

Graduate Student Handbook

Department of Sociology
College of Arts and Science
American University
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The Graduate Student Handbook was originally created by the Graduate Student Council under the direction of the Department Chair and Department Council. Its purpose is to promote fairness and equality in the operation of the graduate programs by making public to all the requirements, rules, and procedures that guide the administration of the graduate programs in advising students, in overseeing their progress towards degrees, and in allocating resources among students and faculty.

Occasionally the Handbook goes into minute detail regarding rules and operating procedures. These details are the result of the Department Council's efforts, in past cases and controversies, to pursue the Department's mission, particularly the phrases calling on us to create "education and research for social justice" and to participate in "building equitable, humane and sustainable social institutions." Social justice, equality, humanity, and sustainability are served by rules and procedures that are democratically arrived at, publicly proclaimed, and consistently, universally applied.

Mission Statement:

"Our common purpose is education and research for social justice in an increasingly global social system. We expect to create sociological knowledge and apply professional research skills to inform effective policies and programs for social change. We intend to empower ourselves, faculty and students, with the knowledge, skills, and commitment necessary to participate in building equitable, humane, and sustainable social institutions. We consider one source of our strength to be the multicultural diversity of our department, and we seek every opportunity to expand that strength."

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I. Introduction

The Graduate Student Handbook is intended as a source of information about the policies and procedures of the Department of Sociology. In addition, students are governed by policies and procedures of American University detailed in the University Catalog and Academic Regulations, and by policies and procedures of the College of Arts and Sciences. The code of Ethics of the American Sociological Association addresses issues specific to the sociological profession.

Please note that while efforts have been made to keep the Handbook current, university, college, and departmental regulations are subject to change. When in doubt, consult with the chair of the Graduate Committee.

The M.A. program in Sociology is set up in a sequence designed for students beginning their graduate programs in the fall. Candidates accepted for spring admission may have special problems related to course sequences that they should resolve with the department before they begin course work.

II. Graduate Program in Sociology: Description

M.A. in Sociology

Admission to the Program

For a complete description of Admissions requirements please refer to the University Catalog.

Applicants must meet the minimum university requirements for admission to graduate study, including a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, with at least a 3.3 (on a 4.0 scale) grade point average. Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test scores are required. Admission to the program is at the discretion of the department's Graduate Committee and is based on academic

record and letters of recommendation from two persons able to evaluate the applicant's potential for graduate study in sociology.

Provisional admission may be considered on a case-by-case basis where minimum university requirements are not fully met (see American University Catalog, Graduate Study, Provisional Standing).

Degree Requirements

A total of 36 hours of approved graduate work including the research requirement.

Tool of Research:

Completion of SOCY 621 Quantitative Analysis and SOCY 623 Qualitative Analysis with grades of B or better.

Research requirement (6 credit hours):

As early as possible in her/his graduate program, the candidate for the M.A. degree should develop a plan for satisfying the 6 credit research requirement in consultation with the faculty member of her/his choice who will chair the student's committee. The required thesis or research project is evaluated by two full-time faculty members – the chair and another reader.

Students can choose the thesis or non-thesis option. A grade of B or better is required on the thesis or research report completed in SOCY 797 Master's Thesis Independent Study (1-6 credit hours) or in SOCY 795 Master's Research: Independent Study (3 credit hours). If students choose the latter, non-theses option, they must also complete an independent study, an advanced course in research methods, or an advanced course relevant to the research topic with a grade of B or better (3 credit hours).

Comprehensive examination:

The comprehensive exam for MA students in sociology consists of an examination meeting to discuss each student's written proposal for the Thesis or Major Project. The proposal and examination will cover the theoretical background, methodology and method(s), details of the intended study, and an initial bibliography. The exam will emphasize both the student's preparation in theory and methods, and the study plan.

The examination committee consists of the two faculty members – the chair and another reader - who will supervise the student's research for the Thesis/Project.

Ideally, each examination committee will be formed by May of the first year (end of the second semester for full time students), and will agree on a student work plan for the summer. The examination meeting will take place at the latest by the fourth week of the semester before the semester the student intends to graduate (ie: fourth week of fall semester, second year, for full time students). For students in the BA/MA program, who begin in the spring semester, or who study part time an equivalent timetable for the examination will be established to assure timely preparation for the Thesis or Final Project.

