PennState
College of the Liberal Arts

SOCIOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

2026–27

Department of
Sociology and Criminology

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Program Overview

The sociology program offers the following:

- Master of Arts in Sociology
- Ph.D. in Sociology
- Dual-title Master of Arts in Sociology and Demography
- Dual-title Ph.D. in Sociology and Demography
- Dual-title Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Data Analytics
- Certificate in Quantitative Methods

Responsible And Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR)

All entering graduate students must fulfill the Responsible and Ethical Conduct for Research (RECR) program. This requirement will be fulfilled through the following courses and activities:

(1) CITI training in the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR): Students will take the "Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR)" course. Information about CITI is at **researchsupport.psu.edu/orp/education/citi/**. All first-year students are responsible for sending their certificates of completion to the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Program Coordinator before the end of the fall semester of their first year. Penn State requires renewal of CITI training every three years.

(2) SOC/CRIM 500 (**3 hours**): This course, which all incoming students are required to take, will devote up to 3 hours of discussion-based training in the responsible conduct of research, covering topics such as assistantships, mentoring, data access and management, IRBs and human subjects, collaboration, authorship norms, professional conferences, and the peer-review process.

(3) SOC/CRIM 591 (**1 hour**): This course, which is required for all students, will devote 1 hour of discussion-based training in the responsible conduct of research.

(4) RCR Modules/Workshops (**1 hour**). Several opportunities are available for students to fulfill this requirement including RCR workshops and other online modules. Students are responsible for identifying, scheduling and documenting the hour of training. RECR workshops: https://researchsupport.psu.edu/orp/education/recr/curriculum/

The Master of Arts Degree (M.A.) Program

The core of the M.A. program is a set of courses designed to enhance students'

knowledge of substantive specialty areas in sociology, social theory, sociological research methods, and statistics. It is not a stand-alone or terminal M.A. degree program. Instead, it is embedded within the doctoral degree program, with students earning an M.A. on the way to a doctoral degree (Ph.D.).

Identifying an Adviser

M.A. candidates undertake their first year of study with the assistance of an interim adviser. This will be a faculty member to whom the student is assigned as a graduate assistant, appointed by the sociology program's director of graduate studies (or "DGS"). Advisers can be reassigned each year and thus may change over the course of time in the program. M.A. candidates should meet with advisers prior to each registration for the purpose of discussing their progress toward the degree.

Degree Requirements (See Appendix A for Checklist)

The M.A. in Sociology requires a thesis, plus 37 credits, including the following courses:

SOC 500 Introduction to Graduate Studies – 1 credit
SOC 501 Theories of Society I – 3 credits
1 additional course in social theory, chosen from one of the following:
- SOC 502 Theories of Society II – 3 credits *or*
- CRIM 512 Criminological Theories – 3 credits

SOC 513 Sociological Research Methods – 3 credits
SOC 574 Statistical Methods for Social Research – 3 credits*
SOC 575 Statistical Methods for Nonexperimental Research – 3 credits*
5 elective courses – 15 credits
- At least 4 must be electives in Sociology (SOC 5xx)^
- Remaining may be Sociology or another 500-level graduate course

SOC 600 Thesis Research – 6 credits

* Depending on the instructor, a 1-credit lab may also be required
^ For cohorts entering before fall 2025, at least 2 must be Sociology (SOC 5XX)

Note: Required courses in research methods and statistics assume background gained through some combination of undergraduate coursework and individual study. Students who are not confident in their basic statistical knowledge are encouraged to take SOC 470 Intermediate Social Statistics or a comparable course in a related department prior to enrollment in SOC 574 Statistical Methods for Social Research.

A student who fails a required course may repeat the course once. A second failure in the same required course will result in dismissal from the program. Note that if a student successfully completes the course, they might still be off track with regard to program expectations depending on their location in the program timeline.

Required Course Load

The J. Jeffrey and Ann Marie Fox Graduate School specifies that students holding twenty hour/week assistantships must carry 9–12 course credits per semester. Thesis credits (SOC 600) and dissertation credits (SOC 601) count toward this requirement; there is no limit on the number of these credits that can be taken, and after the first year they are frequently used to meet the required course load. Review the **GCAC-501 Credit Load policy** for additional information.

