASAOE630R10](http://e-noah.net/asa/asashoponlineservice/ProductDetails.aspx?productId=ASAOE630R10) has many suggestions, as does information on the ASA career page.

- Set up external advisory boards, internships, alumni sessions, and other ways for students to network with non-academics.
Include grant-writing, graphics, and evaluation skills either in your department or via on-line courses or other departments.

Ensure students learn research and computer skills and list these on their resumes.

Emphasize health care as a subject area via courses on medical sociology, internship programs, or pairing with a professional program.

Show data presented here to careers departments so they have a better idea of what sociologists do.

Emphasize how sociology teaches about race, class, gender and working with diverse groups.

Encourage PhD students to think about non-academic careers.