

AUT

A FUTURE IN
SOCIAL
SCIENCES



WHAT IS SOCIAL SCIENCES ABOUT?

A society is a group of people – a relatively simple concept. Members of the group are connected by shared use of locations and resources and connected by interpersonal relationships – not so simple! The many benefits of living and interacting with other people are inevitably accompanied by problems or issues that may harm some members of society or the environment.

The social sciences, encompassing sociology, politics, economics and other disciplines, examine and explain human functioning on a variety of interlocking levels – from individual behaviour, family and group processes to the functioning of communities, organisations, governments and entire societies.

Social scientists carry out research and analysis, design policy changes and implement strategies and systems to resolve, minimise or remove societal problems and to improve the functioning of groups, communities and societies. The skills and knowledge gained through studying the social sciences are also highly valuable and complementary to other disciplines such as in business, communications and law.

Are you fascinated by people, communities and societies? Do you love interacting and communicating with others and want to do something to help people? Are you motivated to contribute to positive social change? If so, a career in social sciences could be just the thing for you.



OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

An AI future – How do we harness AI and use it for humanity's advantage? As AI grows in influencing all aspects of life and employment, the need to manage AI is becoming more and more evident, particularly in governance, law, policy and regulation. Social science graduates' skills in critical thinking and analysis will be increasingly required in roles needing critically evaluation of AI information, identification of biases in AI algorithms that may exacerbate inequalities, and analysis of the impact of AI on society and social groups.

Third sector value – Not-for-profit and voluntary organisations – the third sector – fill gaps overlooked by the public and private sectors to provide essential services, advocate for change and build community. While reliant on a lot of volunteer hours, this sector also needs employees who can provide policy support and analysis, fundraising and development, and community liaison etc.

Societies of the future – As our society becomes more diverse and complex, employers will be looking for people who understand the way individuals and communities function. They will want people who can deliver research and analysis, as well as design policies, strategies and systems for the future. This will make people with social science qualifications particularly appealing. However, graduates need to be aware of current issues and government initiatives in order to identify the best places to seek work.

Career adaptability – A recent report from LinkedIn identified the 11 most in-demand job skills are communication, customer service, leadership, project management, management, analytics, teamwork, sales, problem-solving, research and adaptability. With people often changing roles up to seven times across their work life, it makes sense to employ people who have a broader education and have learned to be adaptable and open to problem solving. The social sciences provide many opportunities to develop these skills while building up cultural competencies and a deep understanding of how people think and interact.

The worth of a social sciences degree cannot be underestimated. CEOs such as former YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki, former Walt Disney CEO Michael Eisner and Paperless Post cofounder Alexa Hirschfield all studied social science or arts degrees.

WORK SECTOR AND ROLES

An undergraduate degree is a starting point for a range of jobs throughout the social sector, public service and private sectors. The range of entry options and opportunities available to graduates are influenced by the level of qualification and the range of disciplinary studies combined into the degree. Possible sectors and roles include:

Community/social/health/education

Community development worker, aid and disaster relief worker, community programme coordinator, secondary teacher (with additional appropriate high school subjects and postgraduate teaching qualification)

Administration/management/human resources/employment relations

Administration officer, human resources consultant, management trainee, industrial relations consultant

Media/communications

Writer, editor, publications assistant

Politics/government

Government administration officer, advisory officer, youth worker, policy analyst, politician, diplomat (often with appropriate postgraduate qualifications)

Research/academic

Social science research, research assistant, university lecturer (with appropriate postgraduate qualifications)

Business

International trade representative, business or marketing consultant, retail manager, social entrepreneur

Defence/protection services

Police officer, customs officer, immigration officer, armed services

Information management

Customer service supervisor, information manager, AI writer/checker

CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

Here is a sample of the diverse range of graduate roles on offer.

Community development advisor – Includes development and implementation of community development strategies, programmes and projects to enhance community health safety and wellbeing. Establishes, influences and manages relationships with communities, service providers and support agencies. Accesses funding support, prepares and manages budgets and work plans. Identifies and establishes community partnership opportunities.

Policy analyst – Analyses information to assist in the development, interpretation and review of government,

community or industry policies. Involves preparing and writing reports. Can include consulting and providing advice and recommendations and preparing speeches.

Researcher – Collects, analyses and interprets data and opinions to solve problems, explore issues and predict trends. Discusses research findings and provides recommendations.

Co-ordinator of volunteers, events, health and safety – Develops, coordinates, delivers and evaluates policy, procedures and practice. Trains and manages volunteers, forms collaborative relationships with community and external agencies. Facilitates presentations and speaks to diverse groups.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Social sciences graduates develop strong critical thinking skills, highly capable of understanding and analysing situations and providing sound options for positive change.

Specific knowledge:

- Clear understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand culture and society from the perspective of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, biculturalism and multiculturalism
- People, institutions and their relationships
- Processes of social change
- Relevant human rights, health, citizenship and educational legislation
- Knowledge of community, social assistance and family support agencies

Skills:

- Collect, analyse and critically evaluate information
- Competent at quantitative and qualitative research
- Question assumptions and make reasoned arguments
- Deal with complex issues holistically on individual, cultural and societal levels
- Effective verbal communicator
- Strong communicator, particularly in writing
- Confident with ICT, numeracy and statistics, and AI
- Ability to problem solve for complex situations
- Good project management, teamwork and collaborative skills
- Well organised, with good planning skills

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Perceptive and curious about how the world works
- Ability to think broadly
- Interested in social justice outcomes and confronting social problems
- Cares about social justice
- Ability to engage empathetically with people from various cultures and lifestyles

SALARY GUIDE

Salaries vary according to industry, roles and region. The starting salary range is based on public sector rates because many graduates enter governmental and public service roles. This range does not include extras such as KiwiSaver contributions level, medical insurance etc.

	Salary (per year)
Graduate starting salary range (public sector)	\$52,000-\$70,000
After 5 years	\$85,000-\$135,000+

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (mid 2024) and should only be used as a guideline.

Keep up to date with salary data by visiting these websites:

Prosple Graduate Salary Guide

nz.prosple.com/on-the-job

Careers NZ

careers.govt.nz/jobs-database

SEEK

seek.co.nz/career-advice/explore-salaries

THE AUT APPROACH

AUT's strong multidisciplinary approach gives social sciences graduates hands-on, experientially-based skills and knowledge to take into employment.

All third-year students do a compulsory 150 hours of voluntary work placement.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

There are a range of postgraduate opportunities in the School of Social Science and Humanities. If you're interested in postgraduate study, please talk to your Head of School about your options.

Research areas include demography, politics, government and governance, community development and engagement, gender and ethnic rights, ethics, equity and social justice.

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

Registration is not required for social scientists; however other roles may require registration, certification or professional membership.

Note: A social sciences degree does not open doors to social work roles (which do require registration). A specialist degree or postgraduate qualification in social work or applied social services is usually needed to become a registered social worker.



JANET AKAI

Marketing and Communications Manager
Cook Islands Development Agency New Zealand
Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences

"In my graduate role at Auckland Council I was seconded to ATEED to work on JobFest to create work-ready resources for young people looking to enter the workforce. This was when I realised marketing and design was the work I wanted to do. I was then seconded to the Southern Initiative and the Auckland Co-Design Lab as a junior researcher, opening my mind to the world of research and design.

I got a job at CIDANZ initially as communications and research assistant, after volunteering there while working at Auckland Council. CIDANZ were keen on my combination of marketing skills and social sciences background. I've held many roles here since and love being involved in projects from beginning to end.

One of my most favourite projects was leading the Cook Island Women's Leadership Summit 2024. It arose from a youth summit where young women talked about accessibility challenges to leadership roles in their community. The summit looked at the importance of our culture, of being Cook Islands women and how a manager or CEO can carry both those roles. It was very successful with lots of spin-offs, such as young women taking on leadership positions in their regional communities, spin-off workshops, and the hunger for more.

Another project I loved working on was Cook Islands Language Week. I created learning resources in Cook Islands Māori that have been very popular. My position also afforded me the opportunity to travel and meet Cook Islands communities across Aotearoa.

I know my social sciences degree helps me with the research I need to do. I also feel that the understanding I gained about people and their behaviours helps my ability to engage well with my community.

TIPS: Volunteering is a great way to find your place. Volunteering around people with dedication and passion for our Cook Islands people really attracted me."

EMPLOYER COMMENT

"The ability to work inclusively across diverse ethnic and cultural identities and personal situations with an understanding of Cook Islands, Pacific and Māori communities, is important for this role. Janet effectively communicates the heart and stories of CIDANZ and our community because of her depth of experience in the Cook Islands community.

We want self-starters who care for people and can problem-solve and collaborate to make a difference. We want proven experience and knowledge of community development, and ability to build connections with community organisations, NGOs and central and local government agencies. A research background or ability to tell community stories effectively, and to a wide-audience is also important, along with knowledge of market trends and the ability to add creativity and flare.

My tip to graduates is to continue to be open-minded to learning things. Don't stop on completing your degree. There is still experience to be gained, and networks to build."

Mercedes Brown
CIDANZ Corporate Services Manager

USEFUL WEBSITES

Do Good Jobs (vacancies at organisations working to create social and environmental change)
dogoodjobs.co.nz

The Hub
thehub.sia.govt.nz

New Zealand Government jobs
jobs.govt.nz

Volunteering New Zealand
volunteeringnz.org.nz

Auckland Council jobs
careers.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on the study of social sciences or the Bachelor of Arts, visit aut.ac.nz/social-sciences


EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

For other Future Career Sheets visit aut.ac.nz/careersheets

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through elab.aut.ac.nz/@AUTEmployabilityandCareers

FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: aut.ac.nz/enquire
futurestudents@aut.ac.nz

 @FutureStudentsofAUT

CURRENT AUT STUDENTS

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information:


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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, late 2024.

