



Sociology Graduate Student Handbook **MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIOLOGY**

This handbook is intended to supplement the more general Graduate Catalog. Please refer to the general [Graduate Catalog](#) for subjects that are not covered in this handbook, such as residency requirements and degree deadlines. It is recommended that you read this handbook in its entirety as you begin your graduate career and keep it handy for future reference. If you have questions not answered in either the Catalog or this handbook, please consult the Sociology Graduate Director, Lisa Slattery Walker at lisa.walker@charlotte.edu.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Master of Arts in Sociology degree program provides students with theoretical and methodological skills for analysis of social phenomena, from contemporary social problems to theoretical issues. The program is designed to accommodate both full-time and part-time graduate students. Classes typically are held in the evening to serve students who are currently employed.

The Masters of Arts degree in Sociology is designed to prepare students for further graduate work in sociology (or related fields) and for a variety of positions in teaching, public service, and business. The graduate training provided by the Department of Sociology focuses on developing both theoretical and empirical knowledge. All students will conduct sociological research involving the analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative data. Substantive areas of expertise in the Department of Sociology at UNC Charlotte include Social Psychology, Education, Social Stratification, Organizations, Health Research, Social Movements, and Public Policy.

The MA curriculum is designed to meet the needs of students seeking master's level research skills in occupations requiring such expertise: in government; marketing; program planning and evaluation; business; the media; and in the non-profit sector. The curriculum also prepares students who wish to pursue the Ph.D., whether in sociology or a related discipline (such as Public Policy or Organizational Science). Coursework in the program concentrates on building skills in research design, sampling, data analysis and interpretation, and application of sociological theory. Students complete either a thesis or a research practicum, each with an oral defense. Either option entails the student applying sociological knowledge to a problem/topic of his/her interest.

In addition to traditional classroom courses, students can tailor their coursework to specific areas of interest through individualized tutorials. Tutorials (SOCY 6895) involve directed

reading or research in a specialized area. A variety of research interests are represented among the Sociology faculty. Among these are education, health care, group processes (social psychology), social movements, stratification, work and organizations, social behavior and evolution, and comparative and historical sociology. Through coursework and tutorials students can gain a substantive knowledge base that complements their social research skills.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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DEPARTMENTAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM

- (1) An overall undergraduate grade point average of 3.0 or better on a 4.0 scale;
- (2) 18 credit hours in social science courses; and
- (3) Demonstrated undergraduate competence in research methods and statistics for social research.

Students who have not had undergraduate statistics will be *required* to take the undergraduate quantitative analysis class (SOCY 4156/5156). This, and other undergraduate classes, cannot count toward completion of the M.A. degree. (SOCY 5156 does count toward full-time status for financial aid purposes.)

Credit Transfer: With departmental approval, students may transfer up to six (6) hours of graduate work for which the applicant received a grade of B or better from another institution or related UNC Charlotte program. Likewise, up to six (6) hours of post-baccalaureate credit (courses taken after a student has finished the undergraduate degree but before acceptance to the graduate program) can be applied to the graduate degree.

ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

The management of a student's graduate program is largely in the hands of the student, under the guidance of the student's advisor and the Graduate Director. The Graduate Director initially serves as the student's advisor; the student should seek out a member of the faculty to serve as mentor, advisor, and thesis committee chair. This is typically done during the second semester. The committee chair then works closely and individually with the student in program planning, committee member selection, selection of research topics, and planning of tutorials.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE

All students are required to complete a minimum of thirty-five (35) semester hours of coursework, including:

- (1) 15 hours of common core courses;
- (2) at least one additional research methods course in the department;
- (3) at least two elective courses in the department; and
- (4) six hours of thesis (SOCY 6996) or research practicum (SOCY 6897).

Students may take up to **five** elective credit hours in tutorials (see below).

Students also may take up to two 5000-, 6000- or 8000-level courses in other departments (subject to approval by the Graduate Director), and are encouraged to do so where their areas of interest overlap with other programs (i.e., psychology, education, organizational science, public policy, history, geography). Courses taught in other programs (e.g., Public Policy, Organizational Science) by Sociology faculty do not count as coursework outside of the department.

Courses only count toward the degree if the student earned a B or better. Two Cs from courses taken inside or outside of the Department will result in suspension from the program. Students wishing to re-enter the program must re-apply. Readmission is not guaranteed. The application must address causes of poor performance and an amelioration plan. Re-admitted students must re-take any credits where they earned a C. Two additional Cs will result in permanent expulsion from the program.

Core Courses:

- SOCY 5151. Proseminar (3 credits). Introduction to the discipline of sociology and the UNC Charlotte sociology program; basic skills for graduate school.
- SOCY 6651. Social Theory (3 credits). Analysis of contemporary social theories.
- SOCY 6652. Issues in Social Research (3 credits). Principal methods of social research.
- GRAD 6100. Basic Statistics and Probability (3 credits). Foundational knowledge and introductory level statistics.
- GRAD 6101. Linear Regression (3 credits). Multiple regression models and related techniques for applied research.

Note: The Graduate Program Director may waive the requirement for GRAD 6100 if the student presents evidence of quantitative skills comparable to what is learned in the course. This would not alter the number of credit hours required for the major.

Additional Research Methods courses *may* include:

- SOCY 6136 Qualitative Research Methods
- SOCY 6617 Data Utilization
- SOCY 6630 Investigating Health and Health Research
- SOCY 6640 Evaluation Research
- SOCY 6090 (as appropriate and with permission of the Director of Graduate Studies)

Elective Courses

Students may choose their elective courses from 5000-, 6000-, and 8000- level courses offered in the department and from approved courses outside the department (check with the Graduate Director).

At least 50% of the required credit hours for the M.A. degree must be at the 6000 level or above. Students may not count 4000-level or lower courses toward the M.A. **Required undergraduate courses may not be used for graduate credit, even when enrolled at the 5000 level.**

TIME TABLE (subject to adjustment)

The MA program is designed so that students may finish in two academic years, although students taking courses part-time may take longer. Full-time coursework consists of 9 hours; maximum course load is 12 hours. The following provisional timetable may serve as a planning guide. It assumes that students begin their coursework in the Fall; students beginning in the Spring will have to make adjustments.

<u>Year 1</u> Fall SOCY 5151 Proseminar SOCY 6652 Social Research Methods GRAD 6100 Basic Statistics & Probability Identify research interests	Spring SOCY 6651 Social Theory GRAD 6101 Linear Regression Elective or Tutorial Identify thesis topic. Begin literature review
During the summer, complete literature review for thesis and begin data collection	
<u>Year 2</u> Fall Research practicum or thesis hours Research Methods Elective Elective or Tutorial Analyze data and write first draft of thesis	Spring Research practicum or thesis hours Elective or Tutorial Elective or Tutorial Revise thesis; Oral defense

TIME LIMITS

All requirements for the degree must be completed within 6 calendar years, beginning with the date the student commences courses carrying graduate credit applicable to the degree program.

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

Upon successful completion of a minimum of 18 semester hours of graduate work and in no case later than four weeks prior to the beginning of the semester in which he/she expects to complete all requisites for the degree, a student should file for admission to candidacy on the form supplied by the Graduate School. This application is a check sheet approved by the student's advisor, department chairperson and college dean listing all course work to be offered for the degree (including transferred credit and courses in progress).

TUTORIALS (SOCY 6895)

A tutorial is similar to a directed independent study (DIS) in that a student elects to work closely with a faculty member to explore a given substantive area or develop research skills not typically available in regular courses. Students may take up to 5 hours of tutorial credit.

You must obtain the consent of a faculty member to work with you on the tutorial and together *complete a form to be turned in to the Graduate Director*. You will slow your progress through the program if you do not complete the tutorial in the semester you enroll for it. Tutorials involve a great deal of commitment on the part of both the student and the faculty member. However, if used properly, they can assist the student in preparing for the thesis, research practicum and/or further graduate work.

THESIS (SOCY 6996)

A Master's Thesis is a demonstration of your ability to apply skills you have learned in graduate school to a concrete problem. Commonly, a thesis involves developing an argument, then supporting that argument with evidence. Typically, the evidence consists of appropriately analyzed empirical data, either primary (that you collect) or secondary (collected by others and available for use). A guideline as to quality is that the thesis should have the potential to be published in an appropriate refereed journal.

Note that thesis hours will be graded "IP" (for "in progress") until the thesis has been approved by your committee at defense and submitted to the Graduate School.

Steps to completing the thesis are:

1. Choose a thesis committee chair. Your committee chair will act as your advisor and help you select courses and a research topic. *You are encouraged to select a committee chair after one full semester of coursework (9 hours)*. You will want to weigh a number of factors in deciding on a committee chair. Among them are the person's research expertise and publication record, the person's current areas of interest, other students' experiences with this person as an advisor, and the ability of the person to facilitate your post-M.A. plans. You may find classroom experience, faculty publication records, faculty websites, direct meetings, and discussion with students and other faculty helpful in making this decision.

2. Meet with your committee chair several times to help identify a specific research area and to narrow your thesis topic. It often is a good idea to take a tutorial as a readings course in the subject matter in which you are interested. This will familiarize you with the general field of study in which you will be able to find a narrower topic of interest for your thesis.

3. Formulate a thesis committee. You need a committee of three members. Two members of the committee must be from the department (including your committee chair), while the other can be from another department. You may have additional members from outside the University as long as they possess a doctoral degree, however, you will need to appeal to the Graduate School for faculty outside the University to be approved for your committee. The chair should help you in selecting the second member for your committee. The third member of your committee will be assigned by the Graduate Director.

3. Prepare a Thesis Proposal. The completion of a thesis proposal should be the focus of your second full semester of coursework (or in the span of 12 – 18 hours of coursework). This will be done in close coordination with your committee chair.

4. Defend the proposal and revise your research plan as needed. To defend your thesis proposal you should distribute copies to all committee members. Then set a date when you and the committee members can meet for about 1½ hours. At the defense you will be asked to

present a brief review of what you are proposing. The committee members will ask questions to help them understand what you are trying to do. They probably will ask you to make some changes to help you focus the research, add relevant literature, or improve the methods. The Graduate School requires that a form be filled out indicating completion of the thesis proposal and to ensure that you have received Institutional Review Board approval for research involving human participants (if needed, see page 8).

5. Develop and execute a research plan and time line. You should map out when you will accomplish each of the tasks set out in your research proposal. This will help to keep you on track and keep your work organized.

Use the summer after your first year (or some time around completion of 18 hours) to organize your research and obtain or collect data. In the Fall semester of your second year (or at 24-30 hours of coursework) analyze the data and write the first draft of your thesis.

6. Write your first draft. The thesis should be between 40 and 60 pages long, and should follow the format of a journal article in your particular substantive area. Consult with your committee chair concerning examples. In preparing the thesis, use the style established by the American Sociological Association, as followed by *American Sociological Review* and other ASA journals.

7. Your thesis will go through several revisions. Your committee chair will review your thesis and make comments and suggestions first. You will revise the thesis based on his/her feedback, perhaps going through several iterations of comments and revisions. You will then submit the thesis to your other committee members. As a rule of thumb, expect committee members to take two or three weeks to review drafts. It may be necessary to call a second committee meeting if you find that comments are contradictory or confusing. Frequent contact with committee members is the best way to ensure timely progression and completion of the thesis. Revisions should be completed and your thesis defended in the last three months of the program.

8. Arrange a time for the thesis defense with your committee members. Notify the Graduate Director of the date, time and place of your defense. *The Graduate School stipulates that committee members must receive a final draft of the thesis at least three weeks before the defense.* Fill out the Report of Thesis Defense required by the Graduate School. At the conclusion of a successful defense your committee will sign the forms. The Report of Thesis Defense must be filed with the Graduate School and your submitted Thesis must comply with all formatting regulations.

RESEARCH PRACTICUM (SOCY 6897)

A research practicum is for those students who want to find a career in applied sociology with the M.A. degree and do not want to pursue a Ph.D. If you want to pursue a Ph.D. you should complete a thesis as described above. Students completing the research practicum/internship will work directly with an organization or agency in the local community. They will develop a consultant-client relationship with the agency or organization and conduct a research/evaluation project on behalf of the agency or organization. Some examples are needs assessments, studies of worker morale and job satisfaction, surveys of political preferences, and general attitude surveys (e.g., a survey of levels of community stigma against those with disabilities). The research conducted may be very similar to the research conducted for a thesis, the only

difference being that the student is working with an agency and is meeting its needs. A final report or recommendation to the agency will be submitted in lieu of the thesis.

In developing a research practicum, the student should work with a faculty member whose interests lie in the proposed area. They will contact various agencies or organizations; alternatively, the department may have internships available (check with the Graduate Director). Although the student is working with the agency, he/she still will have a committee with three members from the faculty. The student also will prepare a research proposal (to be approved by the departmental committee following a proposal defense) and will have a final oral defense in which the student presents his/her study and results or recommendations. A proposal form is to be completed. The student is directed to the section above on the thesis, as many of the steps are similar.

The final research report will resemble a thesis, although it is likely to be shorter and more narrowly focused on the problem specified by the agency. It should contain the following:

1. Introduction: State the research problem, justification, and the type of research (e.g., exploratory, descriptive, analytical, evaluation).
2. Background: Describe the agency, specific problem, history, and the student's role and relationship to the agency. This will contain a brief overview of the relevant sociological literature and a clear specification of the research objectives or hypotheses.
3. Methodology: Specify the research design (e.g., field interviews, survey, outcomes study), the methods of data collection (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, secondary data), and the analytic techniques (e.g., descriptive statistics, contingency tables or group comparisons, regression analysis). In general, much of the needed data analysis tends to be primarily descriptive and comparative. Agency personnel often find use of advanced statistics to be confusing.
4. Recommendations: State the findings of your study and the implications or recommendations suggested by your data.

TIME AND EFFORT FOR THE THESIS AND RESEARCH PRACTICUM

The thesis and the research practicum are equivalent in time and effort. With a research practicum the student is likely to spend time in interaction with the agency, which is offset by the more narrowly focused objectives of the research project.

CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT

Once the thesis or research practicum proposal has been approved, you fall under the continuous enrollment policy of the University. You are expected to be enrolled *every fall and spring semester* until you complete the thesis.

Students who have taken the allotted 6 credit hours of Thesis (SOCY6696) or Research Practicum (SOCY 6897) and have defended their project, but have not yet submitted their project, use the one-credit Graduate Residence (Grad 7999) to maintain their enrollment.

FACILITIES

The department of Sociology is located on the 4th floor of Fretwell. We have a good deal of space, including a conference room, photocopying and fax room, mailroom, and lounge. Students on teaching assistantships share one office; however, the computers in the graduate office are available to all graduate students. There also is a computing lab on the 4th floor of Fretwell that is for use by Sociology and Political Science students.

STUDENT SUPPORT

The department currently has four teaching assistantships (TAs) that pay approximately \$14250 each for nine months of work at 20 hours per week. TAs either assist faculty with their classes or teach lab sections of the undergraduate methods and statistics courses. Funding is guaranteed for only one year. A second year of support will be contingent on evidence of excellence in coursework, marked progress toward completion of the degree (completion of research proposal and commencement of research), and positive faculty evaluations. Each TA will be evaluated by his/her immediate faculty supervisors upon completion of the TA's work.

Research assistantships (RAs) also may be available, depending on the grants and contracts obtained by departmental faculty.

RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

All research involving human participants *must* be approved first by the UNC Charlotte Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Graduate School also requires completion of a form indicating that the research proposal has been accepted by the student's committee and that the research has received approval from the IRB. For more information about requirements and appropriate forms and templates see "Research Compliance & Ethics" at the Office of Research Services website. You should also consult with your committee chair.