



Department of Sociology Graduate Student Handbook

This handbook outlines requirements, procedures, and departmental policies of graduate study in the Department of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. It covers both the formal requirements and the “common law” practices of advanced study in the department, and should serve to answer most questions that students have at any stage of progress, from entry to completion of the Ph.D.

The Department of Sociology operates under the rules, regulations and policies of graduate studies as established by the Faculty of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with the Handbook and Requirements for Graduate Studies in Arts and Sciences that summarizes the policies and rules for graduate study found in the Graduate and [Professional Catalog](#). The Graduate and Professional Catalog remains the official document-of-record governing graduate studies of the University and within Arts and Sciences. Many aspects of the University’s general graduate study requirements are not repeated in this handbook.

The Department of Sociology has the discretion to modify, alter, overrule, or change any of the rules or policies set forth in this Handbook according to established practices, while remaining within the rules and policies of the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and the University of Pittsburgh.

Those seeking further information about departmental rules and procedures should contact the Director of Graduate Studies or the Graduate Studies Administrator:

The Department of Sociology
4600 Wesley W. Posvar Hall
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Phone: [412] 648-7270
FAX: [412] 648-7277

Updated August 2020

**GRADUATE HANDBOOK
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

1. INTRODUCTION

The special character of the University of Pittsburgh's graduate program in Sociology is its emphasis on individual interests, combined with rigorous training in theory and method. The department's structure and culture support students who pursue their own intellectual concerns, stimulated and helped by the faculty and their peers. The department provides in-depth training in two thematic areas,

- * Social Movements
- * Politics and Culture

Within these two areas, we pay attention to race, class, gender, and other forms of social inequality, as well as to the global and comparative dimensions of sociological inquiry. The academic program in Sociology begins with required courses and elective seminars. Student learning is further enriched by departmental colloquia, personal advising and supervision by faculty, informal study groups with peers, and teaching opportunities at the undergraduate level.

Development of research expertise is fostered through course offerings in research design, qualitative methods, and introductory and intermediate statistics. In addition, departmental faculty and students are affiliated with numerous research centers and institutes of the University of Pittsburgh.

2. ADMISSION

The graduate program in sociology focuses primarily on the Ph.D. degree. (In special circumstances, applicants may be admitted to pursue the MA degree.) The MA is also awarded to students in the course of working toward the Ph.D. Applications are considered once a year for fall admission only. The department is strongly committed to increasing diversity in the discipline. All students wishing to apply must submit their application electronically through the university's online application process.

Additional application materials include:

- An application form (which must be submitted to the School of Arts & Sciences [online using this link](#))
- A non-refundable application fee of \$75 is required. The University offers fee waivers, for the following national programs that cover application fees: Gates Millennium

Scholars Program, McNair Scholars, and Society for Advancement of Chicanos & Native Americans and applicants who are currently serving or who previously served as members of the U.S. Armed Services. To apply for a fee waiver you need to fill out the application form: https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3CxvKCWrXUv6tCd .

- **A career statement** that in 2-3 pages responds to some of the following questions:
 - What kinds of sociological problems and methods interest you?
 - What kind of career do you have in mind, and how will being a disciplined sociologist help you meet your goals?
 - How do you evaluate your current proficiency in the discipline, and what sort of training will best develop your capacities?
 - What stimulated your interest in **this** Department of Sociology?
- **A sample of written work** (e.g., a senior thesis or term paper) that provides evidence of creative and critical thinking, quality of writing, and potential for engaging in independent research.
- **Three (3) letters of recommendation** intended to provide independent evaluation of each applicant's potential. Letters should come from current or former teachers or others who can evaluate your intellectual and academic qualifications for graduate study. Reference writers will submit these forms and letters independently from the application using a link embedded in an e-mail they receive from the "apply online" process.
- **Unofficial transcripts** from all undergraduate and graduate institutions you have attended. If non-US citizens, please submit transcripts in the native language accompanied by notarized English translations. The University requires at least a 3.0 GPA. Note: official transcripts will need to be sent if admitted into the program.
- **TOEFL scores:** All non-U.S. citizens applying to the graduate program - except for those who have received degrees from a U.S. institution or from other English-speaking countries - must submit scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as part of their application packet to demonstrate a sufficient command of English to meet the requirements of their field. The minimum scores are 90 for TOEFL (with at least a score of 22 in all of the four sections of speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and 7.0 for IELTS (with at least 6.5 in each of its four sections).

The Department does not consider GRE scores in the admissions process.

3. GENERAL INFORMATION

3.1 Advisors

The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) supervises the graduate program as the representative of the department in all academic matters concerning graduate students. The DGS interprets the requirements to students, monitors the progress of students through the program and their satisfaction of requirements on schedule, and acts to enforce departmental and university rules and policies. The DGS also acts as an advocate for the graduate students to the department.

Upon a student's accepting admission to the graduate program, the student is advised by the DGS. Before the end of the first year, the student chooses a faculty advisor in the student's intended area of training and expertise within Sociology. The faculty advisor offers advice, assistance and consultation, including (but not limited to) counsel in designing a course of study appropriate to the student's interests. When a student is formally admitted to Ph.D. candidacy, the functions of advice, assistance, and consultation are normally passed to the dissertation chair, who is then the official advisor of the student. Dissertation committees are formally approved by the DGS, who makes a recommendation to the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research, who formally makes and changes dissertation committee appointments.

3.2 Registration

After the first year, students should submit their plan for course enrollment each term to their faculty advisor for approval. It is then the student's responsibility to notify the graduate administrator that the advisor has approved their course of study so that the administrator may lift the registration hold, allowing the student to register before the course registration deadline. Registration is online, so add/drop forms only need to be processed if registration is not finalized until after the add/drop period has ended.

The deadlines for course registration and add/drop are fixed each term by the academic calendar of the university and can be found online at <https://www.registrar.pitt.edu/calendars>. The university charges a fee for registration after these deadlines; these fees are outside the department's jurisdiction and cannot be waived by the department. The add/drop deadline is usually about two weeks after the first day of classes.

3.3 Course Enrollment

The range in which a course's number falls indicates its approximate level:

Zero-level (courses numbered 0010-0999) are introductory undergraduate courses. Graduate students are ineligible to take these courses for credit.

1000-level (courses numbered 1000-1999) are primarily advanced undergraduate courses. Graduate students are ineligible to take these courses for credit.

2000-level (courses numbered 2000-2980) are designed for graduate students and constitute the bulk of the department's graduate instruction. These courses are designed to introduce graduate students to a field, topic or methodologies. Such courses are typically completed with research papers and presentations, and students are assigned a letter grade upon completion of the course.

Directed Study for MA Students (SOC 2902) is for students working on their Second-Year Paper. Directed study will not replace any of the department's required courses as described in sections 4.0 and 5.0. Students may register for up to 6 credits of SOC 2902.