Satisfactory Scholarship

A minimum grade-point average of 3.00 for work done at Penn State is required to graduate. However, sociology faculty expect students' grade-point averages to be 3.50 or above. Students with grade-point averages below 3.25 are considered to be performing below a satisfactory level. Review the **GCAC-404 Satisfactory Scholarship policy** for additional information.

Thesis Committee

Before completion of the second semester of study, the student should select and obtain the consent of three graduate faculty members to compose an M.A. committee. At least two of the committee members, including the chair of the committee, must be tenure-line sociology faculty. One of the sociology faculty is designated by the student to be thesis adviser and committee chair. The role of the chair is to oversee the student's work, provide ongoing feedback, and guide the student through the thesis process. The role of the other members is to consult and assist the student upon request and to evaluate the final thesis. Typically, M.A. candidates should convene a meeting of their three-member committee at the beginning of their third semester in the graduate program.

M.A. Thesis

The M.A. thesis is the culminating experience for the M.A. degree. Students are advised to take advantage of all opportunities during their first year of study to develop an M.A. thesis proposal and then to begin work on the thesis during the first summer. Preparation of the thesis in journal-article format is encouraged. M.A. candidates are required to submit a thesis acceptable to their M.A. committee and to defend the thesis at a meeting with committee members. Students are expected to defend the thesis before the beginning of the third year. The thesis defense is not public, and there is not a separate required public presentation of the work.

The criteria for the thesis and defense are:

- The thesis forms a sociological research question and addresses it with appropriate theory and methods.
- The student correctly articulates and defends the thesis's theoretical and methodological choices with evidence and reasoning, in writing and orally.

All theses are subject to regulations detailed in the **Office of Theses and Dissertations** of the University.

Graduate Council Graduation Publication Requirements

The thesis must be made available to the public as an official University record through inclusion in the University Libraries.

Time Limit for the M.A.

Sociology program requirements are such that it should take two years to satisfy requirements for the M.A. Failure to defend the M.A. thesis before the beginning of the third-year Fall semester is considered poor performance, and it places the student at risk of losing department funding and continuation in the program. This limit is shorter than the maximum time limit as described in GCAC-632 Time Limitation – Research Master's, but is consistent with GCAC-610 – Time Limitation – Research Doctorate providing for programmatic time limits along the way to the Doctorate degree.

The Doctoral Degree (Ph.D.) Program

Identifying an Adviser

Doctoral students often work with the same faculty member who served as their advisers during the M.A. degree, but this is not required. Advisers can be reassigned each year and thus may change over the course of time in the program. Students should meet with advisers prior to each registration for the purpose of discussing progress toward their degree.

Ph.D. Qualifying Examination

A Qualifying Examination is required by the Fox Graduate School of all students aspiring to enter a Ph.D. program at Penn State. The purpose of this examination is to assess the student's potential to successfully complete a high-quality Ph.D. program. If approved for qualifying, the student is officially admitted to the Sociology Ph.D. program.

The Qualifying Examination, which is conducted by the Graduate Committee, is based on a dossier prepared by the student (prompted by a Form sent to students). The student dossiers will contain the approved M.A. thesis; an additional academic paper; an up-to-date CV, and a Plan of Doctoral Study supplied by the student. The additional paper must have been written during graduate study at Penn State. The Plan of Doctoral Study must include a checklist of classes already taken, probable course selections for the future, a rationale for the proposed courses, plans for comprehensive exam areas and dissertation, and probable faculty committee members. **In addition, the student must provide a written release allowing the Graduate Committee to examine all violations of academic integrity that have been filed with the Academic Integrity Office during their term of graduate study at Penn State.** After admission to qualifying, Ph.D. students are required to meet with their advisers prior to each subsequent registration for the purpose of discussing the candidates' progress on their plans of study and revising such plans as appropriate.

The criteria for the Qualifying Examination are:

- Mastery of sociological scholarship appropriate for their career stage. This includes, but is not limited to, a demonstrated ability to ask and answer questions based on foundational sociological concepts and the ability to implement methodologically sound research based on these key concepts.
- Strong performance in coursework as evidenced by a minimum of 3.5 grade-point average in sociology graduate courses.
- Coherent and concrete plan for a program of research in the dissertation that can be chaired by a faculty member and overseen by a committee at Penn State.

