Guide to College Majors in Sociology

What is Sociology? Sociologists study human behavior as it pertains to human interaction within the guidelines of an organizational structure. The interaction between humans is more complex than the interactions between other animal species. Human behavior is greatly influenced and governed by social, religious, and legal guidelines. A sociologist studies these behaviors and the influences that preserve certain behaviors and change others. Sociology is a broad science, covering many different disciplines in the social sciences. Anthropology, archeology, and linguistics are the few disciplines that surpass what sociology readily encompasses. Sociology also studies more tangible measures of human behavior such as class or social status, social movements, criminal deviance, and even revolution.

Career Education in Sociology Because sociology-related careers are so diverse, one's education requirements vary from one position to the next. To ensure the proper degree or courses are available, future sociology majors should consider their ultimate career goals before enrolling in a degree program. Consider the following degree types: Diplomas, Certificates, and Associate Degrees in Sociology. Certificate programs in sociology give students a solid foundation in the field. Course time is typically equivalent of two full time semesters of work. The actual time required to obtain an online certificate in sociology varies depending on the educational institution and the individual student's learning pace.

Bachelor's Degrees in Sociology A bachelor's degree in sociology requires degree specific classes such as principles of sociology, social problems, statistical analysis, race and ethnicity, social deviance, social theory, sociology of business, sociology of politics, sociology of education, urban sociology, and social psychology. Many colleges and universities also expose sociology majors to key arts and science courses, including: composition, humanities, mathematics, general science, fine arts, history and a variety of electives. Many full-time students can complete their bachelor's degree in sociology in about four years. Part-time students can complete their course work in four to seven years, depending on their own learning pace and their outside commitments.

What Can You Do With a College Degree in Sociology? It is common for those with sociology degrees to seek employment in one of the following industries or positions.

Sociology Career Paths

Administration A professional with a degree in sociology is well prepared for administrative positions, particularly in government and public agencies that administer human services. Sociologists in leadership roles help define policies toward groups of people in need of public assistance. By leading teams of researchers and social work professionals, sociologists can reshape their communities. Corrections As the prison population in our country continues to expand, many local governments hire sociologists to understand the impact of tougher laws on neighborhoods. Sociologists also help corrections officials determine the effects of new programs and regulations on the prison population. ALSO SEE BELOW FOR CRIMINOLOGY

Counseling Some counselors and therapists study sociology in order to better understand some of the larger trends they see among patients. By using the kinds of pattern analysis techniques that sociologists are known for, counselors can focus their practices on critical needs in their communities.

Education A person with a sociology degree may choose to pursue a career in education. A bachelor's degree and teaching certificate are adequate for teaching classes such as political science, history, and social science at the high school level. PhD level graduates may pursue careers at the college and university level.

Investigations Sociology professionals play larger roles at major investigative bureaus, especially the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Working with detectives and profilers, sociologists help law enforcement officials anticipate crime by identifying obscure patterns. Targeting areas that are likely to be the focus of criminals allows officials to deploy scarce resources more effectively. Therefore, investigators can close cases more quickly while improving the quality of life in previously dangerous areas.

Journalism Sociology majors with a proven ability to communicate well may find a home for their talents in a variety of news gathering organizations. Newspapers and local broadcast news outlets employ sociologists to help understand the kinds of stories that engage readers, viewers, and listeners in a particular region. Sociologists work with editors and market researchers to identify the right balance of news that audience members expect with the stories that need to be reported to uphold civic responsibilities.

Politics Sociology degree holders can play numerous roles in the political community. Campaign managers hire sociology professionals who can identify critical neighborhoods that can make or break an election. By understanding the traditional voting patterns of key districts along with the crucial issues that concern voters, campaigners can deploy volunteers and activists to win over voters. At numerous government organizations, sociologists analyze patterns that can affect the political and economic balance of the county. Examining the trends in housing construction and measuring the number of citizens who move to new cities can provide lawmakers with a clear picture of the challenges facing Americans today. Sociologists can also help lawmakers predict the success or failure of proposed legislation based on voting patterns and current research findings. Most importantly, sociologists manage the process of counting citizens in our census program every ten years. Instead of merely counting individuals in the country, as mandated by law, sociologists use the opportunity to conduct deeper interviews that reveal larger trends when compared to past results.

Public Relations Some sociology majors with an interest in journalism find jobs as public relations officers for major corporations. By reviewing market research data and understanding historic trends, sociologists can anticipate challenges when rolling out new products or building infrastructure. Sociologists who truly understand the motivations of customers, community activists, and journalists can effectively defuse problems in the media by responding to the public's concerns with carefully composed solutions.

Research Some sociology professionals can carve out careers as independent research consultants who examine trends in human behavior for a variety of clients. By carving out a solid reputation for reliable work, these specialists attract interesting problems without having to pursue grants like their colleagues in the academic sector.

Senior Services Over the next few decades, the United States will experience an unprecedented explosion in the number of Americans over the age of sixty-five. Numerous outreach organizations and government agencies are hiring sociologists to study the effects of an agin population on our culture. In addition, many researchers hope to anticipate the results of the coming contraction of population as baby boomers die off. Sociologists use scenario planning exercises along with a variety of resources to predict the opportunities for future generations to thrive in a country with far fewer residents.