Independent Study (SOC 2990) is for students pursuing independent study under the direction of a member of the Graduate Faculty (check this status on this website: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/graduate-faculty-roster>). Students may register for up to 12 credits of this course. Independent study courses will not replace any of the department's required courses as described in sections 4.0 and 5.0. They can count toward the elective course requirement with prior permission from the instructor, their faculty advisor, and the DGS. An appropriate purpose of the independent study would be to pursue an individualized and focused research program. For example, a student who is interested in social movements might want to pursue a program of studies on social movements concerned with health issues, a subfield with a large and growing literature. Departmental faculty are often happy to work with students on an individualized basis for such purposes (but each case needs to be individually negotiated between student and professor). Departmental faculty, however, are usually not willing to offer an independent study when the subject matter is covered by a regularly taught course. Repeated registration for independent study is possible. Students are typically assigned an SNC grade option for independent study. Independent study courses do not count towards the requirements for the MA degree.

Comprehensive Examination Preparation (SOC 3903) is for students who have completed the Second-Year Paper and are preparing for their comprehensive exams. Students may register for up to 6 credits of SOC 3903.

Dissertation Research for Ph.D. Degree (SOC 3902) is for students who have completed the MA phase of the program but have not yet accumulated 72 graduate credits and passed the Comprehensive Examination (at which point they could register as FTDS; see below). Students are advised to register for 6 credits when preparing their Dissertation Overview. Grades are SNC for dissertation research. Repeated registration for this course in different terms is permitted.

Full-Time Dissertation Study (FTDS) is for students who have completed 72 or more credits and passed the Comprehensive Examination. Students must register for FTDS. Students must be registered Full-Time Dissertation Study at least one out of every three academic terms (including summer) to maintain active student status. Students who do not register for three consecutive terms will be discontinued in the student information system (PeopleSoft) and must re-apply to continue study.

Students may also take courses in other departments at the university, and if appropriate, pursue a graduate certificate in any of the interdisciplinary graduate programs (e.g., Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies; Cultural Studies; various area studies) or pursue a secondary master's or professional degree.

3.4 Grades and Evaluations

The grades a student may receive are detailed in the University Graduate Catalog (<https://catalog.upp.pitt.edu/content.php?catoid=189&navoid=17930#university-grading->

policy-for-graduate-courses-) along with policies detailing calculation of GPA and credit. According to university policy, a graduate student who fails to maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher will automatically be placed on academic probation for a period (typically one term), and subject to dismissal at the end of the term unless the student demonstrates an ability to meet requirements determined by the department. Note that students on academic probation are ineligible for scholarship and fellowship support and may not post milestones or graduate.

3.5 International Students

In addition to passing the TOEFL or IELTS exam, international students whose native language is not English are required to take an English proficiency test upon arrival. Those who have teaching assignments are examined for the comprehensibility of their spoken English. These tests are administered by the university as part of university policy, and may not be waived by the department. International students **MUST** arrive two weeks prior to the beginning of the term so arrangements may be made for this proficiency test.

3.6 Annual Review, Satisfactory Progress and Expected Learning Outcomes

Once a year each student's progress is reviewed by the entire faculty of the department. Topics discussed include instructors' comments, grades received, satisfactory progress or its absence, and reports from the DGS and/or the thesis or dissertation advisor and committee members. Decisions regarding continuation in the program and financial support are made at this meeting, subject to approval from the dean's office. Permission to continue in the graduate program, and continued financial support, depend on satisfactory academic progress of the student in meeting the requirements detailed in this Handbook. Failure to satisfy any of these requirements will be *prima facie* reason for dismissing the student from the program and/or financial support.

Each spring term, an Annual Activity Report **MUST** be sent to the Graduate Administrator by each student.

The DGS writes each student a letter in which the student is informed of the result of the annual departmental review, as well as any specific comments, recommendations or requirements which the faculty wishes to communicate to the student. If applicable, notifications of probationary status in the program will be included in or sent along with the annual review letter written by the DGS.

Expected Learning Outcomes

We encourage students to try to achieve the following goals during their graduate training in order to maximize their learning and to enhance their abilities to compete successfully for grants, awards, and professional positions.

Mid-way Learning Outcomes (3 rd year)	ABD/Ph.D. Completion Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write an acceptable Second-Year Paper• Submit an article based on Second-Year Paper to scholarly publication• Present work in the department or for other campus audience (includes poster presentations)• Present a research paper at a professional conference• Prepare an Individual Development Plan (IDP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate competence in three recognized areas of sociology• Apply for external fellowship, grant, and/or award• Publish article in peer-reviewed scholarly journal relevant to sociology• Write an acceptable dissertation

3.7 Transfer Credits

Graduate study done elsewhere may sometimes be counted toward satisfaction of the required and elective courses in the department. In each case, the student should submit a petition to the graduate committee, stating precisely toward which requirements previous work is to be applied, with a detailed description (syllabi, reading lists, and thesis) of the relevant earlier work to aid the graduate committee in its decision. Note that transfer credit will not be accepted for courses in which a letter grade of B or lower has been received; grades and quality points are not recorded for credits accepted by the transfer.

According to university regulations, a maximum of 6 credits may be accepted by transfer toward the requirements for the MA degree. The Dietrich School allows students that have completed a master's degree at another approved graduate school to transfer up to a maximum of 30 credits. However, the department generally accepts transfers of 12 credits or less, as all incoming students must complete the same requirements (including coursework and the Second-Year Paper), regardless of whether the student has a prior master's degree, unless the student is exempted from particular courses. It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with university rules and policies regarding transfer credits.

3.8 Leaves of Absence and Medical Leaves

Under special conditions, graduate students may be granted a leave of absence. A maximum leave of two years may be granted to doctoral students or one year to master's students. The length and rationale for the leave of absence must be stated in advance, recommended to the dean by the department, and approved by the dean. If approved, the statute of limitations for

the degree is extended by the length of the leave. Readmission following an approved leave of absence is a formality.

The department will review proposals from students for leaves of absence. A petition detailing the reasons for the requested leave of absence, and specifying its length should be submitted to the DGS no less than one month before the beginning of the leave.

Medical leaves of absence typically cannot be predicted; the department, in conjunction with the Arts & Sciences Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies, deals with each medical leave on case-by-case basis.

3.9 Financial Support

Students who have external funding already secured may be admitted without financial commitment on the part of the department. Most students, however, are usually admitted with a commitment of 5 years of support for a student making satisfactory progress. This support for 5 years is made up of a mix of teaching assistantships, teaching fellowships, departmental fellowships, research assistantships, or other fellowships. Teaching in another unit within the university is counted in determining the total years of support, as well as any other fellowship received by the student during the 5 years of financial support. In other words, to take a concrete example, if a 3rd year student wins an external fellowship for 1 year or works as a research assistant on a funded project, that counts as part of the 5-year period of committed funding. However, we do urge and expect students to apply for university or external fellowships as appropriate because they free students from responsibilities other than their own research, because they confer prestige that is valuable in eventual academic job-hunting, and because they frequently provide a superior stipend. Since the department requires clear financial planning several years ahead, it is important to note that obtaining such external fellowships, encouraged as it is, does not extend the department's own financial commitment beyond the 5th year.

In all cases, the renewal of funding for a subsequent year depends on the student's making satisfactory academic progress.