For students who earn the M.A. degree in Sociology at Penn State, the Qualifying Examination shall take place no later than the semester following the M.A. thesis

defense. For students who are pursuing the Ph.D. at Penn State, the Qualifying Examination shall take place by the end of the third semester of graduate work at Penn State.

The Fox Graduate School requires that the student must be registered as a full-time or part-time student for the semester in which the Qualifying Examination is held. Appeals of Qualifying decisions can be filed with the Director of Graduate Studies and will be heard by the sociology graduate faculty. Review the **GCAC-604 Qualifying Examination – Research Doctorate policy** for more information.

Students may not retake the qualifying examination. Students who fail the qualifying examination will be dismissed from the program.

The Qualifying Examination has a process to manage conflicts of interest. If the student or any member of the Graduate Committee believes there is a conflict of interest, the DGS (or the Department Head, if the DGS is in conflict) will modify the selection of personnel who will participate in the Qualifying Examination.

The Ph.D. Committee

The candidate's Ph.D. studies, including comprehensive examination and dissertation, are conducted under the supervision of a Ph.D. committee. The Ph.D. committee is composed of at least four members of the graduate faculty, at least two of whom must be sociology tenure-line faculty and one of whom must be from outside the Department of Sociology and Criminology. The committee must include faculty members with recognized expertise in the major and minor areas of specialization selected by the student. One sociology tenure-line faculty member is designated chair of the Ph.D. committee; ordinarily this person also serves as main adviser of the dissertation. The process of Ph.D. committee formation begins with the student obtaining the consent of the faculty members the student would like to have appointed. The student then completes the Fox Graduate School's Research Doctoral Committee Appointment Signature Form. This submission will be reviewed by the Director of Graduate Studies. If approved, the proposed committee will be submitted for final approval by the Fox Graduate School. Students must identify and convene their Ph.D. committee **no later than one semester following their Qualifying Examination.** Review the **GCAC-602 Ph.D. Committee Formation, Composition, and Review - Research Doctorate policy** for more information.

Degree Requirements (See Appendix A or B for Checklist)

The Ph.D. in Sociology requires a qualifying examination, a comprehensive examination, a dissertation, plus 19 credits, including the following courses:

SOC 591 Teaching Sociology - 1 credit
SOC 592 Writing for publication - 3 credits
5 additional electives – 15 credits. Of these 5 elective courses:

- No more than one 3-credit course may be for Individual Studies (SOC 596 or another program's 596).

- At least 3 must be substantive sociology courses. Substantive sociology courses must be taken from an approved list or approved by the graduate committee. The approved list includes SOC 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 535, 537, 533, 534, 538, 544, 546, 551, 553, 557, 560, 579, and 580. SOC 597's will also be approved unless the course focuses primarily on methods or statistics.

Ph.D. candidates must have completed all courses required for the M.A. degree in Sociology at Penn State, or their equivalent.

If a student fails a required course, they are permitted to attempt the course once. Upon repeated failure of the same required course, the student must leave the program. Note that if a student successfully completes the course, they might still be off track with program expectations.

Language/Communication Requirement

The Sociology program has no formal foreign language or communication requirements. However, it is highly recommended that the student pursue additional training in statistics, computer science, a foreign language, technical writing, and/or specialized methods or theory, insofar as these will further their research and career plans. Decisions about advanced work in these areas are made by students in consultation with their committees.

The University requires each Ph.D. candidate to demonstrate high-level competence in the use of the English language, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Proficiency is expected at the time of admission to the Fox Graduate School and must be formally certified in accordance with departmental policy before admission to Ph.D. qualifying.

The M.A. thesis defense will serve as the mechanism to assess the student's oral English competence. The M.A. thesis committee will evaluate whether the student can effectively present ideas, comprehend committee questions, and form and deliver coherent answers. The qualifying examination will serve as the mechanism to assess the student's written English competence, by evaluating the written material's grammar and mechanics, organization and cohesion, and adherence to disciplinary written patterns.

