AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Pathways to Job Satisfaction[1]

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CLASS OF 2005?

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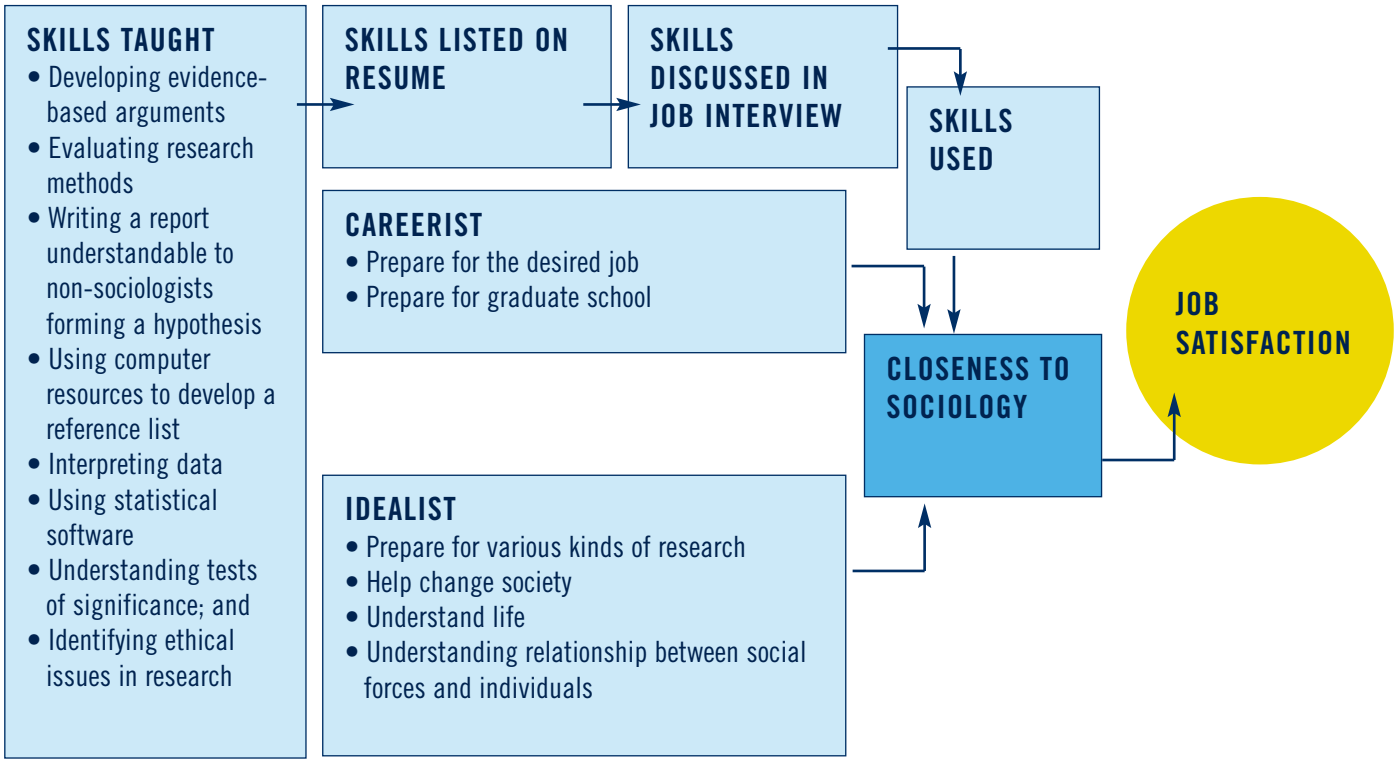
This is the second in a series of Research Briefs that focus on what happened to sociology majors from the class of 2005 who were employed 18 months later. The brief examines the patterns between skills learned and the occupational categories of their jobs. It describes the pathway from the research skills these majors reported learning as sociology undergraduates, to use of these skills on the job, to the closeness of their job to their sociological studies, to job satisfaction. This is an important path for a new graduate to follow because there is a significant relationship between how closely related a job is to sociological studies and how satisfied respondents report they are with their jobs.

The brief also examines the relationship between reported reasons for majoring in sociology in 2005, such as idealistic or careerist reasons, and occupational categories of their jobs in 2007. The results show that both "careerists" and "idealists" are employed in a wide variety of jobs, and that there is a significant relationship between these orientations to their choice of major and the closeness of their job to their sociological studies. Figure 1 presents a model of this pathway. The model shows that the skills used and the reasons for majoring (but not specific occupations) are related the closeness of a job to what students learned in their sociological studies, but only the latter measure is related to job satisfaction.