Beyond the 5th year of support commitment, a student's priority for departmental support is reduced. It often happens that there is available funding, however. Since the availability of funding in such cases is not obvious until the last minute, we strongly urge every student who may be in residence beyond five years to be thinking about obtaining financial support from other sources. For example, Sociology students may be eligible for fellowships in Cultural Studies; Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies (GSWS – these are Teaching Fellowships only); East Asian, Latin American, Russian and Eastern European, and West European Studies offered through the University Center for International Studies (UCIS); the Mellon Pre-doctoral fellowship; and Provost Fellowships (open to women and minority students). For more detailed information on available funding external to the department, visit the department website (<https://www.sociology.pitt.edu/graduate/funding-fellowships-awards>). In addition, there is a

range of non-university-based fellowships, such as those offered by the National Science Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, and various foundations.

Application for financial assistance is made with application for admission to graduate study. Admission to graduate study does not carry with it any implication concerning the award of financial aid. All applications for financial assistance will be reviewed and supported to the extent of available funds. Note that only students with full-time graduate status are eligible for funding through teaching assistantships and fellowships.

The departmental financial support is in the form of the stipend, tuition and fees remission, and other benefits (such as health insurance) a TA or TF receives at the University of Pittsburgh. The TA instructional support comes in the form of running weekly, 50-minute discussion sessions (known as “recitations” – more on these below), grading, and performing routine administrative and clerical tasks for the instructor in a lecture course. The TF responsibilities and training involves teaching independent courses in sociology.

In all cases, financial support depends on the student’s making satisfactory academic progress in the graduate program. All decisions regarding a student’s funding status are determined by the DGS in consultation with the graduate committee and the graduate faculty. After the end of financial support from the department, students are strongly encouraged to seek external funding from either other university sources or national or independent fellowships, scholarships, research grants, grants to study abroad, and so on.

It may sometimes be the case that the Department of Sociology is able to offer financial support to students beyond their fifth year in the form of Part-Time Instructorships (PTI) or when additional funds become available for TA or TF slots. However, such opportunities often materialize at the last minute and cannot be guaranteed.

Lastly, in order to remain eligible for departmental funding, students must:

- complete their Second-Year Paper by August 30 of their second year;
- complete their comprehensive papers by August 30 of their third year;
- accomplish a satisfactory level of work on the Ph.D. dissertation overview by January 30 of their fourth year; and
- be admitted to candidacy by April 30 of their fourth year.

NOTE: These timeframes are the latest possible dates for accomplishing major milestones in the program, and the department strongly recommends that students aim to complete these more quickly, if possible.

Summer term support

In the summer, fewer students end up with support than request it. Unlike either fall or spring terms, the department does not guarantee summer funding. Typically, summer funding is available only through Teaching Fellowships and a small number of summer research fellowships. Note that only students who are eligible for Teaching Fellowships (see section

6.3) are able to teach in the summer term. The university reserves the right to cancel assigned courses for under-enrollment in the summer terms.

Travel support policy

Graduate students will be supported to make presentations at appropriate professional conferences as funds permit. Presentations may include giving a paper, functioning as discussant, or participating in a round-table. Requests for travel funds will be solicited annually by the Chair. Any student requesting travel funds from the department's extremely scarce resources is expected to apply for other appropriate university funds in support of student conference travel. Please visit the A&S Graduate Office website for a list of such sources (<https://www.asgraduate.pitt.edu/financial-support/conference-travel-grants>). The purpose of this funding is to encourage students to present research results. It is not in support of research expenses as such.

4. MASTER'S PROGRAM

Students who begin graduate study in this department without a master's degree must first fulfill the requirements for the MA degree. Only after completion of the MA degree and with the recommendation of their Second-Year Paper Advisor and Reader, may students proceed to doctoral study. Study for the MA degree includes a sequence of required core courses, elective courses, and a Second-Year Paper. Graduate study for the MA degree is expected to take two years of full-time or full-time equivalent study (less for a student transferring credit for prior graduate study).

4.1 Requirements for the MA Degree

For the MA degree, a student must earn 36 credits in approved graduate studies (less if credit is transferred from graduate study completed at another institution). Graduate study for the MA requires 10 courses (3 credits each) and a Second-Year Paper (6 credits). Study for the MA comprises the following courses and credits:

Social Theory	3 credits
Research Methods	3 credits
Qualitative Methods	3 credits
Introduction to Social Statistics	3 credits
Applied Regression Analysis	3 credits
Three elective Sociology courses	9 credits
Two elective courses; these may include individualized Directed Study and/or graduate courses in other departments	6 credits
Second-Year Paper	6 credits

4.2 Sequence of Studies for the MA degree

The MA degree can be earned in two years by earning nine credits each fall and spring term. Credits can also be earned during the summer for individualized directed study. *Note: At*

least 3 of the elective courses must be taken in sociology. The remaining elective courses may be taken either in sociology or in another department.

4.3 Proseminar

First-year students are required to meet monthly in a Proseminar to get to know one another and all the faculty, discuss progress in the program, explore issues related to pedagogy, research, publication, and professional development, and reflect on their experiences. Students may receive up to one credit for this course.

4.4 Second-Year Paper

The purpose of the Second-Year Paper is to provide students with the opportunity to complete a manuscript that will ultimately be accepted for publication prior to their entering the job market. Most often, this paper will be an extension or revision of a seminar paper (or papers); it may also serve as a pilot or set-up for the dissertation. The Second-Year Paper itself does not already have to be publishable, but it must be of sufficient quality that feedback from the faculty and continued work by the student will move the paper toward the point where it is ready to be sent to a journal at some time in the third year of study.

By the end of the second semester of the program (the end of the spring term of the first academic year), students should have selected a Second-Year Paper (SYP) Advisor. This is not necessarily the Advisor for the Comprehensive Exam or Dissertation Phases of graduate study. By the start of the third semester in the program (the beginning of the second year, at the very latest), each student with their SYP Advisor will also select a Second-Year Paper (SYP) Reader. Together, the SYP Advisor and SYP Reader are tasked with evaluating the Second-Year Paper. Note that substantive knowledge in the area of the Second-Year Paper is not required of an SYP Reader. Any one member of the Graduate Faculty should advise and/or read for no more than two students in any cohort. Both the SYP Advisor and SYP Reader must have graduate faculty status. Check the members of the Graduate Faculty on this website: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/graduate-faculty-roster>

Students should obtain the proper signatures and file the Second-Year Paper Form (available on Box <https://pitt.box.com/s/54tqbfu4u8f8xodiizws90ynlfjiwn>) with the Graduate Administrator as early as possible and no later than October 1st of their second year. The Director of Graduate Studies may elect to review the SYP Required Forms and suggest personnel changes to ensure broad participation of the Graduate Faculty in the Second-Year Paper process.

The SYP Advisor and Reader will make a recommendation to the Graduate Faculty of one of three grades: Pass, Pass conditional on revisions, or Fail (see details below). The SYP Advisor and Reader submit this evaluation to the DGS and to the Graduate Committee by April 1.

Three grades on the Second-Year Paper are possible:

- **Pass:** A student who achieves this grade has met the SYP Advisor and Reader's expectations for a Second-Year Paper. Typically, a student who receives this grade will earn an M.A. degree and will be invited to move onto the Comprehensive Exam phase of the program.
- **Pass conditional on revisions:** In special circumstances, the SYP Advisor and Reader may recommend to the DGS and Graduate Committee to allow the student to revise the Second-Year Paper. This recommendation should only be made if the SYP Advisor and Reader judge that the student's overall performance in the program otherwise warrants continuation and if the SYP Advisor and Reader are willing to take on the task of determining whether the student's revisions are satisfactory. Revisions must be complete by May 15 and the SYP Advisor and Reader must evaluate the revised paper by May 20. This option should be chosen only if a reasonable person could address the concerns and desired revisions in an approximately 3-week period.
- **Fail:** A student who receives this grade has not met the SYP Advisor and Reader's expectations for a satisfactory Second-Year Paper, and necessary revisions are too great to be addressed in a 3-week period. Typically, a student who receives this grade will not continue in the program but may under some circumstances (involving holistic evaluation of the student's record of graduate study by the DGS and Graduate Committee) receive an M.A. Degree.