Youth Services Our society places more value on the lives of children than at any point in our nation's history. A variety of government agencies and nonprofit institutions monitor the impact of policies and parental habits on today's young people. Sociologists examine the challenges that young people face when interacting with people of other generations. They also examine the significant cultural shifts driven by young people's tastes in popular culture.
Skills of Successful Sociologists

Students and professionals who excel in the field of sociology typically display a number of the following skills and characteristics:

- Ability to recognize trends and patterns. Sociologists must develop a keen eye for detail and a gift for spotting relationships between pieces of information. By cultivating patterns from otherwise abstract data, sociologists can break through puzzling roadblocks during research assignments.

- Ability to create concise reports and essays. Whether reporting to superiors on the results of research or developing new funding proposals, sociologists rely frequently on their ability to write effective reports. Sociology students learn how to modulate their writing for different audiences. When preparing reports for peers and colleagues, they can use industry shorthand and insider terminology to keep memos and files brief. When writing external reports for funding agencies, or politicians, or the media, they translate that jargon into easily digestible nuggets of information.

- Critical thinking skills. Sociology degree programs challenge students to build their analytical skills through a series of increasingly challenging assignments over the course of their studies. Sociology majors spend time in introductory courses examining the techniques that professionals use to investigate theories. As they move through intermediate and advanced courses, they start to use those techniques on their own research projects. By the time they near graduation, sociology majors use their keen critical thinking skills to solve problems and identify opportunities in their own research.

- Oral presentation skills. In addition to powerful writing skills, sociology majors must develop the ability to speak comfortably and clearly in front of crowds. This skill particularly benefits students who intend to pursue careers in academia. Meanwhile, sociology professionals who work in the private sector also utilize this skill when presenting information to government agencies, funding panels, or audiences at professional conferences.

- Interpersonal communications skills. Regardless of their career paths, sociology majors will rely on strong person-to-person communications skills throughout their working lives. Students learn early in their degree programs to conduct effective interviews with key subjects. In addition, sociologists often work on teams where long hours and tight deadlines can lead to friction between colleagues. Quality sociology degree programs prepare students for future challenges by creating realistic scenarios in which students can improve their interpersonal communications.

- Develop skills in modern data and analysis technology. As with many other careers, modern technology and computers have revolutionized sociology. During the course of their degree programs, students learn to manipulate data using complex pieces of software and hardware. By running research data through sophisticated tools, sociology professionals can spot trends sooner and generate results faster.

- Grant writing skills. Many sociologists must compete for funding from government agencies, from private funders, and from academic boards. Skilled professionals learn to apply their strong writing skills to create attractive grant applications. By stating clear goals and framing up outcomes that advance the agendas or the missions of funding bodies, sociologists can collect vital funds that allow them to continue making breakthroughs in research and understanding of human interaction.

- Research skills. Sociology majors learn to use all of the resources at their disposal to chase down leads and build sets of information for analysis. Many sociology degree programs introduce students to the tricks of efficient library research early in their academic careers. Bolstered by fast searches on the Internet, sociology majors learn to digest catalogued findings for use in their original research projects. By the time they graduate, students learn to conduct personal interviews and mass surveys in order to generate their own sets of raw data for analysis.

- Management skills. Many professional sociologists rely on the help of support personnel and other team members to conduct research and to move projects forward. During their degree programs, students learn to blend the best practices from the business world with the traditions of research professionals. By the time students earn their sociology degrees, they gain the talent to motivate the different kinds of specialists that will help them accomplish major breakthroughs during their careers.

- Planning and organizational skills. Because most sociologists work on time-sensitive projects, students learn how to plan and arrange their tasks to save time and to work as efficiently as possible. Many colleges and universities provide introductory courses in time management and task coordination as part of their core programs. These skills reap huge rewards later in a student's career, when they must marshal scarce resources under tight deadlines.

Certification and Licensure: Sociology degree holders seeking careers as high school teachers must meet local and state requirement for certification. Many municipalities require teachers to pursue additional or continuous education to maintain their eligibility. Professionals seeking careers in social agencies are usually subjected to various background checks and licensure depending on the regulations in their home states.

Check out these sites for careers in Sociology:

http://www.worldwidelearn.com/online-education-guide/social-science/sociology-major.htm
http://www.asanet.org/employment/sociology.cfm

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Criminology careers constitute one of the fastest growing areas of the American economy. It's an unfortunate fact that crime is a significant aspect of modern life, but the silver lining of the situation is that rampant crime means large numbers of people are needed to deal with the situation. For anyone with an interest in these areas, employment prospects are excellent and should remain strong for the foreseeable future. That being said, what exactly is criminology? Like criminology careers, the term criminology itself is broad and expansive. Basically, it refers to the study of crime, criminals, causes of crime, ways of deterring crime, the best ways to prevent and punish crime, apprehending criminals, punishing criminals, handling former prisoners, and so on. As you can see, this list, which is far from exhaustive, covers a wide variety of jobs and careers. Many college professors, for example, specialize in one or more of these subjects, but most people would not consider a college professor to be involved in criminology. They are, though, and so are a great many other occupations, such as district attorneys. Dealing with crime in today's society truly requires a multifaceted approach.
Of course, when most people think of criminology careers, the first occupations they think of are police officers, sheriff’s deputies, and other local law enforcement personnel. This is understandable, as these men and women are in the branch of criminology that's on the front lines of dealing with criminals at large, and ordinary citizens encounter them quite often. Another occupation that more and more people are becoming familiar with is forensic scientist. Not long ago, most people would not have recognized this job title, but thanks to the popularity of shows such as Law & Order and NCIS, these public servants are much better known, even if their day-to-day jobs are highly glamorized on TV.

