



Stony Brook University

Department of Sociology

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY

Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists investigate the structure of groups, organizations, and societies, and how people interact within these contexts. Since all human behavior is social, the subject matter of sociology ranges from the intimate family to the hostile mob; from organized crime to religious cults; from the divisions of race, gender and social class to the shared beliefs of a common culture; and from the sociology of work to the sociology of sports. In fact, few fields have such broad scope and relevance for research, theory, and application of knowledge.

Sociology provides many distinctive perspectives on the world, generating new ideas and critiquing the old. The field also offers a range of research techniques that can be applied to virtually any aspect of social life: street crime and delinquency, corporate downsizing, how people express emotions, welfare or education reform, how families differ and flourish, or problems of peace and war. Because sociology addresses the most challenging issues of our time, it is a rapidly expanding field whose potential is increasingly tapped by those who craft policies and create programs. Sociologists understand social inequality, patterns of behavior, forces for social change and resistance, and how social systems work. As the following pages convey, sociology is an exciting discipline with expanding opportunities for a wide range of career paths.

~Careers in Sociology, The American Sociological Association

10 Jobs That Are Great for Sociology Majors (Plus Expert Advice on How to Land One)

By [Rebeca Piccardo](#)

Sociology is one of those majors with no set path after graduation, which can be scary as you're planning to enter the workforce for the first time. The trade-off is that you'll actually have a lot of flexibility in what you do with your degree and you can take your career in so many different directions.

"I was a first-generation college student and when I was about to graduate, that's when my parents were like, 'Wait, you're majoring in what?'" says Cristina Rojas, an undergraduate advisor at the University of California, Berkeley, and one of the more than three million people in the workforce who has a sociology degree. "It can feel a little daunting, but I think that if a student gives themselves permission to explore a major that they would enjoy and can excel at, there [are] a lot of skills that they're going to gain in the process."

While some sociology majors may go on to become sociologists or otherwise earn a master's, doctorate, or law degree (as former first lady Michelle Obama did), what students learn as undergraduates in this field is already relevant to so many jobs and industries, from business to healthcare to education.

How a Sociology Degree Can Set You Up for Success

Sociology students study human behavior, social interaction, and the structures and groups (from individual families to religious communities to entire demographics) that make up society. In the process, they develop what are known as soft skills, which say more about how you think and work rather than what specific, technical knowledge you may have. "Like a lot of liberal arts majors, it's not like a set content knowledge that you're learning," says Muse career coach Jillian Lucas, a sociology graduate and founder of JML Career Coaching. "It's more about teaching you these transferable skills and how to think and how to learn and there are so many applications for that."

Sociology graduates usually have great interpersonal skills—such as teamwork, collaboration, and empathy—and an understanding of diversity and social dynamics because so much of their curriculum involves group work and learning about different contexts and cultures, Lucas says. Employers in almost any field appreciate candidates who can work well with others, whether it's with your coworkers, clients, customers, or patients.

The major helps students gain written and verbal communication skills from writing reports, presenting findings, and making arguments in class. Students also learn how to use various research methods; how to gather and analyze data that's qualitative (interviews, focus groups) and quantitative (surveys, statistics); and how to navigate the ethical issues involved in research.

While a lot of these more technical skills prepare you for a career in sociology, knowing how to research, write, and present information is crucial in so many other jobs as well. This course of study “teaches you to read and synthesize information, to solve problems, and to see the bigger picture of the things that you’re working on,” says Erynn Masi de Casanova, director of research, professional development, and academic affairs at the American Sociological Association.

Here are 10 roles you might consider pursuing if you have a bachelor’s in sociology—many of which don’t require any graduate-level education. Salary information comes from the compensation resource PayScale, reflecting numbers from June 2021 (their database is updated nightly).

1. Learning and Development Specialist

Average salary: \$62,024

Salary range: \$46,000–\$87,000

Learning and development specialists design and lead programs to help employees improve their skills and knowledge at companies across a variety of industries. In practice, the job often involves administering surveys and conducting interviews with employees or managers to assess training needs as well as facilitating various types of training sessions, which could be in the form of group discussions, team exercises, or self-guided videos. Programs can cover topics such as leadership, conflict resolution, ethics, and time management.

