

Searching for a Job with an Undergraduate Degree in Sociology

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The National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2009 Student Survey indicates that 19.7 percent of students had a job in hand when they graduated in May 2009. Compare this to the 26 percent of students in 2008 and 51 percent in 2007. Clearly, the economic crisis is a personal experience for a large proportion of college graduates. It is equally clear that many recent graduates, and those who will be graduating soon, could use some encouragement and assistance with the job search process.

Below I briefly detail strategies for Internet job searches for recent graduates with an BA/BS degree in sociology. Results for full-time positions using nine different search terms in three popular job banks—Idealist.org, USAjobs.gov, and CollegeGrad.com—are compared. The summary table below compares two of the job banks on the number of job listings found for each of the nine search terms. The third job bank, CollegeGrad.com, does not allow nationwide searches and therefore is not included in the summary table.

The takeaway message for effective searches in any of these job banks is this: Search terms should reflect the knowledge and skills that studying sociology builds, not just the word "sociology" (see the [May/June issue of Footnotes](#)). The good news is that by carefully choosing search terms, sociology students can locate a large number and range of entry-level jobs for which they are qualified in the non-profit, government, and business sectors.

Non-Profit

Idealist.org describes itself as "an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps toward building a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives." The site focuses on the non-profit sector and can be used for locating volunteer opportunities and internships as well as postings for employment. When using the key word "sociology," only 9 job postings were located. In contrast, with "social science" as the keyword, 75 jobs postings were located. "Program assistant" produced 213 hits, and "research" produced 753 postings. While a recent graduate with a major in sociology would not meet the criteria for all of the job results, these terms can expand upon potential jobs for which they may be qualified. For example, a recent graduate could apply for a Research Assistant position studying adolescent fertility and family structure, and a Case Manager position working with families who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

Government

USAjobs.gov is the main job bank for federal government jobs. The federal government employs more than 2,700,000 people and 50 percent of those individuals are currently

eligible for early or regular retirement. While students might initially think that working for the federal government requires living in Washington, DC, 84 percent of federal jobs are located outside of the capital area (Damp 2008).

Job Postings for Graduates with a BA/BS in Sociology: Comparing Search Term Results		
Search Term • Additional search criteria used	Idealist • Country = USA • Education Level = BA/BS • Full time • GS level = 5 to 7	USAJobs.gov • United States • GS level 5 to 7
Sociology	9	166
Social science	75	818
Program assistant	213	1804
Diversity	137	768
Data	752	3861
Research	753	2388
Analysis	221	1487
Statistics	53	587

USAjobs.gov has tens of thousands of job postings, but finding postings that are appropriate for recent graduates in sociology can be challenging. The fact that jobs in the federal government pay more on average than in the private sector, include full benefits, flex-time schedules, and generous vacation time after three years of service, might convince students that searching for these jobs is worth the effort. Here are some tips that can simplify the process. First, search for "Form EI-23" in any internet browser. This document lists federal job titles by college major. Students do not need to limit themselves to the job titles listed under sociology, but this a good place to start searching. With Form EI-23 in hand, go to USAjobs.gov and click on "advanced search." Then scroll down to the pay grade fields and enter "5 to 7". This will ensure that the jobs postings that are returned are entry level. From there, enter job titles from Form EI-23, or use a keyword search. The results can be fascinating and wide-ranging, including everything from a position for a Park Ranger in the Division of Interpretation to a Research Analyst with the Federal Trade Commission. Additional information on applying for federal government jobs can be found at the Partnership for Public Service www.ourpublicservice.org.

Everything In Between

The third online job bank examined was CollegeGrad.com, which describes itself as "The #1 Entry-Level Job Site." This site has won numerous awards including the Microsoft "Best of the Web" award and the "Dow Jones Business Directory Select Site," The site automatically searches by zip code, which made it impossible to create a nation-wide comparison of this site with Idealist.org and USAjobs.gov in terms of numbers of job postings using the search terms in the table below. Additionally, the number of job postings located with the same search terms vary widely from day to day.

That said, some interesting opportunities were located at CollegeGrad.com including two entry-level research jobs: A Research Assistant position whose duties included conducting literature reviews and coding qualitative data with Atlas.ti software and an

entry-level Public Health Analyst whose duties included collecting and analyzing social science data and conducting site visits and interviews. Both positions were seeking candidates with a BA/BS in sociology or another social science discipline with strong oral and written communication skills.

There is a demonstrated relationship between how closely related sociology graduates' jobs are to their major and how satisfied they are with that job (Spalter-Roth and Van Vooren 2008). Finding a job in today's economy is far from simple. Yet, by carefully choosing search terms and emphasizing the skills sets they learned in their sociology courses, students can locate a large number of sociologically relevant jobs for which they are likely qualified in a variety of popular online job banks. 

References

Damp, Dennis V. 2008. *The Book of U.S. Government Jobs: Where They Are, What's Available, & How to Get One*. McKees Rocks, PA: Brookhaven Press.

Spalter-Roth, Roberta and Nicole Van Vooren. 2008. *Pathways to Job Satisfaction: What Happened to the Class of 2005?* American Sociological Association, Research Department. Washington, DC.