Satisfactory Scholarship

A minimum grade-point average of 3.00 for work done at Penn State is required to graduate with a doctorate. However, the expectation is a grade-point average of 3.50 or above. Review the **GCAC-404 Satisfactory Scholarship policy** for additional information.

Comprehensive Examination

A comprehensive examination will be administered by the student's Ph.D. committee. Candidates are required by the Fox Graduate School to have a minimum grade-point average of 3.00 for work done at Penn State at the time of the Comprehensive Examination, and they must be registered as full-time or part-time degree students for the semester in which the Examination is taken. A favorable vote of at least two-thirds of the committee is required for passing. The Comprehensive Examination shall be placed in the student's departmental file. The purpose of the comprehensive examination in sociology is to ensure competency in the earlier-described major and minor areas of specialization. At the discretion of the faculty committee, examination content, while focusing on the major and minor areas of specialization, may incorporate aspects of general social theory, research methods, and statistics.

The criteria for evaluation are:

- Ability to demonstrate familiarity with the fundamental knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches for each of the areas of specialization, in both written and oral modes.
- Ability to defend scholarly ideas with evidence and reasoning, in both written and oral modes.

The Comprehensive Examination consists of written and oral segments. The written closed-book exam will be administered in morning and afternoon sessions on two consecutive days. Effective fall 2027, the comprehensive exam will be administered fully in person. The Program will provide a non-networked computer and room for the exam.

Native English speakers will have three hours for each session, and non-native speakers will have four hours. The Student Disability Resources (SDR) Office permits reasonable accommodation. The student's exam schedule can be adjusted based on accommodation with an approval letter from SDR.

The oral portion of the Comprehensive Examination occurs in a meeting of the candidate with the Ph.D. committee. This shall be an occasion for feedback and discussion of the student's written examination and often will include an initial discussion of the student's plans for dissertation research. The oral portion of the Comprehensive Examination must be scheduled two weeks in advance with the Fox Graduate School. The oral portion can be held fully in person (encouraged), fully remote, or hybrid with some individuals participating in person while others participate remotely. Student preference for delivery mode should be strongly considered, but the student and adviser must agree on the mode. If the student and adviser cannot agree on the mode, the graduate program head will make the final decision. Either the student or adviser can appeal the decision of the graduate program head to the associate dean for graduate education.

Timing of the Comprehensive Examination

Students who are pursuing the M.A. and Ph.D. must pass the exam before the end of fall

semester of their fourth year to be eligible for continued funding. They are encouraged, however, to take the exam before the beginning of the fall semester of their fourth year. Thus, *encouraged timing* is before their seventh semester; *required timing* is by the end of their seventh semester.

Students who are pursuing only the Ph.D. must pass the exam before the end of fall semester of their third year to be eligible for continued funding, but they are encouraged to take the examination prior to the beginning of the fall semester of their third year. Thus, *encouraged timing* is before their fifth semester; *required timing* is by the end of their fifth semester.

Repeating the Comprehensive Examination

Students who fail the Comprehensive Examination may repeat it once, if time limits are not exceeded. The student must repeat the exam in the semester following the failure. A second failure will result in the student being dismissed from the program.

Review **the GCAC-606 Comprehensive Examination – Research Doctorate policy** for more information.

Dissertation

The Ph.D. dissertation provides evidence that the student can conduct independent scholarship. According to the Penn State **Graduate Bulletin**, "The ability to do independent research and competence in scholarly exposition must be demonstrated by the preparation of a thesis on some topic related to the major subject. It should represent a significant contribution to knowledge, be presented in a scholarly manner, reveal an ability on the part of the candidate to do independent research of high quality, and indicate considerable experience in using a variety of research techniques."

Dissertation Proposal Hearing

The student's dissertation research is conducted under the supervision of the Ph.D. committee. The purpose of the Dissertation Proposal Hearing is to arrive at a detailed, mutually agreeable contract between the student and the committee as to what the dissertation will include. Ideally, the hearing should be scheduled at a point at which a substantial literature review has been conducted and drafted, and at which methodological questions have been worked out in detail. The hearing also provides the committee with an occasion on which to make any final recommendations for the student's coursework. The hearing may be held in combination with the oral portion of the Comprehensive Examination.

