Dear New Sociology Major:

We are pleased you have declared a major in sociology. Welcome to the profession! In your remaining time as an undergraduate, you will focus on mastering your sociological skills and knowledge. You should also be using your educational experiences to begin exploring how sociology can help you be successful in a workforce where jobs require both the ability to work well with diverse groups and to use analytical and scientific skills. We hope the following information will help you make a thoughtful and successful transition from your major to the next phase of your life.

Your chosen field of study is a core social science that will provide you with a broad range of conceptual and technical skills that will expand your understanding of how individuals are influenced by, as well as can improve, social, economic, political, educational, and religious institutions. As you consider the variety of career and educational paths for which your chosen major in sociology will prepare you, you will begin to see how the array of sociological skills, concepts, and knowledge you learn as an undergraduate can be relied upon to help you be successful in the workforce or in graduate school.

Why do students major in sociology?
Students like you are attracted to sociology by the wide range of challenging questions sociology explores and thoughtful answers about the social world that it provides. The sociology major allows you to engage with sociological concepts, such as race and ethnicity; sex, gender and family life; rural, urban, suburban, and global communities; crime and the law; and social, cultural, political, and religious organizations and movements. Students emerge from the sociology major with conceptual skills, research skills, computer skills, and interpersonal skills, and they use what they have learned in sociology on the job. According to a former sociology major, now a college recruiter:

One of our goals... is to recruit a diverse student body and so understanding the history and cause and effect of racism in the United States... is a ... concept that I don’t think I would have gotten... in another major. Even gender, I took a great class in gender roles, so that comes into play.

What career opportunities will I have after graduation?
Sociology majors also expect that a sociology degree will help them successfully enter the labor market and attend graduate school after graduation or later on. A four-year study of sociology majors, conducted by the American Sociological Association, showed that more than half of undergraduate sociology majors go directly into the workforce after graduation. The graduate with a sociology major can succeed in a variety of careers without pursuing an additional degree. Eighteen months after graduation more than nine out of 10 sociology majors who were not full-time graduate students held paid jobs. Former majors reported finding jobs in many different fields, including case and group workers, non-profit administrators, paralegals, crime scene technicians, human rights advocates, managers, computer consultants, marketing researchers, teachers, editors, and survey workers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, these job categories are expected to grow. Sociology majors also report finding these careers very satisfying, especially when the work is more closely related to what they learned as a sociology majors. By four years after graduation, 80 percent of those majors who entered the labor market have changed jobs, although often staying in the same field. These job changes frequently reflect promotions, salary increases and better benefits, more responsibility, and increasingly interesting work.

Will I be prepared to pursue further degrees?
Many sociology majors (about half) pursue advanced degrees, directly after undergraduate school or after working for a while. Their degrees are masters or doctoral degrees in sociology, social work, education, psychology, law, business, criminology, health care, public policy, and communications. Many of these degrees lead to job and career advancement. The sociology major leads to these advanced degrees for all types of students, especially those who achieve a higher grade point average in college, regardless of the undergraduate institution they attended or the level
of education achieved by their parents. Students who go on to graduate school do so for idealistic reasons and to pursue specific career goals. According to a former sociology major, now a lawyer:

*I like that I am able to refer back to some of the skills that I learned through fulfilling my sociology degree and to apply some of the socio-economic differences and their effects on the law.*

**How can I prepare myself for the future?**

It is important that you start thinking about your future now as you pursue your major in sociology. The decisions that you make during your undergraduate years will affect your success in finding an interesting job or in being admitted to the graduate program you want to attend. You should discuss your future plans for employment or graduate study with your advisor as well as other faculty members in order to choose courses that prepare you for your immediate future. If you plan to find a job directly after graduation, you should participate in internships, engage in community activities, take part in service learning programs, gain leadership training skills, and attend job fairs. If you desire to complete an internship, make an appointment to discuss this with me further at the beginning of your academic career. Do not hesitate to list the skills that you learned in sociology on your résumé and be sure to discuss them during job interviews. Research on former majors tells us that you are more likely to use your sociological skills and knowledge on the job if you follow these steps. In addition, the result will be greater job satisfaction. If you are considering going on to graduate school (whether sooner or later), you should prepare yourself by participating in scholarly networks and in mentorship activities. This will help you make your decision about graduate school and provide you with additional knowledge and skills if you do pursue an advanced degree. Scholarly networks—such as our student sociology club, our chapter of the sociological honor society Alpha Kappa Delta, and state or regional sociological meetings—help students be aware of the latest knowledge and cutting-edge research; develop relationships with faculty members and graduate students; and teach undergraduate students how to present their work at scholarly meetings and use those meetings effectively in pursuing professional goals. Whenever possible, you should work with one or more faculty members on their research projects so that you expand the range of your research skills and forge relationships that may lead to recommendations for graduate school or professional school. Without academic success (a high grade point average), pursuing your plans for an additional degree will be more difficult.

**What should I tell my parents?**

Parents want their children to be successful, and some parents do not have a strong idea about what sociology is. You can address these issues if you talk about your major. Engage your parents and family members in conversations about what you find interesting in your classes. If your parents understand what interests you about sociology, they are more likely to understand and appreciate sociology and be supportive of your choice of the major. You might want to mention that the First Lady Michelle Obama was a sociology major at Princeton University. They might also be surprised about professionals they know personally who started with a degree in sociology. But more importantly, tell your parents about the skills and knowledge you are acquiring as a sociology major and that have led majors to find jobs in growing fields, as we described above. You can also tell your parents that sociology prepares students for graduate school: about half of sociology majors of the class of 2005 had completed a graduate degree by 2009. The choices you make now as a college student will influence your future. Concentrate on mastering the many skills and the vast knowledge that the sociology major provides, look around at jobs that allow you to apply what you learn in sociology in those work settings, and begin preparing yourself for a career or graduate school. Learn as much as you can, become involved in as many related activities as possible, and enjoy what sociology has to offer. For more information about the sociology major and careers in sociology go to [http://www.asanet.org/students/resources_majors.cfm](http://www.asanet.org/students/resources_majors.cfm).

Good luck.

Cordially,

Dr. Timothy E. Nissen, Chair
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice