

# Sociology Department Graduate Handbook

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## Doctoral Degree Requirements

The graduate program has two objectives: to give students a command of a basic core of sociological knowledge and analytical skills, and to provide opportunities to extend this knowledge through original scholarship. Professional competence in theory and research methods is coupled with in-depth knowledge in one of the four areas of specialization. The areas are defined by collaborative research and curricula, and constitute the major locations for graduate student training. Specialization requires course work and an area qualifying examination.

By the end of their first year in residence, students must choose an area of specialization and an advisor from that area. They must notify the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) of their choices. Subsequent course and research work is done in close consultation with the student's area advisor according to the area requirements. After qualifying in an area, the student prepares a proposal for original dissertation research in the specialty area. The defense of this proposal is the preliminary examination for admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree. Completing and successfully defending the dissertation are the final requirements for the doctoral degree.

The following sections describe the course requirements, evaluation and examination procedures, dissertation committee, and dissertation requirements for a Ph.D. in Sociology. Students should also become familiar with the requirements of the Graduate College as set forth in *A Handbook for Graduate Students and Their Advisors*, available on the web at: [www.grad.uiuc.edu/gradhandbook](http://www.grad.uiuc.edu/gradhandbook).

### Course Requirements

#### *Amount of Course Work*

Students who enter with a bachelor's degree must complete 72 credit hours of course work. Students who enter with a master's degree in sociology or a related social science must take 48 credit hours.

#### *Specific Course Requirements*

There are two categories of required courses: core courses required by the Department, and courses required by each of the four areas of specialization. Area requirements are specific to each area; students must consult Area Chairs and area documents.

The departmental courses required for the PhD are:

- Departmental pro-seminar (Soc 510), taken in the first year, 2 credits per semester, pass/fail grading.
- One theory course: either Soc 500 or Soc 501
- One intermediate statistics course: Soc 586
- If students have not already taken an upper-level undergraduate statistics course, they should take Soc 485, the prerequisite for Soc 586, during their first semester in residence

- One advanced methods course from the following list: Soc 571, Soc 580, Soc 581, Soc 583, Soc 587, or Soc 590.
- Area requirements: at least 3 courses in the student's area of specialization – areas themselves may have further or more specific requirements.
- Two breadth courses from departmental areas other than the student's area of specialization. These should be “substantive” courses, not general theory courses and not methods courses. Additional courses, beyond these and area course requirements, are taken as elective courses.
- Optional courses to consider are Soc 505: Department seminars, Soc 597: Readings in sociology (to be taken in preparation for area examinations), and Soc 598: Thesis proposal
- Students should take from 3 to 24 credits of Soc 599, Dissertation Research.

### ***Waiving Required Courses***

Students who believe they have already completed course work equivalent to a required course in the doctoral program may request that the department waive the requirements.

To request a waiver of a required course, give a folder to the Director of Graduate Studies that contains the following:

- a note to the DGS giving your name, saying which course you would like to have waived, and describing the course you had that you think was equivalent. Say where you took the course, and who the instructor was.
- evidence of the requirements of the course you took, such as a syllabus, exams, reading list, homework problems, course catalog descriptions, and the like.
- evidence of your performance, such as your answers to exam questions or homework problems, papers you wrote, grades, evaluations, and the like.

The DGS will ask the appropriate sociology faculty, including area chairs, to evaluate the merits of the request. The faculty member(s) will make a recommendation to the DGS. The DGS will make a decision and communicate it in writing to you, and to your advisor if you have one. The decision will be recorded in your permanent file. You may be asked to take an examination to help confirm the merits of your waiver request. It is best to request waivers as soon as possible. In order of preference, the best time to request a waiver is before registering for one's first semester, during the first semester, or in the semester before the course in question is offered and usually taken.

### **Evaluation of Good Standing and Progress**

Graduate College and Department rules require that students be informed annually of their progress in meeting requirements and their likelihood of completing the doctoral program. Near the end of the Spring semester, the sociology graduate faculty meet to evaluate each student's progress, course load, course completion, and grades. The faculty also discuss each student's performance as teaching assistant, teaching fellow, or research assistant, and any special accomplishments such as presenting at a meeting, publishing a paper, or getting a teaching award. Each student's progress is compared to the standards for normal progress described below, and to that of other students – particularly those who entered in the same year. After the faculty meeting, the Director of Graduate Studies sends a letter to each student that

- summarizes the evaluation of progress and standing,
- conveys any special commendations or concerns, and
- states any specific risks to good standing, with the steps and deadlines for correcting those risks.

