



Beyond the Ivory Tower: Professionalism, Skills Match, and Job Satisfaction in Sociology



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▶ Project Purpose

- Many U.S. sociologists work outside of academia, frequently applying sociological research and perspectives for judicial courts, health and welfare organizations, social policy-oriented foundations, marketing firms, and government agencies. This work has often been ignored by academic sociologists who believe that it may lower the status of the discipline. Training in applied work has virtually been absent in top-ranked sociology departments. ASA is interested in reinvigorating efforts to increase employment outside of the professoriate, especially if these are jobs with high satisfaction ratings.
- More than 600 PhD sociologists employed in applied, research, and policy positions outside of the professoriate responded to a survey in 2006 about their job satisfaction conducted by ASA's Research and Development Department. Given current debates about the loss of autonomy and the growth of contingent work in the professoriate, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether jobs that are not in the professoriate reflect the sociological training and the characteristics of a scholarly profession, and may be more desirable than academic jobs. Specifically:
 - Do they include professional characteristics such as autonomy or commitment to a body of disciplinary knowledge?
 - Do they include the skills and concepts that are learned in graduate sociology programs?
 - Which factors increase overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with economic security?
 - How does satisfaction vary by occupation, sector of the economy, and age cohort of the respondent?



Questions

- What can sociologists working outside of the professoriate take from the disciplinary core?
 - ◇ Specialty areas?
 - ◇ Perspectives?
 - ◇ Methods?

- What can these sociologists bring back to sociology as an academic discipline?
 - ◇ Increase its social capital & the market for its labor?
 - ◇ Prepare the discipline for the current transformation of the academy?



▶ The Historic Debate: Inside versus Outside

There is one dominant career model in sociology ... consisting of *standardized courses, regimented careers*, intensive examination, the lonely dissertation, and refereed publications—all captured on the all-powerful CV.

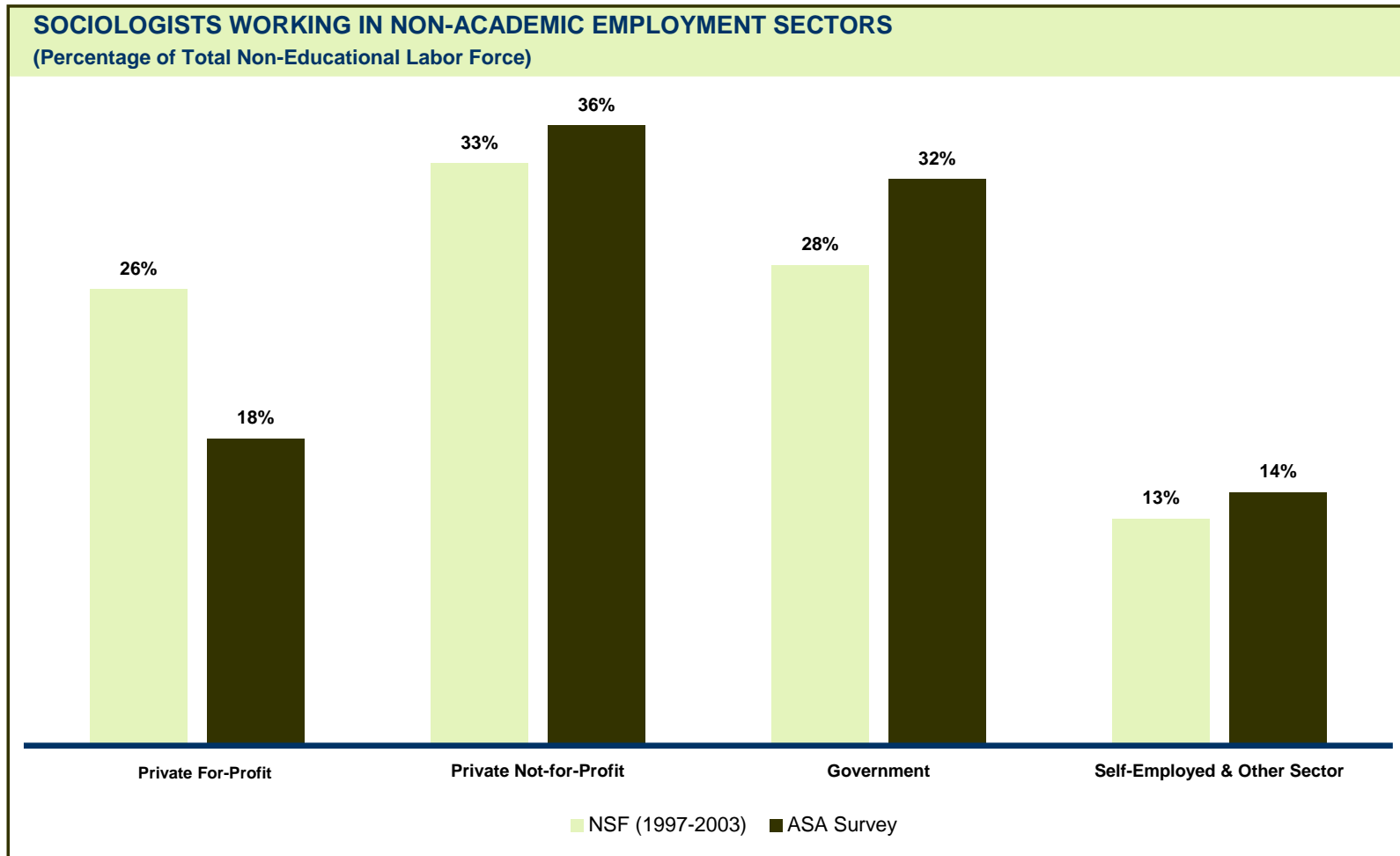
--Michael Burawoy, 2004





Where Do They Work?

Figure 2



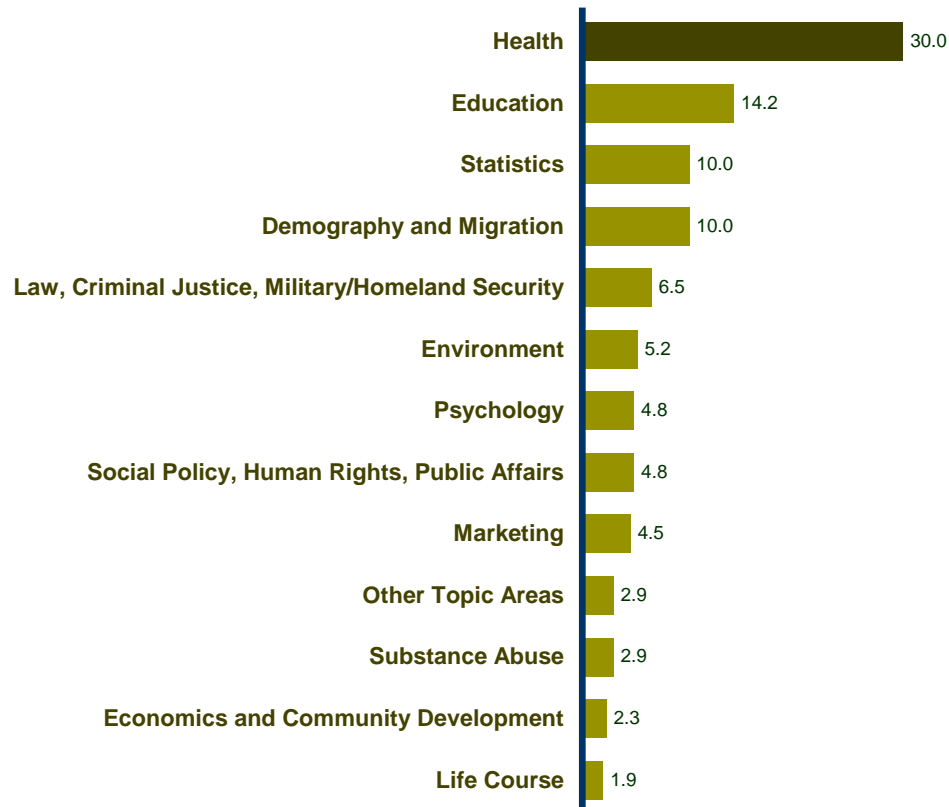
Source: American Sociological Association, Research and Development Department, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Survey of Non-Academic PhDs in Sociology* (Washington, DC: ASA, 2006); National Science Foundation, Science Resources Statistics, *Characteristics of Doctoral Scientists and Engineers in the United States* (Arlington, VA: NSF, 1999-2006), retrieved December 15, 2006 (http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/pubseri.cfm?seri_id=13#1993).



► Specialty Fields: Field of Work

Figure 3

TOPICAL AREA CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-ACADEMIC PHD SOCIOLOGISTS (Percentage of Respondents)



Source: American Sociological Association, Research and Development Department, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Survey of Non-Academic PhDs in Sociology* (Washington, DC: ASA, 2006).



► Specialty Fields: Sociological Perspectives

Figure 4

SOCIOLOGICAL EDUCATION USED ON THE JOB: DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW SOCIAL PROCESSES WORK

"[Applies] assimilation theory for immigrants and how it influences development of young children of immigrants and their performance in public schools."

"I am currently directing an NSF-funded study on globalization of law. I am using theories of neo-institutionalism, postcolonialism, law and development, and world systems to develop a new theory of international development of legal norms and how they affect the dynamics of law-making in nation-states. With my colleague, we have developed a theory of the recursivity of law."

"My work requires a detailed knowledge of social structures and processes in Latin America to inform project development, and to advise colleagues around the world."

"Although a family program evaluation is focused on a single program, that program is more and more likely to be part of a larger, integrated network of local community services. Within that framework ... client needs, cultural beliefs, values, and community resources constitute the everyday world in which program activities are carried out. The sociological perspective is one of discovery, a search for the dynamic processes that constitute the program in action."

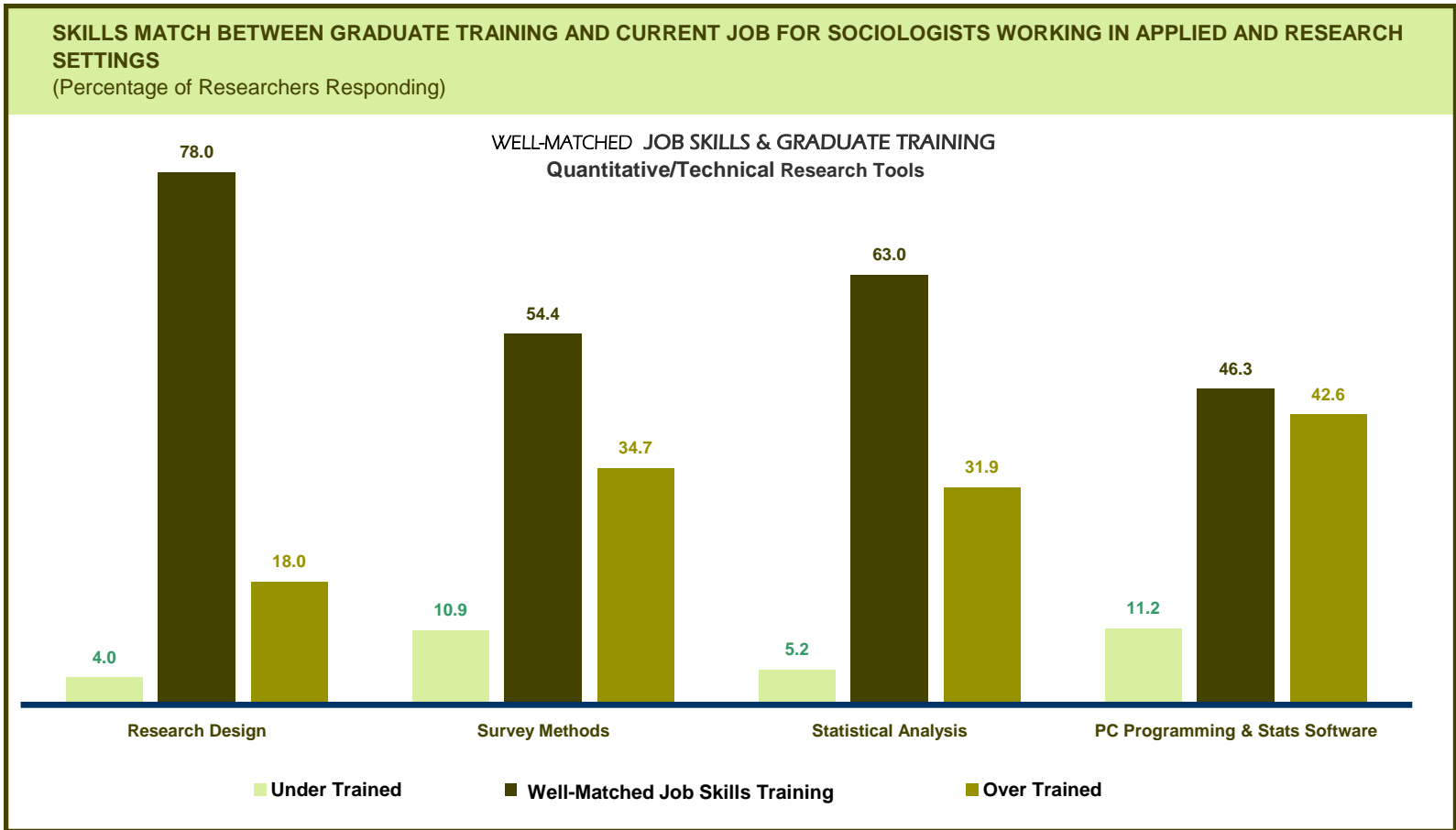
SOCIAL PROCESSES INCLUDE:

- Assimilation
- Community engagement
- Globalization
- Marginalization
- Organizational processes
- Population shifts
- Power relations
- Processes of underclass development
- Relations among social groups
- Social construction
- Socialization processes
- Structural change, especially industrial downsizing



Skills Taken from Graduate School

Figure 5A



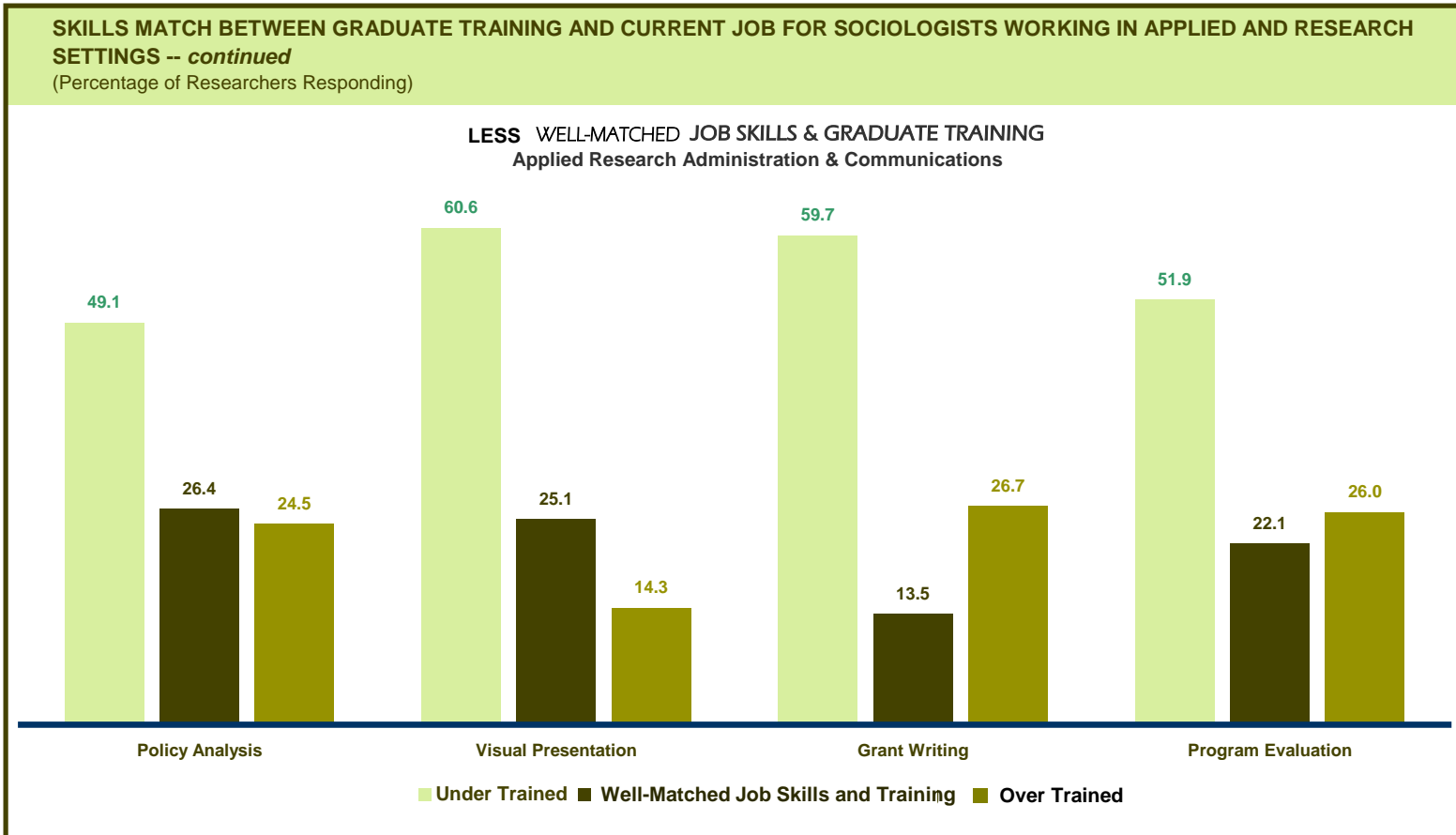
Note: **Under Trained:** Important skills for current job but less than adequate training in graduate school.
Well-Matched Job Skills and Training: Important for current job and adequate training.
Over Trained: Less important skill for current job although adequate graduate training.

Source: American Sociological Association, Research and Development Department, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Survey for the Ford Foundation of Non-Academic PhDs in Sociology* (Washington, DC: ASA, 2005, p.4).



Skills Needed from Graduate School

Figure 5B



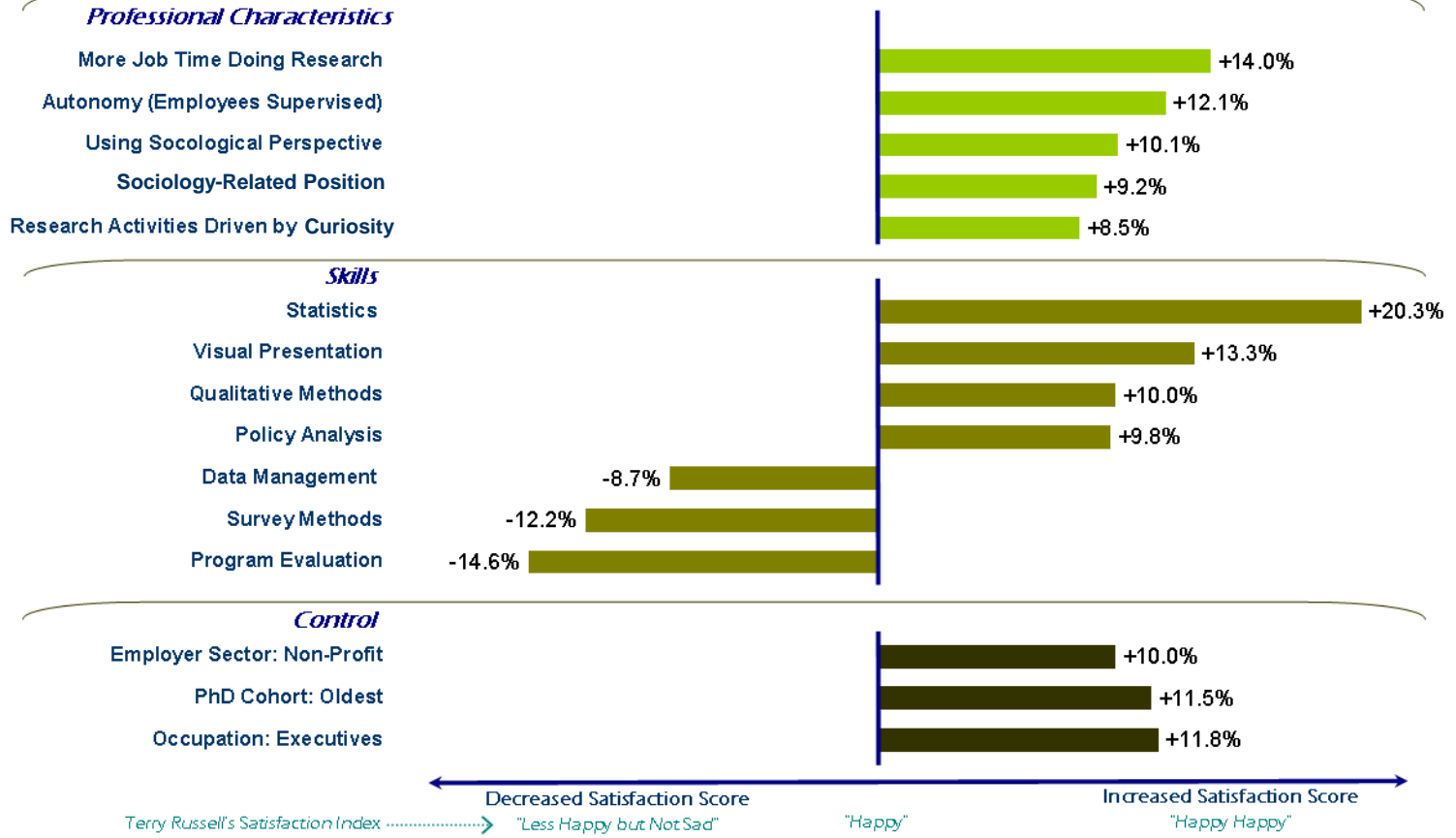
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Job Satisfaction

PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SKILLS THAT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE OR DECREASE OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION (Standardized Categorical Regression Coefficients as Percentage of One Standard Deviation)

