What Are You Going to Do With That?

-Ed Brown

“What are you going to do with that?” I was asked with some frequency when I was a sociology major at Brigham Young University. My answer then was the same as it is now, more than 35 years later—A lot!

I did not get lost one day and stumble into a sociology class. Sociology was not just a default major after I tried business and chemistry. I guess I have always loved social theory; Why do groups of people do what they do? My curiosity was no doubt shaped by historical events leading up to my attendance at BYU.

I was a “child of the 60s”. I vividly remember viewing the aftermath of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy with the other children in our school on the black and white TV in the teacher’s lounge. A few years later we watched violence erupt in the Deep South as Freedom Fighters and civil rights workers marched.

In the summer of 1965, civil unrest in reaction to police brutality and racial injustice led to riots in Los Angeles just 15 miles west of my home. I could see the smoke from the store where I had a part-time job. By 1967, that violence had spread to other major cities. As I approached my senior year in high school, Bobby Kennedy was shot in Los Angeles. My chemistry lab partner was a youth worker in his presidential campaign. Then there was Vietnam. We watched the nightly news stories and wondered if we would end up there.

From these experiences, I wanted to know what made groups of people do what they do—from White Supremacists and Black Panthers to the North and South Vietnamese. Sociology and I were a perfect fit! To be sure, I asked myself what I planned to do with this major other...

What is PEAT?

The Project Evaluation Assessment Team (PEAT) is a group of students and professors that care about and engage in effective development work through supporting and participating in evaluation research.

As evaluators, we conduct research including collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information about an organization’s work. Our research assists organizations in improving future actions and developing stronger, more effective programs.

Professors Tim Heaton, Carol Ward and Ralph Brown from the Sociology department head this program. Three student facilitors...
A Graduate Perspective

-Erin Moore

Near the end of my undergraduate career, I knew I needed to continue my education, but I was not sure which path was best for me. After considering Teach for America, law school, and other graduate programs, I decided to stay with BYU Sociology and pursue the Master’s degree. Having almost completed my second semester in the program, I am confident this was the best decision I could have made.

This department believes strongly in faculty-mentored student research; because of this investment, I received excellent training and experience as an undergraduate, something that was not afforded to my friends in other programs. In grad school, those opportunities are amplified. Students develop close relationships with faculty in courses and in thesis work. Professors maintain active involvement in our academic careers. It is clear that they sincerely desire us to be successful, giving much of their time to help us with our course work and thesis projects. In addition to close relationships with faculty, I also love belonging to a cohort. The department is selective in admissions, and this keeps the Master’s cohorts small—our year has only thirteen students, and this has allowed us to grow close as colleagues and friends. Though the environment is competitive, we also look out for each other—group projects, study parties, and plenty of food keep things fun. Graduate school is very demanding, but the great support from both my cohort and the faculty makes the experience enjoyable, even in its most challenging times.

Looking ahead, I am excited about the opportunities open to me because of this program. I am receiving expert training in statistics, social theory, research methods, and substantive areas of my choosing like criminology and race and ethnicity. These are highly marketable skills that can lead to many different fields. Whether I pursue law, a sociology PhD, or some other path, I know that I will leave BYU with skills that enable me to be successful and make a difference in the world.

Sociology students enjoy the closing social on April 13, put on by the Sociology Student Association.
than soak in all of the theory and research.

My bishop during high school was an attorney. Being a lawyer seemed exciting to me. Both of my two mission presidents were lawyers. I looked up to them. I wanted to be a lawyer too! After registering as a sociology major, I asked my former bishop if I could study sociology and still go to law school. He told me that his major was geology and that law schools wanted to know that you could think, write and verbalize ideas. That was enough encouragement for me. I simply added an English minor.

I loved my sociology course work and therefore did well. My plans to go to law school were almost derailed when one of my sociology professors encouraged me to get advanced degrees in sociology then research and write. I could see myself doing that. I thought long and hard about it. I still believe that had I chosen that route it would have been rewarding.

I stayed with the original plan and attended law school. But I took what I learned from my sociology studies with me. I have practiced as a litigator for over 30 years now. I have been married for almost 37 years; have three children and four grandchildren.

I would like to think that as a supplement to the gospel of Jesus Christ, my education in sociology has taught me tolerance of people and tolerance of new ideas. It has helped me want to learn and understand the causes of conflict and how to resolve conflict where possible. It has enhanced my critical thinking. It has caused me to look differently at world news. I know how to research both sides of an issue—and not just assume that all information is accurate.

Of course, a sociology degree is not per se a springboard to law or any other field of work. It can be a foundation for any career you chose. To be honest, this is a difficult time to find and keep jobs. In this economic climate, a degree in sociology may not necessarily give you the ability to slide seamlessly into a prestigious, well-paying job. Do any undergraduate degrees do that anymore? But your sociology degree will provide you with a tremendous lens for viewing our ever-changing society differently.

Following college, get some real life experience or get trained for the new jobs that are unfolding. I do not think you can go wrong by getting a degree in sociology whether you intend to be a homemaker or the next Bill Gates. But you will need to build on your sociology degree.

One of my sons is a dentist. He graduated in sociology from BYU before getting his dental degree at Marquette University. My plumber also graduated in sociology then began his plumber’s apprenticeship. He is a master plumber and doing well.

You are probably going to have to invest more than four years of college to be good at whatever you decide to do in life. Start with sociology. If you love it, you will succeed in it. But be thinking of the education or training you would like or will need next. The knowledge you gain in your sociology classes will serve you well. It has for me—for many years now.

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CHOICE Internship Highlight

-Jeff Swindle

After taking coursework from the Sociology department in program evaluation, I was fortunate to receive an internship grant, allowing me to work as a project evaluator for the Center for Humanitarian Outreach and Inter-Cultural Exchange (CHOICE) in Guanajuato, Mexico. In this experience I was privileged to put the skills I learned in the classroom to work; I developed my theory and research question, conducted interviews and focus groups, analyzed my findings, and made suggestions to the NGO for improvement of their programs. Not only was this experience enriching for me educationally, it contributed to the humanitarian efforts of the NGO.

In my graduate school applications I highlighted the importance of this experience because it demonstrated that I was capable of conducting scholarly research personally. I was accepting into two elite graduate programs primarily due to my research experience. I am grateful to the College of Family, Home & Social Sciences for my internship grant. It was a catalyst in changing the direction of my future and boosting my personal confidence in my academic abilities.
Participating in PEAT

-Jeren Meldrum

For nearly three months this summer, we will live in a tiny village in central Uganda, called Kaberamaido. We will lead baseline evaluations for two organizations that operate in the rural village.

First, we will live in the orphanage of the Asayo’s Wish Foundation, which houses nearly 200 orphans. We will train local staff to gather information regarding the children’s health, schooling, skill development, and general well being.

Also, we will work with an organization called the Kaberamaido Cooperative to gather data regarding several “widows groups”—groups of about 100 widows whose husbands have been killed due to war or disease. The Cooperative organizes small projects for the women (e.g. growing ground nuts, making magazine paper jewelry, etc.) to give the women opportunities to earn money and send their children to school. We will evaluate the economic situation of the women and the difference the Cooperative is making in their lives.

These evaluations will inform the organizations’ administrators, enabling them to make key decisions to improve their impact.

Our work will provide the means for more evaluations in the future to track the organizations’ progress over time. Funds from PEAT will make this possible.

PEAT sent out 8 interns during the 2010 spring and summer semester to conduct evaluations for various NGOs in El Salvador, India, Mexico, Uganda, and Ukraine. This year 7 interns will be conducting evaluations in multiple countries. Students are selected from various departments and invited to take courses that prepare them to conduct evaluations for NGOs. PEAT helps these students to partner with desiring NGOs and then provides them with tuition and travel scholarships, allowing the students to serve as evaluators for NGOs in-country for a period of 3-4 months.

PEAT continued from p.1

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Get Involved in Honors
-Todd Goodsell

Ask yourself these questions:
• Have people been saying to you since you were in elementary school that you really should get a Ph.D.?
• Have you ever used the word “intertextuality” while on a date?
• Do you like being around energetic, nonlinear thinkers?
• Do you think having “University Honors” on your transcript and your resume (for the rest of your life) is pretty cool?
• Do you love lots of different disciplines?
• Are you ready to contribute to scholarly debates, not just listen to them?
If you answered “Yes!” to any of these questions, consider doing the University Honors program!

Current requirements to graduate with University Honors include the following:
1. Enroll in the Honors program
2. Complete 22 total Honors credits
3. Complete the Honors Great Works requirement (and we just got more sociology books added to the Great Works reading list!)
4. Complete the Honors advanced languages requirement (a foreign language and either math or statistics)
5. Complete the Honors service requirement
6. Complete the Honors thesis requirement
7. Graduate with a cumulative GPA of at least 3.5
8. Submit a graduation portfolio

If you’d like to know more, contact Dr. Goodsell (goodsell@byu.edu) or University Honors (honors@byu.edu).

Field Studies
-Heather M. Williams

Every summer and fall, the BYU Kennedy Center Field Studies office sends students across the globe to learn about other cultures and conduct their own research or creative projects. I went to East London, South Africa with four other students, each of us doing different projects. I lived with a host family who taught me about their culture, I interned at a rural development organization, and conducted a study on women who work for non-governmental organizations. I am excited to return to South Africa this upcoming summer to do a project on sports and values.

My field study experience has been invaluable to my academic career. I learned so much about the research process that I could never have learned in the classroom, and I have learned skills that have not only helped me in my classes, but in my everyday life as well.

If you are interested in learning more about Field Studies, email byu.fieldstudy@gmail.com or stop by 101 HRCB and talk to one of the Field Studies facilitators.

Meet the new SSA
-Michelle Aliaga

The new Sociology Student Association is full of new positions and faces. Previous to winter semester, only one member of SSA, the president, coordinated all activities, events and put together the newsletter. This semester, the sociology department hired 4 new members and in the fall, the SSA plans on expanding by adding additional subcommittees of volunteers in order to put on more career boosting events and informational meetings for different career tracks in sociology. This will allow for not only a better sociology department, but also allow for more students to become involved.

The Sociology Student Association.
From left:

Tyler Roberts; Vice President

Michelle Aliaga; Media Director

Natalie Chambers; SSA Chair

Angela Kraniski; President

Benjamin Harrison; Activities Director
We would like to say *thank you* to all alumni who have donated to the sociology department. If you would like to make a donation, visit: https://secure3.convio.net/ldsp/site/Donation2?df_id=4340&4340.donation=form1.