The DGS also transmits these evaluations to the Dean of the Graduate College for all second-year students who entered with a Bachelor's degree and all first-year students who entered with a master's degree.

#### ***Normal Progress***

Normally, students are expected to complete course work and other degree requirements in a reasonable time. This is currently indicated by completing:

- all required core courses in the first 1½ years
- all area and elective courses within the first 2½ years
- the qualifying (area) examination within the first 3 years (Soc 597 can be taken as a readings course in preparation for area examination)
- the preliminary examination (proposal defense) within the first 3½ years
- the dissertation defense within 5 years

#### ***Defending the Dissertation within Five Years***

The faculty discuss the case of any student who has not defended the dissertation within five years. The student could be deemed in bad standing, depending on the other things normally considered in the student's annual review. More commonly, the student will be notified of marginal progress. All students passing the five-year mark will be reminded of the seven year limit (six year limit for students who entered with a Masters).

#### ***Completing Courses on Time***

Students should avoid incomplete (EX, temporarily excused) grades. A history of EX grades indicates an inability to handle a normal workload and jeopardizes good standing and financial aid.

If course work is not completed by the last day of instruction of the following semester, an EX reverts to an F. Students may petition the Sociology Department and the Graduate College to extend the EX beyond this "lapse" date or to drop the course retroactively; however, the department rarely approves such petitions. If an EX reverts to an F, after the work is completed and graded and with the approval of the instructor and the DGS, a student may petition the Graduate College to change the grade.

#### ***Grades in Required Courses***

Students must earn a B or better in any required course. A grade of C in a required sociology core or graduate area sociology course indicates an academic deficiency that initiates a mandatory review (see "Mandatory Review" section below) of the student's progress which will include consultation with the course instructor.

#### ***Grade Point Average***

Students must maintain grade point averages (GPA's) of at least 3.25. The GPA reflects all course work graded A through F and "absent" (AB). It excludes courses with grades of credit (CR), no credit (NC), excused (EX), deferred (DF), satisfactory (S), or unsatisfactory (U); and excludes course work completed at other institutions; and undergraduate courses taken for credit in semester hours.

**Seven Year Limit**

Graduate College rules allow no more than seven years for completion of the doctoral program (six for students who entered with a master's degree). The only standard exceptions are for students in the Medical Scholars Program (MSP). Any student (including Medical Scholars) who must take more than seven years to complete the Ph.D. must obtain an exemption from the 7-year rule from the Graduate College. To request an exemption, the student must write the Dean of the Graduate College, through the Head of the Sociology Department. Students' letters should describe their degree progress, work plans, and anticipated time for completing the degree. Although the Graduate College provides a formal procedure for requesting an extension, they are reluctant to grant extensions except to students in the MSP.

**Deadline Extensions**

Students may request extended deadlines by writing to the Director of Graduate Studies. A request must include a projected schedule that shows when requirements will be met. The student must be explicit about reasons for the request. The student's advisor must approve the request.

Family and medical leave are the most common reasons for approved extensions of deadlines. Extensions also may be approved for special academic needs such as study abroad. Students in the Medical Scholars Program get standard academic extensions on written request. Relevant departmental time limits may be extended by one year for students who have completed their first year in medical school, two years for students who have completed their second year in medical school, and three years for Medical Scholars who have completed the required 60 weeks of medical clerkship.

**Mandatory Review**

The DGS will bring to the attention of the Department Head and the student's faculty advisor any student who fails to meet all the requirements for good standing in any semester. The Head, the DGS, and the student's faculty advisor will constitute the student's Graduate Program Review Committee (GPRC). The Head will consider the advice of the GPRC, and may decide to warn the student, put the student on probation, or dismiss the student from the program. If the Head decides to place the student on probation, conditions for lifting probation in a given period of time (usually one semester) should also be stipulated.

Any decision of a GPRC is advisory to the Head, who may accept the advice, modify it or reject it. If the Head concludes that a student who is subject to a mandatory review cannot meet degree requirements satisfactorily, the Head can terminate the student immediately.

