

Social Scientists, Other

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Significant Points

- The educational attainment of social scientists is among the highest of all occupations.
- Anthropologists and archaeologists, geographers, and sociologists will experience average growth, but slower-than-average growth is expected for historians and political scientists because they enjoy fewer opportunities outside of government and academic settings.
- Competition for jobs will remain keen for all specialties because many of these social scientists compete for jobs with other workers, such as psychologists, statisticians, or market and survey researchers.

Nature of the Work

The major social science occupations covered in this statement include anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers, historians, political scientists, and sociologists. (Economists, market and survey researchers, psychologists, and urban and regional planners are covered elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Social scientists study all aspects of society—from past events and achievements to human behavior and relationships among groups. Their research provides insights that help us understand different ways in which individuals and groups make decisions, exercise power, and respond to change. Through their studies and analyses, social scientists suggest solutions to social, business, personal, governmental, and environmental problems.

Research is a major activity of many social scientists, who use various methods to assemble facts and construct theories. Applied research usually is designed to produce information that will enable people to make better decisions or manage their affairs more effectively. Interviews and surveys are widely used to collect facts, opinions, or other information. Information collection takes many forms, including living and working among the population being studied; performing field investigations; analyzing historical records and documents; experimenting with human or animal subjects in a laboratory; administering standardized tests and questionnaires; and preparing and interpreting maps and computer graphics. The work of specialists in social science varies greatly, although specialists in one field may find that their research overlaps work being conducted in another discipline.

Anthropologists study the origin and the physical, social, and cultural development and behavior of humans. They may study the way of life, archaeological remains, language, or physical characteristics of people in various parts of the world. Some compare the customs, values, and social patterns of different cultures. Anthropologists usually concentrate in sociocultural anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, or biophysical anthropology. Sociocultural anthropologists study the customs, cultures, and social lives of groups in settings that vary from unindustrialized societies to modern urban centers.

Archaeologists recover and examine material evidence, such as ruins, tools, and pottery remaining from past human cultures, in order to determine the history, customs, and living habits of

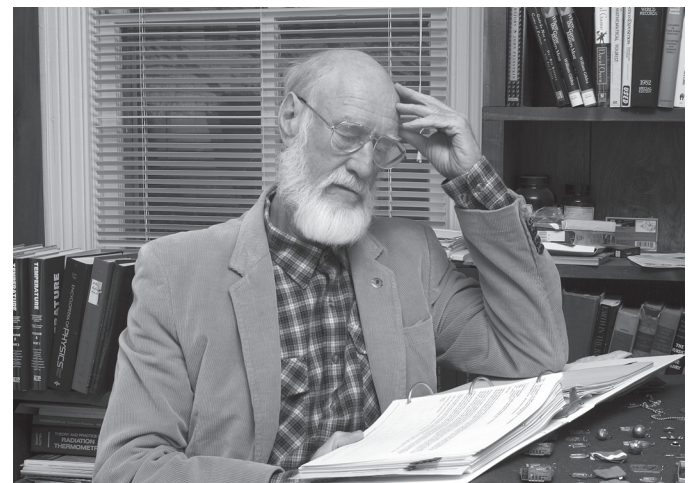
earlier civilizations. Linguistic anthropologists study the role of, and changes in, language over time in various cultures. Biophysical anthropologists study the evolution of the human body, look for the earliest evidences of human life, and analyze how culture and biology influence one another. Most anthropologists specialize in a particular region of the world.

Geographers analyze distributions of physical and cultural phenomena on local, regional, continental, and global scales. Economic geographers study the distribution of resources and economic activities. Political geographers are concerned with the relationship of geography to political phenomena, whereas cultural geographers study the geography of cultural phenomena. Physical geographers study variations in climate, vegetation, soil, and landforms and their implications for human activity. Urban and transportation geographers study cities and metropolitan areas, while regional geographers study the physical, economic, political, and cultural characteristics of regions ranging in size from a congressional district to entire continents. Medical geographers study health-care delivery systems, epidemiology (the study of the causes and control of epidemics), and the effect of the environment on health. (Some occupational classification systems include geographers under physical scientists rather than social scientists.)

Increasingly, geographers are utilizing geographic information systems (GIS) technology to create computerized maps that can track information such as population growth, traffic patterns, environmental hazards, natural resources, and weather patterns. They then use the information to advise governments on the development of houses, roads, or landfills.

Historians research, analyze, and interpret the past. They use many sources of information in their research, including government and institutional records, newspapers and other periodicals, photographs, interviews, films, and unpublished manuscripts such as personal diaries and letters. Historians usually specialize in a country or region, a particular period, or a particular field, such as social, intellectual, cultural, political, or diplomatic history. Biographers collect detailed information on individuals. Other historians help study and preserve archival materials, artifacts, and historic buildings and sites.