Timing of Dissertation Proposal Hearing

Students entering the graduate program in sociology at Penn State with a B.A. or B.S. degree are advised to hold the formal Dissertation Proposal Hearing during their fourth year. They must have held the hearing before the beginning of their fifth year. Students

entering the program with an M.A. degree are advised to hold the formal Dissertation Proposal Hearing during their third year. They must have held the hearing before the beginning of their fourth year.

Final Oral Examination (Dissertation Defense)

Completion of the requirements for the Ph.D. includes a formal oral defense of the dissertation. A favorable vote of at least two-thirds of the committee is required for passing. As stipulated in **GCAC-607**, the dissertation committee chair and the student are responsible for ensuring the completion of a draft of the dissertation and for adequate consultation with members of the thesis committee well in advance of the oral examination (i.e., defense). Major revisions to the thesis should be completed before this examination. The dissertation should be in its final draft, with appropriate notes, bibliography, tables, etc., at the time of the oral examination; both the content and style should be correct and polished by the time this final draft is in the hands of the committee. It is the responsibility of the doctoral candidate to provide a copy of the thesis to each member of the doctoral committee at least two weeks before the date of the scheduled examination. **GCAC-608** specifies that the final oral examination, which serves as the defense of the dissertation, shall be "related in large part to the dissertation, but may cover the candidate's whole program of study . . ."

The criteria for evaluation are:

- Ability to demonstrate deep mastery of the research area, identify gaps or limitations in the extant research and articulate theoretical, methodological, or substantive contributions that could mitigate some of these limitations.
- Ability to provide novel contributions to this area with significant research questions or novel methodological approaches.
- Ability to defend the dissertation's theoretical and methodological choices with evidence and reasoning, in both written and oral modes.

The final oral examination can be held fully in person (encouraged), fully remote, or hybrid with some individuals participating in person while others participate remotely. Student preference for delivery mode should be considered, but the student and adviser must agree on the mode. If the student and adviser cannot agree on the mode, the graduate program head will make the final decision. Either the student or adviser can appeal the decision of the graduate program head to the associate dean for graduate education.

Timing of the Dissertation Defense

The formal defense of the dissertation shall be scheduled by the Fox Graduate School upon receipt of written notification from the Ph.D. committee chair that the committee judges the dissertation to be satisfactory for a defense. Prior notice of **two weeks** is required by the Fox Graduate School. The deadline for holding the defense is **seven weeks before commencement**. The student must be registered as a full-time or part-time degree student for the semester in which the final oral examination is taken.

Review the **GCAC-608 Final Oral Examination – Research Doctorate policy** for more information.

Graduate Council Graduation Publication Requirements

The dissertation must be made available to the public through inclusion in the University Libraries. See GCAC-607 – Dissertation – Research Doctorate.

Time Limit for the Ph.D.

A Ph.D. student is required to complete the program, including acceptance of the doctoral dissertation, within eight years after the date of successful completion of the qualifying examination, not including approved leaves of absence as outlined in GCAC-610 – Time Limitation – Research Doctorate.

ASSISTANTSHIPS

All sociology graduate students receive teaching or research assistantships. The program makes every effort to continue from year to year the assistantship of each graduate student who: (1) maintains a satisfactory level of academic performance; (2) fulfills duties associated with the assistantship; (3) completes degree requirements and milestones in a timely fashion; and (4) demonstrates satisfactory departmental citizenship and professionalism. One of the most important of these requirements is timely completion of the M.A. thesis which, means before the first day of the third year of graduate study. Continuation of funding is always subject to the availability of funds.

Graduate students given research or teaching assignments are responsible for carrying out their duties throughout the entire semester. For those with teaching assignments, the semester (or summer session) does not end until grades are computed and posted. If a graduate student is the instructor of record (e.g., teaching their own class or teaching a lab section that has its own course registration), graduate student teachers must be present for each class session. Any absences except for last-minute emergencies must be approved in advance by the Director of Graduate Studies and alternative arrangements for the class, acceptable to the Director of Graduate Studies, must be made. It is not acceptable for graduate student teachers to miss class without the consent of the Director of Graduate Studies. Similarly, research assistants are expected to be present for scheduled meetings as well as for any occasions for which they have scheduled duties.