Applications to take the examination are made to the department on a standard form available from the office. After approval is obtained, the student pays the appropriate fee (\$25) at the Office of Student Accounts.

Course Requirements:

SOCY-610 History of Sociological Theory (3)
SOCY-611 Modern Sociological Theory (3)
SOCY-620 Social Research Methods (3)
SOCY-621 Quantitative Analysis (3)
SOCY-623 Qualitative Analysis (3)

15 credit hours in the areas of Social Inequalities and/or Global and Transnational Sociology. At least 3 credits must be at the 600 level. Students choose courses in consultation with chair of the Graduate Committee or another Sociology faculty advisor; lists of courses in two areas are available from the Sociology Department and include a 3-credit internship.

B.A./M.A. in Sociology:

See the university Catalog for information on admission and requirements. Students should consult with the chair of the Graduate Committee and apply to this program by the second semester of their junior year – using the AU graduate application process. The GRE is waived for BA/MA applicants; all other elements of the application must be completed.

Graduate Certificate in Social Research:

See the university Catalog for information on admission and requirements. This certificate is open to all students with a bachelor's degree or equivalent from an accredited institution.

Students admitted to the MA in Sociology automatically qualify for the Certificate upon completion of the course requirements but must declare their intentions to pursue the Certificate in writing to the Graduate Committee no later than the semester before graduation. Non-degree candidates apply to the program through the AU graduate program application process.

Students in the Certificate program pursue 15 credit hours of coursework (that can be done simultaneously with the MA degree program):

Course Requirements (15 credit hours)

SOCY-620 Social Research Methods (3)

SOCY-621 Quantitative Analysis (3)

SOCY-623 Qualitative Analysis (3)

and

two additional graduate level courses (6 credit hours) related to Social Research chosen in consultation with the chair of the Graduate Committee.

Graduate Certificate in Public Sociology:

See the university Catalog for information on admission and requirements. This certificate is open to all students with a bachelor's degree or equivalent from an accredited institution.

Students admitted to the MA in Sociology automatically qualify for the Certificate upon completion of the course requirements but must declare their intentions to pursue the Certificate in writing to the Graduate Committee no later than the semester before graduation. Non-degree candidates apply to the program through the AU graduate program application process.

Students in the Certificate program pursue 15 credit hours of coursework (that can be done simultaneously with the MA degree program):

Course Requirements (15 credit hours)

SOCY 684 - Seminar in Public Sociology (3)

SOCY 695 - Internship Seminar in Public Sociology (3)

and

SOCY 525 - Social Advocacy and Social Change (3)

-or-

SOCY 580 - Social Policy Analysis (3)

and

two additional graduate level courses (6 credit hours) related to Public Sociology chosen in consultation with the chair of the Graduate Committee.

III. Graduate Program in Sociology: Additional Information

ADMISSION

Transfer of Credit

Credit for graduate courses taken at other accredited institutions may be considered for transfer credit. A maximum of 6 credit hours of graduate credits, earned with a B or better, may be counted toward course work requirements for the M.A.

The evaluation of graduate work completed elsewhere in terms of its applicability to the program may be made by the department chair, in consultation with the department's Graduate Committee, during the admission evaluation process. If so, transfer credits granted will be noted on the admissions evaluation form. If not, the admission form will include a note indicating that transfer credit will be evaluated after the applicant has begun course work in the program. In the latter case, the student must submit a petition for consideration of transfer credit to the department's Graduate Committee no later than the completion of 9 credit hours of course work in the graduate program to which he/she is admitted. The petition for transfer credit must be formally

submitted on a Graduate Academic Action Form (available from the department office) and must include the following attachments:

- (a) a description of each course for which transfer credit is requested and, if the course is not in a field of sociology, an explanation of its relevance for the student's degree program
- (b) an official transcript of grades received in each course.

Removal of Provisional Standing

Students who have been provisionally admitted to the department must petition the Graduate Committee for full standing immediately after completion of their first semester of full-time study or the first 9 hours of part-time study. Use a Graduate Academic Action form (available in the department office) for this purpose. A grade point average of B or better in courses completed is required for removal of provisional standing.