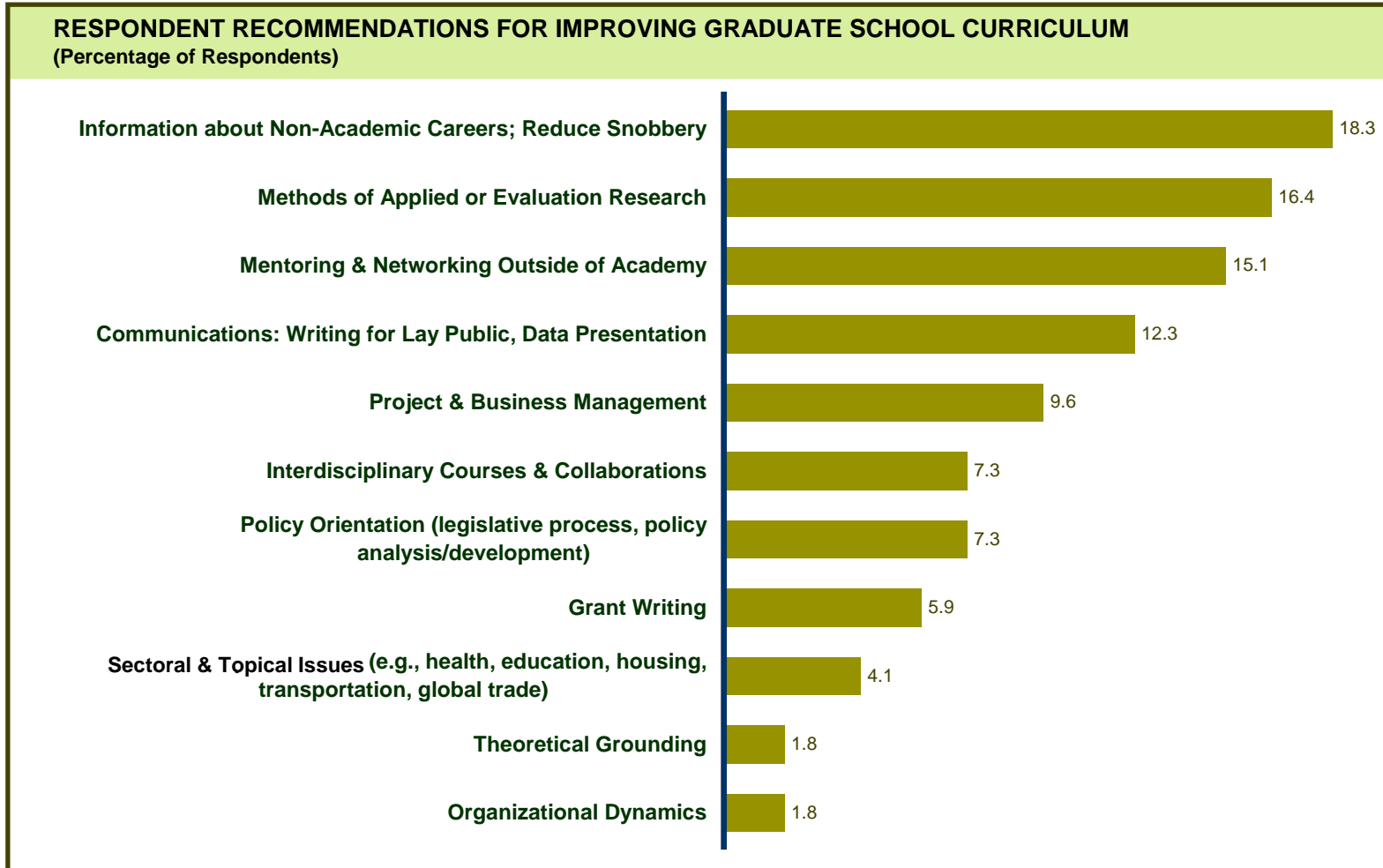


Source: American Sociological Association, Research and Development Department, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Survey of Non-Academic PhDs in Sociology* (Washington, DC: ASA, 2006).



► On Improving Graduate Programs

Figure 7



Source: American Sociological Association, Research and Development Department, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: A Survey for the Ford Foundation of Non-Academic PhDs in Sociology* (Washington, DC: ASA, 2005, p.4).



Conclusions

- Sociology as a discipline might gain status (or at least more jobs) if there was more than one career model.
- Characteristics of work outside the academy could be a model for solving real world problems in large-scale funded disciplinary teams.
- Expand efforts to provide information to students, faculty, and administrators on careers in government, for-profit, and non-profit sectors in order to:
 - ✓ Improve movement between employment sectors
 - ✓ Change curricula
 - ✓ Develop networks with employers