Sociologists currently are expressing serious concern over the availability of employment opportunities for bachelors of sociology. This issue of jobs for sociologists has received a very narrow conceptualization, with little focus on what kind of work opportunities might be available, which of this work is related to any sociological perspective and/or definable body of sociological skills, or how undergraduate programs in sociology might help students develop the skills necessary for work related to their formal educations. The failure to confront these three issues generally has resulted from an outdated world view of the linkages between school, work, and the future. An alternative conceptual framework is proposed, and three substantive suggestions for sociology departments are offered: (1) Departments of sociology should critically rethink and redefine the objectives of an undergraduate education in sociology, and identify a body of skills which a sociology major ought to possess. Undergraduate courses which can provide a framework for the development of these skills then should be instituted and/or expanded. (2) Departments of sociology also should develop supervised fieldwork experiments which place undergraduate students in emerging community organizations or other nontraditional working situations. (3) Sociologists as individuals should give their full support and encouragement to graduating students who select career options other than graduate or professional school. The implementation of these three propositions should be of significant assistance in establishing a productive relationship between the undergraduate education in sociology and the creative and challenging work of both the present and the future.

The Undergraduate Education in Sociology

A Case for Experiential Learning

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Awareness is growing among teachers of sociology that their students may be unable to find work upon graduation. As an employment credential, the usefulness—or uselessness—of a B.A. in sociology seems generally comparable with undergraduate degrees in a host of other fields. But given the present

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societal emphasis on college as a job prerequisite, sociologists (right along with everybody else) feel forced to "sell" their field to students on an employability basis. If they don't (or can't), "valuable" student credit hours will be lost, which often precipitates a reduction of faculty positions. Such an outcome is naturally threatening, for one significant function of schools, as Ivan Illich (1970: 36) notes bluntly, is to "create jobs for schoolteachers."

Teaching sociologists, then, will probably hold a different position on the placement problem than some of us who work in community agencies.[1] They have a vested interest in convincing undergraduates that sociology is a good major field, that more/better jobs eventually will be available to bachelors of sociology, and that these jobs will be distinctly the consequence of their sociological backgrounds. Possibly, this may be true. Even so, the worth of this scenario is very limited unless three major issues are raised: what *kind* of work may be available for sociology majors in the future; will this work be related at all to any sociological perspective and/or any definable body of sociological skills; and how can undergraduate programs in sociology help students develop the skills necessary for work related to their formal educations? The purpose of this paper is to analyze these three issues, and its central objective is to establish a productive link between creative work opportunities and the undergraduate education in sociology. A basic assumption here is the belief that many undergraduate curriculums in sociology presently focus on and enjoy teaching the student who wishes to pursue an advanced degree, but fail to adequately encourage and direct the student who wishes to pursue employment with a B.A. degree. The evidence, however, suggests that "Most undergraduate majors in sociology do not pursue graduate degrees in sociology and become professional sociologists" (Schultz, 1974: 97-98).

12, 1975. I would like to thank Martha Ann Atkins for a number of helpful editorial suggestions, and also the anonymous reviewers at Teaching Sociology *for their constructive criticisms.*

What kind of work may be available in the future to persons with a bachelor's degree in sociology? At least two approaches to this question are discernible and generally reflect two diametrically opposed perceptions of the future. Barnes (1974: 4) distinguishes between linear and systemic views; the linear view is:

> predicated on the assumption that what is today will be tomorrow; that is, the trends of today will continue into the future and it is naive and unrealistic to expect any fundamental change. There are a number of futurists who believe we can simply extrapolate present trends into the future and thus get good information about the future we can expect.

The systemic view, on the other hand, assumes:

> that man controls his future and he should exercise that power consciously and creatively. . . . Systemic thinkers believe that man is altering his way of thinking, that he is for instance becoming less willing to be subordinated to technology or other external forces, and is assuming more control over his own life.

Typically, the question of available work opportunities in the future has been answered in a linear fashion, something like "the same opportunities which presently are available, yet *more* of them." The evidence fails to support this view. In June 1973 the U.S. Department of Labor reported that "most of the men and women who received baccalureate and advanced degrees between July 1971 and June 1972 and were employed as of October 1972 were in work directly related to their major field," a conclusion which initially lends support to the linear view. However, the report continued by noting:

> The unemployment rates of the men and women graduates did not differ significantly, but baccalaureates had a much higher rate than those with advanced degrees. Also, *the degree recipients with majors in social sciences and the humanities had appreciably higher unemployment rates than those with majors in other fields.* [italics added]

Given the joblessness crunch of late, this situation undoubtedly has deteriorated even further. It is true that no small part of this

problem is a reflection of national economic disorder, yet some of the problem facing sociology departments must be attributed also to internal disorders, e.g., in curriculum structure, out-of-class activities, and student advising procedures.

Current approaches to job placement in most fields—including sociology—presuppose significant relationships between school, work, and the future, but these linkages have grown more and more illusory. The fallacy in this view is at least twofold. Part of the problem is that school, though future-oriented, tacitly assumes a linear view of the future. Needed instead is a systematic approach to curriculum, one which rests on a vision of what occupations people will hold in 10, 20, or even 30 years, rather than merely projecting from society's present occupational structure. This view would acknowledge the existence of alternative possibilities from which to choose in shaping both the social and occupational structure of society in the next decades. It would further acknowledge the potential of new baccalaureate holders to help select those alternatives by virtue of the knowledge and skills with which they leave college.

The other part of the problem encompassing the entire area of job placement is the increasingly limiting characteristics of both student and worker roles. A college degree, if and/or when it seriously reflects a body of knowledge mastered, invariably reflects knowledge principally of the "old" problems. In this society, at least, the role of student is narrowly circumscribed, and neither allows for nor encourages the consideration of future problems and issues. With rare exceptions, the world of work does little to change this "present-time" orientation with which students leave the university. As Werdell (1974: 302) notes, "the majority of students sense, quite realistically, that most of the jobs offered them upon graduation, if indeed there are jobs, offer them roles as workers no less limiting than the traditional roles of learners."

If there is to be work for bachelors of sociology, will it be work which is at all related to the educations they have obtained? Will it be work which will benefit the individual as well as the society in which it is done? And what criteria can be

used to make these judgments? Some readers may object that this is an unmanageable philosophical problem which has no place here. The problem, however, surfaces in various forms throughout the literature on the role of the Ph.D. sociologist in contemporary American society. Foote (1974), for example, wants to put sociologists to work, but his conception of a sociologist appears limited to one holding a Ph.D. in sociology. A similar implicit definition pervades the career-related suggestions of Tarter (1973). In the last several years, however, a number of Ph.D. sociologists have pleaded for the widespread rejection of the usual positions being offered them (e.g., Szymanski, 1968; Johnson, 1974; Nicolaus, 1968), and their criteria are quite clear. "Corporate sociology" is rejected; "mainstream sociology" is challenged; and the sociologist is castigated as "an Uncle Tom not only for this government and ruling class but for any." Despite the difference in terminology, each, of course, is condemning a sociology viewed as unduly dependent upon the dominant institutions of American society. If such a sociology is rejected by the "fully trained," then possibly their objections may be applicable also to the sociology currently being imparted to undergraduate students. Is there room within the curriculum to advance judgments concerning what work will contribute toward "building the good society" and which work is antagonistic to such an end? Is there room also for propositions concerning how more of the former can be conceived and initiated? I hope so, for such foresight could play a critical role in determining the structure of society in the next decades. For example, anyone who had suggested in a rural sociology class, say six years ago, that a free university might serve as the educational model for rural Kansas, probably would have been dismissed without a hearing. However, this process is not only in progress today, but also is being pursued with the goal of a national paradigm for rural educational development (Rippetoe and Killacky, 1976; Killacky and Rippetoe, 1976). Such work should fit most definitions of contributing toward building a better society. Unfortunately, there is little connection between the undergraduate studies and the work being done by two principal coordinators of this project. In this case,

neither the students (both are non-Ph.D. sociologists), who became the coordinators, nor the faculty with whom they studied, gave much consideration to work potentialities until the reality of graduation. Indeed, both students entered graduate school because it appeared to be the most reasonable option at that time. The case is not atypical, as statements concerning the value of potential work experiences—either to the individual or the society—are seldom explored as a regular part of most sociology programs.

Are undergraduate curriculums in sociology helping students to develop the skills necessary for that work which can be identified as valuable to both the individual and the society? Generally they are not. Departments appear to be operating without a model of what an education in sociology means, either for the individual or any human group of whatever size. Werdell (1974: 303), however, has suggested several models through which "traditional elements of the multiversity can be focused on learning, work and the future," one of which involves *intentional work experiments.* This simply means the testing out, large scale or small, with as yet unknown or little known forms of work. Werdell notes just how enormous the possibilities are, for example, drop-in centers, drug counseling, day-care centers, medical and legal-aid services, free schools, and groups organized around national or global issues. Universities could play an important role in the creation of intentional work experiments, with or without departments of sociology. But if social scientists are indeed "the best qualified people available to lead others in building the kind of society where there would be optimum opportunity for the greatest numbers to achieve happiness" (Hoult, 1968: 3), then it logically follows that their students also have a role to play in this process. Students, though, have seldom been allowed to take part. Sociology departments rarely indulge in credit-awarding for applied work in the community, summarily dismissing such activity as being within the social work mandate. Departments seem to have been so preoccupied with advertising all of the areas sociology students have traditionally worked in that little serious consideration has been given to a most basic issue: what body of

skills should a bachelor of sociology possess in order to creatively innovate programs to meet the future needs of society?

Sensitivity to this question has been partially neutralized by the college catalog. A fundamental shortcoming of such publications is their emphasis on the areas in which a person trained in a particular field *should* be able to find employment. Rather than indicating that a bachelor of sociology will possess certain skills, the catalogs merely suggest that s/he will be able to work in research, community services agencies, prison systems, or whatever. They suggest that, of course, because those were always the areas bachelors of sociology worked in before the job market became flooded. Through participating in the hiring of individuals for our agency, I became acutely aware of how little a degree mattered. Everyone, or almost everyone, had at least one. It therefore became necessary to look for other characteristics, usually specific skills. Some hypothetical questioning in interview situations might go like this:

> We see from the information you have given us that you have taken several courses in methods of social research. Considering the program here, how would you design an evaluation instrument for a specific section of courses, administer it, and begin drawing conclusions and interpretations from the resulting data? Finally, can you defend the method you would choose over the other alternatives available?
>
> Our previous experience indicates that the needs of youth in this community are not being met. Some people have suggested that a teen center might be a good direction for the community to move in. Considering the ideas you have gained in courses like juvenile delinquency and community organization, plus your general knowledge of the community, how would you go about determining the viability of this idea? If it is desirable, could you conceive and design the operation of such a center for this community? How would you obtain financial and other kinds of support for it? Finally, how could the impact of the center on the community as a whole be evaluated?
>
> For this position it may prove useful that you have taken courses in community organization and formal organizations. Using what you have gained from your studies, plus your general knowledge of the community, how would you figure out the power relations which

> are blocking our agency's applications for revenue-sharing and other city funds? Also, and more important, how would you develop a plan for future success in obtaining this support?

Perhaps the case has been overstated; however, the problem is not only that bachelors of sociology do not possess the skills to deal with such questions as a means of creating their own work, but also that so many do not even realize they have been educationally short-changed. I would argue that generally this is not their own fault.

What should be done? Here are three suggestions, all of which are based on the belief that few links exist between an undergraduate education in sociology and future work situations. Nevertheless, this position assumes that such a connection can be established.

1. First, departments of sociology should seriously rethink the objectives of an undergraduate education in sociology. Then these objectives should become the basis for determining what body of skills a sociology major should possess upon completion of the program. Catalogs should be rewritten to reflect this determination, instead of continuing to rely on catalogs that simply advertise the areas in which sociology students have traditionally worked.

Having determined a set of skills which are linked to a sociological perspective, departments of sociology then should institute and/or expand undergraduate courses which use the community as a laboratory for experimenting with new forms of community organization, and which demonstrate both the usefulness of sociological knowledge in the immediate community and its connection with applied knowledge derived from related disciplines. In other words, a framework must be established through which these skills can be developed. Saul Alinsky may be revered in community organization classes, but to date little has been done to deal practically with his criticisms of the limitations of sociology seminars. One exception to this comment is the work of Manis et al. (1974), but their focus is limited to graduate as opposed to all sociological education. Introducing the sociology student to the community

in a practical way might go a long way toward lessening the numbers of sociology students who, upon graduation, try to answer the question: "How have these past four years helped me in deciding what I should do next?"

As both advisors and teachers, sociologists should be aware that new organizations are appearing to counter the inadequacies of traditional ones. A good example may be seen in the free university focus on postsecondary education, an area where conventional wisdom obviously has failed. The emergence of community crisis intervention centers, though less widespread, points an equally critical finger at the mental health establishment. These, along with other human service agencies, are no longer merely social "experiments"; rather they represent organizational forms of the future. If the sociologist's task involves a commitment to aid in "building the good society," as so many have suggested (e.g., Lynd, 1939; Hoult, 1968; Szymanski, 1968; Johnson, 1974), surely his or her teaching should deal with social forms of the future, as well as with present institutions of diminishing importance, vis-à-vis this objective.

2. Departments of sociology should develop supervised fieldwork experiments which place undergraduate students in emerging agencies or nontraditional working situations. Free universities, crisis intervention centers, legal-aid societies, and drop-in centers are among some good places to start. It simply is not enough to expound upon the merits of applied sociology unless we also consider who is applying it, what they are applying it to, and why. Furthermore, as Gelfand (1975: 14) notes, "the extent of the applied sociologist's endeavors do not end with research. Working in organizations in the community, the sociologist will find himself involved in roles that go beyond the research stages of projects and extend into the areas of planning, implementation, and evaluation." Gelfand (1976) also has taken some large strides in using field placements; however, only graduate students have been included in the program thus far. The need now is to determine whether a truly critical sociological perspective can be developed at the undergraduate level and, if so, to determine whether such a perspective can be valuable to emerging social organizations where the focus is

social change rather than social order. Our agency presently supervises Campus-Free College students and VISTA volunteers, and has previously been responsible for the work of B.S.W. students and one M.S.W. student. It has never been responsible for the work of a sociology student and, as best can be determined, neither have any of our over 200 counterparts.

Why is there no current link between a sociology education and the larger world of working situations during the student's time in college? One answer is that many Ph.D. sociologists really are not able to assume responsibility for supervising actual working situations. Many have never had such experience themselves, having taken three degrees in a row by the age of 27 or 28 years, and then have moved straight into university teaching and research. Research is particularly problematic here, since unduly high rewards are generally attached to its performance, at least in contrast to the customary lack of departmental importance attached to supervising student independent work and problems courses.

3. Finally, sociologists should give their full support and encouragement to graduating students who select career options other than graduate or professional school. The idea is not to produce carbon copies of one another. Comparable time and energy should be devoted to undergraduate students not wishing to continue formal education—because they are interested in actively seeking work opportunities in the larger community—as well as to those seeking Ph.D.s. The encouragement particularly of community action work would be a first step in reversing the student's likely perspective that four years of sociology has not done much for him/her, and indeed will not do much for any human collectivity, either. Presently, sociologists do not sufficiently assist students into any activities after graduation except for graduate programs, actively trying to convince them, in fact, that they can't expect to do much without additional professional training. The socialization process of graduate school heightens awareness not only of the pressure to continue, but also of the excessive structuring of the undergraduate program toward further graduate or professional training. True, this legitimizes countless graduate programs in sociology; however, it raises the basic contradiction of depart-

mental programs as a whole. For sociology students learn little related to the world of work, particularly future work, unless they also buy into the second, and typically the third, departmental installments–the M.A. and the Ph.D.

Not everyone should tread the path to graduate school; this is a generally accepted notion. It is now time to employ this wisdom as a basis for restructuring the undergraduate education in sociology as a total entity in itself, but an entity which must link up with the world of creative and challenging work. The foregoing three propositions, if implemented, will not impact significantly upon *academic* western sociology, but they could have a substantial effect upon some of the enormous numbers of students currently under instruction by academic sociologists. These propositions, which attempt to link up sociology with the useful work of both the present and the future, are, of course, only a beginning. However, unless serious steps are taken to make the B.A. in sociology a meaningful degree, the number of sociology students may take an even bigger plunge than is already predicted.

NOTE

1. Having identified myself as a nonteacher and before proceeding very far, I probably should explain what work I do. University for Man (UFM) is a free university based in Manhattan, Kansas, a community of approximately 47,000, including some 17,000 college students. In eight years, UFM has evolved from a predominantly college-student-oriented organization into an agency serving not only the entire community but also other areas of the state. My responsibilities, briefly, are evaluation and documentation of both the Manhattan program and out-of-town projects. I also work on the development of new programs and the cultivation of funding sources.

For purposes of this paper, an important organizational characteristic is the growth of UFM's staff from volunteers at the beginning to 13 salaried members at present. Such growth, I would argue, lends support to the proposition that individuals can creatively design their own work in emerging organizations. A more detailed discussion (Rippetoe and Maes, 1974) of our agency can be obtained by writing to UFM, 615 Fairchild Terrace, Manhattan, Kansas 66502.

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