

YOU'RE HIRED!

Putting Your Sociology Major to
Work

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Putting Your Sociology Major to Work

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

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This book is dedicated to my students — past, present, and future — as well as the teachers, mentors, and supporters who have provided me with direction and motivation throughout my own journey.

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PREFACE

You're Hired! Putting Your Sociology Major to Work has its origins in the questions, concerns, and misconceptions that have emanated from my students, their parents, other faculty, counselors, advisors, and employers over the nearly 40 years that I have been teaching. I have also been deeply touched by the numbers of former students who continue to correspond with me long after graduation, excitedly extolling new jobs, job transitions, new-found career goals, and especially, the life changes brought through marriage, family life, travel, and relocation. I've been impressed by the variety of career opportunities these graduates have found and how often they speak of loving their job. I am equally amazed by those who have been plying their trade for years and yet still demonstrate the excitement of fledgling sociologists as they speak of new research, responsibilities, and interests at the professional meetings I attend.

Yet, I recognize that the nature and value of sociology still remains largely misunderstood. So, through the stories of practicing sociologists, I intend for this book to clarify and demystify the confusion often associated with this discipline. Further, I hope this book will nurture growing interest in sociology by providing insights about its use in our contemporary world and rapidly changing labor market. Moreover, I am hopeful that the information, particularly in Part III, will benefit not just sociology majors but anyone pursuing a new career or transitioning to another. Additionally, I anticipate this book will spark enthusiasm about the vast array of exciting and fulfilling career opportunities avail-

able to sociology majors in particular, but those with degrees in the liberal arts or other social sciences as well. Finally, I wish that you readers will find the stories of the people contained in this book enjoyable and that they will inspire each of you to pursue your dreams, however tentatively formed they might be at this time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nearly every work ever published begins with a lengthy roll call of those to whom the author is grateful. This book is no exception.

I am most ingratiated to the individuals who shared their experiences and insights with me then patiently persevered as I edited their stories to most accurately reflect them. These contributors include: Laura Barulich, Gary Battane, Diane Binson, Carolina Cervantes, Mel Coit, Lakeshia Freedman, Bee Friedlander, Lincoln Grahlfs, and Janet Hankin. I am equally indebted to Danica Wise Hill, Lynnett Hernandez Kinnard, Stephen La Plante, Maria Lara, William (Bill) McNeece, Carolina Cervantes, Eileen Monti, Rebecca Morrison and Sr. Roseanne Murphy, as well as Christine Oh, Adam Ortberg, Mylene Pangilinen-Cord, Casey Porter, Mario Rendon, Megan Scott, and Christina Risley-Curtiss. My appreciation also extends to Karen Schaumann, T.D. (Tom) Schuby, Kathleen Soto, Don Stannard-Friel, Amber Brazier Voorhees, and Jana Whitlock.

In addition, my thanks to those who briefly disclosed snippets about the multitude means by which they are using their bachelor's degrees as sociologists in fulfilling occupations. I am thankful as well to the employers who shared their thoughts about the unique skills that sociologists bring to the labor market. Moreover, I extend my appreciation to the American Sociological Association (ASA) for materials from which I drew for the section titled, "Sociologists in the Public Eye." I am also grateful to

Michelle Beese who provided the content that made Part III possible.

For my reviewers, I am immensely appreciative. From them, I received perhaps the most valuable feedback as they read the manuscript from the vantage point of my potential audience. The most noteworthy of these reviewers are Joshua Aguirre, Andrew Durham, Rebecca Flores, Jan Perinoni, and Victoria Strelnikova.

I also thank my colleague and friend, Margo DeMello at New Mexico State Community College, as well as Gina Horwitz from Wayne State University both of whom painstakingly reviewed my drafts and offered valuable suggestions. Of course, I am most appreciative of my publisher, Kim Chadwick, who took a chance on me. I thoroughly enjoyed her British wit and benefited immensely from her publishing expertise.

To Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU) goes my sincere gratitude for the release time and sabbatical leave they granted me so that I could bring this book to fruition.

I am especially indebted to Tom Schuby, not only for the constructive criticism and direction he gave to this book, but for prodding me to begin my own journey into sociology so many years ago.

On a personal note and possibly most important of all, I am grateful to Russ, as well as Beethoven and Penny, my canine kids, for the infinite patience and emotional support they gave me during this endeavor.

Without all of these individuals, this book would have remained a mere manuscript. Most of all, however, I am indebted to you, the reader. Whether you are a student or someone interested in a student's future, embarking on that first job, or transitioning from one career to another, I wish you the inspiration to put wings to your dreams.