Before students are eligible to teach their own course (the "instructor of record"), they must meet specific requirements: All students must successfully complete SOC 591 (Teaching Sociology/Criminology) before teaching their own course. In addition, students pursuing the M.A. and Ph.D. at Penn State must successfully defend the M.A. thesis before teaching their own course. This requirement does not apply to students with an M.A. from another institution and who are pursuing only the Ph.D. at Penn State.

Sociology program requirements are such that it should take two years to satisfy requirements for the M.A. degree. Completing the Ph.D. should take three more years for students who earn their M.A. degree at Penn State and four years for students who enter the Penn State Ph.D. program after earning an M.A. degree elsewhere. Students who take longer to complete the respective degrees and are making good progress may be awarded one additional year of funding, following a formal application and review process, but this is not guaranteed. Students will not be awarded more than one additional year of funding from the department. Funding from any University source (College or University assistantship or fellowship; faculty grant or other funds) is limited to a maximum of six years of total funding, regardless of source.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Annual Evaluation

At the end of each academic year, students receive written feedback on their

performance from the Director of Graduate Studies, based on faculty discussion at the annual review meeting that is held at the end of the spring semester. Information for this performance evaluation is obtained from all faculty who have had a particular student in a course, supervised an independent study course for the student, or served on the student's M.A. or Ph.D. committee. Course grades and assistantship evaluations are also reviewed for each student.

As part of the evaluation, students are assessed to determine whether they are on track or not with regard to program milestones, performance, and timelines. If not on track, students are provided guidance on what they must do to be on track for achieving program milestones.

Residency Requirements

There are additional Fox Graduate School requirements that apply to Ph.D. candidates: Over some twelve-month period after admission to Ph.D. qualifying, the candidate must spend at least two semesters (which may include the semester in which the Qualifying Examination is taken) as a registered full-time student engaged in academic work at the University Park campus. After the residency requirement is met and the Comprehensive Examination passed, status as a student must be maintained by continued registration for credit or noncredit dissertation research courses for at least two semesters of each calendar year until the dissertation is accepted by the doctoral committee. See the Penn State **Graduate Bulletin** for further information about all Fox Graduate School requirements.

Graduation

At the beginning of the semester in which they intend to graduate, students are responsible for informing the Fox Graduate School of their intent via LionPATH (effective fall 2016), and paying the thesis and/or dissertation fee. If the student does not graduate until some subsequent semester, it is necessary to inform the Fox Graduate School again of the intention to graduate at the beginning of the actual semester of graduation. Deadlines are given at https://gradschool.psu.edu/academics/academic-dates-and-deadlines.

Format details for both M.A. and Ph.D. theses are provided in the Thesis and Dissertation Handbook. Ph.D. candidates must submit a final copy of the thesis to the Fox Graduate School Office of Theses and Dissertations by the announced submission deadline for the semester or summer session in which the degree will be conferred.

Program Standards and Expectations

a. Academic standards
   - Students are expected to maintain a grade point average at or above the minimum required for their degree, as listed in the appropriate section above.
   - Students are expected to be on track towards achieving program milestones. As part of their annual review, students receive an assessment of whether they are

on track or not.

b. Integrity standards
   - Graduate students are expected to conform to the highest standards of professional conduct.
   - Students must follow all relevant policies regarding human subjects, IRB protocols, data use agreements, data management procedures, and financial reimbursements.
   - The Sociology Program does not have specific rules regarding the use of artificial intelligence tools. Sociology Program instructors and committees may set their own rules for the use of artificial intelligence tools in courses and milestones.
   - Graduate students are subject to the College of the Liberal Arts Interim Graduate Academic Integrity Policy and Fox Graduate School GCAC-805 - Academic Integrity. All students in the sociology program are subject to these policies. In the case of a conflict between these two policies, the Fox Graduate School policy will apply.