Analytical thinking and communication skills are essential to be successful in the role, and sociology students are particularly well suited because they have a sense of how organizations work and what challenges they face, Casanova says. Although you don’t need a master’s in this role, many employers require related work experience in areas like education (either teaching or working in instructional design) or human resources. You could also gain an edge on the competition by completing a certification program through an organization like the Association for Talent Development. Learning and development specialists can advance to roles like training and development manager or human resources manager.

2. Social Worker

Average salary: \$48,884

Salary range: \$35,000–\$70,000

Social workers help people cope with and navigate the logistics of a broad range of issues in their everyday lives, including housing, unemployment, mental health, substance abuse, domestic conflict, and child welfare. They could be employed at schools, hospitals, senior centers, health clinics, and various public and private agencies that serve people in need.

“There’s a common thread among people who choose to major in sociology in that they want to help people and they want to improve their communities and improve their society,” Casanova

says. “A lot of undergrads that I’ve taught find jobs in nonprofit organizations or in social service agencies because that’s what they liked about sociology.”

Although a bachelor’s degree is the most common requirement, you’ll likely be required to have a master’s in social work as well as a professional license—either the licensed master social worker (LMSW) or the licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).

3. HR Coordinator

Average salary: \$47,851

Salary range: \$38,000–\$61,000

Human resources or HR professionals manage the issues that affect the workforce within an organization, including recruitment, compensation, benefits, training, and workplace safety. In an HR role, you could be answering employee questions about topics like benefits, payroll, and company policy; helping with new hire onboarding; planning training sessions and team-building activities; maintaining employment records and processing paperwork; scheduling candidate interviews; and more.

Human resources is often a natural fit for sociology majors because they develop strong interpersonal and communication skills, as well as a broad understanding of social dynamics in the world of work. “You develop this really strong social and cultural perspective and understanding, and that’s really needed in a global work environment: to be able to work effectively and communicate effectively with others who aren’t like you,” Lucas says.

There are many ways to grow in HR. You can become a specialist in areas like recruitment or onboarding or work as a generalist—and, either way, you could go on to become a manager or director.

4. Paralegal

Average salary: \$49,095

Salary range: \$35,000–\$72,000

Paralegals help lawyers prepare for hearings, trials, and other important meetings by gathering facts and evidence, preparing legal documents, and conducting research on any relevant laws to a case. Sociology majors are a good fit for this because they know how to properly gather and interpret information. There’s a lot of paperwork and teamwork involved as well, so written and verbal communication skills are also important.

Paralegals can specialize in a particular area of the law, such as corporate, criminal, bankruptcy, immigration, family, or real estate law. Senior paralegals can take on more complex legal work on behalf of attorneys and even supervise their own team of paralegals. It’s also a good stepping stone for someone considering going to law school.

5. Urban Planner

Average salary: \$58,381

Salary range: \$43,000–\$88,000

Urban planners help shape what communities look like. They are responsible for developing short- and long-term solutions to improve infrastructure and revitalize areas based on the community's needs. This can include planning new parks, buildings, streets, and neighborhoods. "Planners use both macro-level understanding of how society works and the micro level, like how people go about living their everyday lives, and sociology students are trained in both of those," Casanova says.

The discipline requires a lot of research and analysis, such as reviewing environmental impact studies and census data, as well as working with public officials and community members when developing a plan for land use. "There's a strong expectation now in urban planning that you get the community's input when you're going to change something, whether you're going to build something or change the layout of a neighborhood," Casanova says. "Sociology students are really well placed to lead those kinds of conversations."

To become an urban planner, you need a master's degree from an urban or regional planning program accredited by an organization such as the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB).

6. Community Health Worker

Average salary: \$39,264

Salary range: \$30,000–\$51,000

Community health worker, or CHW, is an umbrella term that describes a variety of frontline professionals who act as liaisons between health organizations—including hospitals, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies—and the general public. In simple terms, they deal with the human side of healthcare, usually helping underserved communities and focusing on promoting health initiatives like educating people on the importance of preventive health screenings and addressing any potential barriers to healthcare access.

Howard Aldrich, a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says he's noticed an increasing interest among students in fields like healthcare. In fact, UNC started a minor program within the sociology major called health and society. "Quite a few of the students don't want to become doctors, but they want to work in the healthcare field and so that means they need to understand the social relationships," he says.

Although you don't need more education after your bachelor's degree, some states have certification programs for community health workers.

7. Market Research Analyst

Average salary: \$54,735

Salary range: \$41,000–\$75,000

Market research analysts help companies understand what products and services people want, which consumers are willing to buy them, and what price point would make sense. They do this by evaluating data collected on consumer behavior through interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, market analysis surveys, and public opinion polls to forecast future trends. This type of role appeals to sociology students who are well-versed in research methods and statistical analysis from their coursework.

Although you can get your start in this field with a bachelor's degree, an advanced degree (like an MBA) or a chartered financial analyst (CFA) certification is preferred by many employers. It's also likely you would need a master's degree in statistics, marketing research, or another related field to move into leadership roles or positions that perform more technical research.

8. Public Relations Specialist

Average salary: \$50,122

Salary range: \$36,000–\$74,000

Public relations (PR) specialists are responsible for managing an organization's external communication and public image. This includes drafting press releases, responding to media requests, writing and delivering speeches, and more. Depending on the company, PR specialists are also sometimes called communications or media specialists, and in government roles, they tend to be referred to as public information officers or press secretaries.

The ability to present information and communicate ideas effectively is a huge part of the job, and sociology majors are trained to do just that. Their understanding of society and human behavior can also help them craft an effective message. "That's something that not only sociology but other social science or liberal arts degrees will prepare you for because you'll know how to get a message across in a clear way and be able to talk to different kinds of audiences," Casanova says.

You don't need more than a bachelor's degree to get this type of job, but employers will be looking for relevant experience (which you could gain through an internship) or proof that you have solid communication skills, whether that's through writing for your school's newspaper, leading a student group, or taking advanced sociology (or other) courses that require writing or public speaking.

9. Diversity Manager

Average salary: \$81,800

Salary range: \$55,000–\$124,000

A diversity manager, who's typically a part of an organization's human resources department, focuses on developing and implementing strategic initiatives that help attract and maintain a diverse workforce. Responsibilities include collecting and analyzing statistical data to evaluate the employee and candidate population, providing training sessions on diversity and inclusion topics, and making recommendations on policy updates.

Sociology graduates not only have the research and communication skills for this type of role, but they often have the cultural context needed to see the big picture and improve processes accordingly. Casanova says: "Sociology will give them a good understanding of how bias can shape hiring and promotion practices, for example. Or how organizations can change to be more equitable and inclusive."

Although holding a master's degree is preferred for this role, it's possible to make the jump with a bachelor's after gaining relevant HR experience.

10. School Counselor

Average salary: \$51,300

Salary range: \$38,000–\$74,000

School counselors help students navigate their academic careers and support their social development. Responsibilities vary depending on what age group they're working with. For example, for elementary school students, counselors may meet with parents or guardians to discuss their child's developmental progress, challenges, and needs; in middle school, counselors help prepare students for their transition to high school; and in high school, counselors advise students in making plans after graduation.

Because sociology students analyze all aspects of society and its many problems, they're often qualified to become agents of change in their communities. One way to make a difference in society is by working with children and addressing issues in education.

Most school counselors need a master's degree in school counseling or a related field and a state-issued credential.

Key Tips for Sociology Majors in the Job Search

Now that you've seen some of the many career possibilities you have as a sociology major, here are some specific things you can do to figure out your ideal path—and how to make yourself stand out as a candidate.

1. Get Some Real-World Experience

Gaining experience outside of class is crucial when you're a sociology major, not only to help you start building your resume, but also to identify what kind of work you'd be interested in doing after graduation. "It can be very challenging to earn a sociology degree and have a clear idea as to the job or career you want to pursue without some practical experience," says Tara Goodfellow, a Muse career coach and owner of Athena Consultants, Inc. "The more exposure and experience you can gain while earning your degree, the better. Even if it's to determine what you don't like, that's helpful."

You can seek out:

- **Internships:** Completing different internships allows you to explore areas that pique your interest to help you decide what to pursue, Lucas says. In her case, she wanted to explore the nonprofit world: "I really liked it, so I went on to work in nonprofit administration."
- **Experiential learning courses:** These types of courses take you outside the classroom to work on a project with community organizations, which gives opportunity to see the practical applications of what you're learning, Lucas says. "It's one thing to learn it and another thing to actually experience it in the community," she says. "It makes it come to life."
- **Research:** Working on a professor's or a grad student's research project—or conducting your own research with the guidance of a faculty member—provides hands-on research experience and looks great on a resume, Casanova says.

