

## Career Prospects for Sociology Graduates

In these uncertain economic times, it is understandable for students to worry about their futures and wonder whether their BA will open the door to a specific career or even whether there will be any kind of job waiting for them at the end of their schooling. The first thing to remember is that many employers are much less concerned with a job applicant's major than with the set of skills that the applicant has acquired in university. **Many employers are looking for people who are good communicators, self-disciplined, well organized, and capable of working independently.** The study of sociology encourages the development of these skills, helping students to become critical and creative thinkers.

**Sociology graduates find jobs in** research (e.g., as data analysts or pollsters), in social service and other community organizations, in teaching, in policing and corrections, and in business. Many of the courses taught in our department not only provide a critique of social institutions (the law, medicine, and work, for example), but also encourage students to think about alternative social policies. Accordingly, sociology graduates are well equipped to find employment at the various levels of public service: municipal, provincial or federal.

**Information about career options for sociology graduates** can also be found from Career Services and the Departmental Co-ordinator, Viola Bartel. The university's Counselling Centre has a Career Services office and also provides advice.

Many of our graduates do not stop their education at the BA level, but go on to pursue **graduate studies or specialized professional degrees or certificates.** This, of course, opens up the possibility of different careers, as well as higher salaries. An honours degree can be a precursor to further post-secondary education. The important thing is to keep an open mind about what your future may hold, and not to cut off your options. Every year we encounter students who are surprised by their own academic development and by their increased abilities. You could be one of those students -- so learn as much as you can about the various directions your educational life could take.

## Sociology And Social Policy

We do not do social research and theorize about human behaviour just because we find it to be an interesting intellectual exercise. Rather, most sociologists are concerned about what is happening in our social world, and we wish to explore what might be done about social problems. This is where social policy comes in.

Some people think about "policy" as remote from them, confined to cabinet rooms and board of directors' tables. What they do not realize is that most people "talk policy" a good deal in their everyday lives. Admittedly, much of this talk takes the form of criticizing existing policies: how the social assistance programme functions, what kinds of people enter Canada under the immigration laws, or complaints about working conditions at the plant. Yet, when

alternatives to the *status quo* enter into the conversation, ordinary people are involved in policy analysis and advocacy, even though they may not call it that.

Policy discussions address what is being done about a problem and what might or should be done. Policy may be defined as "any plan or course of action adopted by an organization, designed to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters" (Kolbe, 1988:390). It is apparent from this definition that concern with policy crosses many boundaries and jurisdictions, and that, at all levels of organizations, formal and informal, policy affects procedures. Attempts to change, monitor or study policy can be identified in all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) as well as in Canadian regulatory bodies. Policy concerns also extend to the international level. Policy change or study can also be focused on organizations, such as agencies or corporations involved in service delivery, education and so on. Social movement organizations – trade unions, so-called “non-governmental organizations” and activist groups – are also concerned with the elaboration and evaluation of policies and programs that will facilitate the realization of their objectives.

Approaches to studying policy can be grouped under two headings: "analysis of policy" and "analysis for policy." The first classification includes studies of existing policies and policy processes, as well as research on how policies compare to one another. "Analysis for policy" encompasses gathering information for policy making, suggesting improvements in policy implementation, and policy advocacy. Studying the impact of policies (outcome evaluation) can be used both as analysis of and for policy (Pederson et al., 1988:11). Thus, the study of policy embraces a broad range of scholarly and political activities.

As an academic discipline, Sociology provides the tools to analyze social policy, and it promises hope for the future by laying the foundations on which carefully constructed social policies may be built.

