Brandeis University Sociology Department

Sociology Major: Learning Goals

Sociology focuses on core questions of group and societal organization to explore how order is maintained and how social change occurs. Our department seeks to develop what C. Wright Mills referred to as the “sociological imagination,” by investigating how broader social forces shape life trajectories, how social categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality structure social experiences, and how individuals and groups confront, and sometimes alter, institutionalized systems of power.

Sociological inquiry is central to many of Brandeis’ interdisciplinary programs, including Health: Science, Society, and Policy; International and Global Studies; Peace, Conflict, and Coexistence Studies; Religious Studies; Social Justice and Social Policy; and Women and Gender Studies. The department focuses on five core areas: theory and methods; gender and feminist studies; institutions, culture and religion; sociology of health and illness; and politics and social change. In each of these areas, students integrate critical scholarly analysis, foundational research techniques, and “hands-on” experiential learning to hone their abilities to engage in the community and the world as active, self-reflective change agents.

Knowledge:
Students completing the major in Sociology will understand how to:

- Recognize the ways in which social contexts shape individual and group behavior
- Rigorously engage with core questions of inequity, identity, justice, and social meaning
- Relate sociological frameworks to pressing social, economic, and political issues and policies
- Locate the ways in which Sociology as a professional discipline develops and considers major questions, concepts, theories, and methodologies

Core Skills:
The Sociology major emphasizes core skills in critical thinking, theory development, research design, data collection and analysis, and writing. Sociology majors from Brandeis will be well prepared to:

- Creatively identify, confront, and assess issues of sociological significance in a range of real-world settings
- Understand, develop, and extend theoretical frameworks for critically and systematically engaging with social phenomena
- Employ established principles of research design, data collection and analysis to rigorously address empirical research questions
- Clearly communicate theories, ideas, and analyses, both orally and in writing
Social Justice:
The Sociology curriculum provides graduates with knowledge and perspectives needed to participate as informed citizens in a global society. Conceptions of justice, in particular the relationship between theory and action, are at the heart of the Brandeis Sociology experience. Sociology majors will have ample opportunity to:

- Recognize and understand how structural, cultural, and relational contexts shape systems of power, access, and inequity
- Develop a reflexive and ethical sense of how diversity operates in social settings
- Respectfully engage with ethnic, religious, cultural, and political difference
- Collaborate with local agencies and communities to develop strategies to address pressing issues