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To most Canadians, sociologists are invisible. Every year, thousands of young people graduate with sociology degrees, yet, outside of colleges and universities, we don't often notice them. Compared with economists and psychologists, doctors and lawyers, few sociologists seem to make headlines, or appear in videos or on TV. So, what does happen to sociology graduates?

Some emerge as lawyers or doctors, and a few find work in the media. For the majority, though, the route from school to work is unanticipated – the paths they follow are not yet well-worn and their destinations, often, are more surprising than what they had imagined when they first signed up for sociology. Why does this happen? Perhaps the main reason is that, while the vast majority of sociology graduates successfully join the labour force, almost none have a job title that suggests there's a sociologist lurking inside!

This pamphlet talks about the sorts of places in the work force frequented by sociologists and how to get to those places. Beyond pointing out which jobs are best suited to sociology graduates, we will also supply a number of tips and suggestions to help you find and obtain one of these jobs.

We begin with a short piece on *what sets sociology apart as an academic discipline*, specifically noting the kinds of skills that make sociology a specialized field of study. Next, we give *contextual material* situating sociology graduates and their employment trajectories in the modern Canadian labour market. Finally, we provide two focused commentaries, supplying *practical advice* on how to best prepare for the job market and how to go about finding relevant work.



Of course, some Sociology BA grads continue their education and eventually join the world of academia, teaching and doing research in colleges and universities. Indeed, that is where many students first discover sociology, and sociologists. But this pamphlet is not about professors and instructors - they arrived at academia through graduate school, a path described in other pamphlets.

Read on!

What IS sociology... and

What sorts of employment skills will a degree in sociology give me?

Sociology is the study of individuals and society. What makes it unique among academic disciplines is its focus, from a myriad of angles, on the linkages between our individual experiences and the context of the wider society in which we live. Investigating the social ties between individual and society, between our private realm and the public sphere, and between freedom and constraint – these are at the heart of sociology. Adopting this way of seeing – C. Wright Mills called it “the sociological imagination” – helps us understand how powerfully the world in which we live shapes what we do and how we do it.

Sociology has a revelatory mission: To highlight the pervasiveness of power and inequality in everyday life, something that is not always apparent to the untrained eye. Beyond merely revealing these patterns, however, sociology also seeks to understand and explain them. Very often sociology examines the hidden injuries or advantages of social power, a subject that is immediately relevant to the ways in which our place in society, including our ethnicity, gender, or sexuality, impacts our rights and opportunities and influences our thoughts and actions.

Sociology thus offers a special way of seeing and thinking that differs from other disciplines. The connections between sociological perspectives and employment opportunities may not be immediately obvious, yet training in sociology provides a set of specialized skills that many employers value highly:

*the ability to think, reason, and understand
across time, space, and circumstance*

*the ingenuity to look beyond the manifest/visible/obvious
so as to also comprehend, and question,
the latent/invisible/non-obvious*

*a facility for seeing issues from a variety of vantage points
– from positions of both privilege and paucity
and from standpoints differing from our own*

*an alertness as to how power operates
across different levels of society,
from the macro to the micro, and back and forth*

*an appreciation of how context matters
in shaping both our actions and our emotions*

*an understanding of the constructed nature of social life,
including its categories, claims, processes, and changes*

*an awareness that meaning matters, and that, unlike hard sciences such as physics,
the social world is not subject to deterministic laws
but is nevertheless soaked through with patterned, recurring regularity*

Like other students of the social sciences, sociologists are skilled at communications (oral, written and, increasingly, digital), at research methods (both qualitative and quantitative), and at policy analysis and provision. Indeed, sociology is like most humanities and social sciences in that it focuses mainly on analytical thinking skills, or “soft” skills. Among the generic skills employers want that are nurtured in the humanities and social sciences, we find communication, creativity, ethics, perseverance, reasoning, reliability, sociability, teamwork, and did we say communication! These valuable skills, and many others, are the hallmark of an excellent liberal arts education. And, even though this

pamphlet focuses on sociology and the labour market, we would be remiss if we did not also emphasize that these generic skills, together with the specialized sociological expertises highlighted above, are beneficial well beyond the employment sphere, for such skills nurture lifelong good citizens.

In summary, what makes sociology distinctive is the sociological imagination which enables us to comprehend, from multiple vantage points, the complex interconnectedness between public issues and private lives. Sociologists may not know how to construct a bridge, but they certainly know how bridging and bonding capital works to create effective networks. And they know that networks are critically important to the success of individuals, organizations, and nations. Sociologists know how to think socially and how to use that thinking creatively and constructively. Sociology helps people think beyond the box, outside the circle, and behind the edges.

Taking stock...

Sociology and the Canadian Labour Market

Finding employment is a private matter for the most part, but one that is shaped profoundly by public issues. These issues form the context in which people seek jobs, and they relate to the health of the economy, the likelihood of older workers retiring, and the competition for work in specific sectors. Recent graduates in all fields of study have experienced a tough labour market. The sting from the financial crisis of 2007-08 lingers still. Opportunities are returning, but gradually. In this context, CW Mills’s sociological imagination – that is, linking private troubles and public issues – offers new Sociology BA graduates an important perspective for understanding labour markets. In what follows, we stress the public issues that Mills would highlight, in order to reveal something about the world our graduates will venture into when they seek paid employment in the next few years.

Labour Market Composition and Size

Several key trends augur well for the future employment success of Sociology BA graduates. First, the labour market is expanding. In 2010 there were about 18.5 million Canadians working for pay, a number likely to rise to as many as 20.5 million - 22.5 million by 2031 (Martel *et al.*, 2011). Second, the service sector, where most sociology graduates are employed, is expanding faster than any other sector. Although the Canadian economy remains significantly tied to resources, the vast majority of jobs and a huge slice of our economic productivity currently occur in the service sector, as Table 1 shows. In fact, over 87% of jobs are in the service sector, with a preponderance of these jobs occurring in communications, education, finance, health, human resources, management and administration, media, and transportation. Certainly, some service-industry positions are McJobs – low paying and with little security – but a significant proportion offer stable career paths. Third, while older workers have tended to delay retirement in recent years, partly because of better health but also because the financial crisis seriously impacted pensions, many of these workers will soon be retiring.

Table 1 : Percentage Distribution of Canadian Economic Activity by Sector (2010's)		
Economic Sector	% of Goods/Services Produced (\$ Value)	% of Labour Force Jobs
Agricultural	2	1
Industrial	29	23
Service	69	87

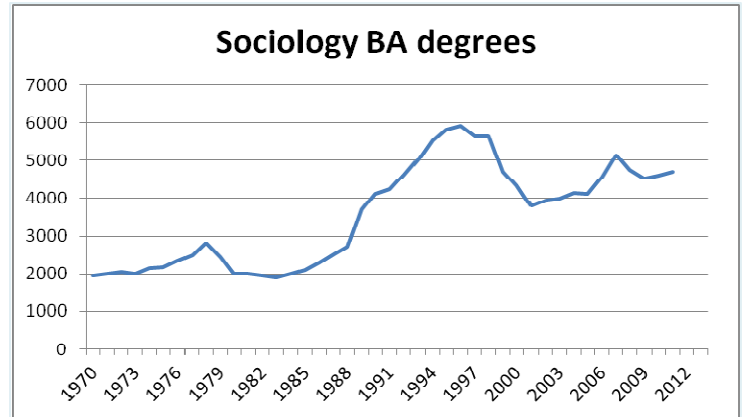
Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Table 282-0008

Sociology Degrees

The number of students pursuing degrees in sociology continues to be strong. The graph here charts the number of graduates with BAs in sociology from 1970 to 2012. There is clearly an increase in degrees awarded to sociology graduates, although this is mainly a function of more graduates from Canadian universities overall, not from an increase in the proportion of students pursuing honours or majors in sociology.

It is worth remembering that few job titles explicitly say “sociologist.” This does occur at Statistics Canada as well as in post-secondary education but it is rare in other places. Of course, such “loose coupling” between

credential and career is also true of many other fields of study, such as anthropology, English, geography, history, and political science, to name a few. Indeed, many managers, lawyers, and planners, among others, have first degrees in sociology and subsequent professional degrees in their chosen fields. Their sociology backgrounds are simply hidden behind their newer, professional identities. Because job advertisements do not typically say “sociologist wanted,” it may require a bit of effort to identify opportunities where you can thrive. The important thing to remember is that many employers seek the very skills you will gain while studying sociology.