Political scientists study the origin, development, and operation of political systems and public policy. They conduct research on a wide range of subjects, such as relations between the United States and other countries, the institutions and political life of nations, the politics of small towns or a major metropolis, and the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Study-



Many social scientists conduct research and write reports.

ing topics such as public opinion, political decisionmaking, ideology, and public policy, they analyze the structure and operation of governments, as well as various political entities. Depending on the topic, a political scientist might conduct a public-opinion survey, analyze election results, analyze public documents, or interview public officials.

Sociologists study society and social behavior by examining the groups and social institutions people form, as well as various social, religious, political, and business organizations. They also study the behavior of, and interaction among, groups, trace their origin and growth, and analyze the influence of group activities on individual members. Sociologists are concerned with the characteristics of social groups, organizations, and institutions; the ways individuals are affected by each other and by the groups to which they belong; and the effect of social traits such as sex, age, or race on a person's daily life. The results of sociological research aid educators, lawmakers, administrators, and others interested in resolving social problems and formulating public policy.

Most sociologists work in one or more specialties, such as social organization, stratification, and mobility; racial and ethnic relations; education; family; social psychology; urban, rural, political, and comparative sociology; sex roles and relations; demography; gerontology; criminology; and sociological practice.

Working Conditions

Most social scientists have regular hours. Generally working behind a desk, either alone or in collaboration with other social scientists, they read and write research articles or reports. Many experience the pressures of writing and publishing, as well as those associated with deadlines and tight schedules, and sometimes they must work overtime, for which they usually are not remunerated. Social scientists often work as an integral part of a research team, among whose members good communications skills are important. Travel may be necessary to collect information or attend meetings. Social scientists on foreign assignment must adjust to unfamiliar cultures, climates, and languages.

Some social scientists do fieldwork. For example, anthropologists, archaeologists, and geographers may travel to remote areas, live among the people they study, learn their languages, and stay for long periods at the site of their investigations. They may work under rugged conditions, and their work may involve strenuous physical exertion.

Social scientists employed by colleges and universities usually have flexible work schedules, often dividing their time among teaching, research, writing, consulting, or administrative responsibilities.

Employment

Social scientists held about 17,000 jobs in 2002. Many worked as researchers, administrators, and counselors for a wide range of employers, including Federal, State, and local governments; educational institutions; social assistance agencies; scientific research and development firms; and management, scientific, and technical consulting firms. Other employers included architectural, engineering, and related firms; civic and social associations; museums; and business, professional, labor, political, and similar organizations.

Many individuals with training in a social science discipline teach in colleges and universities and in secondary and elementary schools. (For more information, see teachers—postsecondary and teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and

secondary elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) The proportion of social scientists who teach varies by specialty—for example, the academic world usually is a more important source of jobs for graduates in history than for graduates in most other social science fields.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

The educational attainment of social scientists is among the highest of all occupations. The Ph.D. or equivalent degree is a minimum requirement for most positions in colleges and universities and is important for advancement to many top-level nonacademic research and administrative posts. Graduates with master's degrees in applied specialties usually have better opportunities outside of colleges and universities, although the situation varies by field. Graduates with a master's degree in a social science may qualify for teaching positions in community colleges. Bachelor's degree holders have limited opportunities and, in most social science occupations, do not qualify for "professional" positions. The bachelor's degree does, however, provide a suitable background for many different kinds of entry-level jobs, such as research assistant, administrative aide, or management or sales trainee. With the addition of sufficient education courses, social science graduates also can qualify for teaching positions in secondary and elementary schools.

Training in statistics and mathematics is essential for many social scientists. Mathematical and quantitative research methods increasingly are being used in geography, political science, and other fields. The ability to utilize computers for research purposes is mandatory in most disciplines. Most geographers also will need to be familiar with GIS technology.

Many social science students find that internships or field experience is beneficial. Numerous local museums, historical societies, government agencies, and other organizations offer internships or volunteer research opportunities. A few archeological field schools instruct future anthropologists, archeologists, and historians in how to excavate historical sites.

Depending on their jobs, social scientists may need a wide range of personal characteristics. Because they constantly seek new information about people, things, and ideas, intellectual curiosity and creativity are fundamental personal traits. The ability to think logically and methodically is important to a political scientist comparing, for example, the merits of various forms of government. Objectivity, openmindedness, and systematic work habits are important in all kinds of social science research. Perseverance is essential for an anthropologist, who might spend years accumulating artifacts from an ancient civilization. Excellent written and oral communication skills are necessary for all these professionals.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of social scientists is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012. However, growth rates will vary by specialty. Anthropologists and archaeologists, geographers, and sociologists will experience average employment growth. However, employment of historians and political scientists will grow more slowly than average because these workers enjoy fewer opportunities outside of government and academic settings.

