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The Study of Human Group Behavior

Have you ever wondered what makes social groups tick, how they are formed and sustain themselves, come to cooperate, compete, conflict with one another, and resolve their problems in what we call human society? Such questions have intrigued social philosophers and religious sages throughout all written history.

Not until the nineteenth century did a social philosopher, Auguste Comte, coin the word sociology, which literally means “study of society.” Until then, most of man’s thinking about his society was just that, merely thinking. Comte suggested that we replace the earlier highly speculative thinking about the problems of human society with a scientific approach to human social behavior.

Today sociology is widely accepted and recognized as a legitimate scientific enterprise. Sociologists have generated large quantities of empirical data and have developed theories that attempt to provide explanations and further understanding of the social world. Their findings have also found application in numerous areas including governmental programs, industry, urban planning, court systems, and adult and juvenile correctional programs.

Sociology has come of age. Why not join us in the exciting adventure in the study of human social behavior?

Objectives and Career Opportunities

The Department of Sociology offers both a 30-hour major and 21-hour minor in sociology. Up to six hours of the major may be earned in anthropology and/or social work. In the minor three hours may be earned in anthropology or social work. These programs are designed to provide students with a rich and diverse curriculum, taught by 15 highly trained sociologists, each a specialist in his or her own right. The program provides an extensive background in sociology for those who wish to teach at the secondary level or to pursue non-academic careers in a sociology-related field such as criminal corrections and treatment programs. A master’s degree is normally the minimum requirement for those seeking employment as professional sociologists. However, students with a bachelor’s degree in sociology are frequently able to compete successfully for jobs with local, state, federal, or international agencies, social action programs, juvenile and adult courts and correctional agencies, health delivery services, government planning and policy agencies, and with private industries in such areas as personnel management or research.

Western’s sociology major provides excellent preparation for the state merit exams necessary for employment in a wide variety of state positions. There is also an excellent program for those wishing to become professional sociologists by continuing their studies here or in other graduate departments of sociology.
To afford students more contact with the real world of sociology, audio-visual aids, interactive computers, simulation games and field trips to mental institutions, prisons and industrial organizations enrich our course offerings.

In addition, students in many of our courses are given opportunities to do their own research and to work closely with faculty actively engaged in research and publication of scholarly works. During the past several years, department members have been involved in research at the local community and regional levels. Students have been employed in all of these ventures which have included a study of the alcohol problem in the area, a community health care survey, a study of attitudes toward economic development in a nearby county, and evaluation of selected programs in a local health care agency. Most recently, two faculty members have held government research grants which have produced numerous paid research positions for our students who are especially interested in criminology. The very active Sociology Club and chapter of Alpha Kappa Delta, the national sociological honorary society, afford additional experiences for the intellectual growth of our students.

Sociology Major with Emphasis in Criminology and Corrections

A new exciting option within the sociology major is the criminology and corrections emphasis which now consists of seven courses, a total of 21 hours, designed to provide quality education for students interested in the rapidly expanding juvenile and criminal justice systems. According to the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice:

In corrections agencies, comparisons of actual staffing ratios in key occupations with those proposed by various national commissions or professional associations indicate major deficits of probation or parole officers and of treatment and educational staffs in prisons and local jails between the years 1974 and 1985. Total employment in state and local courts will increase by 54 percent with much more rapid growth for general jurisdiction courts than for courts of limited or special jurisdiction. . . . Overall employment in corrections activities is projected to increase by 62 percent . . . . The most rapid employment growth is projected for probation and parole agencies and in locally based juvenile institutions. . . . Employment in adult correctional institutions is expected to increase by 58 percent as a result of a projected trend towards increased imprisonment of some categories of offenders.

Other Specialties within the Sociology Major

Other areas of specialization in sociology include population and community issues, social psychology and mass communications, and the sociology of economic life. In considering career preparation, the American Sociological Association states in its official publication "Careers in Sociology,"

. . . ., a strong undergraduate program in sociology can conceivably produce a competitive advantage in the job market. For example, students interested in business careers after the BA might emphasize courses in industrial sociology and complex organization; students seeking work with public welfare agencies might concentrate their course work in areas such as stratification, race and ethnic relations, sociology of the family, and urban sociology.

We are proud of the fact that Western's sociology program is strong and provides the courses recommended by the American Sociological Association.

Financial Aid

In addition to government and university scholarship, grant, and loan programs, the Department of Sociology, in cooperation with the university's Department of Financial Aid, offers Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP) grants for those sociology students currently employed by law enforcement and correctional agencies or pre-service loans for those planning to work in law enforcement or correctional agencies after graduation.

For information regarding our program contact either:

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