

# Graduate Studies in Sociology

## Purdue University

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### Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	2
<b>MS Component of Program</b>	2
MS Plan of Study	2
MS Committee	3
Analytic Project Proposal and Defense	3
Analytic Project and Defense	3
Admission to the PhD Component of the Program	4
<b>PhD Component of the Program</b>	4
PhD Plan of Study	4
PhD Committee	5
Dissertation Proposal and Preliminary Examination	5
Dissertation and Defense	7
Time Limit	8
<b>Funding</b>	8
<b>Annual Review</b>	8
Minimum Grades and Program Milestones	9
<b>Other Topics</b>	9
Academic Honesty and Research Integrity	9
Research Away from Campus	10
Leaves	10
Grievances and Rights	10
Waivers and Appeals	10
<b>Appendix 1: Plan of Study Worksheets</b>	12
MS Plan of Study	12
PhD Plan of Study	13

# Introduction

The Sociology graduate program consists of two parts. The first two and a half years of the program focus on foundational work in social science research methods, classical theory, and our department's areas of research specialization. This period of study culminates in the production of an Analytic Project (AP), an original piece of research, no later than the end of the Fall semester of the third year. Following the completion of this component of the program, students earn an MS degree. The remainder of the program focuses on developing deeper expertise in social science research methods and students' chosen areas of specialization that lead to the completion of a dissertation.

Students who enter our program having already completed a Master's degree in Sociology may, with the permission of the Graduate Committee, bypass completing an AP and begin with the PhD component of our program.

## MS Component of Program

The MS component of the Sociology graduate program is completed during the first two to two and a half years. It involves completing (1) a set of required sociological theory and social science research methods courses, (2) a selection of five MS-level course electives, (3) a professional seminar (ProSem), (4) an Analytic Project proposal defense, and (5) an Analytic Project defense. Each component is described below.

## MS Plan of Study

The MS degree requires a minimum of 38 credit hours beyond the BA/BS degree. This includes required courses in sociological theory, research methods, qualitative methods, two statistics courses, and a year-long professional seminar (see Appendix 1 for a plan of study worksheet). Beyond the required courses, students select five MS-level elections, which consist of courses offered in our department's areas of specialization and other topics designated as MS-level seminars. Students may petition the Graduate Committee to count a course outside of the department as fulfilling an MS-level elective by submitting a *Course Approval Request Form*. Finally, the MS degree requires a minimum of 6 credits of Analytic Project hours (Soc 695).

Incomplete grades for coursework or Soc 695 credits are given only under special circumstances such as a prolonged illness or a personal crisis. University policy requires that incomplete coursework must be completed and graded by the 12th week of the second semester following the semester in which the incomplete was received. Incomplete grades automatically turn into failing grades if the work is not completed and graded by that time.

The student, in consultation with the Major Professor, should develop and submit a plan of study for the MS degree to the Graduate School. An MS plan of study includes a primary research area, the specific courses the student will complete to satisfy degree requirements, an expected date of degree completion, and the MS committee (see below). Only courses numbered at the 500 or 600 levels should be included

on the MS plan of study. Only one Soc 590 may appear on the MS plan of study. Coursework used to satisfy the requirements for the MS degree may not be used on the plan of study for the PhD.

An approved MS plan of study constitutes formal admission to candidacy for the MS degree. The MS plan of study should be submitted to the Graduate School at the beginning of the Spring semester of the second year and at least two weeks prior to the AP proposal defense.

## MS Committee

By the end of the first year, students should have identified a Major Professor who will serve as an advisor for the Analytic Project and must be a member of our department. The Major Professor-student relationship must be mutually acceptable to both parties. Once a Major Professor has agreed to work with a student, a *Major Professor Appointment Form* should be completed and submitted to the Graduate Program Assistant.

In addition to the Major Professor, the MS committee consists of two other faculty members. Professors from outside the department who are qualified and willing to assist students with the AP may be members of the MS committee. In addition, retired faculty and faculty from other universities may serve on an MS committee if approved by the Graduate School. Professors outside our department may not make up a majority of MS committee members.

## Analytic Project Proposal and Defense

Students are required to complete an Analytic Project proposal defense no later than the end of the Spring semester of the second year. The Analytic Project proposal should follow a conventional proposal format that includes: (1) a clearly stated and motivated research question, (2) an assessment of relevant literature including both theoretical and empirical work, and (3) a data and methods section that provides a justification for the data and measures used in the study as well as the analytic approach. In addition, the proposal should articulate the intellectual merit and/or anticipated contributions of the research. Finally, the Analytic Project proposal should also include IRB approval or a ruling or indication of exempt status.