In Academic Year 2005 the American Sociological Association's Research and Development Department surveyed a sample of 1,777 seniors to explore their experiences and satisfaction with the sociology major and their future plans for work, graduate school, or both. Early in 2007 we re-surveyed the class of 2005 to learn what they had been doing since graduation. The response rate for the second wave of the survey was 44 percent or 778 graduates. Three out of five respondents (60 percent) were employed in December 2006 and not attending graduate school. Another 22 percent were working and in graduate school, while 13 percent were attending graduate school full-time and not employed (see

[1] We are grateful to the Sociology Program at the National Science Foundation for partial funding of this study.
[2] The authors wish to thank Grant Blank and Janene Scelza for their helpful work on this project; any errors, of course, are our own.

FIGURE 1: PATH TO JOB SATISFACTION



What Are they Doing with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology? at http://www.asanet.org/galleries/Research/ASAResearchBrief_corrections.pdf.)

Given the cohort's dominant experience of employment 18 months after graduation we focus in this Research Brief on their reports about the relationship between their undergraduate sociology training and their post-graduate work experience. The findings include the following:

- Occupational category is not significantly related to the other variables in the model and therefore is excluded. For example, although majors in some job categories strongly agreed that they had learned research skills compared to majors in other job categories, the relationship is not significant. There is no significant relationship between occupational categories and any measure of work experience;

- Response patterns suggest a pathway from learning research skills as an undergraduate to using them as an employee. The minority who report that they listed these skills on their resumes and talked about them during job interviews were significantly more likely to report using these skills on the job than those who did not;

- There is a significant relationship between majors' reported use of the research skills they learned as undergraduates and the reported closeness of their post-graduate jobs to their sociological studies;

- There is a significant relationship between majors' reported job satisfaction and the closeness of their job to their undergraduate sociological studies;

- Respondents reported majoring in sociology in 2005 for reasons of idealism, careerism, and first attraction. There is some variation in reason for majoring by job category, but it is not significant, suggesting that both careerists and idealists find jobs after graduation;

- There is a significant relationship between both careerism and idealism and reported closeness of a job to their undergraduate sociological studies; and

- Of the job-related measures, only the reported closeness of a job to sociological studies is related to job satisfaction.

Each of these findings will be discussed in greater detail below.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SKILLS AND SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS

We created a scale composed of the sociology research skills that majors reported in the 2005 survey learning in college. Majors strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that they had learned these skills, and we created a scale by summing the scores for each of the following specific skills:[3]

- Developing evidence-based arguments;
- Evaluating different research methods;
- Writing a report understandable to non-sociologists;
- Forming a causal hypothesis;
- Using computer resources to develop a reference list;
- Interpreting the results of data gathering;
- Using statistical software;
- Understanding tests of significance; and
- Identifying ethical issues in research.

We also recoded the occupational categories of the jobs majors had at 18 months post graduation to better reflect their descriptions of post-graduate jobs in relation to the occupational categories they checked. This recoding was imperfect because some majors could be placed in more than one category. Table 1 shows the relation between skills and subsequent

[3] The research skills scale was developed by taking the strongly agree to strongly disagree score (1-4) for each of the specific skills and summing them into an overall score. Those whose total score was 9 or 10 were coded as agreeing that they had a set of skills. Those whose total scores were 11, 12, 13, or 14 were coded as having mixed skills, that is, agreeing that they had some skills but disagreeing that they had others. Those who had scores of 15 or above were coded as disagreeing that they possessed these sociological skills. This breakdown is somewhat arbitrary, however, and under-emphasizes agreement that skills were learned.

TABLE 1:
AGREEMENT ABOUT WHETHER MAJORS LEARNED RESEARCH SKILLS BY JOB CATEGORY *(In Percents)*

JOB CATEGORY	*LEARNED SKILLS IN BA PROGRAM*			
	STRONGLY AGREE	MIXED AGREE/ DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
Social Services	19.5	29.0	29.5	26.6
Clerical/administrative support	13.4	13.4	14.2	13.7
Management	16.1	11.2	10.9	12.4
Teachers, Librarians	11.4	11.2	8.7	10.4
Services	10.7	7.6	11.5	9.7
Sales, marketing	10.1	8.9	8.7	9.2
Social Science Researchers	8.1	9.4	7.1	8.3
Others	3.4	4.9	4.9	4.5
Other Professionals (including PR and IT)	7.4	4.5	4.4	5.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ASA Research and Development Department, *What Can I do With a Bachelors in Sociology? A National Survey of Seniors Majoring in Sociology Wave I*, spring 2005, *Wave II*, spring 2007.

occupations. This relationship is not statistically significant, but the data show some patterns. For example, a higher percentage of those employed as managers, teachers or librarians, salespersons or marketers, as well as "other" professionals agreed more than they disagreed that they had learned the above-listed sociological research skills. In contrast, a higher percentage of those coded as employed in social service jobs disagreed rather than agreed that they had learned these skills, although the largest share of these respondents agreed that they had learned *some* skills (but not others).