Admission from Non-degree Status

A student registered in non-degree status who later establishes eligibility for admission to graduate degree status may apply a total of no more than 12 credit hours of graduate work completed while in nondegree status or up to 21 credit hours earned in a completed graduate certificate program, provided the courses were completed within seven years of the beginning of the semester for which the student is admitted to degree status. To be considered for admission to degree status at the graduate level, a nondegree student must have maintained a grade point average of at least 3.00 (B) in all graduate level work.

DEGREE AND MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

Tool of Research

Students must complete a Certification of Tool Requirement form (available from the department office). M.A. Candidates satisfy the tool requirement by completing SOCY 621 Quantitative

Analysis and SOCY 623 Qualitative Analysis with grades of B or better.

Students who receive a B- in a course taken to satisfy the research tool may petition the Graduate Committee to waive the B or better grade requirement. The petition should include a justification for the request. Such petitions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive exam for MA students in sociology consists of an examination meeting to discuss each student's written proposal for the Thesis or Major Project. The proposal and examination shall cover the theoretical background, methodology and method(s), details of the intended study, and an initial bibliography. The exam will emphasize both the student's preparation in theory and methods, and the study plan.

The examination committee consists of the two faculty members – the chair and another reader - who will supervise the student's research for the Thesis/Project.

As the examination and proposal also are used for *graduate program assessment*, the examining committee will take into account the following assessment objectives:

Students will be able to use both sociological theory and sociological research methods. Our understanding of this objective is that in comprehensive exam papers and meetings, students should:

- 1. Demonstrate a command of sociological theories and their relevance to the research area.*
- 2. Demonstrate facility in the logic and reasoning of social research, data collection, and data analysis.*
- 3. Demonstrate an ability to integrate both theory and methods.*

Applications to take the examination are made to the department on a standard form available from the office. After approval is obtained, the student pays the appropriate fee (\$25) at the Office of Student Accounts.

For full time students the examination must take place by the 4th week of the regular semester before the semester a student intends to graduate, that is, the Fall semester of the second year. Students who are in the BA/MA program, studying part time or who began the program in the spring semester should see section II, the discussion of *Comprehensive Examination* (above), for information on alternative timing of the examination.

Students receiving a grade of **unsatisfactory** on an examination are permitted one more attempt. In preparation for this second attempt, students should discuss the performance on their first attempt with faculty members who evaluated their examination. A maximum of two attempts on the examination is permitted.

Research Requirement

The department has developed a manual that presents guidelines for the preparation of a Thesis or Project Proposal. This document is available from the Graduate Committee. Members of the Graduate Committee routinely offer a seminar on the research requirement in the fall semester. All first year students are expected to attend. Students are still advised to work closely with their individual advisors on the elements involved in completing the research requirement. Students who elect the Thesis option are also directed to the Guidelines for Preparing Theses and Dissertations at www.american.edu/academics/provost/2/guidelines.

OTHER COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Credit for Courses Taken Outside the Department of Sociology

Students who wish to take courses in academic units of American University other than the Department of Sociology or in other universities to satisfy course work requirements must receive prior approval from Graduate Committee. The student must prepare a written request which includes a course description and justification for taking the specific course. Approval will be based on the relevance of proposed course work to the student's degree program.

Substitution of Other Courses for Required Courses

Under special circumstances, students may petition for substitution of required courses. However, they must receive approval from the Graduate Committee prior to enrolling in the substitute course. The petition must include a description of the alternative course and justification for the substitution.

MAINTAINING MATRICULATION

Students whose degree requirements have not been completed must register each Fall and Spring semester during regular registration periods for courses, for thesis or non-thesis option, or for maintaining matriculation. Those who do not follow this convention will be administratively classified as having withdrawn from the program. Such students are eligible to reapply and, if readmitted, are governed by requirements and regulations in effect at the time of readmission.

STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS: PETITIONS FOR EXTENSION OF CANDIDACY

Candidates for a Master's degree studying full time must complete all degree requirements no later than three years after the date of first enrollment in the degree program. Candidates for a Master's degree studying part time must complete all degree requirements no later than five years after the date of first enrollment in the degree program.