Many social workers are also involved in criminology, which many people don't realize.

Probations and parole officers are two other occupations that fill vital roles in society's war on crime, along with jail and prison guards are also criminologists in their own ways, doing what many believe to be one of the most difficult and thankless jobs in America.

Border patrol agents, too, fight crime at our nation's borders, striving to keep out both illegal aliens and potential terrorists.

As you can see, there are a wide variety of criminology careers, and on this site, you'll be able to get all the information you need to decide if one is right for you.

**Advantages of Criminology Careers:** Every person has his or her own special reasons for finding criminology careers so appealing, but there are some common themes that you hear again and again when you start asking people what first got them interested in a criminology career—why they chose their jobs, what they love most about their jobs, or what aspects of their jobs give them the most pride and satisfaction. Sure, from time to time, you'll run into the odd person who drifted into it for lack of anything better to do or the controlling person who enjoys having power over others, but these types are extremely rare. There are a lot of great things about criminology careers, and that's why most people choose them. Let's discuss some of the best advantages.

First off, it's the path not taken, an occupation shunned by most people. It's not your average, ordinary job. Many people are happy working regular, ordinary jobs, but some aren't. They want something more, and many of these folks gravitate to criminology careers. In most jobs, one day is pretty much like every other day, but not in criminology, where every day is a new adventure.

Another benefit of a criminology career, often cited as one of the best things about it, is knowing that you’re making a real difference in people’s lives. Without law enforcement officers and prison guards, criminals would run riot, destroying civility in America. The sacrifices of the men and women who take these jobs are what keep America a safe, civilized place.

Helping criminals stay on the straight and narrow path after they're released is another important function, and parole and probation officers fill this need. Every person involved in criminology, no matter their role, has earned the heartfelt thanks of hundreds of millions of American citizens whose lives are better for their efforts.

The education a person receives on their way to becoming a criminology professor is an often overlooked benefit of these jobs, and it's a very rich and rewarding one. Few people understand all the vagaries of the human condition as well as people who’ve completed a course of study in criminology. They learn what makes people tick, why some people would never hurt a fly, while others are capable of killing their own mothers. They’ve peered into the dark depths of the worst that humanity has to offer, but they’ve retained their belief in the essential decency of most human beings. For that, they’re not only better persons, but they often make better friends, spouses, and parents for this very reason.

**Disadvantages of Criminology Careers:** Any discussion of criminology jobs would be incomplete without talking about the downsides of choosing one of these occupations. Every job or career has advantages and disadvantages, and when making plans for your life, it’s important to look at both sides of the equation. It’s easy to look at your hopes and dreams through rose-colored glasses, but this temptation must be avoided, and everyone should face the cold, hard reality of what they’re looking at when they commit themselves to criminology careers. Don’t get the wrong idea; criminology careers have a lot of factors in their favor, and we’re not trying to talk anyone out of pursuing one. We just want to make sure everyone has a clear idea of what such jobs entail.

One of the first negative aspects that must be acknowledged is that criminology careers are not known for their high pay. It’s a shame that such important roles aren’t compensated more generously, but facts are facts. This isn’t to imply that a person can’t survive on the income of a probation officer or border patrol agent but only to stress that going into criminology is unlikely to lead to a high income. What’s worse is that many people working in the field of criminology work for local and state governments, and in this age of austerity, budgets are being cut, and even the viability of pensions is being questioned.

Another drawback is that the job can be both mentally and emotionally draining. Going to war on crime and the culture that produces it is not a task for the squeamish. Mentally, it can be wearisome to deal with criminals and ex-cons who tend not to be very high on the IQ scale. Dealing with these people day in and day out, and trying to relate to them and reach them, can be daunting. Emotionally, it’s quite difficult to embark on a task which we all know can never really be accomplished. It may be possible to reduce crime, but we will never eliminate it. And, when it happens on your watch, it can be difficult to separate yourself from it, and it can be easy to view yourself as having failed.

For some criminology careers, putting your life at risk is one of the disadvantages that must be faced. Every year, police officers, sheriff’s deputies, FBI agents, and other law enforcement personnel die in the line of duty, either accidentally or at the hands of a criminal. Statistically, this is a rare occurrence, but it’s very real, and it’s something to consider. Again, we want to stress that criminology careers are fulfilling and rewarding, and many criminology professionals wouldn’t switch jobs with anyone. However, no one should go into the field without frankly considering the disadvantages.

Check out these sites related to careers in Criminology: