



Sociology

Ignite your sociological imagination

“A strength of Sociology is its versatility – while underpinned by social theories, it has a strong focus on research methods and also encourages analytical perspective. These are all valuable skills required for a policy career and are sought after by potential employers.”

Lydia Clixby
BA (Sociology), DPH
Policy Analyst, Child and Youth Policy Team,
Ministry of Social Development

Sociology considers the ways that everyday lives relate to the social structures that shape identity, relationships and power in society. Students of Sociology develop a set of critical lenses that shed new light on the social world.

A Sociology degree will prepare students to dissect the multiple layers of our social reality – with all its pitfalls and promises – and apply that knowledge to guide our society to a better future.

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Why study Sociology?

If you believe that Sociology has meaning, relevance and applicability beyond the University, you are already one step ahead in developing your sociological imagination. This term was coined by the American sociologist, C Wright Mills, who wanted us to see how our "private troubles" related to "public issues".

For instance, instead of blaming people for their circumstances, with our sociological imagination we can begin to see how political arrangements, economic forces and the broader social order operate to create a world in which some people have the opportunities to advance, while others do not.

While the experience of being poor, unemployed or discriminated against is felt very deeply at the personal level, our sociological imagination encourages us to understand how the thoughts, feelings and actions of the individual relate to broader structural and historical realities.

In the words of Mills, "The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. To recognize this task and this promise is the mark of the classic social analyst." (Mills, 1959, p12)

By igniting your sociological imagination, you will begin to understand how personal choice is shaped by social context.

What will I study?

Are you interested in people and social relationships? Do you find habits, mannerisms and everyday life interesting? If so, Sociology is for you.

Sociology is useful for anyone working with people, particularly in groups or organisational settings. Sociological research and analysis can make an important contribution to the development of sound social policies that address inequality and promote social justice.

In addition, the study of Sociology will help you to acquire diverse skills that can be applied in a range of settings. These include the ability to:

- Ask insightful questions about power, human behaviour and social processes.
- Deepen our understanding of social issues using a variety of research methods.
- Critically analyse information.
- Develop your own theories about the social world.
- Propose alternatives that promote social justice.

Background required

The single most important requirement for the study of Sociology is curiosity and the willingness to look beneath the surface. A background in social sciences, history, geography or liberal arts is useful, but not required. Most students will be studying Sociology for the first time so everyone will be on an equal footing.

Careers using Sociology

Sociology graduates work in a variety of fields such as local and national politics, government departments, non-profit organisations, trade unions, social services, public health, journalism, social policy development, advertising and marketing, human resources and academia.

Sociology at Otago

Sociology can be studied as a major or a minor subject within the three-year Bachelor of Arts degree, or a Bachelor of Arts and Science. Many students who choose to major in the Arts or Social Sciences include Sociology papers in their degree.

In their first year, Sociology students are introduced to key concepts and approaches in local and global sociology. Second- and third-year papers explore theory; methods; basic social processes (such as interaction, modernity and culture); aspects of institutional life (such as family, education, health, politics and the economy); and drivers of social change (such as colonisation, globalisation, environmental sustainability, technology, youth culture and popular protest).

Teaching style

Sociology at Otago has a reputation for teaching excellence and innovation. Our teaching style involves interactive lectures and small group tutorials, where students are encouraged to apply theoretical concepts to practical cases. Students are helped to prepare for University life and are given assessment tasks that incorporate incremental skills development.

PROFILE

Lydia Clixby

Bachelor of Arts (Sociology), Postgraduate Diploma in Public Health
Policy Analyst, Child and Youth Policy Team, Ministry of Social Development (MSD)

"I went into my BA with the plan of pursuing a career in social policy. Reviewing the variety of papers available to study, a major in Sociology seemed most aligned to the set of skills required to best prepare me for this career.

"What particularly appealed to me about Sociology is how it is connected to the real world in the sense of the people and communities around us, with a lens to understanding social issues and dynamics from an academic standpoint and how we may work to improve outcomes in these areas. A strength of Sociology is its versatility – while underpinned by social theories, it has a strong focus on research methods and also encourages analytical perspective. These are all valuable skills required for a policy career and are sought after by potential employers.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the variety of Sociology papers and the passion behind those teaching them. Some Sociology papers were focused on social theory, while others had more of an emphasis on demographics and research skills. The Public Sociology paper allowed me to gain invaluable practical experience working with a charitable organisation. I also appreciated the opportunity to study more unique papers such as Environmental Sociology and Sociology of Food.

"In 2019, I was fortunate to secure a place on the MSD Policy Graduate Programme which included rotations in two different policy teams. After 12 months, I was promoted to my current role as a permanent policy analyst in the Child and Youth Policy Team. My main role within this team so far has been to lead and support work around New Zealand's commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It involves an interesting mix of short and long-term projects, and no day is ever the same!

"I feel the versatility of my Sociology studies prepared me well to effectively navigate ambiguity in the policy field. Many of the core concepts within Sociology (especially cross-cutting social issues such as poverty, inequality and wellbeing) also provided me with a strong introduction and analytical lens to the types of issues that my area of government policy is working to address."



For questions about
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otago.ac.nz/sociology