A student may petition for an extension of candidacy in a degree program for a limited period if such extension is sought before these time limits expire. In no case may the total amount of time granted in extensions of candidacy exceed two years. A petition for extension of candidacy must be submitted to the Graduate Committee on a Graduate Academic Action form (available from the department office) and must include the following attachments:

- (a) a written statement from the student explaining why the extension is needed and detailing plans to satisfy remaining degree requirements,

- (b) a written evaluation of the proposed plan from the chair of student's thesis or project committee.

Upon approval by the Graduate Committee, the petition is submitted to the department Chair who then forwards a recommendation to the Associate Dean of CAS.

ANNUAL EVALUATION OF GRADUATE DEGREE CANDIDATES

Each spring shortly after the end of classes, the Graduate Committee will meet – in consultation with other full time faculty as necessary – to conduct a formal evaluation of the performance of all graduate students in the program. Each student's progress will be rated satisfactory or unsatisfactory. In the case of an unsatisfactory rating, the student will meet with an individual faculty advisor to discuss his or her progress and to develop jointly a written plan for bringing the student's performance up to the satisfactory level within the shortest possible time. This document will be placed in the student's departmental file.

IV. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The department has a long history of training international students, that is, students who are not citizens or “permanent residents” of the US. We have strong ties to the office of International Student and Scholar Services whose mission is to advance the building a global community by orienting, advising, and advocating for international students and ensuring compliance with federal regulations governing international educational exchange. We encourage international students to visit www.american.edu/ocl/iss/index.cfm and make use of the ISSS resources and programs.

V. STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DEPARTMENTAL GOVERNANCE

The department incorporates graduate students in governance processes in several ways. The Graduate Student Council, which includes all graduate students in the department, may select students to serve on the following departmental bodies:

- Department Council (2)
- Graduate Committee (1)
- Mediation and Grievance Committee (1)

Students may also serve on other committees formed on an *ad hoc* basis in any given academic year, e.g. search committee, planning committee, etc.

NOTE: Graduate student government has been reorganized at the college and university level. At this writing, consult the Graduate Committee for more information.

VI. KIANDA BELL MEMORIAL AWARD

Kianda Bell's life exemplified the department's mission in myriad ways. To recall and honor his contributions to the Sociology community, we established the Kianda Bell Memorial Award.

Details TBA.

V. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS

All official student information records maintained by the department are considered confidential, and only such information as is necessary to the normal operations of the University is maintained in official student information records. Only those administrative, faculty, and academic staff personnel who have a legitimate educational interest and who require access to student information records in the course of their normally assigned duties will be granted access to these records. Each student has the right to inspect his or her official student records, subject only to reasonable restrictions regarding the time, place, and form of supervision.

It is the department's policy to apply the principle of confidentiality to all communications, including oral communications, which concern students' academic performance. In general, information concerning a student's performance should only be shared with persons who have a legitimate educational interest and require access to such information in the course of their normally assigned University duties. Specifically, information about a student's performance will not be shared with other students, excepting those who require access in performance of their duties as student representatives.

VI. APPEALS/GRIEVANCES

REQUESTS FOR RECONSIDERATION OF GRADUATE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON GRADUATE STUDENT PETITIONS

A student may request that the Graduate Committee reconsider its recommendation on petitions she/he has submitted. The request must be written and should be addressed to the Graduate Committee. If the Graduate Committee determines that reconsideration is not warranted, the student has a right to appeal

(in writing) to the Department Chair who will consider the appeal. Absent of questions of due process, the Chair's decision on the matter will be considered final.

In questions of due process in handling of appeals, the student has the right to appeal to the Grievance Committee of the Department of Sociology and a further right of appeal first to the Dean of CAS and then to the Provost. The decision of the Provost shall be binding and shall be submitted in writing to all parties involved and the appropriate administrative official for implementation.

GRIEVANCES RELATED TO ACADEMIC QUESTIONS

The aggrieved party should begin by discussing the matter with those most directly concerned. If a satisfactory response is not received, he/she may then discuss the matter with the Department Chair who will seek an informal resolution with those most directly concerned. If the aggrieved finds the results of the Chair's attempts at informal resolution unsatisfactory, he/she may then present a written statement of his/her grievance and redress sought to the Grievance Committee of the Department of Sociology. For a complete description of the University Grievance Procedure please consult the Academic Regulations 50.00.02 at www.american.edu/american/registrar/AcademicReg.