

Preparing for a 21st Century Job Hunt with a BA in Sociology

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The transition from college to the working world can be daunting. For sociology majors, many of whom help to translate their education into meaningful work, the transition sometimes proves even more complicated. While the sociology major provides students with a variety of transferrable skills, it can leave room for interpretation on how the sociological skill set and sociological imagination can prepare students for successful and meaningful careers. Through resumes, cover letters, and interviews, sociology graduates can promote their critical thinking, research, and analytic skills, which can be applied to a wide range of positions. It is my hope that this article can serve as a primer for the 21st century job hunt, and help alleviate some of the anxiety that often arises as college comes to an end.

Do Some Research

The good news is that you can harness the skills you acquire in sociology and apply them to a variety of fields. To get an idea of the kind of jobs that are out there for sociology majors, look at research on what recent graduates are doing, such as the *Bachelors and Beyond* research series from the ASA Research Department). The brief, *Jobs, Careers and Sociological Skills: The Early Employment Experiences of 2012 Sociology Majors* (2015), reported that the largest number of sociology graduates were employed in social services or as counselors (21.9%). Interestingly, those

employed in social services or as counselors were also more likely to report overall satisfaction in their careers. And those satisfied with their jobs report higher use and application of sociological concepts in their day-to-day duties.

While social service jobs may seem like a natural application for sociology students, the skills acquired with the degree provide a foundation for a variety of fields. Graduates have gone on to teaching positions, research, information technology, public relations, and sales and marketing roles (ASA 2015). The key is describing how your degree offers the skills employers want.

The task of actually searching for jobs can feel overwhelming. While everyone needs to log a certain amount of time searching online, there are other meaningful and effective ways you can learn about careers, secure interviews, and land rewarding jobs.

Online Job Boards

Most graduates begin their job search on online job boards. *Idealist* is a job board on which non-profit and non-governmental organizations post directly. *Simply Hired* and *Indeed* are Google-like job aggregators. They pull together postings from a wide variety of company websites, job boards, and newspapers.

Below are the results from searches I conducted on *Idealist*. The search terms listed here can serve as a starting point for your search.

The term "sociology" yielded very few results, which is why creativ-

ity is important when doing a job search. In a recent ASA Department Affiliates webinar, Loren Collins, a career advisor at Humboldt State University, shared the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) examples of the top 10 skills employers want. Some examples are communication skills, ability to work in a team, problem solving, organizational skills, and quantitative data analysis. By examining this list, it becomes clear that an applicant with a sociology degree holds many of the traits employers want.

The numbers of job postings drop significantly when you filter for entry-level positions. It is not a requirement to apply for an entry-level position right after college, so if you see other positions posted, consider applying. Draw on job experiences you had during college and skills you learned in your courses. Use any internships or service work as examples of job experience.

Experts in the field of recruitment and human resources say that job boards are a good way to gather information, but may not be the final portal to landing a satisfying job. That isn't to say applicants don't have success applying to a position directly from an online job posting, but that may be the exception and not the rule.

So what else can job boards help with? They can assist in learning about your field of interest. Do you dream of working as a social media manager for a nonprofit? Check out some of the job posts in this field. Getting a sense of the daily

responsibilities of your ideal job will help you understand what would be expected of you, as well as offer some insight on the reality of the job. If you look at the job boards prior to being on the job market, you can begin to research some of the skills and qualifications needed for your ideal job and work toward gaining them before graduation. Do you see an organization with many openings? Explore their website. Try to find a person within the organization to contact directly with an application. Often job boards direct you to a generic inbox where applications can get lost in the shuffle.

I recommend finding an entry-level employee holding a position similar to one you want for yourself. Ask them for an informational interview. This informal meeting is a great way to learn about their personal experience, how they managed to land their job, and their day-to-day responsibilities.

Resources at Your Doorstep (or closer)

Networking is an important part of searching for a job. By reaching out to personal connections as well as using social media, you can increase your chances of learning about job openings, landing an interview, and receiving a job offer.

You should take advantage of the job search resources you have in your own backyard. If you are a current student, find out what career services your university or college offers. Talk to your department chair. I stress this point: use the free resources available on your campus. Ask about job training and internships and resume writing and interview workshops.

Talk to your professors about your interests and what you hope to do with your degree. It is possible they have a former student who now works for an agency aligned with a field of interest. Even if they don't have a contact, they could serve as a professional reference or write a recommendation for graduate school.

LinkedIn: Get on it! Networking is important and LinkedIn can serve as a starting point. I have spoken

Search terms	# of jobs posted (filtered for 4-year degree and full time) on Idealist	# of jobs posted (filtered for full time, 4 year degree, and entry-level) on Idealist
sociology	138	4
program assistant	2,703	232
research assistant	1,468	168
social media	1,077	94
case management	753	53
education	4,514	354
social services	2,183	169

*search conducted on 12/16/15 and includes results from the United States only

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to individuals in management roles who report checking a candidate's LinkedIn page as the first step in the applicant review process. It is also a good place to connect with individuals who work for organizations or fields that interest you. LinkedIn can also be an alternative when it's difficult to make it to the "young professional" face-to-face happy hours, or if you live in a town that doesn't offer them. When you set up your LinkedIn account be sure to join the ASA LinkedIn group.

Alumni associations: Most major cities have alumni association chapters. They often organize networking events. If you are on the job hunt it may make sense to attend some of these events. People WHO have gotten jobs with the help of alumni or other contacts may be willing to pay it forward.

Don't Forget Why You Studied Sociology

A 2014 ASA "BA and Beyond" research brief revealed that appli-

cants who put sociology-related skills on their resume, regardless of the level of mastery, felt more confident and received more job offers. The takeaway: Remember why sociology inspires you, be confident, and sell yourself. Your degree will get you in the door and then the rest is on the job training. Graduates are happy they chose sociology because its meaning and relevance goes beyond a career; it sets you up to be a critical thinker and a productive and contributing member of society. Good luck with your job search!

Additional Resources

- *21st Century Careers with an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology.* This popular booklet contains profiles of sociology graduates who are applying their degree in a variety of fields, as well as more tips for navigating today's job market.
- *Nuts and Bolts of Applying for a Job with a Bachelors Degree in Sociology.* Chairs in ASA Affiliate departments can

access this webinar recording via the department portal. Gather a group of students together for a viewing.

Contact apap@asanet.org with any questions or comments.

Jaime Hecht has a BS in sociology from Florida State University and a MA in applied sociology from the University of Central Florida. ☺

References

Senter, Mary Robert Spalter-Roth, Nicole Van Vooren. 2012. *Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates Survey.* Washington, DC: Department of Research and Development on the Discipline and Profession, American Sociological Association.

Spalter-Roth, Nicole Van Vooren, Mary Senter. 2014. *Recent Sociology Alumni: Would they Major Again.* Washington, DC: Department of Research and Development on the Discipline and Profession, American Sociological Association.

American Sociological Association. 2013. *21st Century Careers with an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology.* Washington, DC: Teaching Resources Center, American Sociological Association.

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an extended one) when there will be confusion at the local IRB level regarding the decisions about how specific research projects will be handled. In order to avoid delays, sociologists embarking upon research projects during this period would be well advised to be conversant with the proposed changes.

In addition, the ASA *Code of Ethics*, which is currently in the process of revision, will reflect any changes in the Common Rule (see www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm). This will likely affect those standards dealing research, informed consent, and confidentiality. Since the membership of the ASA must approve any changes to the *Code of Ethics*, all recommended changes will be publicized and open for comment. At our workshop in Seattle we will further elaborate the changes in the Common Rule and their implications for the revisions to the Code. ☺

announcements

Correction

The February issue of Footnotes incorrectly listed Douglas Anderton's affiliation. The announcement should have been "Douglas L. Anderton, University of South Carolina and a Fellow of the American Statistical Association, has been elected to the International Statistical Institute."

Call for Papers

Publications

Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum, will turn its attention in a forthcoming special issue to articles that offer critiques of any one of the five core social science disciplines, including sociology, combined with proposals for catalyzing reform of that discipline. Theme: "Rebuilding the Core Disciplines to Discover what is Humanly Possible and How to Achieve It." The journal seeks articles offering specific measures and proposals for rebuilding the core social science disciplines to focus on discovering the "scientific" theories and "laws" of human group and individual behaviors as a basis for designing technologies for social justice and social betterment. Deadline: May 1, 2016. Contact: David Lempert at superlemp@yahoo.com. For more information, visit: www.trace.tennessee.edu/catalyst/.

Intersectionality and Images of Female Aggression in 21st Century Media

is seeking submissions on female aggression. Aggressive women saturate the media. Even concern of aggression among young girls has increased with scholars, educators, and parents scrambling to respond to bullying, peer pressure, and social manipulation. This collection uses an intersectional lens to analyze how "aggressive girls" are treated in the media and the criminal justice system. The book is intended to be a reference for researchers, policymakers, professionals, and students interested in images of female aggression and violence in popular culture. Submit an abstract of 500-700 words. Deadline: May 31, 2016. Contact: Krista McQueeney at mcqueeneyk@merimack.edu.

Michigan Sociological Review (MSR)

invites submissions for vol. 30 (Fall 2016). MSR is the official, peer-reviewed publication of the Michigan Sociological Association. As an interdisciplinary, double-blind peer-reviewed journal, it welcomes previously unpublished manuscripts exploring a broad range of theoretical, methodological, and empirical questions. To submit, send an e-mail with two files attached: one that has all author identification removed, and a second file with author contact

information, biography of no more than 100 words, and any acknowledgements. All files should be in .doc format, using ASA citation style. Deadline: May 15, 2016. Contact: Brigitte Bechtold, at becht1bh@cmich.edu

Teaching Sociology invites submissions for its upcoming Special Issue on "Incorporating Globalization in the Sociology Curriculum." *Teaching Sociology* seeks articles and notes that address issues which focus on innovative approaches that incorporate globalization and transnational concerns in the curriculum. Topics of interest are: Effective strategies that make global and transnational concerns evident to students. Exercises or assignments that engage students in the study of global and transnational concerns. Strategies of orchestrating transnational learning experiences, such as class trips abroad. Critical reviews of ways that global and transnational content are presented in the curriculum. Deadline: February 1, 2017. Contact: Patti Giuffre at pg07@txstate.edu; or Stephen Sweet at teachingsociology@ithaca.edu. For more information, visit: www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal201974.

Conferences

Association for Humanist Sociology 2016 Annual Meeting, November

2-6, Denver, CO. Theme: "Elevating Humanity: Pathways to Progressivism." At this meeting certain questions about a more progressive society will be asked, such as: what would it look like and how do we get there from here? What are the obstacles and impediments and how can they be overcome? Submit papers and sessions which enhance understanding of social issues and problems, while focusing on strategies, movements, and collective efforts that strive to bring about humanistic solutions and progressive change. Deadline: June 15, 2016. Contact: Chuck Koeber and Bhoomi K. Thakore, at ahsdenver2016@gmail.com. For more information, visit: humanist-sociology.org.

International Conference on Well-Being: National Accounts of Happiness and Social Development, October 31– November 1, 2016, SIM University, Singapore. The broad concept of well-being is closely linked to many key societal and life outcomes, such as family relationships, health, work, wealth and quality of life. In view of its importance, an increasing number of national governments are using research findings on well-being as a guide for public policy. Abstracts are now being accepted. Deadline: May 9, 2016. For more information, visit