The DGS and Graduate Committee will review the recommendations of the SYP Advisor and Reader and consult with the Graduate Faculty to recommend one of four outcomes (Pass, Pass conditional on revisions, MA Degree, or Fail). Combined consideration of the Second-Year Paper, performance in coursework, and overall research potential informs this recommendation.

Four recommendations from the DGS and Graduate Committee to the Graduate Faculty are possible:

- **Pass:** The student will earn an M.A. degree and will be invited to move onto the Comprehensive Exam phase of the program.
- **Pass conditional on revisions:** If the SYP Advisor and Reader have recommended "Pass conditional on revisions," the DGS and Graduate Committee may also make this recommendation. This recommendation should only be made if the DGS and Graduate Committee judge that the student's overall performance in the program otherwise warrants continuation. If the SYP Advisor and Reader ultimately determine the revisions to the Second-Year Paper are adequate, the student will earn an M.A. degree and will be invited to move onto the Comprehensive Exam phase of the program. If the SYP Advisor and Reader ultimately determine the revisions to the Second-Year Paper are inadequate, the student will earn an M.A. degree and but will not invited continue in the program.
- **M.A. Degree:** A student who receives this grade has earned an M.A. degree but is not invited to continue in the program.
- **Fail:** A student who receives this grade does not receive an M.A. degree and is not invited to continue in the program.

The Graduate Faculty will hold an evaluation meeting to discuss all second-year students and review the recommendations from the DGS and Graduate Committee. The Graduate Faculty may approve the recommendation from the DGS and Graduate Committee or make changes, subject to majority vote. The final decision on whether students continue in the program resides with the Graduate Faculty. After the meeting, the Director of Graduate Studies is responsible for informing the student, in writing, of the decision of the Graduate Faculty on their continuation in the program.

4.5 Satisfactory Academic Progress

By the start of their second term, students making satisfactory academic progress will have completed at least two of their five required courses and at least one other seminar. By the start of their third year, they will have completed all requirements for the MA degree, including the Second-Year Paper.

5. Ph.D. PROGRAM

Students are required to have 72 graduate credits and an MA in Sociology. For students who come without an MA in Sociology, the first 36 credits, including a Second-Year Paper, go toward earning the MA. Students must also pass their comprehensive examination (written exam and presentation) and their Overview of proposed dissertation.

5.1 Duration of Graduate Studies Leading to the Ph.D.

On average, graduate study for the Ph.D. degree is expected to take five years. The graduate office records progress toward the degree, and student progress is evaluated annually by the faculty. The student should check periodically with the graduate administrator to ensure that the record is up to date.

5.2 Requirements for the Ph.D. Degree

For the Ph.D. degree, a student must earn 72 credits in approved graduate studies (less if credit is transferred from graduate study at another institution). This includes study for the MA degree. Study for the Ph.D. comprises the following required and recommended courses and credits:

Social Theory - required	3 credits
Research Design - required	3 credits
Qualitative Methods - required	3 credits
Introduction to Social Statistics - required	3 credits
Applied Regression Analysis - required	3 credits
Six elective Sociology courses - required	8 credits
Two elective courses	6 credits
these may include individualized Directed Study; and/or graduate courses in either Sociology or other departments – certificate coursework encouraged	

Second-Year Paper (SOC 2902) (recommended)	6 credits
Faculty Development Seminar (recommended) required for solo teaching	3 credits
Comprehensive Exam Preparation (SOC 3903) (recommended)	6 credits
Ph.D. Overview Preparation (SOC 3902) (recommended)	6 credits

Although only 60 credits are listed here, you must have 72 credits and have passed the Comprehensive Examination to be eligible for Full-Time Dissertation Study (FTDS)

5.3 Sequence of Studies for the Ph.D.

First Year

Fall

*1 – 2 Required Courses
2 – 3 Electives
Proseminar*

Spring

*1 – 2 Required Courses
2 – 3 Electives
Proseminar*

Summer

*Work on Second-Year
Paper
(for credit with summer
appointment)*

Second Year

Fall

*1 – 2 Required Courses
2 – 3 Electives
Directed Study for MA
(SOC 2902) (3 credits)*

Spring

*1 – 2 Required Courses
2 – 3 Electives
Directed Study for MA
(SOC 2902) (3 credits)*

Summer

*Possible TF for students
with MA (in which case,
register for credits)*

Third Year

Fall

*2 – 3 Electives
Comp Exam Prep
(SOC 3903)*

Spring

*2 – 3 Electives
Comp Exam Prep
(SOC 3903)*

Summer

*Possible TF for students
with MA (in which case,
register credits)*

Fourth Year

Fall

*Electives, Directed Study
for Ph.D. (SOC 3902), or
FTDS*

Spring

*Electives, Directed Study
for Ph.D. (SOC 3902), or
FTDS*

Summer

*Possible TF for students
with MA (in which case,
register credits)*

Fifth Year & Beyond

Fall

FTDS

Spring

FTDS

5.4 Phases of Studying for the Ph.D.

There are three phases of advancing towards the Ph.D.:

- A. The comprehensive phase
- B. The overview phase
- C. The dissertation phase

A. Comprehensive Phase:

The Comprehensive Exam is a series of three essays, each approximately 20-25 pages in length, excluding references. Each essay should answer one or more questions, and students are expected to identify, analyze, and integrate the conceptual, methodological, and empirical literature relevant to the question. Comprehensive exam essays should help students to develop and express a point of view in dialogue with existing theoretical and empirical shortcomings in sociology.

Comprehensive Examination Committee

No later than the spring term of the second year, the student should have selected their Advisor for the Comprehensive Exam. The Advisor is the primary point of contact for the student and arbiter of the Comprehensive Exams. The Advisor must have a primary appointment in the department and hold Graduate Faculty status. (check this status here: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/graduate-faculty-roster>) The Comprehensive Exam Advisor may be different from the Second-Year Paper (SYP) Advisor.

The student consults the Comprehensive Exam Advisor in selecting preliminary topics of the Comprehensive Exam essays and identifying additional committee members to serve as essay readers. All members of the Comprehensive Exam Committee must hold graduate faculty appointments in the university (check this status here: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/graduate-faculty-roster>).

Each essay must be read by the advisor and at least one other member of the committee. Each essay must have two, but no more than three, readers. The committee, however, can be flexible regarding the division of labor so that it aligns with their expertise.

Exam Content

Students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in two or more areas of sociology. Students may work with their committee members to define their areas of concentration in ways that best reflect their skills, interests, and career objectives. In order to broaden their expertise, students are encouraged to focus at least one of their essays in a field outside of the main thematic areas of the department (social movements and politics & culture).

The following areas of concentration are meant as a guide to graduate students and their committees, not as a mandatory or all-inclusive list. In addition to these specific areas, students may select a world **geographic area** of concentration or an appropriate **interdisciplinary** area. Comprehensive exams should highlight students' strengths, while at the same time showing how their work communicates with larger sociological bodies of knowledge. Defining the optimal balance between the two is left to the specific graduate committees.

1	Collective Behavior & Social Movements
2	Communication and Information Technologies
3	Community and Urban Sociology
4	Comparative and Historical Sociology
5	Culture
6	Economic Sociology
7	Environment and Technology
8	Gender & Sexualities
9	Global and Transnational Sociology
10	Immigration
11	Labor, Work, and Occupations
12	Racial and Ethnic Minorities [Race and Class]
13	Peace, War, and Social Conflict
14	Political Economy, Development, and World-Systems Analysis
15	Political Sociology
16	Religion
17	Research Methods
18	Sociology of Organizations
19	Stratification and Inequality
20	Theory

Although the above list reflects broad thematic areas in which comprehensive exam essays are situated, each essay should be narrowed to one or more specific questions. For example, rather than writing a comprehensive examination essay on “race and ethnicity,” the student and committee should agree on a narrower set of questions, such as: “Discuss two major theoretical paradigms in the study of race and ethnicity, and their shortcomings. How do you suggest we remedy these shortcomings in future research?” The questions should be answerable by an essay of the specified exam length (20-25 pages). Questions should not focus on the specific empirical cases that are the focus of the Second Year Paper or dissertation. Questions should be framed as to help students move beyond a summary of the literature.

After identifying the question(s) for each comprehensive exam essay, students should develop reading lists in consultation with their committee. In designing their reading lists, students are encouraged to draw from existing reading lists and materials from their coursework.

Comprehensive Exam Format

Comprehensive exams take the form of three separate exam essays.

- The body of each essay should be between 5000 and 6250 words (approximately 20-25 pages, double-spaced), not including references.
- Exams should be double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, one-inch in margins, pages numbered, and free of typos.
- References should be included in the reading list. As long as work is cited appropriately throughout the text, no additional bibliography is needed.
- Essays shall be submitted at 5 pm on the pre-arranged, standardized date (November 15, March 15, or July 15), via email as Microsoft Word documents to all committee members.

Comprehensive Exam Process and Deadlines

During the second year of study, the student must complete and submit the Graduate Student Comprehensive Exam Required Form. The form identifies the student's Comprehensive Exam Advisor, the additional reader(s) for each paper, the overarching question that each essay will address, and the decided upon "due date" of the exam. This form must be signed by the advisor and the graduate student. The completed form must be submitted to the DGS by Friday at 12 noon of the last week of classes at the end of the student's second year. The form can be found on Box: <https://pitt.app.box.com/folder/46851634538>

While preparing comprehensive exam essays, a student is permitted to take six credits of comprehensive exam credits (SOC 3903) with their advisor or another member of their committee. Whether these six credits of comp essay directed study are taken and, if so, how they are distributed throughout the third year is up to the student and her/his comp committee.

It is recommended that students submit their exams by the fall semester deadline of their third year, but students must complete their exams no later than the spring semester of their third year.

The following deadlines must be met:

- Essays due in fall must be submitted by email by 5pm on November 30.
- Essays due in spring must be submitted by email by 5pm on March 30.
- Essays due in summer must be submitted by email by 5pm on July 30.

Because faculty-student interaction tends to be somewhat sporadic over the summer months, summer deadlines are discouraged. Students who want to commit to a summer deadline should first confirm that all committee members are available and willing to read the essay(s) during the summer term.

Students are expected to follow the exam schedule as agreed in the Graduate Student Comprehensive Exam Required Form. However, students are permitted to extend a deadline for one or more exams only once with permission of their Comprehensive Exam Advisor. Exam extensions of more than one semester will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and require approval of the DGS.

Before submitting an exam for final review by their advisor and reader(s), a student may be allowed to submit a draft for committee review. However, the plan to submit a draft must be specified in advance on the Graduate Student Comprehensive Exam Required Form. Students are only permitted to submit one draft for committee review before submitting the essay for final review.

Comprehensive Exam Committee should read and come to a consensus decision (Pass or Revise) within two weeks.

A decision of “Revise” indicates that the essay is not sufficient to warrant a Pass and should not be used to have a student perfect a passing essay. In the case of a “Revise,” the Advisor should clearly communicate to the student why the essay is deficient. The student has two weeks to re-write the essay, and the committee must then re-evaluate the essay. The committee must then read and come to a consensus decision (Pass or Fail) within two weeks. Failing exams are sent to the DGS and Graduate Committee, who review the Comprehensive Examination Committee’s decision. Students who fail one or more Comprehensive Exam essays will not advance to the next stage of the program.

B. Overview Phase

The doctoral overview should follow quickly after the comprehensive exams. By the end of the third year, having passed the comprehensive examination, the student should define a dissertation topic. The overview phase is the final stage before entering formal Ph.D. candidacy. In this phase, students work with their major advisor to select a dissertation committee and to prepare a written prospectus of their proposed dissertation. This will be an essay of approximately 15 or so pages (the format and length of the prospectus should be determined in consultation with the chair of the dissertation committee) that describes the purpose, scope, significance, sources, and methods to be employed in the proposed dissertation.

Dissertation Committee

Students should form a dissertation committee of four persons, one of whom must be from outside the Department of Sociology. It is sometimes the practice that a fifth member is also added to the committee. The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences requires that at least 3 members of the committee, including its chair, must belong to the graduate faculty in sociology. Check this status here: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/graduate-faculty-roster>. The members of the dissertation committee need not be identical to the members of the comprehensive exam committee.

When the chair of the dissertation committee (the student’s major advisor) agrees that the student’s prospectus can be presented for the overview, the student will distribute copies to all members of the committee, and the graduate administrator will schedule the overview defense. The dissertation committee may approve the prospectus or recommend changes and request a further overview before final approval.

Upon completion of the dissertation overview, the student will be required to give an oral, conference-style presentation. On a specified date (typically in April), all graduate students who

have completed their overviews since the previous year's presentations will prepare and deliver a 12 – 15 minute conference-style presentation to their committee, the dissertation committees of other students presenting that year, the DGS and Chair, as well as other interested faculty and graduate students. The objective of this event is to give each student further experience in presenting their work to a disciplinary audience.

C. Dissertation Phase

After the dissertation committee accepts a prospectus, the student becomes eligible for admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. In order to become a candidate, the student and the dissertation chair must file an application, using the appropriate university forms, with the Chair of the Department and the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies. If approved, the student will be informed of admission to candidacy and the approval of the membership for the dissertation committee; a copy of this document will be placed in the student's file.

Admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree constitutes a promotion of the student to the most advanced stage of graduate study and provides formal approval to devote essentially exclusive attention to the research and the writing of the dissertation. The doctoral dissertation presents the results of an original research project. An appropriate research project involves a substantive piece of original and independent research grounded in and contributing to sociological knowledge. Once the dissertation is completed, the student defends the dissertation in an oral examination conducted by the dissertation committee.

Approval of the proposed dissertation research and research design does NOT imply either the acceptance of a dissertation prepared in accord with those plans or the restriction of the dissertation to this original proposal.

