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Why Major in Sociology?

By [Karen Sternheimer](#)

If you are like many students who enjoy sociology classes, you might be considering majoring in sociology. I get many students visiting my office considering adding sociology as a major who want to know what kind of job they might get with a major in sociology. The better question might be: what *can't* you do with a major in sociology?

As I [wrote about a few years ago](#), you learn many important critical thinking skills, research tools, and knowledge about diverse populations when you study sociology. Very few college majors have set career paths, and it is important for each student to learn about what kinds of work environments they might enjoy through internships, volunteer experiences, and on-the-job training when possible. Very few college majors are specifically geared for job training; instead, it is up to you to figure out what kind of career path you would like to start on—keeping in mind that many people have several careers over the course of a lifetime, some of which bear little relation to their original major.

Sociology lends itself particularly well to a double major, or as a skill set to acquire along your chosen career path.

Want to be a doctor? Understanding the social side of medicine is vitally important. For instance, how socio-economic status impacts health outcomes, gender and health, and how workplace stress can create health problems are just a few things you might learn in a sociology course.

Thinking about counseling or social work? Besides learning about individual psychopathology, understanding the importance of social interactions and the broader context of navigating the world based on gender, race, and class are important to understand clients' realities.

Going into law? Learning about changes in family structure, marriage, and divorce are important in the practice of family law. Civil rights attorneys, immigration lawyers, and those focusing on the workplace will benefit from related sociology courses.

For people not planning to go on to earn an advanced degree, sociology pairs nicely with many other majors. Education majors will benefit from courses on how inequality may impact student achievement, as well as learning more about peer interaction in groups. Business majors benefit from learning more about diversity and managing workers in diverse settings; sociologists also study groups and organizations, as well as the sociology of work.

Journalism is also another major that students will find broadened by the study of sociology. Good journalists must learn to talk to people from a variety of different backgrounds and circumstances, and learn about the contexts of their lives—both of which are central to

sociology. Other students who want to be writers—even fiction writers—would benefit from learning about how people interact with one another in large and small groups.

Virtually no major provides a guaranteed job in a specific field. Choosing a major should be both a practical decision and also one based on your personal interests—interests which you are responsible for exploring well in advance of entering the job market. Each major provides a skill set, but in the end it is you that employers hire, not merely your degree.

Of course you don't have to choose a major in addition to sociology. As you can see from [this post I wrote in 2010](#), sociology on its own provides several skills that graduates report using on the job, skills like understanding diversity, critical understanding of social issues, and basic report writing. Being able to critically analyze data—numbers and words—is a basic skill that translates to many different higher-level management positions.

And some of you might just [decide to be sociologists](#) yourselves, teaching or researching the concepts that interest you most.

Posted by W. W. Norton on August 08, 2013 in [Karen Sternheimer, Social Institutions: Work, Education, and Medicine](#), [Social Problems, Politics, and Social Change](#)