2. Connect With Alumni

Another good way to explore potential jobs that are a good fit for sociology majors is to look at what other recent grads are doing. You can look up alumni from your school via LinkedIn or a dedicated alumni directory, if your school has one, and see what career paths they've followed. "If you see someone doing something cool that you are curious about and want to learn more about, then reach out to them," Lucas says. "You never know what that can lead to. In fact, that's how I landed my first internship in college."

You can also check if your school hosts alumni events. For example, UC Berkeley's sociology department gives students the chance to hear from alums at panel discussions, where they get to ask questions and then mingle with folks who've been in their shoes, says Laura Enriquez, the department's director of undergraduate studies. "We are now doing, one to two times a year, an alumni night with our current students so they have some sense of all the different paths they can take after they graduate."

3. Highlight Relevant Skills and Experience on Your Resume

In addition to mentioning jobs, internships, and research on your resume, you can list specific courses you completed in your program if they're relevant to a role you're applying for, as well as volunteer roles and leadership positions that may help you stand out as a candidate, Goodfellow says.

It's also important to include specific skills on your resume, Casanova says. "So [for example], think about the statistical software that you used in your stats class, or any qualitative research methods that you used or practiced."

You can also use the skills you've identified to find the right jobs to apply to. "Don't search for jobs with 'sociology' in the title because you're not going to find any," Casanova says. "Look for jobs that require a bachelor's degree and involve some of the keywords that match up with your skills and interests, like 'research' or 'analysis.'"

And if you ever need extra help figuring out what's next for you once you graduate with your sociology degree, you can always turn to your school's career services office, both to help you think about which jobs would be a good fit and to make yourself competitive to go out and land those jobs.

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Rebeca Piccardo is an associate editor at The Muse, where she produces branded content focused on company profiles and employee career stories. Before joining The Muse, she was an editorial assistant at Interval International, reported for the Miami Herald, and worked as a staff writer at the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, where her crime and courts beat reporting was recognized at the Society of Professional Journalists' 2017 Sunshine State Awards. Rebeca holds a bachelor's in journalism with a minor in international relations from Florida International University and is fluent in English and Spanish. Find Rebeca on LinkedIn or Twitter, or visit her website.

CAREER OPTIONS FOR SOCIOLOGY MAJORS

Business

Administrative Assistant
Advertising Manager
Budget Analyst
Compensation/Benefits Specialist
Consumer Survey Advisor
Convention Organizer
Demographic Analyst
Human Resources Specialist
Insurance Agent/Broker
Labor Relations Representative
Marketing Research Analyst
Motivational Speaker
Personnel Interviewer
Public Relations Specialist
Sales Representative
Trainer

Government

City Planner
Congressional Aid
Data Analyst
Population Specialist
Public Administrator
Public Opinion Surveyor
Secret Service Agent
Social Welfare Examiner
U.S. Census Bureau

Corrections

Corrections Officer
Criminologist
Parole Officer
Probation Officer

College/University

Admissions Counselor
Financial Aid Director
Professor
Resident Assistant

Education

Elementary Teacher
High School Teacher
School Administrator
School Counselor

Human Services

Adoption Agent
Alcohol and Drug Case Worker
Career Counselor
Child Welfare Officer
Community Organizer
Community Relations Director
Community Service Agency Administrator
Consumer Advocate
Family Guidance Case Worker
Foster Care Worker
Fundraiser/Development Officer
Gerontologist
Human Services Worker
Marriage and Family Therapist
Peace Corps
Program Specialist
Social Service Program Director
Residential Counselor
Social Worker
Veterans Affairs Specialist
Welfare Counselor
Youth Counselor

Health Services

Health Care Worker
Hospital Administrator
Medical Social Worker
Public Health Educator
Public Health Statistician
Rehabilitation Counselor

Publishing/Journalism

Editor
News Correspondent
Reporter
Technical Writer
Writer/Author

Researcher

Demographer Assistant
Market Researcher
Social Scientist
Researcher
Research Assistant

Please note: Some of these jobs may require education beyond a bachelor's degree.