5.5 Annual Meeting of Dissertation Committee

The university requires that all active and/or registered doctoral candidates meet annually with their dissertation committee. At the initiative of the student, a fall or spring semester date for such a meeting should be set suitable for the dissertation chair and other members of the committee. At the review meeting, the student reports and committee members comments on progress on the dissertation and changes from the original overview. The dissertation chair signs and distributes to the entire committee a consensus written summary of progress. The written progress report is placed in the student's departmental file and serves as a record of the required annual meeting.

Dissertation chairs must inform the administrator of graduate studies that a review meeting (or equivalent) has taken place and will provide a copy of the report for the candidate's file. The department will keep a log of the occurrence of such meetings.

5.6 Defense of the Dissertation

The doctoral defense will only be scheduled when the student's dissertation committee chair and committee members decide that the dissertation is ready for a final defense. Every member of the committee must be consulted on this point by the chair. ***Every member of the committee, therefore, must be provided with the draft of the dissertation at least one month in advance of a proposed defense date.*** Students are responsible for meeting this deadline.

Students must be enrolled during the semester in which the defense is scheduled. The student is responsible for ensuring that the format of the manuscript conforms to the regulations of the university and the School of Arts and Sciences, for paying certain fees, and for otherwise fulfilling the requirements for graduation. The dissertation committee will determine whether or not to approve the dissertation and award the doctorate. If it approves the dissertation, it decides whether it has passed; passed with distinction; or passed subject to revisions. The committee should also advise the candidate on prospects for publication.

If the committee does not approve the dissertation, it will advise the student on what changes are needed in order to pass it. In that case, the student may, within the statute of limitation, defend the dissertation again only after the committee is satisfied that all required changes have been met satisfactorily.

5.7 Graduation

Each candidate for graduation must file an official Application for Graduation in the Office of Graduate Studies early in the term in which graduation is expected and *must be registered* at the University during that term. Students are required to register for at least one credit (or the Full-Time Dissertation Study course) in the term of graduation. University deadlines for application for graduation are announced for each term. Students are responsible for meeting all University deadlines. Diplomas are mailed approximately four weeks after the end of the term of graduation.

5.8 Statute of Limitations

There is a university mandated statute of limitations: From the student's initial registration for graduate study, all requirements for the master's degree must be completed within 4 years. All requirements for the Ph.D. degree, including a successful defense of the dissertation, must be completed within a period of 10 years, or within eight years if the student has a prior master's degree. A student who is unable to complete all Ph.D. requirements within seven years after passing the comprehensive examination is required to retake the examination. University policy allows no exceptions to this rule.

If the dissertation is not completed in this time frame, students are required to petition the DGS and the Chair of the Department for readmission into the department. If students beyond the statute of limitations for the comprehensive exams are approved for readmission, they are required by the university to repeat their comprehensive exams. A student approaching the statute of limitation for their degree may request an extension which, if granted, will not require the student to petition for readmission. Request for extensions are exceptional and must be in writing. A petition should include a precise statement and detailed explanation for the reasons

for such extension and a detailed time frame for the completion of the dissertation. Supporting materials such as letters or evidence of related work may also be submitted in support of the petition. If the department approves the petition to extend the statute of limitations, then the DGS formally petitions the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies for the extension.

It should be noted that the request for the extension is ultimately granted or denied by the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies. The graduate committee (or the department) does not create policy with its response to any given petition, no matter the response. In particular, the response to a given petition does not constitute any sort of precedent. The graduate committee (or the department) is not obliged to defend its ruling to the student, although typically an explanation will be provided.

6. GRADUATE STUDENT TEACHING POLICIES

Teaching assignments are made by the DGS, the scheduling committee and the chair. The actual assignment of individuals to courses and sections is governed by the students' status in the department and departmental needs. Students whose first language is not English are required by the University to pass an English comprehension exam before they can assume a role in classroom teaching.

For TA/TF/GSA and GSR Appointments:

<https://www.gradstudents.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/GSRPolicyStatement.pdf>

For Pre-Doc Fellows:

<https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Predocctoral%20Fellows%20and%20Trainees%20Policy%20Statement%20FINAL%206-1-2020.pdf>

6.1 Guidelines for TA/TF Appointment, Reappointment, and Termination of Appointment

The three main considerations in appointment and reappointment of TAs and TFs are:

- Departmental teaching needs
- Student academic progress and timeliness in completing program milestones
- Satisfactory performance, as assessed by supervising instructor, faculty mentor, and surveys of student opinion of teaching

Other factors include:

- Prior teaching experience in a substantive area (i.e., allowing a chance to teach multiple iterations of a course and to improve a class over time)
- Professional development (we expect all of our Ph.D. students to have some teaching experiences before graduation)

Termination of appointment may result from documented failure to perform required duties, submit OMETs, or otherwise meet expectations and standards.

6.2 Teaching Assistants

One part of graduate education at the University of Pittsburgh may include appointment as a Teaching Assistant (TA). Appointment as a TA serves three main purposes: financial support for graduate study, instructional support for large undergraduate courses, and training and practice in teaching Sociology.

Each course is different, and each instructor organizes lecture courses differently. It is hard to make generalizations about your precise duties, responsibilities, and opportunities as a TA. In some courses, you will be the only TA. In other courses, there will be two of you (in Sociology, there is usually one TA for every 100 students enrolled in a course, and most lecture courses are capped at 100 or 200 students). You are encouraged to contact the instructor in the course to which you have been assigned as soon as possible to acquire the syllabus and reading materials for the course and to clarify mutual expectations.

Recitations are discussion and problem-solving sessions that meet once a week as a supplement to lectures. They are designed with several instructional purposes in mind. Recitations are an opportunity for students to work in a smaller, more interactive setting than the lecture hall. In recitations, students can reasonably be expected and encouraged to ask questions and also to demonstrate their learning by explaining new concepts or ideas in their own words (hence “recite”). Recitations are a place where the combination of more individualized attention and small group interactions ideally make teaching and learning more effective and enjoyable for both teacher and student. TAs are there to make this process possible. TAs usually lead 4 recitation sections each week, with 25 students in each session.

TA appointments are typically for 20 hours/week. If you find you are working over 20 hours a week, *on average*, talk with the instructor or the Director of Graduate Studies, who will try to help you find a balance of time devoted to teaching, research, and your own coursework. TA responsibilities include the following:

- **TAs grade student work.** Homework assignments, problem sets, presentations, papers, and essay examinations may all be part of the materials you are expected to evaluate. There is no substitute for communicating clearly and frequently with the instructor about standards, expectations, and the like. Return materials promptly. In some weeks, the time you spend grading may push your hours over the usual 20 hours/week; show some flexibility, and be prepared for some “rush” periods if the instructor has organized the course to have you grading 100 items at once.
- **TAs hold office hours.** Schedule *at least 2* hours per week for office hours. Demand and need are likely to vary over the course of the term. Expect a relative flood of students just before and just after exams or big assignments, for instance. Coordinate with the instructor so that your office hours do not entirely overlap (although a partial overlap is not a bad idea, for consulting on questions you feel you can’t answer thoroughly yourself). Be prepared to meet with students by appointment if necessary, as well, and to respond quickly and often to student email. Feel free to use your office hours to read for class, grade, or meet your other TA obligations. But be sure to set aside time when students know you will be available to them for asking questions, discussing materials, explaining

comments or grades on assignments, helping with homework (preferably in small groups meeting during office hours), preparing for exams, etc.