The Analytic Project proposal defense is an oral defense that includes the student, the Major Professor, and the other two committee members. The student should work with the Major Professor to schedule the defense prior to the annual review at the end of the Spring semester. At the conclusion of the proposal defense, the committee completes an *Analytic Project Proposal Defense Form* that documents that the defense occurred and whether the AP proposal has been approved. If the AP proposal is not approved, the student may request to attempt a defense of the proposal one additional time.

## Analytic Project and Defense

Students are required to complete an Analytic Project defense no later than the end of the Fall semester of the third year as part of the requirements for the MS in sociology. The Analytic Project should be comparable in quality, style, and length to a manuscript prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. The Analytic Project defense is an oral defense that includes the student, the Major Professor, and

the other two committee members. The student should work with the Major Professor and committee to schedule the defense prior to the end of the Fall semester. Once a date and time for the defense is determined, the student is responsible for initiating a *Request for an Appointment of an Examining Committee with the Graduate School (Graduate School Form 8)*. Advertising and the modality of the defense – in-person or virtual and, if in-person, the number of committee members required to be present – must follow current Graduate School guidelines. The process of scheduling the defense with the Graduate School needs to be initiated at least two weeks prior to the date of the defense.

The outcome of the defense is recorded online by the Major Professor using the *Report of the Master's Examining Committee (Graduate School Form 7)*. If the Analytic Project defense is not successful, the student may request to attempt a defense one additional time in the following semester. Following the completion of a successful defense, an electronic copy of the Analytic Project should be provided to the Graduate Program Assistant for our archives.

## Admission to the PhD Component of the Program

At the end of the semester in which a student successfully defends an AP, the graduate faculty will vote on admitting the student to the PhD component of our program. The vote will be based on overall performance in the MS component of the program. In addition to successfully completing the requirements to earn an MS, students will be evaluated on their potential to succeed in the PhD component of the program. This evaluation includes a holistic assessment which can include performance in courses, ability to develop innovative research questions, quality of writing, facility with social science analytic methods, professionalism, and engagement in the department.

## PhD Component of the Program

The PhD component of the Sociology graduate program begins when students successfully complete the AP, earn an MS degree, and are admitted to continue in our program. Alternatively, students with an MS in Sociology from another university may, with the approval of the Graduate Committee, begin with the PhD component of our program.

The PhD component of our program involves a combination of coursework, research hours, and several milestones. The milestones include (1) submission of at least one paper for publication, (2) a preliminary exam, and (3) a dissertation defense.

## PhD Plan of Study

The PhD degree requires a minimum of 90 credit hours (see Appendix 1 for a plan of study worksheet). A Master's degree in Sociology from any accredited institution (including Purdue) may contribute up to 30 credit hours toward the 90 credit hours needed. The remaining 60 credit hours must consist of a minimum of 24 credit hours of graduate-level seminars and a minimum of 18 credit hours of PhD research hours (Soc 699). The PhD plan of study requires that two of the graduate-level seminars be courses on advanced

research methods. These may focus on quantitative or qualitative methods and are typically offered as Soc 681 special topics courses. Students may petition the Graduate Committee to count a course outside of the department as fulfilling the advanced research methods requirement by submitting a *Course Approval Request Form*. The remaining 18 credit hours can be split between additional courses or PhD research hours. Students should develop a plan of study in consultation with their Major Professor that provides specialization in their areas of interest.

Incomplete grades for coursework or Soc 699 credits are given only under special circumstances such as a prolonged illness or a personal crisis. University policy requires that incomplete coursework must be completed and graded by the 12th week of the second semester following the semester in which the incomplete was received. Incomplete grades automatically turn into failing grades if the work is not completed and graded by that time.

The student in consultation with the Major Professor will develop and submit a plan of study for the PhD degree to the Graduate School. A PhD plan of study includes a primary research area, the specific courses the student will complete to satisfy degree requirements, an expected date of degree completion, and the PhD committee (see below). Only courses numbered at the 500 or 600 levels (i.e., graduate-level courses) should be included on the PhD plan of study. Courses used to satisfy the requirements for the MS degree (i.e., included on the MS plan of study) may not be used on the PhD plan of study.

The PhD plan of study should be submitted to the Graduate School at the beginning of the Spring semester of the fourth year. The plan of study can be revised at later points if a student ends up taking different courses than anticipated.

