



Individual Salary is Not Enough:

Measuring the Well-Being of Recent College Graduates in Sociology

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This is the final in a series of research briefs from the National Science Foundation-supported study, *Social Capital, Organizational Capital, and the Job Market for New Sociology Graduates*. In this current brief we examine predictors of the outcomes of a college education. We argue that a single-minded focus on income is misguided, and we ask whether earned income is the best measure of post-college well-being or if aspects of the college experience, including use of the concepts and skills learned, are an equally or more important route to well-being after college. Based on the data examined here, we find that income is inadequate as a sole predictor of well-being and that college experiences matter in producing what are, by and large, positive outcomes for recent sociology majors. Second, we show that sociology graduates who use the concepts and skills that they learned as undergraduates on the job are better positioned for long-term careers, are happy that they majored in sociology, and are well

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positioned to assist their communities in creating a better world.

In contrast, Federal agencies, funding organizations, higher education administrators, and accreditors want to develop and distribute limited outcomes data to students, parents, and tax payers. Many state governors, arguing that the purpose of publicly-funded higher education is to train graduates for jobs, have railed against “intellectual luxuries,” “curiosity for curiosity sake,” and subsidizing disciplines that do not lead to a job (Berrett 2015). These concerns from governors and others stem, in part, from a desire to cut state higher education budgets of “frills” and are consistent with a business-oriented model adopted by many institutions of higher education (Bok 2003; Roth 2014; Rothberg and Garrett, 2009). Recently, the Obama Administration released an institution-by-institution interactive web site, “the College Scorecard,” which reveals metrics on college costs, graduation rates, and alumni salaries, using data from the Internal Revenue Service. Numbers of researchers have followed this path (see, for example Carnevale, Cheah, and Strohl 2013).

Critics of this view, suggest that income is not the penultimate goal of a college education. They have given renewed attention to the argument that colleges produce social goods, such as developing the skills needed to participate in a democratic state and to contribute in meaningful ways to communities (Geary Schneider 2015; Roth 2014). Researchers are beginning to respond to this argument with empirical work. A joint study by the Gallup organization and Purdue University asked graduates if college experiences promote well-lived lives (Ray and Kafka 2014). To this end, they created an index that measures the success of graduates in obtaining “great jobs” and “great lives.” We contribute to this literature by providing a series of job-related and non-economic outcomes of the baccalaureate experience.

The current focus on student outcomes after graduation was preceded by at least three decades of concern about what students were learning while in school. Beginning in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983), commentators have expressed alarm, about pre-college-age students’ relatively low levels of proficiency in core academic subjects. Recently, similar concerns were expressed by Arum and Roksa (2011) in *Academically Adrift* who question whether students learn anything in college. We respond to these critics of higher education by analyzing the extent to which collegiate experiences contribute to positive outcomes after graduation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data for this brief come from two waves of our longitudinal survey project. Wave I data were gathered in Spring, 2012 from May and August, 2012 graduates, with 2,695 majors (a

37% response rate) from 160 colleges and universities throughout the United States responding to the survey. The third wave of the survey was administered between November, 2013 and January, 2014, approximately 18 months after students' baccalaureate graduation. Third wave surveys were returned from 911 respondents (or 36 percent of the original respondents). An annotated list of previous briefs is found in the Appendix, and an expanded discussion of the project is found at <http://www.asanet.org/research-publications/research-sociology/research-projects/bachelors-and-beyond-2012>.

Although we had 911 third wave respondents, the analysis presented here focuses on the 575 graduates who were in the job market and who reported, if they were also in school, that work was their primary activity. The remaining respondents were in school only plus a small percent that were neither in school nor in the labor force. Since much of the salary-based outcome data in the literature are derived from alumni that have income and, therefore, are probably in the workforce, we, too, focus on those graduates in the labor force. To analyze these data we rely on both descriptive and multivariate analyses. To reduce the number of variables, we created a variety of scales and indexes, as described below. In what follows we present a description of the measures used. Then we summarize the results of univariate frequency analyses and a series of multivariate regression analyses.

DESCRIPTION OF MEASURES

We distinguish between several job-related outcome measures and several non-economic outcome measures (dependent variables), and then discuss the independent (explanatory) variables to be used in the analysis. Figure 1 shows the relation between these two types of variables.

Outcomes Measures (Dependent Variables)

Job-Related Outcomes

Although our measures of engagement at work are not as direct as those used in the Purdue/Gallup survey, we are able to distinguish between three job-related outcomes that provide a greater emphasis on graduates' future success and societal contributions than available when there is a singular focus on post-graduate income. These three outcome measures are whether the job is viewed as a career, the number of job advancements, and job satisfaction.

Job Viewed as Career Scale. This outcome is formed from combining two survey items. Respondents were asked whether or not they believe they have a "career-type job." They also were asked whether they believe "having this job will lead to where you'd like to be

career-wise in the next five years." There is a high correlation (.67) between these two measures. The strength of this correlation suggests that respondents understand the meaning of a career-type job as one that includes career ladders and advancement.¹

Number of Job Advancements. The Number of Job Advancements counts the number of positive job changes the respondent has experienced since graduation. These 11 advancements include the following: increase in salary; increase in benefits; increase in job security; better location; better opportunities for advancement; greater intellectual challenge; increased level of responsibility; increased degree of independence; better co-workers; making a greater contribution to society; and increased role in helping people. Hence, the index ranges from 0 to 11, with 0 representing no advances and 11 representing all advances in the scale.

Job Satisfaction. Job Satisfaction captures respondents' views about whether their job provides rewards and meets needs. Respondents were asked to rate their over-all job satisfaction on a four-point scale with response options "very dissatisfied," "somewhat dissatisfied," "somewhat satisfied," and "very satisfied."

Non-Economic Measures of Well-Being

In addition to the job-related outcome measures, we created non-economic measures of well-being. The first reflects retrospective satisfaction (or Happiness) with the sociology major. The second, Living Independently, reflects a successful transition to adulthood, and the third, Civic Engagement reflects participation in activities that produce social goods, including participation in a democratic state and communities.

Happiness with Sociology Scale. The retrospective measure we use is a scale that combines two questions. These are: (1) "Overall, given where you are now, how satisfied are you with your undergraduate sociology experiences?" and (2) "If you had to do it all over again, would you choose sociology as your undergraduate major field of study?" Responses to the two questions are strongly related (with a correlation of .58), suggesting that they can be viewed as part of the same construct.²

1 The first item's response options are "no," "not sure," and "yes," with codes 0, 1, and 2, respectively. The second item's options are "not at all likely," "not very likely," "it might," and "yes, definitely," with codes 0, 0, 1, and 2 (to give the two items equal weight). Hence, the additive scale created from these two variables ranges from 0 to 4. Cronbach's alpha (a measure of internal consistency) for the scale is .80.

2 Each of the two items has four response options. The first item includes the options "very satisfied," "somewhat satisfied," "somewhat dissatisfied," and "very dissatisfied," while the second item includes "definitely choose sociology again," "probably choose sociology again," "probably not choose sociology again," and "definitely not choose sociology again," coded 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Cronbach's alpha (a measure of internal consistency) for the summative scale is .72.

Living Independently. We distinguish between two categories—respondents who live with their parents and those who live independently rather than with their parents. The second option includes living alone, living with a roommate, living with a spouse or partner, and living with family members besides parents.

Civic Engagement Index. Civic engagement is measured in a different fashion than the other outcomes. Respondents were asked: “To what extent do you think the concepts and skills that you learned in your undergraduate sociology program have been useful to you?” in each of four different arenas of community life—volunteering, making political choices, understanding current events, and working with family members (including children).

We created a composite variable by adding the number of “a great deal” responses across the items; hence, the index ranges from zero to four.

Independent (Explanatory) Variables

With the exception of yearly income, many of the independent variables in this analysis are based on responses to questions about undergraduate experiences. Therefore they precede the dependent variables in time, and, thus, may be predictive of post-baccalaureate outcomes. They are:

Yearly Income. We view income as an independent variable that may or may not be related to broader measures of well-being. Respondents were asked: “What were your earnings for this job?” To make regression coefficients easier to interpret, yearly income was divided by 1,000 (so that coefficients represent the impact on outcomes of a \$1,000 increase in income, rather than a \$1 increase).

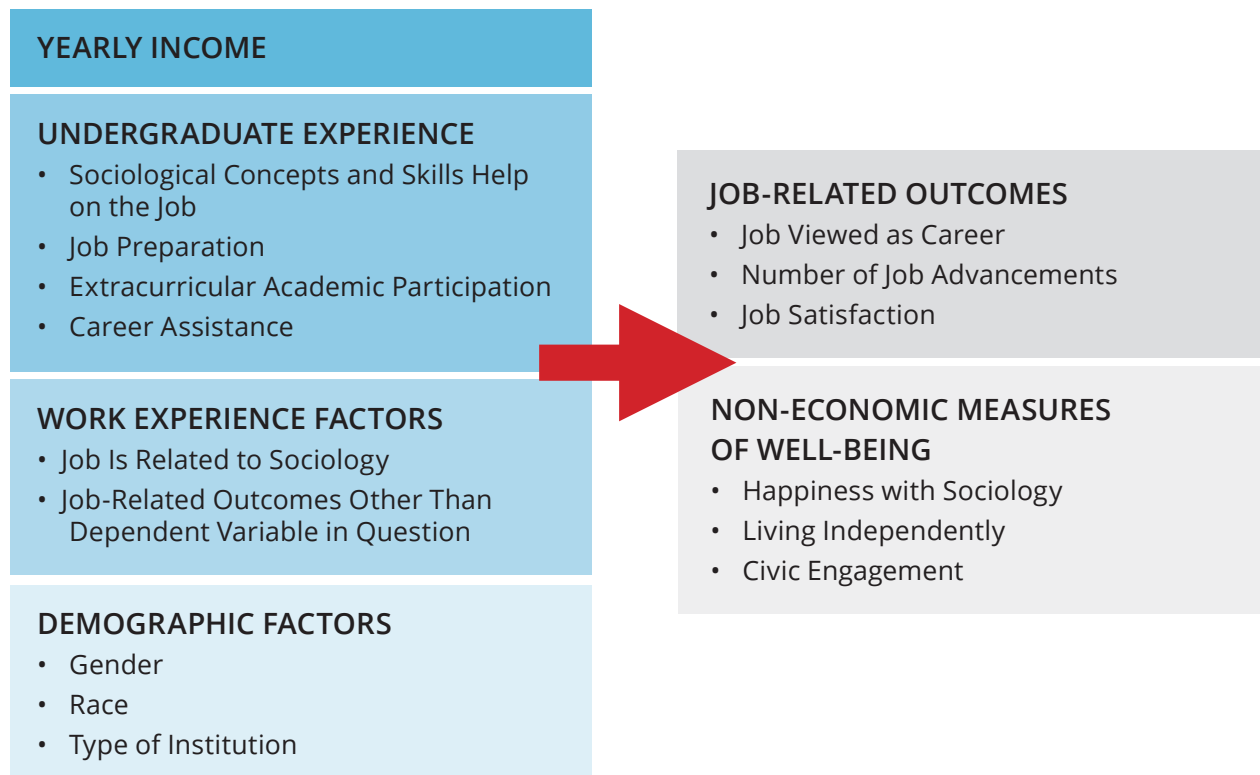
Sociological Concepts and Skills Help on the Job Index. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with nine statements, focused on the extent to which respondents agree that concepts and skills from undergraduate sociology studies help on the job. The concept/skill areas include: data analysis, research design, sociological concepts and theories, the general sociological imagination, diversity (e.g., race, gender, class), groups and teams, social institutions and their impact on individuals, social problems, and alternative or critical perspectives. The composite Sociological Concepts and Skills Help on the Job Index is a tally of the number of “strongly agree” responses, and, hence, ranges from zero to nine.

Three Undergraduate Activity Participation Indices: Job Preparation, Extracurricular Academic Participation, Career Assistance. Wave 1 respondents were asked whether or not they had participated in a variety of activities as part of their undergraduate experience.

We created three indices each of which counts the number of activities that respondents report. The grouping of items is based on factor analysis. The first index is Job Preparation and includes participation in internships, service learning projects, and community or other volunteer activity. The Extracurricular Academic Participation Index counts participation in sociology clubs, sociology Honors programs, attending a local/state/regional/national sociology meeting, and working with or receiving mentoring from a faculty member. The third of these indices is the Career Assistance Index, which includes attending job fairs, on-campus interviews by firms, other networking opportunities; participating in a leadership development program; and seeing a career advisor.

Job Is Related to Sociology. Respondents were asked “How closely is your job related to sociology,” with response options “closely related,” “somewhat related,” or “not related,” that are ranked from one to three.” This variable is useful in highlighting the distinct role of using concepts and skills on the job as opposed to simply viewing the job as being close to sociology.

FIGURE 1. Model Linking Job-Related Outcomes and Non-Economic Measures of Well-Being to Independent Variables.



Race/ethnicity, Gender, Type of Institution. Finally, the demographic factors race/ethnicity, gender, and type of institution from which the respondent graduated were included as independent variables in the regression analyses.

UNIVARIATE ANALYSIS

To address commentators who are critical of the undergraduate experience, generally, or of the sociology major, in particular, we first explore the impact of gaining a baccalaureate degree in sociology on the multiple measures of post-baccalaureate well-being. Table 1 summarizes the post-graduation outcomes for these graduates. The top row of the table focuses on job-related outcomes while the bottom rows of the table (see next page) focus on other non-economic measures of well-being. We find a higher level of engagement on some measures than others, thus highlighting the advantages of our use of these multiple measures.

Job-Related Outcomes

Job Viewed as Career Scale. We find that 32 percent of respondents are in the most advantageous career situation (currently in a career job that definitely will lead to positive

TABLE 1. Outcomes of the Baccalaureate Experience in Sociology for Employed Sociology Graduates: Percent Distributions

JOB RELATED OUTCOMES

Job Viewed as Career Scale	# of Job Advancements	Job Satisfaction
0=low 20.2%	0 14.8%	Very dissatisfied 6.3%
1 7.4%	1-2 12.2%	Somewhat dissatisfied 15.9%
2 12.8%	3-4 16.1%	Somewhat satisfied 41.3%
3 27.3%	5-6 16.7%	Very satisfied 36.5%
4=high 32.3%	7-8 17.0%	
	9-10 14.6%	
	11 8.5%	

TABLE 1. (Continued)

NON-ECONOMIC MEASURES OF WELL-BEING

<p><i>Happiness with Sociology Major Scale</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>2=lowest</td> <td>1.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>2.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>4.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>12.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>6</td> <td>18.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td>22.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8=highest</td> <td>37.3%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2=lowest	1.7%	3	2.7%	4	4.7%	5	12.7%	6	18.6%	7	22.3%	8=highest	37.3%	<p><i>Independence of Living Situation</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>With parents (coded 0)</td> <td>24.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Without parents (coded 1)</td> <td>75.0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	With parents (coded 0)	24.7%	Without parents (coded 1)	75.0%	<p><i>Sociology Helps with Volunteering</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not at all</td> <td>3.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not too much</td> <td>10.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some</td> <td>35.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A great deal</td> <td>50.9%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Not at all	3.4%	Not too much	10.2%	Some	35.5%	A great deal	50.9%
2=lowest	1.7%																											
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<p><i>Sociology Helps with Making Political Choices</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not at all</td> <td>4.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not too much</td> <td>11.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some</td> <td>31.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A great deal</td> <td>53.3%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Not at all	4.0%	Not too much	11.3%	Some	31.3%	A great deal	53.3%	<p><i>Sociology Helps with Understanding Current Events</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not at all</td> <td>2.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not too much</td> <td>5.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some</td> <td>30.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A great deal</td> <td>62.5%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Not at all	2.5%	Not too much	5.0%	Some	30.0%	A great deal	62.5%	<p><i>Sociology Helps when Working with Family Members (Including Children)</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not at all</td> <td>4.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not too much</td> <td>12.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some</td> <td>39.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A great deal</td> <td>43.2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Not at all	4.6%	Not too much	12.5%	Some	39.6%	A great deal	43.2%		
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<p><i>Civic Engagement Index</i></p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>0 ("A great deal")</td> <td>31.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>13.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>18.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>17.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 (A great deal")</td> <td>18.6%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	0 ("A great deal")	31.1%	1	13.7%	2	18.6%	3	17.9%	4 (A great deal")	18.6%																		
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outcomes in five years), with another 27 percent in a “might” be situation.

Job Advancements. While these sociology graduates from the class of 2012 have had only so much time to progress in their careers, what is notable in Table 1 is the high percentage of recent graduates who experienced multiple positive job changes. In fact, 57 percent report experiencing five or more kinds of job advancements, while only 15 percent report no positive advances. Examining specific types of advancement that are combined in our composite measure, we find that more than one half of respondents experienced four specific types of advancements--an increased level of responsibility, a salary increase, an increased degree of independence on the job, and an increased role in helping people. Some of these advances may be the result of job change rather than advancement within a single position.

Job Satisfaction. Overall, more than one-third (37 percent) of graduates are very satisfied and another 41 percent are somewhat satisfied with their jobs. Examining specific aspects of the job, 56 percent of respondents are very satisfied with the location of their jobs, and more than 45 percent are very satisfied with their co-workers, their degree of independence, and their ability to help people (Senter, Spalter-Roth, and Van Vooren 2015). These findings suggest that strong satisfaction is not limited to salary for sociology graduates, although they were less satisfied with the material aspects of their jobs including benefits opportunities for advancement, and salary (Senter, Spalter-Roth, and Van Vooren 2015).

In sum, the responses to our job-related outcomes measures suggest that the sociology majors in our study appear to be positively situated for career growth and for a well-lived life.

Non-Economic Measures of Well-being

Happiness with Sociology Scale. About half of respondents were satisfied with the major after graduation and said they would major in sociology if they had to do it over again (Spalter-Roth, Senter, and Van Vooren 2014). When we combine these two retrospective measures into a “happiness scale” we find that 37 percent are in the highest scale category with another 22 percent in the next highest category (as shown in Table 1). The percentage of unhappy majors is low, with less than 10 percent of respondents falling into one of the three lowest categories of our scale.

Living Independently. About one quarter of former sociology majors are living with their parents (Table 1). By contrast, about three quarters of the new graduates are

living independently, suggesting they have made a positive transition to adulthood. This percentage compares with Arum and Roksa's finding that about 30 percent of college graduates live at home (2014). Thus, sociology majors are somewhat more likely to live independently.

Civic Engagement. Arum and Roksa agree with many other researchers that the transition to adulthood should involve greater social responsibility and civic engagement (2014: 99). We find that half of more of respondents agree that sociology helps a great deal with volunteering, making political choices and understanding current events. Over 40 percent agree that sociology helps in working with family members. As noted, this kind of care work is necessary for the maintenance of the social fabric (Abel and Nelson 1990). The index shows that more than one third of majors report using sociology a great deal when engaging in three or four of these civic activities.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF OUTCOMES

In this section we concentrate on which factors are associated with our multiple outcomes measures, when other variables are held constant. We focus, in particular, on whether income trumps other explanatory variables and on whether undergraduate experiences, especially using sociological concepts and skills, are equally or more important. We present a model, for each of our outcomes dependent variables, including income, the work and college experience variables, and the demographic variables. Table 2 provides the models for the three job-related outcomes, and Table 3 provides the models for the non-economic outcomes.

JOB-RELATED OUTCOMES REGRESSIONS

Job Viewed as Career Scale. Yearly Income does have a statistically significant relationship with our Job Viewed as Career Scale. However, we also find that respondents' views of whether they hold a career job are affected by a number of conditions. These include, whether their job is related to sociology, the number of job advancements they experience, the extent to which sociological concepts and skills help on the job, and the extent to which the respondent participated in job preparation activities as undergraduates. The demographic variables are not related to our Job Viewed as Career Scale. The major findings are that income is not the sole explanation of whether the job has longer-term career potential and that undergraduate experiences do matter. We are able to explain more than one third of the variance in this dependent variable.

Number of Job Advancements. When the Number of Job Advancements is the dependent variable, we explain almost one quarter of the variance. There were two significant

TABLE 2. Regression Models with Job-Related Outcomes as Dependent Variables: Regression Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses

	Jobs Viewed as Career Scale	Number of Job Advancements	Job Satisfaction
Key to cells	Regr Coef (Std Error)	Regr Coef (Std Error)	Regr Coef (Std Error)
(Constant)	.028 (.211)	2.745** (.520)	2.020** (.124)
Job Is Related to Sociology	.416** (.139)	-.068 (.356)	-.005 (.083)
Job Viewed as Career Scale	--	.914** (.104)	.285** (.026)
Number of Job Advancements	.143** (.016)	--	.050** (.010)
Sociological Concepts/Skills Help on the Job Index	.121** (.021)	.180** (.055)	.018 (.013)
Job Preparation Index	.089* (.042)	-.052 (.106)	-.005 (.025)
Extracurricular Academic Index	-.050 (.043)	.156 (.108)	-.010 (.025)
Career Assistance Index	.079 (.052)	-.025 (.131)	-.021 (.031)
Total Yearly (by 1000)	.029** (.004)	.008 (.011)	-.002 (.002)
Gender--Female	.037 (.130)	-.310 (.328)	.115 (.076)
Race/Ethnicity—Black	.096 (.188)	-.498 (.474)	-.126 (.110)
Institution—Master's	-.206 (.122)	-.076 (.308)	.123 (.072)
Institution—Bachelor's	-.208 (.158)	.060 (.401)	.173 (.093)
<i>Adjusted R-square</i>	<i>.370</i>	<i>.224</i>	<i>.364</i>

* significant at $p \leq .05$; ** significant at $p \leq .01$

TABLE 3. Regression Models with Non-Economic Measures of Well-being as Dependent Variables: Regression Coefficients for OLS Regression or Coefficients and Odds Ratios [exp(b)] for Logit Regression, with Standard Errors in Parentheses

	HAPPINESS WITH SOCIOLOGY	LIVING INDEPENDENTLY	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INDEX
Key to cells	Regr Coef (Std Error)	Logit Coef Odds Ratio (Std Error)	Regr Coef (Std Error)
(Constant)	1.475** (-0.191)	0.419 -0.869 (-0.462)	.865** (-0.266)
Job Is Related to Sociology	0.129 (-0.128)	0.911 -0.093 (-0.311)	0.152 (-0.158)
Job Viewed as Career Scale	0.068 (-0.04)	1.095 0.091 (-0.092)	-0.062 (-0.052)
Number of Job Advancements	0.006 (-0.016)	0.981 -0.019 (-0.038)	.044* (-0.021)
Sociological Concepts/Skills Help on the Job Index	.094** (-0.02)	1.063 0.061 (-0.049)	--
Job Preparation Index	0.043 (-0.038)	1.061 0.059 (-0.087)	0.077 (-0.05)
Extracurricular Academic Index	.111** (-0.039)	1.125 (0.118) -0.094	0.07 (-0.051)
Career Assistance Index	-0.016 (-0.047)	(0.856) -0.155 (-0.109)	-0.052 (-0.062)
Happiness with Sociology Scale		1.117 0.11 (.102)	.324** (-0.058)
Total Yearly (by 1000)	0.005 (-0.004)	1.040** (0.039)	-0.004 (-0.005)
Gender--Female	.338** (-0.118)	0.878 -0.13 (-0.276)	-0.002 (-0.156)

TABLE 3. (Continued)

	HAPPINESS WITH SOCIOLOGY	LIVING INDEPENDENTLY	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INDEX
Key to cells	Regr Coef (Std Error)	Logit Coef Odds Ratio (Std Error)	Regr Coef (Std Error)
Race/Ethnicity—Black	-0.01 (-0.171)	1.096 0.092 (-0.409)	0.242 (-0.224)
Institution—Master’s	0.142 (-0.11)	1.556 0.442 (-0.257)	-0.022 (-0.145)
Institution—Bachelor’s	.362* (-0.144)	2.416* 0.882 (-0.385)	-0.258 (-0.191)
<i>Adjusted R-square</i>	<i>0.151</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>0.081</i>

* significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .01$

variables: respondents who score high on the Concepts and Skills Help on the Job Index and those who score high on the Job Viewed as Career Scale are significantly more likely to have experienced job advancements. Including income in the model does not increase the explained variance, and income is not a statistically significant. Likewise, adding the demographic variables does not change our ability to explain the Number of Job Advancements. This model suggests that higher income respondents are not the ones most likely to advance on the job (although salary increases are one factor included in our Number of Advancements Index).³

Job Satisfaction. When focusing on Job Satisfaction, we find that only two independent variables are significant— the Job Viewed as Career Scale and the Number of Job Advancements experienced by respondents. This model suggests that respondents who view themselves as being on a career path and who experience job advancements in the 18 months since graduation are the ones most likely to be highly satisfied with their jobs. Increases in Income do not enhance job satisfaction in the multivariate context. Similarly, the demographic factors are not related to job satisfaction. These findings suggest that recent college graduates in sociology can find satisfying employment that looks beyond the

³ When we removed “increase in salary” from our Number of Advancements Index and re-ran the regressions, we found no change in substantive findings.

rewards associated with income.⁴

NON-ECONOMIC MEASURES OF WELL-BEING

Happiness with Sociology Scale. Recall that our Happiness with Sociology scale is negatively skewed with high numbers of happy graduates. For the regression analyses, the variable is recoded to eliminate the negative skew.⁵ Our regression model shows that the Sociological Concepts and Skills Help on the Job Index is significantly related to retrospective views about happiness with the major. A second variable significantly related to retrospective happiness is participation as an undergraduate in extracurricular academic activities. For this model, two types of demographic factors—gender (being female and institutional type (attending a bachelor’s institution are associated with happiness with sociology. Again, income does not help us understand this component of well-being, while using knowledge learned as undergraduates does provide respondents with satisfaction in reviewing the choices they have made.

Living Independently. As we have seen, about one-quarter of sociology graduates are living with their parents, and three quarters are living independently. Given the dichotomous dependent variable, we developed three logit models, comparable to OLS models used for the other dependent variables. We find that the Cox and Snell pseudo R-square is low for our model, suggesting that the characteristics chosen do *not* do a good job of explaining whether or not graduates live independently or at home. The only significant independent variable is Yearly Income; for each \$1,000 increase in income, the chance of living independently increases by four percent. In addition, graduates from a baccalaureate-only college are more likely to live independently.

In a previous analysis, based on data from this study, we found that those attending baccalaureate-only colleges were more likely to have parents who were college graduates or beyond (Senter, Van Vooren, and Spalter-Roth 2013. These students may have resources from parents to assist them in living independently, and, of course, income itself helps to pay the rent. If we focus on the non-demographic factors, we see that this is the only

4 We also ran regression models using Yearly Income as a dependent variable. The model comparable to those presented in Table 2 explains 13 percent of the variance in Yearly Income. Three re-gression coefficients are statistically significant. The Job Is a Career Scale is positively and the Sociological Concepts/Skills Help on the Job Index is negatively related to Yearly Income (while the bivariate correlation between income and the index is not significant). In addition, female graduates have lower incomes than male graduates. One possible explanation is that men are less likely than women to have jobs that rely on sociological skills and concepts.

5 Codes 2-5 from Table 1 are collapsed into a single “lowest” happiness category.

instance where we find income to be a significant predictor of a non-economic outcome.

Civic Engagement Index. Recall that we measured civic engagement differently than the other dependent variables, because we asked explicitly whether sociological concepts and skills were useful when participating in each of four aspects of civic life. In the regression models, we exclude this Concepts/Skills Help variable because the survey question itself addresses the issue of whether sociological learning is helpful. Our model, which only explains eight percent of the variance, shows that graduates who are happy with sociology and who have experienced job advancements are more likely to score higher on the Civic Engagement Index. Income, the variable so important in the literature, is not significant in any of these models. Similarly, the demographic factors do not help determine which graduates find sociology useful when they contribute to civic life.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Given difficult economic times experienced during the Great Recession, the modest recovery that followed, and the high cost of higher education, there is increasing pressure by federal and state governments, by college administrators, and by parents to concentrate on salaries as the sole outcome of a baccalaureate degree. This brief, by contrast, follows recent research that goes beyond income and examines the impact of a college education on “great jobs, “great lives,” and the transition to adulthood (Arum and Roksa 2014; Ray and Kafka, 2014). Other commentators and researchers cited here have questioned whether colleges are successful in providing graduates with the knowledge and skills useful for developing a full life that contributes to social well-being, communities, and the social fabric. Our research follows in this tradition by suggesting that collegiate experience matter in promoting a life that includes economic as well as non-economic well-being for individuals and their communities.

Using data from a longitudinal study of sociology majors from the class of 2012, this brief develops a series of measures of college outcomes including proxy measures for economic and non-economic outcomes. It documents the extent to which graduates from this discipline experience positive outcomes in the first years after their graduation. We find that sociology, given its core concepts and methodological skills, appears to be important for successfully pursuing well-being. Graduates who use sociological concepts, skills, and experiences on the job and in daily life are likely to report a range of positive post-baccalaureate outcomes.

Although income is not an irrelevant factor in our graduates’ lives—for example, more income contributed to graduates’ ability to live independently away from parents—income

by itself is not the sole or always the best predictor of a range of beneficial outcomes for sociology graduates. The singular focus on income, embraced by many higher education and government officials, is not sufficient for comprehending alumni well-being. Income needs to be coupled with recognition of the ways in which both jobs and non-economic life can be rich and satisfying, even when earnings are not maximized.

These findings suggest that recent college graduates in sociology can find satisfying employment by embracing an orientation that looks beyond the individualistic rewards associated with income. They will be particularly successful if they learn sociological concepts and skills and embrace additional college experiences. More generally, efforts to reduce the “frills” associated with the collegiate experience may be undermining efforts not just to create skilled graduates but happy ones who are civically engaged as well. These findings also suggest that sociology departments and faculty should highlight for undergraduates the links between collegiate experiences and successful post-baccalaureate employment and life outcomes.

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Spalter-Roth, Roberta, Nicole Van Vooren, Mary S, Senter. 2015. *First Generation Sociology Majors Overcome Deficits*. Washington, DC: The American Sociological Association.

Spalter-Roth, Roberta, Nicole Van Vooren, and Mary Senter. 2014 *Recent Sociology Alumni: Would They Major Again?* Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

APPENDIX: RESEARCH BRIEFS FROM THE 2012 BACHELOR'S AND BEYOND PROJECT

All briefs listed below are available on the ASA website at <https://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-briefs>.

FIRST GENERATION SOCIOLOGY MAJORS OVERCOME DEFICITS

Roberta Spalter-Roth, Nicole Van Vooren, and Mary S. Senter. May, 2015. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

Most studies of first generation college students focus on the deficits and difficulties they face. While there appears to be truth to these claims, there is evidence that first generation sociology majors who graduate from college overcome these deficits, although they appear to gain less social capital and human capital while in school.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/first-generation-sociology-majors-overcome-deficits>

JOBS, CAREERS, AND SOCIOLOGICAL SKILLS: THE EARLY EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES OF 2012 SOCIOLOGY MAJORS

Mary S. Senter, Roberta Spalter-Roth, and Nicole Van Vooren. February, 2015. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

This brief focuses on the work experiences of majors for whom paid work was primary 18 months after graduation during the post-recession years still characterized by high unemployment and high student debt. The employment outcomes for these graduates were relatively positive.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/jobs-careers-sociological-skills-early-employment-experiences-2012-sociology-majors>

RECENT SOCIOLOGY ALUMNI: WOULD THEY MAJOR AGAIN?