For each of the specific skills in the skills scale, the scores of majors in social service jobs who disagreed that they had learned each skill were 8 percent to 13 percent higher than those who agreed. In contrast, a higher percentage of those who reported employment in social science research jobs agreed that they had learned this set of skills than the percentage of those who disagreed (data not shown). Because skills such as learning statistical packages, evaluating methods, and creating hypotheses tend to be taught in research methods courses, we would expect majors in social science research positions to use them on the job. However, many fewer graduates go into research occupations than social service occupations directly after earning a baccalaureate degree. It may be that those who were not adequately prepared or who did not learn these skills found jobs where they were less likely to be called upon to use them.

INCREASING THE CHANCES OF USING JOB SKILLS

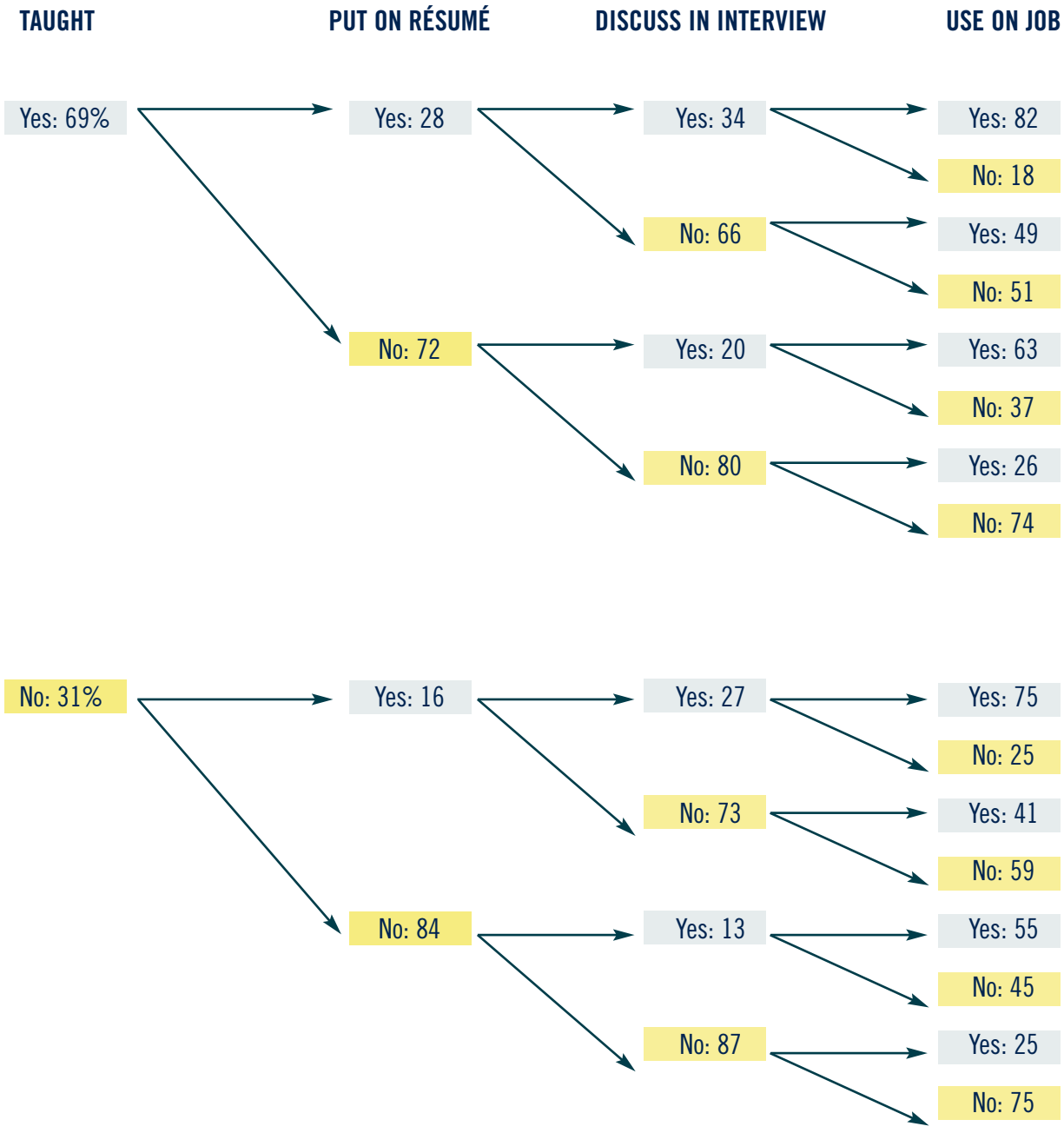
Regardless of job category, learning skills is not enough. Those majors who report communicating their sociological skills to potential employers are more likely to use them on the job than those who learned such skills but did not communicate their knowledge to potential employers. This pathway between learning skills and using them can be seen in the following two examples. Figures 2 and 3 show the pathways that take majors from reporting that they learned specific skills in college to reporting that they used them on the job.

In 2005, 69 percent of majors strongly agreed that they learned to evaluate different research methods before applying them, and 44 percent agreed that they had learned to use statistical software (including SPSS, STATA, or SAS). Of the 69 percent who strongly agreed that they had learned to evaluate different research methods, almost three quarters failed to list this skill on their resume. Of those who did not list the skill on their resume, 80 percent also did not discuss their ability to use this skill at a job interview. Perhaps this skill was irrelevant to the job they were pursuing, but 26 percent of those who did not list this skill on their resume or discuss it during a job interview ended up using this skill on the job. Contrast this level of usage with the experience of the 28 percent of majors who did report listing this skill on their resume. A third (34 percent) of this 28 percent also discussed it during an interview. Of those who listed this skill on their resume and discussed on the job interview, over 80 percent of them reported using the skill on the job. Those majors who identify, name, and single out their skills with potential employers are more than twice as likely to use them on the job.

Even those majors who did not strongly agree that they learned to evaluate research methods, listing and discussing this skill increased the likelihood of using it on the job. Of this 31 percent, 16 percent put it on their resume and 27 percent discussed it in job interviews. Of those who did discuss it during an interview, 75 percent reported using the skill on their jobs.

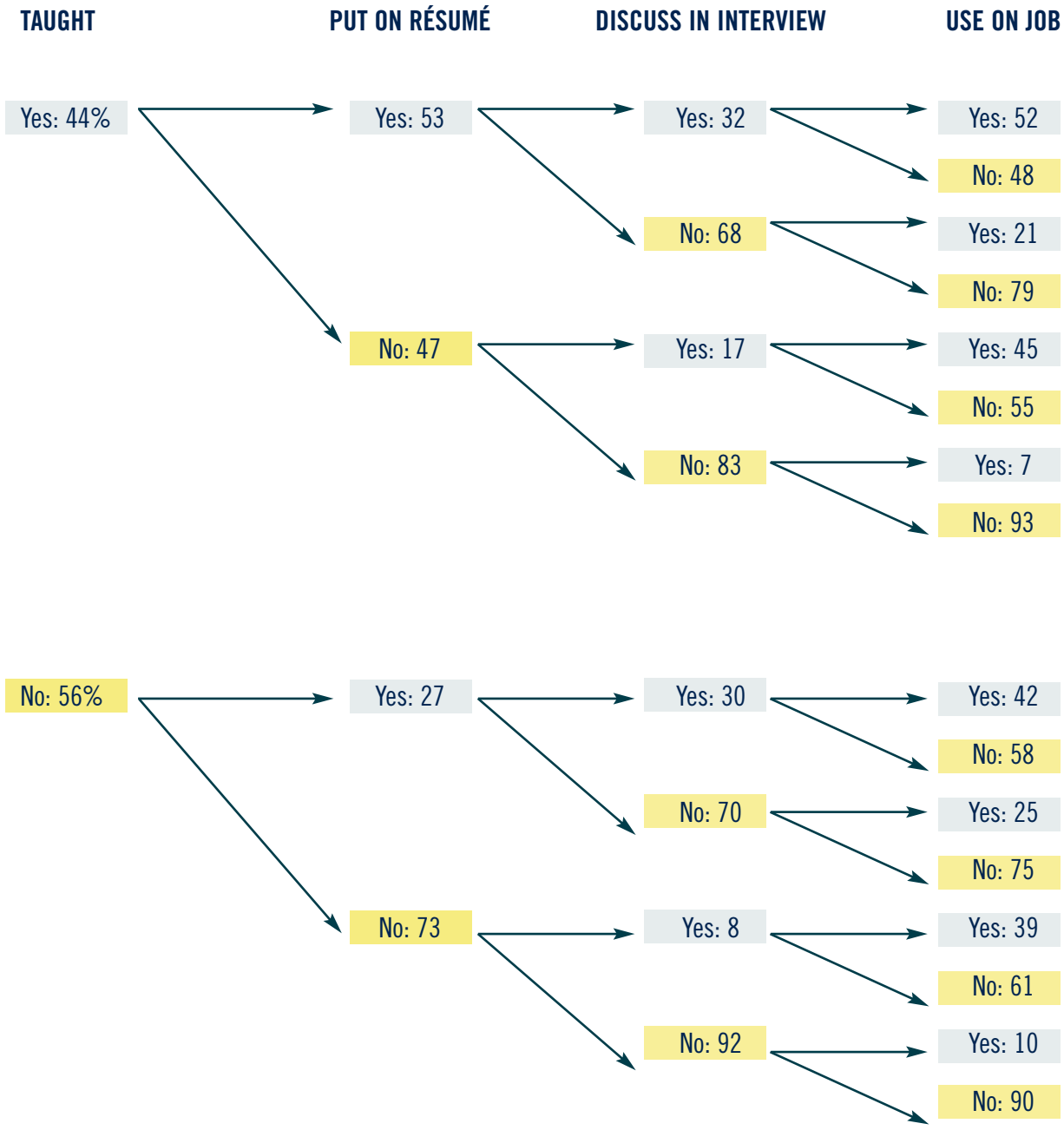
Similar outcomes are found following the pathway from learning statistical packages for the social sciences as a sociology major to using these packages on the job. Of the 44 percent of majors who strongly agreed that they had learned to use a statistical package, almost half (47 percent) did not list the skill on their resume and 83 percent did not discuss their ability to use statistical packages during a job interview. Of these few (7 percent) used a statistical package on their jobs. This is in contrast to the 44 percent of majors who strongly agreed that they learned this skill as a part of the sociology major, listed this skill on their resume (53 percent of those who learned it) and discussed it during a job interview (32 percent of those who listed it on their resume). More than half of these majors (52 percent) reported using one of these packages on the job. Again those sociology majors who identify, list, and discuss their skills are many times more likely to use them on the job than those who do not.

FIGURE 2: ARE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIOLOGY SKILLS USED ON THE JOB?
Evaluate Different Research Methods *(In Percents)*



Source: ASA Research and Development Department, *What Can I Do With a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology? Wave I and Wave II*

FIGURE 3: ARE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIOLOGY SKILLS USED ON THE JOB?
Use statistical Software (SAS, SPSS, Stata) *(In Percents)*



Source: ASA Research and Development Department, *What Can I Do With a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology? Wave I and Wave II*

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SKILLS AND THE CLOSENESS OF A JOB TO SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES

A minority of majors (20.2%) reported that the jobs they held 18 months after graduation were very closely related to their sociological studies. Almost half (48.7 percent) reported that their current job was somewhat related to sociology, and an additional 31.1 percent reported that their jobs were unrelated to sociology.

As Table 2 shows, those majors who reported that their jobs were closely related to sociology were the most likely to report that they used sociological research skills on the job. In contrast, those who reported that their jobs were unrelated to sociology were the least likely majors to report using sociological research skills. For example, more than half of those who reported that their job was closely related to sociology said that they used sociological research skills most of the time, compared to 33.7 percent of majors who reported using research skills only some of the time, and 9.6 percent who did not report using these skills. In contrast, many fewer (14.4 percent) of those majors who reported that their job was not related to their sociological studies reported using research skills most of the time.

The relationship between skills used on the job and the closeness of the job to sociology is significant and important because those majors who strongly agree that their job is closely related to sociology also report being highly satisfied with their job. This finding is from a logistic regression model whose purpose is to explain overall job satisfaction. A key variable that is significantly related to majors' job satisfaction is the job's closeness to sociology (see Appendix I). While other job-related variables, including skills used on the job and reasons for majoring, are related to the closeness of the job to sociology, they are not directly related to majors' job satisfaction. Control variables such as race and gender are not significantly related to job satisfaction, although having a parent with a college degree is. This suggests that parents with more social capital may be able to help new sociology graduates obtain more satisfying jobs than parents with less social capital.

TABLE 2: RELATIONSHIP OF JOBS TO SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES VERSUS SKILLS USED ON THE JOB *(In Percents)*

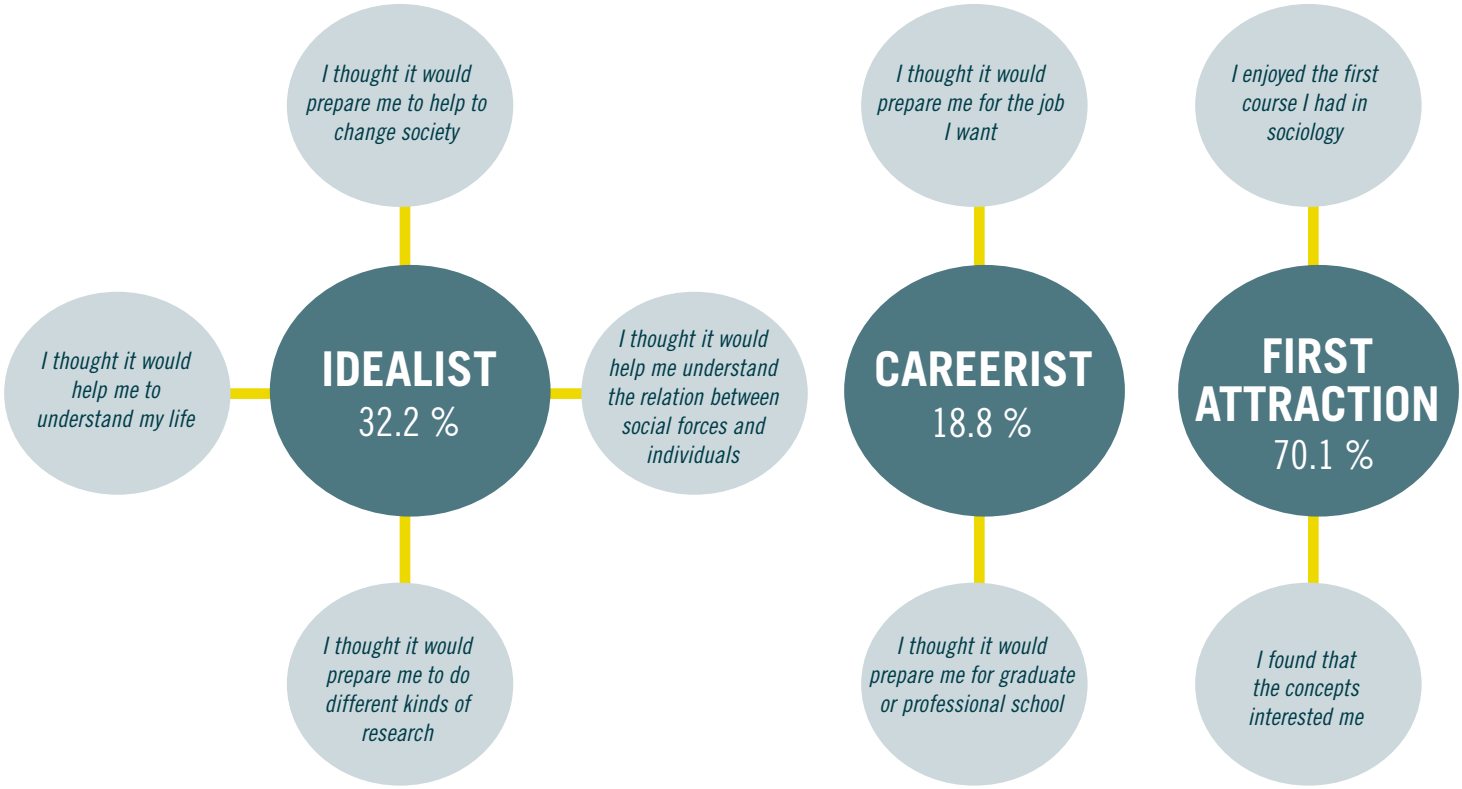
	HOW CLOSELY IS YOUR JOB RELATED TO THE SKILLS LEARNED FOR YOUR SOCIOLOGY DEGREE?		
HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE THESE SKILLS ON THE JOB?	**CLOSELY RELATED**	**SOMEWHAT RELATED**	**NOT RELATED**
Very often	56.7%	29.3%	14.4%
Sometimes	33.7%	43.7%	28.7%
Not very often	9.6%	27.0%	56.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	N = 104	N = 270	N = 174