## PhD Committee

By the end of the fourth year, students should have identified a Major Professor who will serve as an advisor for the dissertation and must be a member of our department. The Major Professor-student relationship must be mutually acceptable to both parties. Once a Major Professor has agreed to work with a student, a *Major Professor Appointment Form* should be completed and submitted to the Graduate Program Assistant. In many cases, students continue to work with the Major Professor from the MS component of our program, but this is not a requirement.

In addition to the Major Professor, the PhD committee consists of at least three other faculty members. Professors from outside the department who are qualified and willing to assist students with the dissertation may be members of the PhD committee. In addition, retired faculty and faculty from other universities may serve on a PhD committee if approved by the Graduate School. Professors outside our department may not make up a majority of PhD committee members.

## Dissertation Proposal and Preliminary Examination

The purpose of the preliminary examination is to provide the PhD student's examining committee with the information it deems necessary to determine whether the student is qualified and ready to undertake or continue the dissertation research that is required for the PhD degree.

Students are required to complete a preliminary examination, which must be evaluated and passed in its entirety. To remain in good standing students must complete the exam successfully by the end of their 5th semester in the PhD portion of the program.

The preliminary examination consists of three related components: a PhD dissertation proposal, a set of take-home exam questions to be completed within seven days, and an oral defense of both written portions of the exam (i.e., the proposal and the take-home). The examining committee prepares the take-home questions. The preliminary examination must be completed at least two semesters before the expected date of the dissertation defense.

The student selects an examining committee, which is normally composed of the same faculty members who make up the student's PhD committee. In cases where one of these faculty members is unavailable or unwilling to participate, the preliminary exam may be conducted with an examining committee of only three faculty members. The examining committee is responsible for the exam and any procedures it deems appropriate for evaluating it.

A PhD Plan of Study must be submitted to the Graduate School for approval at least four weeks before the oral portion of the preliminary exam is scheduled. The student must have an approved Plan of Study on file with the Graduate School before the oral portion of the preliminary exam is scheduled.

The preliminary examination is an oral defense that includes the student, the Major Professor, and all other committee members. The student should work with the Major Professor to schedule the defense prior to the annual review at the end of the Spring semester. Once a date and time for the defense is determined, the student is responsible for initiating a *Request for an Appointment of an Examining Committee with the Graduate School (Graduate School Form 8)*. Advertising and the modality of the defense – in-person or virtual and, if in-person, the number of committee members required to be present – must follow current Graduate School guidelines. The process of scheduling the defense with the Graduate School needs to be initiated at least three weeks prior to the date of the defense.

The dissertation proposal should follow a conventional format similar to proposals prepared for external funding agencies (e.g., the National Institutes of Health or the National Science Foundation). The proposal should include (1) a clearly stated and motivated research question, (2) an assessment of relevant literature including both theoretical and empirical work, and (3) a data and methods section that provides a justification for the data and measures used in the study as well as the analytic approach. In addition, the proposal should articulate the intellectual merit and/or anticipated contributions of the research. Finally, the dissertation proposal should include IRB approval or a ruling or indication of exempt status.

The student's CITI Certification must also be current. Complete information about the Purdue Committee on the Use of Human Research Subjects and all forms can be found at <http://www.irb.purdue.edu/>.

The take-home exam questions are given to the student approximately two weeks after the dissertation proposal is submitted to the examining committee. The questions may cover (1) the dissertation proposal, and (2) substantive areas of specialization within the discipline of sociology. Questions about the

dissertation proposal will require the student to demonstrate a clear understanding of the methods of the proposed project, the theoretical foundation that will guide the inquiry, and how the proposed project is related to an extant body of literature.

Questions on substantive areas will ask the student to demonstrate an understanding of a body of knowledge (including theory, methods, and empirical research) in a particular field. Examples of substantive areas include aging and the life course, family, politics and economy, stratification, race, urban sociology, gender, or social change.

The oral portion of the exam has two goals: (1) to give a student the opportunity to respond to any specific questions about the dissertation proposal or the take-home portion of the exam that are raised by any or all members of the examining committee; and (2) to give the student's examining committee an opportunity to evaluate how well the individual responds to questions about the dissertation project and related literatures.

The outcome of the defense is recorded online by the Major Professor using the *Report of the Preliminary Examination (Graduate School Form 10)*. The report indicates whether the exam was "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory." Three members of the examining committee must evaluate the preliminary examination as "satisfactory" for the student to be recommended for PhD candidacy. If the preliminary examination is successful, the Graduate School will reclassify the student as a PhD candidate. If the preliminary examination is not successful, the student may request to attempt a defense one additional time in the following semester.

## Dissertation and Defense

The Graduate School requires a minimum of two semesters must elapse between completing the preliminary examination and the dissertation defense. The dissertation defense is an oral defense that includes the student, Major Professor, and the other committee members. The student should work with the Major Professor and committee to schedule the defense. Once a date and time for the defense is determined, the student is responsible for initiating a *Request for an Appointment of an Examining Committee (Graduate School Form 8)*. Advertising and the modality of the defense – in-person or virtual and, if in-person, the number of committee members required to be present – must follow current Graduate School guidelines. The process of scheduling the defense with the Graduate School needs to be initiated at least two weeks prior to the date of the defense.

The outcome of the defense is recorded online by the Major Professor with the Graduate School using the *Report of the Final Examination (Graduate School Form 11)*. No more than one dissenting vote is acceptable in certifying a candidate to receive the PhD degree. Each committee member also e-signs the *Thesis/Dissertation Acceptance Form (Graduate School Form 9)* to indicate approval of the student's final draft of the dissertation. If the dissertation defense is not successful, the student has the option of attempting a defense one additional time at least one semester later.

Dissertations must conform to the style requirements detailed in the Thesis Preparation Manual prepared by the Graduate School's Thesis and Dissertation Office (see their [website](#) for templates). A final copy of the dissertation must be deposited at the Graduate School prior to the deadline set each session by the Graduate School (usually the end of the last week of classes). PhD dissertations are deposited online via electronic thesis deposit.

## Time Limit

PhD candidates must defend the dissertation within five years after the semester in which the preliminary exam was passed. Degree candidate status may be terminated by the department at the end of the fifth year. To be reinstated to PhD candidacy students must retake the preliminary exam.

## Funding

Students admitted to our program are usually provided a funding package for the academic year that includes a stipend, tuition remission, and access to health insurance. The funding package is contingent on making satisfactory academic progress in the program and satisfactory performance of assistantship responsibilities. The stipend comes with an expectation of part-time work (roughly 20 hours per week, on average) that may be fulfilled as a teaching assistant (TA), research assistant (RA), or instructor. Funding assignments vary from semester to semester and may include a combination of roles. Students in the PhD component of the program are expected to teach their own course in a Fall or Spring semester at least once while working towards their degree.

Students often have the opportunity to teach or serve as RAs during the summer, but summer funding is not guaranteed as part of the standard funding package. Students with assistantships must maintain full-time registration (at least 8 credit hours) for each Fall or Spring semester and, if funded, at least 3 credit hours during the summer. A failure to meet TA, RA, or instructor responsibilities in any semester or during the summer or a failure to remain in good academic standing may result in a loss of current and future funding.

Students are encouraged to seek external funding in the form of fellowships to support their graduate studies and/or grants to cover research expenses. Students are required to submit an *External Funding Form* to the Graduate Program Assistant when they apply for external funding.

## Annual Review

Each year the graduate faculty conduct a review of all students expecting to continue in the graduate program. There are two components of assessment used to evaluate students annually. The first is a checklist of minimum grade requirements and program milestones (see below). The second is a holistic assessment of the past year that may include the student's performance in courses; ability to develop innovative research questions; quality of writing; facility with social science analytic methods; progress on the AP or dissertation; professionalism; and engagement in the department.

The annual review typically takes place at the end of the Spring semester and students receive a letter discussing the review soon after. The letter indicates whether the student is making satisfactory progress and is in good academic standing. If a student is not making satisfactory progress (i.e., has fallen below the minimum GPA, has missed a milestone, or is behind in some domain of the holistic assessment) there are two potential outcomes: (1) the graduate faculty and DGS will outline conditions for returning to good academic standing or (2) the student will be dismissed from the program.

Students are reviewed based on the satisfactory progress guidelines and milestones noted below. To assist with the process, students are responsible for preparing the following materials in consultation with their Major Professors: (1) a statement of activities that discusses progress during the last year and, if needed, the context for failing to meet any of the satisfactory progress guidelines and (2) a Curriculum Vitae. In addition, the Major Professor is responsible for providing a statement on behalf of the student.

## Minimum Grades and Program Milestones

Students are expected (1) to maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.25, (2) earn grades of a “B” or better in the MS-level statistics, research methods, and theory courses, and (3) earn grades of “B” or better or “S” in research hours (Soc 695 or Soc 699).

In addition to the minimum grades evaluated every year, the following milestones will be evaluated no later than the specified times for students who begin with the MS component of the program (MS) and students who begin with the PhD component of the program (PhD), respectively.

Milestone	MS	PhD
Pass AP proposal defense	Spring - Year 2	-
Pass AP defense	Fall - Year 3	-
Submit manuscript to a journal	Spring - Year 4	Spring - Year 2
Pass preliminary exam	Spring - Year 5	Spring - Year 3
<i>Notes:</i> The timing of the milestones for people entering our program having already completed an MS in Sociology are guidelines that may be adjusted during admissions by the Graduate Committee.		

## Other Topics

### Academic Honesty and Research Integrity

Excellence in scholarship demands high standards of honesty and integrity. Academic dishonesty, as defined by Purdue University (see [the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#)), in any form is not

tolerated. In addition, Purdue University is committed to establishing and maintaining the best possible research environment. Students are required as part of the first-year ProSem to complete modules on the Responsible Conduct of Research and CITI IRB training.

## Research Away from Campus

In general, students are expected to be in residence in the area during their time in our program. In some cases, students may need to conduct research away from the area. There are two mechanisms for doing so – Research Away from Campus and Research in Absentia (the Graduate Program Assistant can assist in determining which option is best) – and students need to file requests for either with the Graduate School. In addition, if the student receives funding while conducting research away from campus, the student needs to complete a Change of Duty Station request (the Graduate Program Assistant can assist with this process).

## Leaves

The [Graduate Staff Employment Manual](#) provides information about leaves (as well as other rights and procedures). In addition, Purdue's [Human Resources](#) website outlines leaves available for graduate students.

If circumstances make it necessary for a student to seek an extension to the timeline for program milestones, a written request must be presented to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will bring it to the Graduate Committee for consideration. An approved request will allow the student additional time to meet the remaining program milestones.

Students who do not register for classes for three or more consecutive academic sessions (including the summer session) will be required by the Graduate School to reapply for admission.

## Grievances and Rights

The Department of Sociology is committed to ensuring that all students with a concern or grievance relating to their education or employment are aware of the processes available to them as outlined in the [Purdue Bill of Student Rights](#). Purdue University encourages its academic and administrative personnel to resolve their disagreements through informal, frank, and open discussion. As such, when possible, we encourage students with a grievance to have such informal discussions with an immediate supervisor (i.e., a course instructor, Major Professor, or the Director of Graduate Studies). The University recognizes, however, that more formal processes may be needed, in which case resources can be found in the University Catalog ([grade appeals](#) and [exam appeals](#)).

## Waivers and Appeals

Under normal circumstances, the rules and policies outlined in this document will apply to all graduate students. However, the Graduate Committee recognizes that sometimes there are unusual circumstances

or opportunities that make it advisable to grant a student a waiver from a particular rule or policy set forth in this document.

A student or major professor can request a waiver or appeal from a particular rule, policy or decision by contacting the Director of Graduate Studies in written or email form. The request should specify the nature of the change that is requested and the reasons why a waiver is justified. The Director of Graduate Studies will share the waiver request with the Graduate Committee and the Department Head. Together they will decide if the requested waiver is justified. Depending on the nature of the request, they will also decide whether there will be any conditions or extensions of time limits attached to the waiver.

# Appendix 1: Plan of Study Worksheets

## MS Plan of Study

MS Plan of Study Worksheet.		
	Credits	Semester(s) Completed
<b>Required Courses:</b>		
Soc 580: Research Methods	3	
Soc 581: Statistics I	3	
Soc 600: Sociological Theory	3	
Soc 680: Statistics II	3	
Soc 686: Qualitative Methods	3	
<b>Elective Courses (fill in):</b>		
1.	3	
2.	3	
3.	3	
4.	3	
5.	3	
<b>Other:</b>		
ProSem Year 1 (Fall and Spring)	2	
Soc 695: AP Hours	6	
<b>Total Credits</b>	38	

## PhD Plan of Study

PhD Plan of Study Worksheet.		
	Credits	Semester(s) Completed
<b>Required Advanced Methods (fill in):</b>		
1.	3	
2.	3	
<b>Elective Courses (fill in):</b>		
1.	3	
2.	3	
3.	3	
4.	3	
5.	3	
6.	3	
<b>Required Dissertation Hours</b>		
Soc 699: Dissertation hours	18	
<b>Other Required Credits* (fill in):</b>	18	
1.		
2.		
<b>Total Credits from MS</b>	30	
<b>Total Credits</b>	90	
<i>Notes:</i> Other required credits may be any combination of dissertation hours (Soc 699) or additional electives.		