**Area Qualifying Examinations**

Standing committees of faculty in each area are responsible for preparing, administering and evaluating qualifying examinations.

Each area committee will consist of the Chair of the area and at least two other members of the area appointed by the Chair. The Head will review Chair appointments annually in consultation with area faculty.

Each area provides a description of the area, a list of relevant and required courses, and guidelines, including reading lists as appropriate.

Before taking an area qualifying exam, the student must complete core, breadth, and all area requirements including at least three area courses. The Chair of the area decides which courses count toward meeting area requirements.

Students should prepare for the exam by consulting with their advisors and members of the area examining committee.

Examinations will commence during the third and thirteenth weeks of each semester. For exceptions, students may petition the area examination committee with a copy to the DGS. Exceptions require the examination committee's unanimous approval. Students who plan to take an examination must notify the DGS at least one month in advance of the scheduled examination.

Students should consult area documents for full descriptions of the preliminary exam. Each area examination will minimally consist of two written exams, given in two separate sessions. The first part examines the theoretical, methodological, and substantive matters common to the area, while the second part is designed in consultation with the student to address her or his special area of research.

Examinations will be scored as High Pass, Pass, and Fail. The examination committee will inform examinees, their advisors and the DGS, in writing, of the committee's evaluation of the examinee's performance. If a student fails an exam, a Graduate Program Review Committee (GPRC) composed of the head of the Department, the DGS, and the student's sociology faculty advisor will promptly review the student's record and will often have a hearing with the student. The GPRC will forward a recommendation to the Head, which may result in asking the student to repeat the examination or dropping him/her from the graduate program. A student may not take a qualifying examination in any area more than twice, nor may a student take more than three qualifying examinations, regardless of area.

#### ***Appeals***

The GPRC will hear student appeals on matters relating to the qualifying examinations. Address any appeals of the application or requests for interpretation of any of the above regulations to the DGS. Address appeals regarding the committee's procedures to the departmental Grievance Committee in the manner set forth in the Department of Sociology Faculty Bylaws, Article IV.

#### ***The Dissertation***

The dissertation demonstrates the student's scholarly expertise on a research problem that the student selects. A dissertation committee assists in selecting and developing the research problem, and evaluates the student's work on that problem.

#### ***Dissertation Committee***

The student must consult her or his advisor and the DGS about proposed faculty members for the Dissertation Committee. Those who serve do so because they are specialists on some aspect of the proposed dissertation. The DGS will evaluate and advise the student on the relations between the dissertation problem area and the proposed faculty members. In consultation with the student's advisor, the DGS may alter the committee composition proposed by the student. If, at any point, the dissertation topic changes, a change in the composition of the committee may be required. The student must confirm with the DGS and the dissertation committee chair of any subsequent proposed changes in committee composition.

After the DGS approves a dissertation committee, the student must ask the faculty members if they will serve on the committee. Students must notify the DGS, area chair, and their advisors which faculty members agree to serve. With the concurrence of the Head, the Department then submits the proposed committee members to the graduate College.

#### ***Appointment of Doctoral Committee***

The Dean of the Graduate College formally appoints this committee to conduct the preliminary oral examination on the proposed dissertation research (the "proposal defense") and later appoints a committee to conduct the final oral examination on the completed dissertation. The same persons may (and typically do) serve on both

committees. Note that the official terminology can be a little confusing: the Graduate College uses the term “Qualifying Exam” to refer to what are commonly called the area exams (see above); “Preliminary Exam” refers to the proposal defense; while “Final Exam” refers to the dissertation defense. Students may take Soc 598 in conjunction with writing dissertation proposal.

#### ***Committee Membership and Structure***

Dissertation committees must consist of at least four faculty members. Three members must be sociology faculty, of whom two must have material appointments (greater than 0% time) in the Department of Sociology. The Chair of a dissertation committee must have a primary appointment (greater than 50% time) in the Department of Sociology.

Each dissertation committee must have a chair. At the discretion of the chair, a committee may have a director. Where there is a distinction, the chair organizes examinations and handles the paperwork, and the director acts as primary mentor on the research. Where there is no distinction (the typical case in our department), the chair takes both sets of responsibilities.

At least three members of the dissertation committee, including its chair, must be members of the UIUC Graduate Faculty. At least two members must be tenured. All faculty members with rank of assistant professor or above are eligible for nomination to the UIUC Graduate Faculty by the Department of Sociology. The student should check with the DGS on the Graduate Faculty status of all prospective members of the dissertation committee.

Committee members who leave UIUC may continue to serve and participate in the final oral examination for a period of up to three years after leaving the university.

#### ***Committee Duties***

The student must consult frequently with the director, the chair, and other committee members when developing a dissertation proposal and when doing research for the thesis and its defense.

The primary duties of the Dissertation Committee are

- to examine and evaluate the student's dissertation proposal at the preliminary examination (the proposal defense)
- to examine and evaluate the student's completed doctoral dissertation at the final oral examination

The chair is responsible for reporting to the DGS on the student's progress, committee actions, changes in committee composition, etc.

#### ***Proposal Defense: Preliminary Examination***

The preliminary examination in the Department of Sociology is a formal oral examination. It is based on a written dissertation proposal that the student has developed in consultation with the director of the proposed research and with the other members of the dissertation committee.

Preliminary examinations are open to all faculty and graduate students, but only the committee members have voice and vote (unless faculty arrange otherwise in advance with the chair of the committee).

Before scheduling a preliminary examination, a student must have satisfied all requirements on the Ph.D. Checklist (see appendix A).

***Scheduling the Preliminary Exam***

Students may schedule the preliminary examination only after completing all course work and passing the Area Qualifying Examination. At the beginning of each semester, doctoral students must indicate on a short questionnaire whether they plan to schedule a preliminary proposal or final dissertation examination during that semester. At that time they will be given the checklist of steps they must complete before they can take their examination.

The student must arrange the time and place of the examination with the Secretary to the Department Head. The examination cannot be scheduled in the first or last two weeks of instruction, on reading days, during final examinations, registration periods, or on Fridays after 2 p.m. if a faculty meeting is scheduled; nor should they be scheduled during the summer months or winter recess unless the entire committee can attend (there can be no substitutions). Students must remind committee members of the time and place of the meeting.

***Circulating the Proposal***

At least two weeks prior to the date of the preliminary examination, the student must circulate copies of the dissertation proposal to committee members and give one copy to the departmental graduate secretary for her/his permanent file. Two weeks prior to the examination the student must distribute a one-to two-page abstract of the proposal to all members of the faculty and post a copy in the graduate student lounge. See the Departmental Secretary for the required format for the abstract.

***Evaluating the Proposal***

The examining committee chair records the results of the examination (pass, fail, or adjourn) on a form, "Certificate of Result of Preliminary Examination for the Doctoral Degree" and forwards them to the Departmental secretary who gives the results to the Graduate College within 30 days.

If the dissertation proposal is not approved ("fail"), the student may take the examination a second time. The student must submit a revised dissertation proposal to his/her committee and the departmental secretary for her/his permanent file, distribute a new abstract to all sociology faculty, and schedule a new examination time and place in the same manner specified above. Students who fail a second time must petition the Committee to take the examination a third time.

If the dissertation proposal is approved and the project is later found not to be feasible, the student must submit a new proposal to the Committee and defend it according to the above procedures.

If five years elapse between the date the student passed the preliminary examination and the date of the final oral dissertation defense, the Graduate College requires the student to retake the preliminary examination.

***Dissertation Defense: Final Oral Examination***

Students must register for Soc 599 in the semester of the dissertation's defense. Students can register for 0 units of Soc 599. At the beginning of the semester, the student notifies the DGS in writing of plans to defend (a brief dated note is sufficient). The student's dissertation committee gives the final oral examination after the dissertation text is completed. In the examination the student summarizes the research problem, the theories and the previous studies that generated the research hypotheses, the methods employed to test the hypotheses, the results, and the conclusions that can be drawn. After giving the summary the student answers questions put by the dissertation committee about the ideas, hypotheses, methods, results, and inferences.

***Scheduling the Final Examination***

The student must notify the departmental secretary of the committee membership and the date of the final oral examination at least two weeks prior to the examination. Their dissertation chair must have the Graduate College certification papers in hand before the examination.

The student must arrange the time and place of the examination with the Secretary to the Department Head. The examination cannot be scheduled in the first or last two weeks of instruction, on reading day, during the final examinations or registration periods, on Fridays after 2 p.m. if a faculty meeting is scheduled, or during the summer months or winter recess unless the entire committee can attend (there can be no substitutions). The student must remind committee members of the time and place of the exam.

