Sociologists

Summary

Sociologists study society and social behavior by examining the groups, cultures, organizations, social institutions, and processes that people develop.

Work Environment

Most sociologists work in research organizations, colleges and universities, state and local government, and consulting service firms. They typically work full time during regular business hours.

How to Become a Sociologist

Most sociology jobs require a master’s degree or Ph.D. Many bachelor’s degree holders will find positions in related fields, such as social services, education, or public policy.

Pay

The median annual wage for sociologists was $74,960 in May 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of sociologists is projected to grow 15 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. However, because it is a small occupation, the fast growth will result in only about 400 new jobs over the 10-year period. As a result, candidates should expect very strong competition for jobs.

Similar Occupations
Sociologists study society and social behavior by examining the groups, cultures, organizations, social institutions, and processes that people develop.

**Duties**

Sociologists typically do the following:

- Design research projects to test theories about social issues
- Collect data through surveys, observations, interviews, and other sources
- Analyze and draw conclusions from data
- Prepare reports, articles, or presentations detailing their research findings
- Collaborate with other sociologists or social scientists
- Consult with and advise clients, policymakers, or other groups on research findings and sociological issues

Sociologists study human behavior, interaction, and organization within the context of larger social, political, and economic forces. They observe the activity of social, religious, political, and economic groups, organizations, and institutions. They examine the effect of social influences, including organizations and institutions, on different individuals and groups. They also trace the origin and growth of these groups and interactions.

Administrators, educators, lawmakers, and social workers use sociological research to solve social problems and formulate public policy. Sociologists specialize in a wide range of social topics, including the following:

- Health
- Crime
- Education
- Racial and ethnic relations

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about sociologists by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.
Many people with a sociology background become postsecondary teachers and high school teachers. Most others, particularly those with a bachelor's degree in sociology, often find work in related jobs outside the sociologist profession as policy analysts, demographers, survey researchers, and statisticians.

**Work Environment**

Sociologists often collaborate with colleagues on research projects.

Sociologists held about 2,600 jobs in 2012.

The industries that employed the most sociologists in 2012 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Employment Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleges, universities, and professional schools; state, local, and private</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and development in the social sciences and humanities</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government, excluding education and hospitals</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, scientific, and technical consulting services</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sociologists typically work in an office. They occasionally may work outside the office to conduct research through interviews or observations or present research results.

**Work Schedules**

Most sociologists work full time during regular business hours.

**How to Become a Sociologist**

Sociologists analyze data on sociological issues in order to test theories.

Most sociology jobs require a master’s degree or Ph.D. Many bachelor’s degree holders find positions in related fields, such as social services, education, or public policy.

**Education**

Sociologists typically need a master’s degree or Ph.D. There are two types of sociology master’s degree programs: traditional programs and applied, clinical, and professional programs. Traditional programs prepare students to enter a Ph.D. program. Applied, clinical, and professional programs prepare students to enter the professional workplace, teaching them the necessary analytical skills to perform sociological research in a professional setting.

Many students who complete a Ph.D. in sociology become postsecondary teachers. Other Ph.D. graduates often become research sociologists for nonprofits, businesses, and governments.

Courses in research methods and statistics are important for both master’s and Ph.D. candidates. Many programs also offer opportunities to gain experience through internships or by preparing reports for clients.

Although some graduates with a bachelor’s degree find work as sociology research assistants, most find positions in other fields, such as social services, administration, management, or sales and marketing.

**Other Experience**

Bachelor’s degree holders can benefit from internships or volunteer work when looking for entry-level positions in sociology or a related field. These types of opportunities give students a chance to apply their academic knowledge in a professional setting and develop skills needed for the field.

**Important Qualities**

**Analytical skills.** Sociologists must be able to carefully analyze data and other information, often utilizing statistical processes to test their theories.

**Communication skills.** Sociologists need strong communication skills when they conduct interviews, collaborate with colleagues, and present research results.

**Critical-thinking skills.** Sociologists must be able to think critically when doing research. They must design research projects and collect, process, and analyze information in order to draw logical conclusions about society and the groups it comprises.

**Problem-solving skills.** Sociologists’ research typically is focused on identifying, studying, and solving sociological problems.

**Writing skills.** Sociologists frequently write reports detailing their findings.

**Pay**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociologists</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median annual wages, May 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The median annual wage for sociologists was $74,960 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $43,280, and the top 10 percent earned more than $129,760.

Most sociologists work full time during regular business hours.

Job Outlook

Employment of sociologists is projected to grow 15 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations. However, because it is a small occupation, the fast growth will result in only about 400 new jobs over the 10-year period.

Employment of sociologists will be driven by the need for sociological research to further understand society and human social interactions. Social, political, and business organizations will continue to use sociologists to research, evaluate, and address many different social issues, programs, and problems.

Sociologists will be needed to apply sociological research to other disciplines as well. For example, sociologists may collaborate with researchers in other fields to study how social structures or groups influence policy decisions about health, education, politics, business, or economics.

Job Prospects
Holders of Ph.D. degrees can expect to face very strong competition for sociologist positions. Sociology is a popular field of study with a relatively small number of positions. Many bachelor’s and master’s degree holders will find positions in related fields, such as social services, education, public policy, or other areas. Although these fields require the skills and concepts that sociologists learn as part of their education, workers should face less competition for positions not specifically labeled as “sociologists.”

Candidates with an advanced degree, strong statistical and research skills, and a background in applied sociology will have the best job prospects.

### Employment projections data for Sociologists, 2012-22

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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociologists</td>
<td>19-3041</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

### Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of sociologists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropologists and Archeologists</td>
<td>Anthropologists and archeologists study the origin, development, and behavior of humans. They examine the cultures, languages, archeological remains, and physical characteristics of people in various parts of the world.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$57,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economists</td>
<td>Economists study the production and distribution of resources, goods, and services by collecting and analyzing data, researching trends, and evaluating economic issues.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$91,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Scientists</td>
<td>Political scientists study the origin, development, and operation of political systems. They research political ideas and analyze governments, policies, political trends, and related issues.</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>$102,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary Teachers</td>
<td>Postsecondary teachers instruct students in a wide variety of academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level. They also conduct research and publish scholarly papers and books.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$68,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologists</td>
<td>Psychologists study cognitive, emotional, and social processes and human behavior by observing, interpreting, and recording how people relate to one another and their environments.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$69,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>Social workers help people solve and cope with problems in their everyday lives. One group of social workers, clinical social workers, also diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional issues.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$44,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Salary</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statisticians</strong></td>
<td>Statisticians use statistical methods to collect and analyze data and help solve real-world problems in business, engineering, the sciences, or other fields.</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>$75,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Researchers</strong></td>
<td>Survey researchers design surveys and analyze data. Surveys are used to collect factual data, such as employment and salary information, or to ask questions in order to understand people’s opinions, preferences, beliefs, or desires.</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>$45,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban and Regional Planners</strong></td>
<td>Urban and regional planners develop plans and programs for the use of land. Their plans help create communities, accommodate population growth, and revitalize physical facilities in towns, cities, counties, and metropolitan areas.</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>$65,230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contacts for More Information**

For more information about careers in sociology, visit

American Sociological Association

**O*NET**

**Sociologists**


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