Source: Statistics Canada, university degrees by field of study

So what jobs DO sociologists have?...

Business

- actuary
- administrative assistant
- advertising officer
- computer analyst
- consumer relations
- data entry manager
- human resources specialist
- insurance agent
- journalist
- labour relations officer
- market analyst
- merchandiser/purchaser
- personnel officer
- production manager
- project manager
- public relations officer
- publishing officer
- quality control manager
- real estate agent
- sales manager
- sales representative
- technical writing

Community Affairs

- addictions counselling
- adoption counselling
- caseworker
- child development
- community organizer
- environmental organizer
- family planning
- fundraising
- gerontologist
- group home programmer
- health outreach work
- homeless / housing worker
- hospital administration
- housing coordinator
- marriage / family counselling
- occupational / career counsellor
- public health worker
- rehabilitation work
- residential planning
- social assistance advocate
- welfare counselling
- youth outreach

Government

- affirmative action work
- community affairs
- development aide
- foreign service work
- human rights officer
- information officer
- legislative assistant
- personnel coordinator
- policy research
- urban / regional planner

Social Research

- census officer/analyst
- consumer researcher
- data analyst
- demographer
- market researcher
- social research specialist
- survey researcher
- systems analyst

Teaching / Education

- admissions counsellor
- alumni relations
- continuing studies
- post-secondary recruitment
- public health educator
- records & registration
- school counselling
- student development
- teacher

Table 2: Occupational Destinations for Sociology BAs in Broad Labour Market Sectors

So, you might rightly ask, what does one do with a Sociology BA? The job titles listed in Table 2 above give concrete examples of places sociologists are often employed in. There are some important things to note about this list. First, it is only a partial list. Second, different organizations often use different names for the same job. And third, many of these jobs can be filled by graduates from other social science disciplines (another loose coupling effect).

Two Additional Areas of Opportunity

Looking Abroad: The expansion of the service sector is not unique to Canada. In the case of other developed economies, to the extent that there is growth it is primarily in services. And, when it comes to developing or emerging economies, it is also service jobs that represent the main areas of growth. This growth in international opportunities is good news for sociology graduates. Some young people are finding good employment abroad, often with international non-governmental organizations.

Creating Your Own Job: Self-employment is increasing in many countries, and Canada is no exception. Being an entrepreneur is risky and can be a tough slog but it can also be exceedingly rewarding. Angus Reid, one of Canada's earliest political pollsters and market researchers, is a sociologist, as was Martin Goldfarb, another of the early polling icons in Canada. Current parallels to Angus Reid and Goldfarb may be found in web-based start-up firms.

In considering your journey through the job market, it helps to understand the public nature of factors that affect labour force dynamics. Your journey will be shaped not only by your own efforts and personal biography but also by the larger contextual influences on the ebb and flow of available jobs.

And now the advice:

Preparing for the Job Market: a Sociological Primer

Getting a job takes work and preparation, beginning with turning your mind to why someone might want to hire you. When you enter the job market you are a seller. As such, you must have what buyers – that is, employers – want. This raises three separate questions: What do buyers want? How do you acquire those things? How will buyers know you've got what they want?

Before proceeding, let's consider some basic sociology. Many people, and particularly economists, depict the labour market as a rational-choice arena, a place ruled by reason, fact, and efficiency. Supposedly, information is abundant, options are unlimited, job seekers know how to match their preferences with available options, and errors are rare. The result, according to this perspective, is the best utilization of talent in an economic system where employers and workers are both optimally satisfied.

But this description does not match up with the real world. Actual labour markets are messy places. They are socially constructed spaces where power differentials, institutionalized regularities, class structures, asymmetrical access to information, fads, emotions, the education system, and many other factors shape the making of workers, the need for jobs, how recruiting is done, how pay scales are set, and much more. Furthermore, the market is largely bureaucratized and, increasingly, 'employers' are human resource departments or agencies. Therefore, the matching of jobs to employees that takes place in the labour market is not determined by an efficient, rational exchange process. But it also isn't a complete lottery; it isn't arbitrary. Knowing how labour markets function can prove truly valuable: It can help you be savvy, suitably prepared, and, ultimately, successful.

