

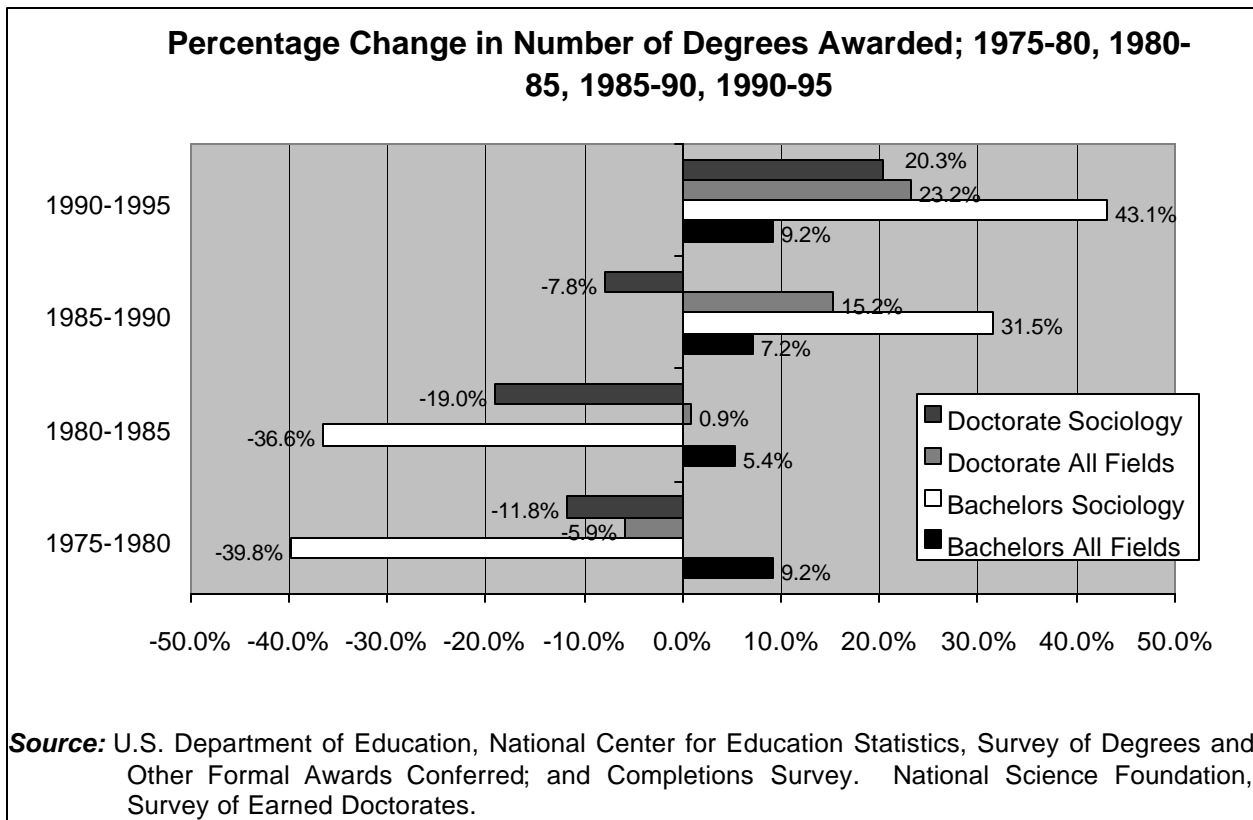
American Sociological Association
Research Program on the Discipline and Profession

Data·Brief

After the Fall: The Growth Rate of Sociology BAs Outstrips Other Disciplines Indicating an Improved Market for Sociologists

An examination of trend data signal the vitality of sociology as a discipline. Most important, the number of students graduating with bachelor's degrees in Sociology has rebounded dramatically from a mid-1980s slump. The surge in sociology BAs is a consequential indicator of the health of the profession; It appears to correlate with rising applications to PhD programs, more funding for graduate students, and increased positions at the faculty level.

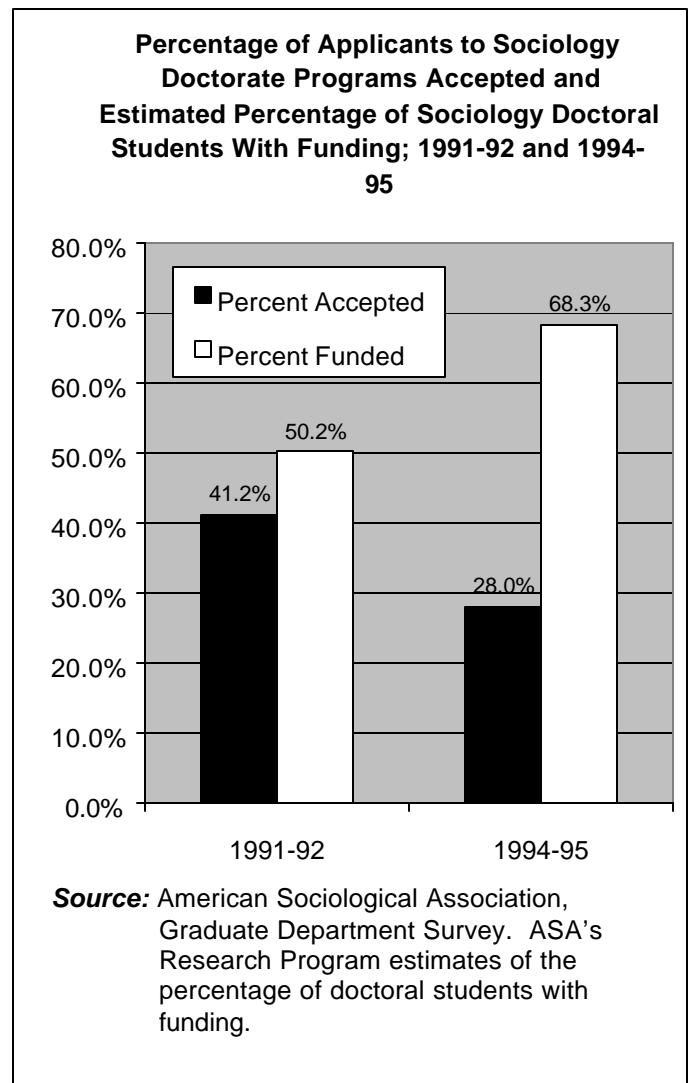
Figure 1:



- In contrast to the overall growth of BAs in all disciplines combined, which remained relatively stable between 1975 and 1995, Sociology experienced a roller coaster ride ending on an upturn (see Figure 1). The production of bachelors degrees in Sociology fell dramatically from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s. While the production of bachelors degrees in Sociology reached a high of 35,996 in 1973, by 1985 the number had fallen to 12,165. Since 1985, however, the numbers have moved upward. Between 1985 and 1995, the percentage increase in the production of bachelors degrees in sociology far outpaced the percentage increases in the production of bachelors overall, increasing 31.5 percent between 1985-1990 and 43.1 percent from 1990-1995. The increase for all disciplines was 7 percent and 9 percent during these same time periods. By 1995, the number of bachelors degrees awarded in sociology had rebounded to 22,886. Likewise, there was a resurgence in the growth rate for Master's degrees awarded in Sociology between 1985 and 1995 that also outpaced all disciplines taken as a whole (data not shown here).
- An increase of BAs in the pipeline appears to have led to both more applications to graduate departments of Sociology, and to greater selectivity by the departments in choosing among these applicants. In the 1991-92 academic year, there were 3,380 applicants to PhD programs, three years later the number had increased to 6,842. In addition, by the 1994-95 academic year, a higher percentage of doctoral candidates received funding than in the 1991-92 academic year

(see Figure 2). This later increase may be, in part, due to the increased need for undergraduate teaching. In 1991-92, an estimated 41.2 percent of applicants to Sociology individual doctoral programs were accepted and 50.2 percent of Sociology doctoral students were funded. By the 1994-95 academic year, the percentage of applicants accepted by individual departments had dropped to 28.0 percent while the estimated percentage of funded doctoral students increased to 68.3 percent.

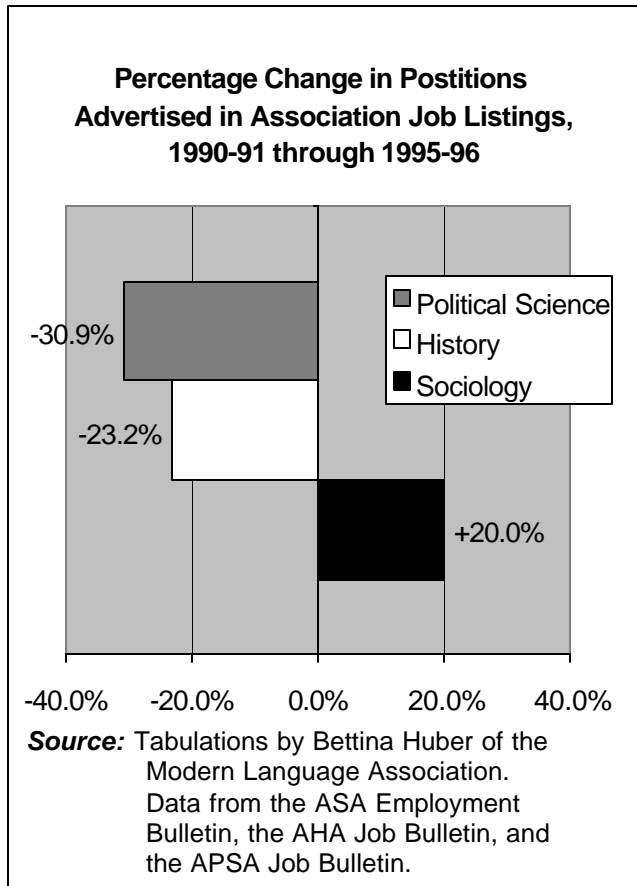
Figure 2:



- Although the turn-around in the growth rate for Sociology PhD production has lagged behind both BA growth rates in Sociology, and PhD growth rates for all disciplines, the trend is moving in the right direction again.

After reaching a high of 734 PhDs awarded in 1976, Sociology experienced greater declines in PhD production than did all disciplines combined, and the turnaround in these declines began later—starting in the early 1990s. Between 1990 and 1995, however, the growth rate in Sociology PhDs increased dramatically and remained only slightly behind all other disciplines, increasing 20.3 percent and 23.2 percent respectively (see Figure 1).

Figure 3:



- Finally, there is evidence that the job market for sociologists is improving. While the percentage change in number of positions advertised in association job listings for history and political science has declined annually from a high in 1990, the rate for sociology has increased. Figure 3 shows the percentage change between 1990 and 1996. Over this time period, Political Science experienced a 30.9 percent decrease, History a decline of 23.2 percent. The rate for Sociology, however, continued to steadily grow over this same time period, increasing 20.0 percent.¹

These comparative data showing the increased production of Bachelor's degrees, the greater selectivity and funding of PhD candidates, and the growth in advertised employment positions in Sociology can be viewed as indicators of the growing health of the Sociological pipeline.

ⁱ These data were compiled by Bettina Huber of the Modern Language Association. The figures for sociology are the number of positions advertised in the monthly employment Bulletin during each academic year (i.e. June through May issues). The figures for history and political science the number of positions advertised in the American Historical Association and American Political Science Association job bulletins during the first four months of each academic year (i.e. September through December).