Roberta Spalter-Roth, Nicole Van Vooren, and Mary Senter. November 14, 2014. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

Over one half of sociology graduates report that they definitely would major in sociology again if they had the choice to make. Using sociological concepts and skills in post-graduate activities and having a job close to sociology increases likelihood of majoring again. Some out-of-class activities and demographic characteristics are also related to respondents' willingness to choose sociology again.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/recent-sociology-alumni-would-they-major-again>

SOCIOLOGY, CRIMINOLOGY CONCENTRATIONS, AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE: DIFFERENCES IN REASONS FOR MAJORING, SKILLS, ACTIVITIES, AND EARLY OUTCOMES?

Mary S. Senter, Nicole Van Vooren, and Roberta Spalter-Roth. April, 2014. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

Many sociology departments are concerned about the growth in the number of criminal justice majors compared to straight sociology majors. The largest group of respondents with joint majors list "sociology and criminal justice." These majors are more likely than straight sociology majors to report that the major would prepare them for the job they wanted, although they were less likely to obtain such a job.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/sociology-criminology-concentrations-and-criminal-justice-differences-reasons-majoring-skills>

STRONG TIES, WEAK TIES, OR NO TIES: WHAT HELPED SOCIOLOGY MAJORS FIND CAREER-LEVEL JOBS?

Roberta Spalter-Roth, Nicole Van Vooren, Michael Kisielewski, Mary S. Senter, July 2013. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association

The largest number of employed graduates work in social services/counseling , with more than half of those for whom work is their primary status reporting that they are in a career-type job. Weak ties (e.g., faculty member, former job supervisor, capstone activities) are more successful than strong ties (e.g., family, friends) or no ties (e.g., newspaper ads, electronic resources) in helping sociology alumni secure career-type jobs.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/strong-ties-weak-ties-or-no-ties-what-helped-sociology-majors-find-career-level-jobs-0>

SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR SOCIOLOGY MAJORS: APPLIED ACTIVITIES AND PEER NETWORKS

Roberta Spalter-Roth, Nicole Van Vooren, and Mary S Senter. March 2013. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

A survey of departments participating in the 2012 Bachelor's and Beyond project found that one-third of them report that they emphasize "real world" applications of sociological knowledge "a great deal." The departmental emphasis on application varies significantly by institutional type, with Master's institutions giving it the most emphasis.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/social-capital-sociology-majors-applied-activities-and-peer-networks>

SOCIOLOGY MAJORS: BEFORE GRADUATION IN 2012 (FROM THE FIRST WAVE OF THE STUDY)

Mary S. Senter, Nicole Van Vooren, and Roberta Spalter-Roth, January 2013. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

This brief provides a summary of data from Wave 1 of the project. It provides information about the demographics of majors, types of majors, reasons for majoring in the field, self-reports of learning, participation in out-of-class activities, and satisfaction with undergraduate sociology experiences.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/sociology-majors-graduation-2012>

WHAT LEADS TO STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH SOCIOLOGY PROGRAMS?

Mary S. Senter, Nicole Van Vooren, Michael Kisielewski, and Roberta Spalter-Roth. November 2012. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

Senior majors in sociology programs were highly satisfied with their experiences, although they were less satisfied with advising than with other aspects of their programs. Students who majored for conceptual rather than convenience reasons (e.g., major required

fewer hours) were more satisfied. Satisfaction is highest for students who participated in a variety of activities and who reported high levels of conceptual and methodological learning.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/what-leads-student-satisfaction-sociology-programs>

RECRUITING SOCIOLOGY MAJORS: WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THE GREAT RECESSION? CONCEPTS, CHANGE, AND CAREERS

Roberta Spalter-Roth, Nicole VanVooren, Michael Kisielewski, and Mary S. Senter. November, 2012. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association.

This brief compares the results from the 2005 study of senior sociology majors and the 2012 study—pre- and post-recession. The racial and ethnic diversity of sociology majors continues to grow, and fewer students in 2012 than 2005 select the reasons presented as “important” to them. Nonetheless students were more satisfied with their major in 2012 than in 2005, a positive sign for retention. Students continue to major for a variety of conceptual and practical reasons.

<http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/recruiting-sociology-majors-what-are-effects-great-recession-concepts-change-and-careers>



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