What do employers want?

1. Credentials: First and foremost, employers look for credentials. Realizing exactly what this means matters. It is almost unheard of for employers to request a transcript of your grades, except to verify your graduation. Grades matter for graduate or professional school admission but they become much less important if your intent is to find a job after your Bachelor's degree. When you graduate, employers will deem you to be a potential candidate, or not, based on the credentials you have. If you possess the right piece of paper you pass that first screening. This is Credentialism 101!

Obviously, in some professional fields, people are only hired when they possess very specific credentials. Physicians need an MD and lawyers require an LL.D. or a JD. But the majority of jobs in the white-collar world – those jobs that make up most of the massive service sector of our economy – simply require Bachelor's degrees. In most cases, the exact field of study is not critical to qualifying for the job.

Sociologists describe this as a “loose coupling” between academic background and the labour market. The fact is that most employers do not know precisely what attributes and skill sets they need their job candidates to have. They have some rough ideas – the person must be “smart,” “driven,” etc. – but no specific profile. In other words, they know they have a need but they may not know all the ins and outs of what that need is, nor how best to fulfill it. While this looseness may seem confusing, it is actually good news for you: With good research about the employer, the job, and your competition, and with proper presentation on your part, you can convince employers that your skill sets are precisely what they are needing, and therefore that you have what it takes to be hired. (Remember here Erving Goffman's writings on impression management and his theories of how one can present oneself in multiple ways.)

It is wise, then, to take the idea of credentials with a big grain of salt. Focus, instead, on understanding what it means. Then use your sociological imagination to help *you* shape what your prospective employer is looking for in the first place.

2. Experience: Employers want experienced workers. Why is this? Again, most employers cannot offer a precise answer. Experience is a proxy for other things. Employers generally perceive experience as a signal that a person is job-ready and will require minimal training. If probed a little more, an employer might say having experience means you are more likely to have good discipline and the work ethic necessary to thrive in their job. That's because working life has its own culture: a culture of time management, getting along with others, and discipline. Experience with this work culture reassures employers. There are plenty of reasons why one might question the relevance of “experience” for any given job but, as a smart sociologist, the important thing to remember is that expectations matter, regardless of whether they are rational or not. Thus, rather than debating the merits of experience, it is more useful to remember the cultural necessity of gaining work experience.

3. Skills: Employers are rarely interested in your specialized disciplinary skills. Again, they may have only a general idea of which skills will best match the openings on hand. However, every discipline provides you with a host of generic skills and it is your task to cultivate the skills your prospective employer is most likely to appreciate, and then advertise yourself along those lines. You will want to do this in such a way that you stand out from all the other job applicants. At the same time – and this is very important – try to understand what you, as a person, really enjoy learning and doing. The idea that our private and professional lives should be totally separate, while helpful in some respects, is a potentially misleading cultural norm. We do not leave our “true” selves behind when we enter the workplace. The job market is not made up of anonymous actors devoid of personality. So the trick is to balance the need for an appealing profile, on the one hand, against your interests and passions, on the other.

UBC Sociology BA graduate Tammy Brimner has had the kind of exciting career that skills in sociology can foster. She began in Human Resources and quickly became a Senior Manager of Faculty Relations at UBC. Her next promotion was to Executive Director of Faculty Affairs. She is currently the Director of Business Development and



Operations in Animal Care Services, sits on the Academic Leadership Development Program Planning Team, and has recently joined the United Way Steering Committee. In all of those positions, she has applied her knowledge and experience in sociology to better understand how everyday life gets organized for the faculty and staff she works with and makes it a priority to look for ways to alter their lives for the better.

With all this in mind, let's identify a few truly critical skills.

1. Communications: Written skills are critical but so, too, are your oral presentation skills. Being able to present ideas clearly and cogently is important. All white-collar jobs demand reading and writing skills but, frequently, you will be part of a team, expected to contribute ideas orally in team meetings. Learning how to be persuasive is valuable and is a skill honed with preparation and practice. Digital fluency is expected. Framing and packaging matter. Assembling evidence is essential. And the job interview itself is an oral presentation!