Source: ASA Research and Development Department, *What Can I do With a Bachelors in Sociology? A National Survey of Seniors Majoring in Sociology Wave I*, spring 2005, *Wave II*, spring 2007.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REASONS FOR MAJORING IN SOCIOLOGY AND TYPE OF JOB

The 2005 sample of sociology majors was asked about 15 possible reasons for majoring in sociology. They rated each reason from 1 "very important" to 4 "very unimportant." A principal components analysis grouped these 15 reasons into 4 categories. These categories were defined as "idealists," "careerists," and "first attraction" reasons for choosing sociology (see Figure 4). Idealists were majors who said that "very important" reasons included "I thought it would

FIGURE 4: WHY DID THEY MAJOR IN SOCIOLOGY?[4]



[4] The three scales shown in this Figure were created from multiple response items and therefore do not add to 100%. Each scale had a statistically significant relation to type of job, although we cannot tell if one is significant compared to the other. The scales were constructed in similar ways. The Idealist scale was constructed by dichotomizing each of its 4 component variables. For each variable, 0 included all respondents who responded with "Very unimportant", "Unimportant", or "Somewhat important", and 1 included all responses of "Very important". The four dichotomous variables were summed to create a scale ranging from 0 to 4, in which "4" consists of respondents who said all four reasons were "Very important". Respondents who scored 3 or 4 on this scale were considered Idealist. The Careerist scale was constructed by dichotomizing its two component variables into the same two response categories used for the Idealist scale. The two dichotomous variables were added to create a scale ranging from 0 to 2, in which "2" consists of respondents who said both reasons were "Very important". Respondents who scored 2 were considered Careerists. The two variables in the First Attraction scale were used to construct it the same way as the Careerist scale.

TABLE 3: REASONS FOR MAJORING IN SOCIOLOGY BY JOB CATEGORY? *(In Percents)*

JOB CATEGORY	IDEALIST	CAREERIST	FIRST ATTRACTION	TOTAL
Social Services	26.0	32.1	28.5	26.8
Clerical/Administrative Support	15.8	15.6	14.8	14.2
Management	9.7	9.2	9.7	11.8
Teachers, Librarians	12.8	8.3	10.2	10.3
Services	6.1	13.8	9.0	9.8
Sales, Marketing	8.7	4.6	9.3	9.3
Social Science Researchers	10.7	9.2	8.6	8.2
Others	3.1	4.6	3.7	4.1
Other Professionals (including PR and IT)	7.1	2.8	6.3	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ASA Research and Development Department, *What Can I do With a Bachelors in Sociology? A National Survey of Seniors Majoring in Sociology Wave I*, spring 2005, *Wave II*, spring 2007.

help prepare me to change society" and "I thought it would help me understand the relation between social forces and individuals." Careerists checked as "very important", "I thought it would prepare me for the job I want" and "I thought it would prepare me for graduate or professional school". First Attraction majors checked "I enjoyed the first course I had in sociology" and "I found that the concepts interested me" as "very important."

Since majors could check "very important" for as many reasons as they thought applied to them, these categories are not mutually exclusive. The 15 reasons are therefore, multiple response questions. Like all multiple response items, respondents can and do fall into more than one category and the responses add up to more than 100 percent. For an exact description of how the scales were constructed, see the footnote to Figure 4.

One third of the majors (32.1 percent) responded in 2005 as idealists and 18.8 percent responded as careerists. The majority of majors (70.1 percent) responded that very important reasons for majoring in sociology were the attraction of their first sociology course or because the concepts interested them. The fourth category consisted of a small number of majors who considered sociology a "flexible and convenient major" (not shown in this figure).

How do the reasons for majoring, reported in 2005, match with the job categories majors reported in 2007 (see Table 3)? Although the findings suggest some patterns, none are significant. Those majors who were employed as clerical workers and administrators, teachers and librarians, social science researchers, or in "other" professions were more likely to be "idealists" than "careerists" (e.g., teachers and librarians were 12.8

percent of the idealists and 8.3 percent of the careerists). In contrast, those in social service and service jobs (including those in the criminal justice system), and others were more likely to be "careerists". Managers were the only occupational category of majors who were more likely to have majored in sociology because it was a flexible and convenient program (not shown in Table 3). As the Table shows, both careerists and idealists can be found in the same kind of occupations, suggesting that being an idealist does not stop sociology graduates from obtaining a wide variety of positions in the job market. The jobs of both those who scored highest on the idealist scale and those who scored highest on the careerist scale were significantly more closely related to sociology than those with lower scores.