INTRODUCTION

SOCIOLOGY: A SCIENCE FOR TROUBLED TIMES AND UNDERSTANDING INTERACTIVE INDIVIDUALS

By the time you read this book, you may have already taken enough classes to know that sociology is a broad-based study of the ways humans behave in groups as well as the ways in which our behavior is influenced by the groups to which we belong. Conversely, sociology also studies the impact that people have on their groups through, for example, collective behavior and social movements. You've likely learned that sociology is not synonymous with psychology, social work, social reform, or socialism although there are many sociologists in each of these arenas. No doubt you've also discovered there is a connection between technology and personal interaction, income security and degree of bigotry, length of incarceration and likelihood of recidivism. Perhaps you've started to observe the behavior of people in crowds, on elevators, and at parties. Even more, you might have found some explanations for your own behavior based on your family, friends, social class, or the other subcultures to which you belong. Best of all, you probably know that sociology is a particularly useful science for life in troubled times as well as interactions between individuals.

Pretty cool stuff, you think. So cool, in fact, that you are considering a major in sociology. The *big* questions, however, loom large: how can I earn a living with a sociology major and what sorts of work do sociologists do? In fact, if you don't ask yourself these questions, chances are your family and friends will.

I am particularly fond of the response a colleague of mine gives to these worried queries. "What can a person do with a sociology major?" he usually repeats for emphasis. Then, with a shrug, the bombshell follows: "Anything. Anything they want." While it is true that most job listings do not specifically ask for a sociologist in the same manner as they might request a bookkeeper, sales manager, or nurse's aid, sociologists are nonetheless found in any number of positions that range from advertising to zoology.

You're Hired! Putting Your Sociology Major to Work will expose you to some of the many and varied opportunities available to people who major in sociology from the perspectives of those who actually work in these professions. Each vignette follows the contributor through their career starting with the forces that influenced their choice of major to their present position and future plans. Some, like Carolina Cervantes, were motivated by the dynamics of their family background. Others, like Gary Battane, were driven by the social events taking place during their college years. Adam Ortberg and Lakeshia Freedman stumbled onto a sociology major quite by happenstance while those like Rebecca Morrison and Diane Binson purposefully selected their major.

Each of the contributors discusses the rewards and realities of their work as well as the challenges and frustrations. Many walk you through their typical workday or work week. They share the sociological concepts and theories, learned in the classroom, that assist them in their work. Several of those interviewed reveal the tactics they used to obtain their positions and all offer sound advice to the fledgling sociologist.

The contributors run the generational gamut. Some, like Laura Barulich, are on the starting block of their careers while others

such as Lincoln Grahls look back from retirement on their fulfilling and meaningful professional lives. All, as the expression goes, have a story to tell. While the experiences and stories are distinctly diverse in both breadth and depth, everyone in this book shares a commonality not always found in the world of work. As theorist Peter Berger so eloquently penned more than years ago, "... for them, sociology is a passion."

READING THIS BOOK FOR BEST RESULTS

This book is meant to be read word-for-word, cover-to-cover, and then placed on your shelf alongside your other reference books. While it would be easy to skip to the career areas that currently attract you or to simply scan this text in preparation for a class discussion, you would do yourself a grave injustice. Most respondents share not just one but many careers that led them to their present position. Any one of the professions they discuss might pique your interest and beckon you down your own personal career path.

As you read further, you will see that this book has been written for you, the student, and for those concerned about you. It is not written for the profession; for other sociologists or academics though they may read it. Therefore, it does not contain information you have to memorize for an exam but rather, insights which will guide you to career decisions that are distinctly your own. At the end of the vignettes, current contact information is provided for each of the people about whom you read. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to communicate directly with the individuals whose vignettes you find most interesting. Ask them the questions that do not appear in their statements but intrigue you nonetheless. While I purposely deleted any references to salaries, for example, you can feel free to query the contributors about this in your interactions with them. All are

willing, indeed eager, to share more of their stories with any of you who inquire.

Though Part I is divided into 12 sections, each devoted to a specific area in which sociologists work, there are dozens, perhaps hundreds more spheres where sociologists are found. To some extent, “Snippets from the Field” as well as “Sociologists in the Public Eye” in Part II bring these to light. “Employers Respond: Why Hire Sociology Majors” materialized serendipitously from administrators and managers who regularly ask me to recommend majors in my department for positions in their organizations. These individuals offer observations about the unique skills and perspectives that sociologists possess.

My hope is that you, the reader, will use *You're Hired!* to launch your own investigation into the myriad opportunities that await a sociology major; that you will imagine yourself shadowing the individuals who share their lives with you; absorb as much as possible from each vignette; then refer to Part III often as you begin and foster your career. Above all, I encourage you to learn, experiment, and enjoy the paths that you travel as you create your own stories and successes.