

Why Study Sociology: A Practical Guide

Is Sociology Right for You?

It is important for every educated person to have a basic understanding of sociology. Whether you are interested in changing the world, or just in making some small improvements in the lives of your fellow human beings, you must first understand what the structure of the system is, how social order is maintained, and how social change can be effected. Some students wonder whether they should pursue further study in sociology. The best way to decide is to take a couple of courses in sociology and see if they stimulate your interest. These courses offer in-depth study in areas such as education, deviance, family, social stratification, and research methodology. In addition to specific research skills, sociology provides a basic understanding of culture and social structures crucial to success in numerous fields and day-to-day social interactions.

What Can You Do with a Major or Minor in Sociology?

Many degree programs offer specific training for only one or two potential jobs. If you find out at the end that you do not like those jobs, or if they are not available in your area, then you might feel that four years of hard work have been wasted. Sociology offers an education that is diverse and, in job terms, *flexible*.

Employers are always looking for people who are broadly educated and who bring numerous competencies to their work environment because they tend to offer training specific to their industry or firm on the job. The skills you acquire by getting a sociology degree *will not box you into only one potential career*, but enable you to pursue all kinds of opportunities.

Some of the competencies you develop in studying sociology include:

- an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies
- the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working
- the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information that come from polls or surveys
- the ability to recognize the important differences in the social, cultural, and economic backgrounds of people
- skills and competency at preparing reports and communicating complex abstract ideas
- the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront our society today

Here is a list of some of the fields in which students who get a BA in sociology might work.

- social work and social service
- law
- criminal justice and corrections
- urban and regional planning
- youth services/senior services
- broadcasting and journalism
- government – local, state, and/or federal
- church administration and ministry
- education
- entrepreneurship
- personnel services
- crisis prevention
- safety and disaster management
- foreign services and international negotiation
- family counseling
- market research and advertising
- medical and health services and assessment

Some of these fields require further education (e.g. in order to get a law degree one must usually have a Bachelor's degree first, and then one goes to law school). Many of the careers listed above, however, simply require a Bachelor's degree. Some students in sociology may also wish to obtain an advanced degree in sociology at the graduate level and pursue research or teaching. Beyond this, the broad and flexible education that sociology provides makes it an **ideal minor** for those who are pursuing degrees at UAHuntsville that lead to specific jobs: e.g. accounting, engineering, finance, nursing, or education.

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