The Keele Sociology Student and their Graduate Attributes

At the forefront of sociology is an understanding that we live in a world characterised by rapid social, political, economic and cultural change. Living in a global society, we are affected by massive socio-economic developments in other parts of the world, whether this be the United States, Pacific Rim or Europe. From electives offered, among many others, on *Conspiracy Theory*, *Risk Society*, *Sex, Death and Desire*, *Crime, Morality and Media, Consumption, Cities, Skyscrapers and Slums*, and *The Sociology of the Body*, we encourage you to view global situations from a range of different perspectives, place local events in a social and historical context and to think from a variety of perspectives in order to imagine situations that may not be readily apparent. Sociology therefore gives you the opportunity to think critically, flexibly and abstractly - attributes that will prove invaluable to your future career and personal development.

After graduation our students embark on a variety of careers, frequently entering the public sector, legal professions and the culture industries. Some students continue their education through completion of higher degrees and further research training. However, sociology is a far-reaching discipline. It exposes you to the ‘big’ questions and encourages an open inquisitive way of thinking. So, rather than embarking on your course wondering: ‘what can I do with a sociology degree?’ you should begin by understanding that sociology opens up countless opportunities for you at this time and in the future.
Graduate Attributes in Sociology

Engagement with the opportunities provided within the sociology programme and in the co-curriculum is designed to help you to develop the following attributes:

1. An open and questioning approach to ideas, demonstrating curiosity, independence of thought and the ability to appreciate a range of perspectives on the natural and social worlds.

Two of the big tasks facing you in sociology are to examine the relationship between the individual and social structures and explain major inequalities and disparities in modern society. Through core modules in Classical Sociology and Inequalities in the Contemporary World, each module requires students to draw from and evaluate a wide range of source material and different disciplinary perspectives. Whether you are examining more traditional understandings of class, gender and ethnicity or exploring global social inequalities through the lens of contemporary events such as the Holocaust in our first year elective, Modernity and its Darkside, you will form a questioning and independent approach to knowledge. These approaches to learning are central to sociology as a discipline: questioning ‘common sense’ assumptions about people in society is fundamental to the ‘sociological imagination’.

2. An appreciation of the development and value of sociology, awareness of their contexts, the links between them, and awareness of the provisional and dynamic nature of knowledge.

By tracing the history of social change through our second year core elective, Twentieth Century Social Theory, it is possible to see how ideas, such as individualism, citizenship and class, began to emerge. In this context, sociology is an essential form of knowledge for future generations because it offers us the opportunity to think about aspects of our social lives that we would otherwise take for granted.

3. Information literacy: the ability to locate, evaluate and synthesise large amounts of frequently conflicting information, ideas and data.

Throughout the degree you will explore a variety approaches to understanding how different societies work and apply careful scholarship to assess the value of sociological studies. We teach specialist modules which include looking at such diverse topics as witchcraft in West Africa, Brazilian shanty towns and body-snatching, postmodernism in Dubai and Los Angeles and crime and ghetto culture in South Africa. Cultural differences between societies are debated – in tutorials, in assessments, in supervision – with peers and tutors, and you will learn much from exploring your reading of research with others: it focuses the mind and encourages sharpness of analysis.

4. The ability creatively to solve problems using a range of different approaches and techniques, and to determine which techniques are appropriate for the issue at hand.

As a sociologist you will learn to appreciate the value of different methods of investigating social phenomena. A good example of this is trying to grapple with large- or small-scale studies of social life. For example in our elective module, Families and Households, we examine large-scale change in family structure over
time, which can be revealed through national household surveys, yet we are also intrigued by an individual’s place within and experience of those structures. Here, you will learn that one-on-one interviews might be a more appropriate method to understand what ‘families’ are.

5. An appreciation of the social, environmental and global implications of your studies and other activities, including recognition of any ethical implications.

The central objective of sociology is to link private problems to public concerns in order to help us to better understand our lives and respond constructively to problems that might seem otherwise impossible to resolve. Part of investigating the social world involves understanding the impact our actions may have on others. This could be our actions as individuals (e.g. as family members, friends, employers or researchers) or as groups (e.g. nations).

6. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively in written and verbal forms for different purposes and to a variety of audiences.

Communicating analytical concepts clearly and with confidence is an essential part of sociological theory and research. Within the taught programme you will be offered feedback on your academic performance and encouraged to develop communication skills vital to the workplace.

7. The knowledge, skills, self-confidence and self-awareness actively to pursue your future goals.

8. The ability and motivation to participate responsibly and collaboratively as an active citizen in the communities in which you live and work.

9. Professional and reflective approach, including qualities of leadership, responsibility, personal integrity, empathy, care and respect for others, accountability and self-regulation.

10. The flexibility to thrive in rapidly changing and uncertain external environments and to update skills and knowledge as circumstances require.

Attributes 7-10 can be realised both through your formal studies and by undertaking a range of activities within the wider university context. Part of this is simply about being a student, taking the opportunities that university life has to offer. However, these can also be realised through the distinctive Keele co-curriculum, which encourages students to participate with a range of confidence-building activities such as volunteering, student representation, and clubs and societies.

These Graduate Attributes are essential for being a successful sociology student, but they are also crucial for success in many professional workplaces. Put all this together and not only do you have a distinctive Sociology graduate; you also develop a ‘rounded’ sense of yourself as a citizen.