- **TAs keep administrative records.** Consult with instructor about Canvas or the current learning management system platform. TAs also help out with routine administrative tasks, such as placing orders from Media Services, making deliveries to Student Services for students with disabilities who take their exams separately, and filling out the paperwork that goes to the Athletic Department for student-athletes.
- **TAs may link students and instructors.** Some undergraduate students, especially in large lecture courses, find the size of the class and the distance from the instructor intimidating or alienating. Do what you can to learn students' names, respond to their questions, and enhance their learning through more personal attention than is practical in lecture. Pass on complaints and compliments, questions and concerns, confidentially or not as appropriate. Keep your ear to the ground for possible problems, and warn the instructor if you suspect trouble is brewing. If the instructor asks for it, provide feedback on lectures and discussions. Some instructors schedule weekly meetings to keep in touch with TAs. Some prefer to communicate via email. Some use a mix of techniques. *Check your email daily*, to keep up with possible communications from both students and the instructor.
- **TAs must be evaluated using the OMET student survey of teaching.** The default is a standard set of questions. You will receive information about adding your own questions and improving response rates on the surveys. It is reasonable to request a meeting with the instructor when you get the results so you can discuss areas of strength and improvement. Submit a copy of your OMET score sheet, and a summary of the written comments from your students, to the office of the DGS after you get the results. You also may arrange to have your recitation recorded for evaluation purposes. Some instructors make frequent or occasional visits to recitations, which can be nerve-wracking but helpful opportunities for observation and feedback.
- **TAs do not establish social, romantic, or sexual relationships with students.** The University has a clear policy on sexual harassment and consensual relationships: They are disallowed between TAs and their students. Avoid any appearance of impropriety (favoritism, *quid pro quo*, or hostile learning/working environment) by refraining from social, romantic, or sexual relationships with your students while they are in your classes. The university's policy on sexual harassment and sexual misconduct is available online: [Sexual Misconduct PDF](#)
- **Some TAs also:** Write questions for examinations and assignments, design their own discussion materials and recitation curriculum (this is generally for more experienced TAs who have taught the same course with the same instructor before), help with syllabus revisions, and compile teaching portfolios. Center of Teaching and Learning: <https://teaching.pitt.edu/>

6.3 Teaching Fellows

Promotion from TA to TF

Students who have completed the MA degree (or received transfer credit for a MA degree), completed the required Faculty Development Seminar, have served as a TA in Sociology for at least one semester, and are making satisfactory progress toward the Ph.D. as certified by the DGS, will be recommended for teaching fellowships. Students are not automatically assigned teaching fellowships upon eligibility. All TFs are required to have a Faculty Mentor (explained below) and should submit the required form (available on Box <https://pitt.box.com/s/22jj6h0pdtlo7u8yjestnifgf07fgd5q>) designating the Mentor two weeks prior to the beginning of the term in which they will be teaching an independent course.

Normal Duties of those Teaching an Independent Course

1. Prompt attendance at each and every course meeting is absolutely required. If circumstances such as sickness arise, the TF should inform their TF Mentor and the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) and assist in arranging for a substitute approved by the DGS. If a class is missed in whole or in substantial part, the matter should be reported to the DUS and a make-up class arranged to suit the convenience of the students. No TF should ever change the time or place of any class meeting without prior approval of the TF Mentor and the DUS and appropriate notification of the Department.
2. Regular announced office hours (not just “by appointment”) are expected of every TF. These office hours must be kept. At least two hours, on different days, are essential. It is especially important that TFs of CGS courses schedule office hours at a time convenient for CGS students. All the ordinary obligations of a teacher, such as grading and commenting upon assignments, constructing and grading examinations, submitting grades, etc. must be performed on time. In particular, teaching duties take precedence over the TF’s own academic obligations.
3. Before submitting textbook requisitions, the TF must submit to the TF Mentor, a course syllabus for the projected course, including a list of required and suggested texts. Once the syllabus has been approved by the TF Mentor, the TF should submit the textbook requisition. In absence of the TF Mentor, summer teaching materials may be approved by an appropriate faculty member or the DGS.
4. All TFs are required to have every course evaluated through the Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching. OMET results must be submitted to the DGS and the TF’s Mentor promptly and a copy is placed in the student’s file.

Supervision of Teaching Fellows

All TFs are required to have a faculty mentor. At least once a year, the mentor should either attend a class meeting at a mutually agreed time or view a recording of a class meeting in the company of the student, followed by a discussion with the student. Note: It is required that

students teaching their own course for the first time as a Teaching Fellow be observed by their chosen faculty mentor during the semester of teaching. **It is the responsibility of the student to work with the faculty mentor to schedule this observation in a timely fashion.** Failure to do so will negatively impact future teaching assignments.

After each term of independent teaching (summer term included), the mentor will review the mandatory student course evaluations, syllabi and course materials, and discuss these with the TF. Each term the mentor will prepare a written evaluation of the past semester's teaching for inclusion in the student's Departmental file. The TF will make evaluations, course descriptions and syllabi from the past semester available to the mentor for the purpose of writing the evaluation. The mentor will be available to the student for consultation on teaching issues, ranging from routine matters to long-term objectives and aspirations.

7. GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION

The Sociology Graduate Student Organization is an official university student organization that advocates the interests and concerns of the graduate students of the Sociology Department. The GSO provides the primary avenue of communications between graduate students and Sociology faculty and staff as well as other university entities. The Sociology GSO schedules regular meetings and socials that all graduate students are welcome to attend.

Representatives from the Sociology GSO attend monthly Sociology department meetings and Arts and Sciences GSO meetings and cast votes at such meetings on behalf of Sociology students. The A&S-GSO is responsible for dispersing funds collected from the student activity fees graduate students pay each semester. They also offer travel grants three times per year for students presenting research at conferences and honor graduate student teaching with an annual award.

8. RESEARCH ETHICS

8.1 Policy on Student Research in Classes: Ethical Concerns

The following addresses ethical concerns when undergraduate or graduate students conduct research for course credit. A copy of this policy is available on Box (<https://pitt.box.com/s/lggpmjxohfc2ybyxynzzhs2mqhyewa0i>) and should be distributed by all faculty and instructors (including PTIs and TFs) to students in their classes who are doing research that poses potential ethical issues. This includes ALL student research that involves human subjects in any way, including passive observation, interviews, focus groups, etc. It includes research in which the human subjects are other students in the class as well as others. In addition, all such research assignments must be approved IN ADVANCE by either the University's Institutional Review Board OR, if appropriate, by the Departmental Research Ethics Committee. In general, instructors should begin with the departmental committee by submitting, in writing and in a timely fashion, a full description of the research assignment and its ethical consideration. No student research involving human subjects may begin before departmental or IRB approval is received.

8.2 Introduction

As sociologists, our research always takes place within an ethical context. Though ethical issues may take varied forms, one area of particular concern involves the ways in which we treat others in the course of our research and writing. In seeking to understand the world, we must do so in ways that will not harm the people with whom we work and study.