***Providing Reading Copies of the Dissertation***

Students must give copies of the final dissertation manuscript to members of the Committee and the Department Head (for review by the faculty and graduate students) at least one month before the day of the final oral examination. Students who cannot provide a separate copy for each committee member must allow additional time to permit committee members to circulate the dissertation.

***Circulating an Abstract of the Dissertation***

At least two weeks before the final oral examination the student must circulate a one- to two-page abstract of the dissertation to all members of the faculty, and the departmental graduate secretary for the student's permanent file, and post one copy in the graduate student lounge.

Final oral examinations are open to the public, but voting is restricted to the eligible members of the committee.

***Evaluating the Dissertation***

Before the results of the final examination can be forwarded to the Graduate College, committee members and the Head must sign a "Certificate of Result of Final Examination for the Doctoral Degree" certifying the candidate's successful completion of the dissertation and the red bordered form certifying that the completed dissertation meets department standards. The latter is signed in duplicate and bound with the copy of the dissertation deposited with the Graduate College.

Students who fail the final examination may take it a second time. A third examination is possible only by petition.

***Dissertation Format***

The student must prepare the dissertation in a written format according to the Graduate College guidelines in *Handbook for Graduate Students Preparing to Deposit*, available online at <http://www.grad.illinois.edu/thesis-dissertation>.

The Secretary to the Department Head must sign the "Format Approval" form and attach it to the dissertation before the student submits it to the Graduate College for a format check.

If more than one year elapses between a student's passing his or her final examination and depositing the dissertation with the Graduate College, the Graduate College will not accept the dissertation unless the Department Head sends with the dissertation a statement to the Dean of the Graduate College recommending acceptance and certifying that the thesis is essentially the one defended.

***Degree Conferred***

Doctoral candidates must deposit two copies of the dissertation at the Graduate College. One will be bound and deposited in the library and the other microfilmed and then returned to the department where it will be available

to faculty and graduate student. The University of Illinois confers doctoral degrees only in May, October and January.

## Master's Degree Requirements

### ***The Master's Degree***

The Department does not offer a master's degree program. All graduate students enter the doctoral program. The master's degree is granted as an intermediate step on the way to the Ph.D. Students should ordinarily complete the requirements during their second year of residence. A student is not making normal progress if the Master's Paper is not completed and approved by the end of the fifth semester of residence. Master's candidates must spend at least two semesters in residence before receipt of the degree.

### ***The Master's Advisor and Review Committee***

By the end of the third semester of residence and in consultation with the student's Academic Advisor, each student seeking a Master's Degree should select a Master's Paper Advisor (who may or may not be the same as the Academic Advisor) and two other faculty members to constitute the Master's Review Committee. The master's Paper Advisor must hold a substantial (non-zero time) appointment in Sociology, and all members of the Committee must hold appointments in the University Graduate Faculty and in the Sociology Department. Guidance of the Master's Paper is generally under the direction of the Master's Advisor, while other committee members are readers. Certification of completion of the paper requires approval by all three members of the committee on a form supplied by the Director of Graduate Studies.

### ***The Master's Paper***

Students qualify for the master's degree by receiving departmental certification as having completed a suitable Master's Paper, as approved by the student's Master's Paper Review Committee. A suitable Master's Paper is one that demonstrates a capacity for proficiency in the paper's adopted mode of sociological analysis and that the Committee deems to be of publishable quality. The Master's Paper should be the product of a research project undertaken either independent of course work or as part of a course, under the direction of the Master's Paper Advisor.

### ***Credit toward a Master's Degree***

The Graduate College may give students up to five units of credit toward a master's degree for graduate-level courses taken at an accredited institution within the past five years that the Sociology Department deems appropriate to count toward the student's master's degree. The Graduate College will not give any credit for courses taken elsewhere until students have earned two units of UIUC credit.

#### ***Required courses:***

One statistics (485)  
One theory (500 or 501)  
One methods (571, 581, 583, 587 or 590)  
Proseminar (2 semesters, 4 credit hours total)  
Six additional courses at 400 or 500 level:  
At least four in sociology  
At least four classes at the 500-level\*

#### ***Summary:***

Total of ten graduate course  
At least five taken at UIUC campus  
At least eight in sociology  
At least four at the 500-level