Despite projected job growth, competition will remain keen for social science positions. Many jobs in policy, research, or marketing, for which social scientists qualify, are not advertised

exclusively as social scientist positions. Because of the wide range of skills and knowledge possessed by social scientists discussed in this *Handbook* statement, many compete for jobs with other workers, such as market and survey researchers, psychologists, engineers, urban and regional planners, and statisticians.

A few social scientists will find opportunities as university faculty, although competition for these jobs also will remain keen. Usually, there are more graduates than available faculty positions, although retirements among faculty are expected to rise in the next few years. The growing importance and popularity of social science subjects in secondary schools is strengthening the demand for social science teachers at that level.

Anthropologists and sociologists will find opportunities performing policy research for consulting firms, nonprofit organizations, and social service agencies in such areas as crime, ethnic conflict, public health, and refugee policy. These social scientists also will be employed by various companies in product development, marketing, and advertising. Others are employed in human resources in conflict resolution and in issues relating to diverse workforces. As construction projects increase, archaeologists will be needed to perform preliminary excavations in order to preserve historical artifacts.

Geographers will have opportunities to utilize their skills to advise government, real-estate developers, utilities, and telecommunications firms on where to build new roads, buildings, power plants, and cable lines. Geographers also will advise on environmental matters, such as where to build a landfill or preserve wetland habitats. As the use of GIS technology expands, geographers will find numerous job opportunities applying GIS technology in non-traditional areas, such as emergency assistance, where GIS can track locations of ambulances, police, and fire rescue units and their proximity to the emergency. GIS technology will also be utilized in areas of growing importance, such as homeland security and defense.

Historians and political scientists also will find jobs in policy or research. Opportunities in government will be limited as government contracts out more work to the private sector or cuts research grants and funding for museums. Historians may find opportunities with historic preservation societies as public interest in preserving and restoring historical sites increases. Political scientists will be able to utilize their knowledge of political institutions to further the interests of nonprofit, political lobbying, and social organizations.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of social scientists (excluding economists, market and survey researchers, psychologists, and urban and regional planners) were \$52,280 in 2002. Anthropologists and archeologists had median annual earnings of \$38,620; geographers, \$53,420; historians, \$42,030; political scientists, \$80,560; and sociologists, \$53,160.

In the Federal Government, social scientists with a bachelor's degree and no experience could start at \$23,442 or \$29,307 a year in 2003, depending on their college records. Those with a master's degree could start at \$35,519, and those with a Ph.D. degree could begin at \$42,976, while some individuals with experience and an advanced degree could start at \$51,508. Beginning salaries were slightly higher in selected areas of the country where the prevailing local pay level was higher.

Related Occupations

Social scientists' duties and training outlined in this statement are similar to those of other occupations covered elsewhere in the *Handbook*, including other social science occupations—economists, market and survey researchers, psychologists, and urban and regional planners. Many social scientists conduct surveys, study social problems, teach, and work in museums, performing tasks similar to those of statisticians; counselors; social workers; teachers—postsecondary; teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary; and archivists, curators, and museum technicians.

Political scientists are concerned with the function of government, including the legal system, as are lawyers; paralegals; and judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers. Many political scientists analyze and report on current events, much as do news analysts, reporters, and correspondents.

Along with conservation scientists and foresters, atmospheric scientists, and environmental scientists and geoscientists, geographers are concerned with the earth's environment and natural resources. Geographers also use GIS computer technology to make maps. Other occupations with similar duties are surveyors, cartographers, photogrammetrists, and surveying technicians; and computer systems analysts, database administrators, and computer scientists.

Sources of Additional Information

Detailed information about economists and market and survey researchers, psychologists, and urban and regional planners is presented elsewhere in the *Handbook*.

For information about careers in anthropology, contact

► American Anthropological Association, 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201. Internet: <http://www.aaanet.org>

For information about careers in archaeology, contact either of the following organizations:

► Society for American Archaeology, 900 2nd St. NE., Suite 12, Washington, DC 20002-3557. Internet: <http://www.saa.org>

► Archaeological Institute of America, 656 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02215-2006. Internet: <http://www.archaeological.org>

For information about careers in geography, contact

► Association of American Geographers, 1710 16th St. NW., Washington, DC 20009-3198. Internet: <http://www.aag.org>

Information on careers for historians is available from

► American Historical Association, 400 A St. SE., Washington, DC 20003-3889. Internet: <http://www.theaha.org>

For information about careers in political science, contact either of the following sources:

► American Political Science Association, 1527 New Hampshire Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20036-1206. Internet: <http://www.apsanet.org>

► National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 1120 G St. NW., Suite 730, Washington, DC 20005-3869. Internet: <http://www.naspa.org>

Information about careers in sociology is available from

► American Sociological Association, 1307 New York Ave. NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005-4712. Internet: <http://www.asanet.org>