CONCLUSION

These findings suggest several important pathways to job satisfaction for 778 sociology baccalaureates 18 months after their graduation in 2005. One pathway includes learning sociological skills, communicating them to potential employers, and using them on the job. Another pathway includes majoring in sociology for idealist or careerist reasons and obtaining a job that is closely related to sociological studies. The pathways do not relate to specific occupations; rather these majors are employed in a wide variety of jobs, with social service work as the largest category.

The findings also suggests several directions for departments interested in improving the attractiveness of a sociology degree, increasing the likelihood that graduates will use sociological research skills on the job, and improving majors' job satisfaction after graduation.

Over 70 percent of majors were initially attracted to sociology by their first course, typically, a "Sociology 101" introductory course. This finding underlines the vital importance of high quality introductory courses in attracting majors.

Given the vast majority of majors in the labor market after graduation, career counseling should consider how to increase awareness of local labor markets, regardless of whether students' reasons for majoring in sociology reflect an idealist, careerist or other perspective. The 2005 survey indicates fewer than one-quarter of majors reported being satisfied with the career advising that they received as undergraduates. Career counseling should increase students' awareness of what the useful job skills they are learning as majors so that graduates know they should list them on their resumes and discuss them on job interviews. The data show that graduates who report listing skills on their resumes and discussing them at job interviews have a greater likelihood of using these skills on the job than those who do not. Those who use these skills on the job report that their jobs are close to their undergraduate sociological studies, and the closer their job to their sociological studies, the greater their job satisfaction.

Majors attracted to sociology for both careerist and idealist reasons differ in what they expect from their degree. Idealists want to be prepared to change society and to understand their lives. Careerists want to be prepared for a job or further schooling. But both go on to be employed, and those who score high on these scales are significantly more likely to have jobs that are close to sociology than those who have other reasons for majoring in sociology. Departments should consider offering courses that cater to students with each of these orientations. A curriculum strong in only one area may cause potential majors to go elsewhere to find a department that better meets their needs.

Finally, departments might consider whether a greater availability of and participation in internships, sociology honors clubs and programs, faculty research, state or regional sociology meetings, and faculty mentoring programs would increase student's social networks and the awareness of the skills they are acquiring in their major. Fewer than one-third of graduates reported participating in any of these activities. These activities may be especially important, however, in creating social capital for the more than half of sociology major's parents do not have a college degree and may not have career information and contacts to pass on to their children. We will examine the impact of these activities on majors' work experience in another research brief.

APPENDIX 1

MULTIVARIATE PREDICTION OF JOB SATISFACTION

Variable	Category	Coeff.	S.E.	df	Sig.
Is degree related to job?	Closely related	2.30	.50	1	.00
	Somewhat related	1.72	.30	1	.00
Frequency of skills used	Often	.10	.37	1	.78
	Sometimes	.59	.33	1	.07
Skills taught scale	Many	.07	.36	1	.84
	Some	.05	.32	1	.88
Idealist scale	Not important	.62	.49	1	.21
	Slightly important	.58	.48	1	.23
	Somewhat	.57	.47	1	.22
	Fairly important	.41	.48	1	.39
Careerist scale	Not important	-.47	.40	1	.25
	Somewhat	-.64	.45	1	.15
Flexible, convenient major	Not important	.36	1.14	1	.75
	Slightly important	.38	1.16	1	.74
	Somewhat	-.37	1.18	1	.75
First attraction scale	Not important	-.41	.56	1	.46
	Somewhat	-.25	.32	1	.44
Amount learned via degree	Little	-.01	.33	1	.99
Gender	Male	.24	.34	1	.49
Race	White	-.07	.52	1	.89
	Black	.20	.69	1	.78
	Hispanic	-.48	.68	1	.48
Parents highest ed.	Some High School	1.57	1.18	1	.18
	High School Grad	-.02	.43	1	.96
	Vocational Grad	1.03	.72	1	.15
	Some College	-.11	.37	1	.76
	College Grad	.86	.40	1	.03
	Some Grad School	.08	.54	1	.88
Constant		-.35	1.34	1	.80

N=464
-2 log likelihood: 379.7
Cox & Snell R-Square: .162
Nagelkerke R-Square: .257

Omitted categories: Is degree related to job: Unrelated; Frequency of skills used: Never; Skills taught scale: None: Idealist scale: Very important; Careerist scale: Very important; Flexible, convenient major: Very important; First attraction: Very important; Amount learned via degree: Much; Gender: Female; Race: All other; Parents highest ed: Graduate or professional school

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