2. Numeracy: Being adept with numbers helps in almost any job. Max Weber's paradigm of rationalization, where the metrics of quantification and predictability are front and centre, means more and more jobs will require you to be numerate. An ability to understand and, even better, to assemble numeric tools, such as graphs, charts, figures, and tables, is a valuable asset.

3. Methods: Being skilled in a range of social science methods will enhance your ability to understand how problems are solved. Identifying the problem, in all of its multi-faceted nature, is a skill in itself, and is one of the key things you will learn when your professors help you explore your research question, or your argument, or your hypothesis. Sociological methods training ensures you can ask pertinent questions and understand the logic of finding nuanced, persuasive evidence.

4. Intercultural understanding: Culture is all about how different peoples relate to and make sense of their world. As cultures deepen and diversify, being able to comprehend others and their meaning-making is critical to organizational success. This is especially so in a globalizing world. Being practiced in inclusion and open to diversity is a core competency in today's workplace. Opportunities are made available outside the classroom, in internships and summer jobs for example, to help you develop – and earn the right to advertise – your intercultural skills.

5. Critical thinking: The features of thought that signal critical thinking include a mind that is agile, creative, curious, nimble, nuanced, probing, smart, and subtle. These things come with practice and are developed by challenging yourself, by moving outside your comfort zone both intellectually and emotionally. Smart students, and by this we mean students who will be successful, are those who choose courses with an eye to augmenting their skill sets. Building a course schedule that enriches your skill set is more important than building a course schedule that fits your social life, although having a social life is important too, and employers value employees who are socially adept.

Contrary to what one might suppose, it is very difficult to measure and quantify critical thinking abilities. More to the point, employers have no way to ascertain how “good” *your* critical thinking skills really are. Instead, they will gather data about you from your resume, from the way you talk, from the way you behave during the interview, and from the way you answer questions designed to test your analytical skills. This means that there are numerous, often subtle, ways of communicating to an employer – who may or may not be consciously focused on this – that you are indeed smart. Put yourself in the reverse role: How do *you* know when you are dealing with a “smart” person?

How can you acquire all the things employers want?

We have mentioned a few ways already. If you have followed this article along, the message is, in fact, rather simple: Be purposeful, careful, and strategic; take charge of your university career by planning for its afterlife; be the author of your own future; have a game plan and stick to it wisely; and, when you need to adapt, do so. Most fundamentally, remember that your job search begins long before graduation.

Here is a simple analogy. In university life, you can be a tourist or a participant. Tourists watch as the years flow by, living in the moment, enjoying the freedoms and the distractions. Participants learn to love exploring knowledge, and they do it vigorously. They learn to be curious; they develop a hungry mind. Participants take control of their lives and author their futures by planning and implementing. The thing is, employers want participants. Over time you have grown intellectually, ethically, physically, and so forth. We encourage you to take increasing responsibility for your continued growth. Be purposeful – it's your life.

For a concrete example, think about the need for experience. How can you get great work experience? A good part-time job in a relevant industry is one way. Enrolling in co-operative education can also help, as can carefully chosen internships. Increasingly, companies are using co-op placements and internships as tools to assess potential employees. Take advantage of these university programs to gain experience.

Other forms of experience are also useful, although supplementary. Volunteering shows employers that you are not too self-centered, that you care about others, and that you have experience working with others. Participation in athletics or the creative and performing arts demonstrates to employers that you have self-discipline, can work in a team setting, and are goal directed. Participating in student governance, campus clubs, community organizations, or social movements can also be valuable. You can acquire transferable skills in all of these places.

There is an obvious lesson here, which is that the university can provide you with experience, both within and outside the classroom, that is critically important to your labour market success, and it is up to you to take advantage of the opportunities. But notice, too, the less-than obvious: The process of finding a job is a social – and, in this case, culturally rich – affair. It is about expectations, becoming legitimate, and being sensitive to certain values and beliefs. Knowing how to make use of this social fact can give you a leg up in your job-search efforts. (For more on this, see our last article, on searching for employment.)