To address these issues, sociologists (among many others) have developed professional norms that guide their work. Such guidelines are far from perfect, but they help to transmit the wisdom of the profession to new practitioners, and they encourage all investigators, from students in an introductory class to experienced scholars, to think seriously about these important matters. In general, these guidelines are of two different types: those which help you assess the potential risk to others of your work; those which provide ways of dealing with potential harm, either by proscribing certain activities or by providing ways to minimize risk.

8.3 Assessing the Potential for Harm

As you formulate your research project, you need to think about the risks involved along four dimensions: the methodological approaches you are using, the topics you are studying, the people with whom you are working, and your plans for dissemination of your results. The purpose of doing so is not to avoid all risks--to do so would mean the cessation of any research. Rather, by identifying potential problems, you may design your research to minimize those risks and actively assess whether your project is ethically acceptable.

Methodologies. In general, investigations that rely on public information (e.g., newspapers, census data) involve little or no risk to others, while those that create new information through interaction with others involve greater risk. Specific methodological approaches differ to some extent in the risks they pose, depending primarily on the extent to which they actively engage participants. Thus, simple observational strategies typically pose little risk, while questionnaires and interviews pose somewhat greater risk and experiments considerably more risk. Whatever the technique, the deception or the manipulation of people significantly increases the potential for harm.

Topics. Investigations that focus on private matters are riskier than those that explore public life are. This is particularly the case where matters deemed private are illegal, deviant, or potentially stigmatizing. Whether private or public, studies of behavior pose greater risk than those that focus on beliefs, attitudes, and values.

Participants. Studies that focus on less powerful peoples pose greater risk to participants than those that study equals or more powerful individuals do. Such differences in power may arise from differences in competence (adults versus children) or from differences in social organization (employers studying employees or teachers studying students).

Dissemination. Investigations that disseminate their results widely pose more risk to participants than those that do not do so. Thus, the use of interview material in a paper read solely by a professor poses relatively little risk, while the presentation of such material in a campus talk or, for example, a Pitt News article poses greater risk.

8.4 Ways of Dealing with Potential Harm

To lessen the potential for harm to those we study sociologists have developed a variety of strategies. Some are used routinely in nearly all professional research, and we, as a department, require the use of such strategies by students. Others are used only under certain conditions, and whether you incorporate them into your work will depend on serious thought and consultation with your professor.

Human Subjects. Human subjects are people from whom researchers get data or information. Regardless of how this information is obtained (for example, from interviews, interactions, journals or interventions in the lives of other people) these people become human subjects. In addition, if the information obtained is identifiable and private, the person is a human subject.

Disclosure. Whenever you are directly working with people as a participant observer, interviewer, or experimenter, you must tell people who you are, what you are doing, and how you plan to use the material you collect. This may be done in different ways (in an introductory conversation or a cover letter to a questionnaire), but participants need to be informed about your identity and purposes. If you plan to disseminate your findings through writing or talks, you must inform them of this possibility. If for some reason you cannot meet these basic requirements for disclosure, you must not undertake your project.

Voluntary Participation. People who participate in your research must do so voluntarily. Such agreement presumes that they know the purposes of your research (disclosure); it also implies that they have freely consented to talk with you, fill out a questionnaire, or let you observe their private behavior. If people do not wish to participate, you must not pressure or in any way coerce them to do so. If you cannot meet this basic requirement, you must not undertake your project.

Anonymity and Confidentiality. Anonymity implies that you, as a researcher, do not know the identity of the person you are observing. This might be the case if you were observing behavior in a public setting or you collect questionnaires from respondents that cannot be identified. Confidentiality means that you know the identity of the person you are working with but that you do not disclose that person's identity in any way to others. Where you are doing research that is not anonymous, you need to inform participants whether or not you will treat their behavior or conversations as confidential. For instance, if you are going to attribute a quotation to a particular person, you must ask their permission to do so. If you are not going to attribute a quotation to a particular person, you need to tell people their participation will be treated confidentially. This is a promise to that person and must be honored. In most cases, research should be designed to insure the confidentiality of participants. Where this is not possible, extra care must be taken.

Prohibitions on Research: High Risk Topics and Participants. As noted above, some research poses significantly greater risks, particularly that which explores illegal activity or involves minors. As the risks of such student research far outweigh the pedagogical benefits of such work, students are not allowed to undertake such work without the formal approval of the Department of Sociology and the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The University's Institutional Review Board. Because some research poses exceptional risk, the University has created a board to evaluate research proposals that have greater potential for harm: e.g., those involving deception, problems of confidentiality, high risk topics, or vulnerable participants. This board, like the norms of the profession, functions to ensure that all researchers consider the ethical (and legal) dimensions of their work. Students whose work poses the potential for such risk must consult their professor, the departmental chair, the Departmental Research Ethics Committee, and/or the University's IRB.

8.5 Is Your Research Ethical: Should You Do It?

While it is relatively easy to determine that some projects are ethical and some unethical, there is no simple moral calculus that can be applied to every project. Rather, it is your responsibility as a sociologist to think carefully about these matters, and where you have doubts, to consult with your professor and the Department of Sociology. In some cases, your professor and/or departmental chair may suggest you redesign your project to minimize potential harm or to go through the University's Institutional Review Board's formal procedure for evaluating research proposals.

9. REQUIRED GRADUATE COURSES AND DESCRIPTIONS

Sociological Theory

Students must take at least one course in Sociological Theory. Courses include but are not limited to: Classical Theory (2101), Post-Classical Theory (2102), or Theories of Gender and Sexuality (2251).

2205 – Research Design

This course is designed to: (1) provide an overview of a variety of methodologies and perspectives in social science research and their strengths and limitations; (2) introduce principals of research design; (3) orient students to contemporary critical debates in the social sciences, and (4) assist in developing methodological approaches and strategies for your own research efforts. This course covers basic philosophical and epistemological foundations of social science research; methodological issues of research design; principles of data collection; and ethical and political issues of social science research. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies will be discussed.

2201 – Introduction to Social Statistics

This course provides an introduction to social statistics. Topics include descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, hypothesis tests, bivariate associations, and data visualization. This course emphasizes the application of statistics to the social sciences and requires no prior

knowledge of statistics. Students will leave the course with a broader understanding of how statistics can be utilized in social scientific research.

2204 – Applied Regression Analysis

This course studies the set of statistical methods called regression analysis. It solidifies and extends students' quantitative and statistical data analysis skills. The course focuses primarily on linear regression, including modeling techniques for continuous, binary, ordinal, and count data. Students will leave the course with the tools necessary to analyze a variety of social science data. This course assumes some knowledge of statistics (descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, hypothesis tests, and bivariate associations). To register, students must have taken Introduction to Social Statistics (SOC 2201) or an equivalent class.

2203 – Qualitative Methods

This course will offer an overview of qualitative research methods in the social sciences. It will emphasize interpretive approaches to social research, and cover the research process from the beginning to end. Key topics include issues inherent in many types of research such as research design, conceptualization, operationalization, data collection, analysis, interpretation, syntheses and theory construction. It will emphasize the importance of reasoning and conceptualization as well as practical skills and techniques, and also cover different epistemologies, reflexivity and research ethics. The uses of triangulation and combining research techniques will also be considered. Students will carry out their own empirical projects using specific qualitative techniques, such as the interview and participant observation