How do you show prospective employers that you've got what they're looking for?

Your success in this next phase will depend upon how well you have done in the previous two phases. It really is impossible to turn a pig's ear into a silk purse. But if you have taken time to figure out what employers want and how they have come to want it, and if you have learned how to acquire the attributes they seek, employers will want to buy the "silk" you have acquired. This is where Goffman's impression management comes into play or, in the lingo of the current job market, this is where you need to promote your brand. You need to show employers that what you have to offer them is distinctive and attractive. Here, again, sociology is relevant – marketing is as much a social action as an economic one. At its core, you are constructing your image in the marketplace, reflecting and adjusting to its require-



Kathy Marshall turned her UBC acquired skills in research methods, and survey research techniques more specifically, into a successful career with Statistics Canada. Canada's chief statistical agency collects reams of data and until she recently retired Kathy helped to assemble that information into meaningful research reports addressing salient policy topics. Here she is pictured with a report she authored, "Fathers' use of paid parental leave." Her work has consistently focused on a range of public policy issues.

ments and ambiguities and, ultimately, shaping that very marketplace. Thus, to present yourself, you should think ahead and plan carefully.

One final point is in order: The loose coupling between academia and the job market we discussed earlier has an additional implication. Many university-age students do not know with certainty what occupational jobs or careers they want to, or will, pursue. Their preferences are far from set or formed. It follows that you should approach the job search with flexibility. Worrying about finding the “perfect” job is pointless. There are multiple good fits, and your desires and interests will be shaped and stimulated by what is out there. The process of matching yourself to a job, in other words, is interactive. It is advisable to be flexible in your expectations about what might suit you. Be ready to package yourself in different ways.

If you think about it, the basic insight here is deeply sociological. Just as the specific requirements of jobs are frequently unclear in an employer’s mind, a recent college graduate can present herself or himself in different ways to different prospective employers. Workers and jobs emerge through a fundamental process of social interaction.

Five Planning Tips:

- 1. Do your homework:** Determine areas in which you might like to work, then learn about potential employers in those areas. Figure out how you fit with them and tailor your resume to speak to their needs.
- 2. Practice some ethnography:** Visit a workplace by contacting people in Human Resources and ask if you can do an informational interview (use your networks if necessary). Research the company in advance and prepare simple but insightful questions about the organization and about the job-search process.
- 3. Craft a good resume:** Create a short overview of your accomplishments and attributes. Set out your credentials and highlight your experiences and skill sets. Do this with a clear understanding of who your target audience is. Have a skilled resume-writer give you feedback on your resume. Tailor your resume to sharpen its focus for different employers.
- 4. Have good references:** When preparing to apply for a particular job opening, ask your best contacts if they “can write a strong letter of reference” for you (yes, use these exact words!) and ask them to contact others they know who can help you. Give them written suggestions as to what to highlight in their letters and phone interviews so they can do a good job of showcasing your skills and experience.
- 5. Prepare for the interview:** While your experiences and skill sets are key, once you are being called up for interviews you are in a whole new stage of the selection process. Other interviewees, too, have attractive experiences and skill sets. How can you differentiate yourself? Remember what we talked about earlier: Learn about your audience; communicate things about yourself without saying these things outright; convince the interviewer that you are, indeed, the very person they are looking for. (translation: “Make them realize that the person they want is someone exactly like you.”)

Ensuring success

To use a classic term from economic sociology, the job market is “embedded” in society. Far from being a rational, efficient, transparent clearing house where talent is optimally matched, with sharply delineated and specified employment opportunities it is, rather, a social arena where cultural, structural, and other factors shape the ways workers and employers ultimately connect and define each other. Understanding and applying the information presented here can give you the advantage you need to succeed in the work force.

The Sociology of Job Finding

How do you find a job in today's tight, turbulent, unpredictable labour market? Sociologists who study job searching and labour markets identify two distinct stages: searching and screening. In the searching stage, applicants turn to online resources, career services, and their social networks for information about job openings. In the screening stage, hiring agents sort countless applications to find the "right" worker. Thus, landing a job is a two-sided matching problem, with workers searching for good, fulfilling jobs and employers screening for capable, productive workers. So how do you maximize your chances of finding (and landing) a good job?

Job Searching: It's Who You Know. Really.

According to sociological research, over half of job seekers find their positions through ties or links in their personal networks (Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore 2000; Marsden and Gorman 2001; Neckerman and Fernandez 2003). These ties can be "weak" – such as ties to acquaintances, career counsellors, and faculty members – and "strong" – such as ties to friends and family members. Though both may provide sources of information and advice about job seeking, weak ties tend to provide access to more expansive information and are the most effective for landing professional jobs. In fact, a recent study by the American Sociological Association (ASA) found that 60 percent of sociology graduates who sought job information from career services, workshops on campus, faculty members, internship supervisors, or former employers landed career-level jobs compared to only 45 percent of those who turned to family or relatives (Spalter-Roth *et al.* 2013). Therefore, to find your dream job, visit career services, workshops, former employers, and, yes, bother faculty. (Helping you is part of our job!)

But what do you do if you have exhausted all your weak and strong ties and come up empty? For those not relying on personal contacts, online search methods may be the next best thing (Choi 2011) although there is often a trade-off between quality and quantity, both for job seekers slogging through online postings and for hiring managers reviewing hundreds of applications (Fountain 2005; Spalter-Roth *et al.* 2013). In the ASA study of sociology graduates, those who used online search strategies landed jobs 68 percent of the time, but those jobs were typically service and clerical work, not career track positions. Think barista, not policy analyst.

Why do networks work? It's simple: They are cheap and easy. It is far easier for employers to give jobs to people they know or who have been recommended by a trusted source than to go to the trouble of putting out ads, sifting through applicants, calling references, conducting interviews, and so on.

Applicant Screening: It's What You Know. And How You Show It.

Does this mean that knowing people is everything? Absolutely not. No one is going to hire you, even if you come highly recommended, if they don't think you can do the job well. You must convey to each and every hiring agent that you have the necessary aptitudes, competencies, and motivation. The critical problem-solving, communication, and writing skills that you have acquired through your sociology studies will make you an attractive applicant (Andrews and Higson 2008; Maes *et al.* 1997). The fact that you have pursued studies that highlight social

diversity, intercultural understanding, and an appreciation for multifaceted forms of knowledge, including divergent ways of doing and thinking, will signal to employers that you can manage variations in interpersonal interactions and team work, which are increasingly common workplace arrangements (Bell et al. 2011).

Beyond your hard skills, be sure to showcase your personality, talents, and soft skills. Employers are looking for people who “fit” well with the workplace culture – in large part because they want to work with people they feel comfortable with (Rivera 2012). Although such “homophily” – or preferring people who are like you – can lead to preferential hiring in some situations, applicants who are wise to this can take advantage by seeking out companies that fit their dispositions, and they can play up any skills, traits, or values that “fit” the company culture. Among a slew of qualified candidates, your unique experiences and traits can set you apart. Still, as much sociological research demonstrates, employers’ gender, race, and ethnic biases can lurk beneath homophily, contributing to discrimination in hiring. To ensure that your resume gets a fair reading, you can craft materials in gender- and ethnically-neutral ways to prevent employers from falling back on unconscious biases and stereotypes. The other message here: Do your homework on potential employers and craft your messaging accordingly.

Remember, too, from your own sociology courses, that considerable research points to systemic processes of unfairness and inequality in getting a job. Be prepared for this. The world is unfair. However, you must not let this awareness undermine your personal efforts. Persistence is important. Staying positive, while sometimes difficult, is important. Being proactive is important. Still, enter the job search with some realism, with an awareness of this as a social process open to a myriad of ups and downs.

Finally, you need to demonstrate that you are highly motivated, and can take initiative and think for yourself, especially when applying for professional jobs. What does this mean? Every cover letter says, “I’m highly motivated.” You need to *show* that you are highly motivated as you go about your life. Offer to do things for other people. Be a go-getter. Don’t wait to be asked. Someone will notice. Even if they don’t hire you on the spot, they will come away impressed and, who knows, they might just provide you with that network-tie to your dream job.

Good luck out there!



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