Mentoring standards

We recommend that students and faculty set expectations for mentoring to guide clear and transparent communication between graduate students and their faculty mentors and assistantship supervisors. The following questions should be considered at the outset of new assignments and reviewed at least annually for ongoing assignments. Each person (student and faculty) should express their preferences, and "final decisions" should be documented. Section 1 pertains to assistantships, and Section 2 pertains to advising. Students and faculty may skip either if not applicable to their current arrangement (e.g., assistantship only, advising only).

Assistantship Work Process and Communication Expectations

- How often will we meet? In person or remotely? (Note: Typical pattern is weekly or biweekly.)
- Who will be responsible for setting the agenda? (e.g., "Student will set meeting agenda based on progress made and advice or guidance needed for next steps." Or "Faculty will set the agenda, with a joint discussion of next steps."
- When should progress or deliverables be provided? (e.g., "Student will share updates as soon as progress is made" or "All updates on progress during meeting times.")
- Is student expected to track/report their hours? If so, how? (e.g., "Student will not be asked to formally record hours until there are concerns about time management or completion of tasks." or "Student will record their hours each week in a Google Spreadsheet.")
- How should challenges related to the assistantship tasks be communicated, such as when a student is getting errors in a particular section of code? (e.g., "Student will attempt to work through these challenges independently, even if it delays completion of tasks"; "Student should consult others before asking faculty"; or "Students reach out to faculty with issues after 1-2 hours of unsuccessful efforts").
- What are our expectations for communication, both medium and timeliness? (e.g.,

"We will do our best to answer emails within 2 business days"; "There is no expectation of participation in weekend emails or phone calls.").
- What amount of flexibility is there on work hours? (e.g., "With advance notice, student may shift work from one week to the next based on other school/work demands, vacation/travel, etc.") Note: Please review paid leave policy for emergencies, special circumstances, and longer-term issues: https://gradschool.psu.edu/graduate-education-policies/gsad/gsad-900/gsad-906-graduate-student-leave-of-absence/

Work Tasks

- What types of tasks should the student expect to work on over the semester? (e.g., coding, writing, guest lecturing, developing class assignments)?
- Are there opportunities for co-authorship or lead authorship on any projects? If so, what level/type of contribution merits authorship or a particular authorship order? If not yet, what can the student do to work toward an authorship contribution in the future?
- How does the faculty plan to provide feedback on progress/quality of work? What would the student prefer? (Note: the annual evaluation letter should not be a "surprise." Students should receive routine feedback on strengths and areas for improvement throughout their assistantship, either verbally or in writing.)

Advising and Mentorship Process and Communication Expectations

What type of guidance does the student want from the faculty mentor? Select up to three areas that the student would like to work on this semester/year.

- Networking (e.g., identifying new collaborators or mentors)
- Time management, work-life balance, goal setting
- Finding funding and/or grant writing/planning
- Identifying research topics, questions, or data sources
- Technical skills (e.g., coding, interviewing)
- Modeling/analytic skills (e.g., causal inference; thematic coding)
- Writing/publishing research
- Public speaking/presenting at conferences
- Teaching skills and experience
- Career pathways or job market guidance
- Meeting departmental milestones (e.g., comprehensive examination, thesis, courses)
- Other

What departmental milestones is the student expected to begin or complete this year? (e.g., master's thesis, qualifying exam, comprehensive exam, dissertation). What support does the student want toward those goals?

For each additional skill-building area above, what specific opportunities and strategies can the mentor provide (e.g., co-writing a paper to work on publication skills; guest lecture opportunities to build teaching experience)? Opportunities/strategies may also include

connecting students to other faculty for co-mentorship or existing programming (e.g., job market committee, working groups).

Engagement expectations

As part of their professional development, students should engage in scholarly and professional activities in addition to coursework and degree milestones. These activities include attending professional talks held at Penn State (e.g., external speakers, internal speakers, and job market candidate practice talks), meeting with academic visitors and speakers, participating in workshops, presenting at professional meetings, assisting in program recruitment, representing graduate students as a member of the Graduate Student Advisory Committee, and other committees related to professional development (e.g., as a student representative on committees). Students are not expected to do all these activities every semester, but it is necessary to engage in some of these activities throughout the graduate program to be a fully trained professional. The annual review will provide feedback and guidance for students and will note if the faculty believe the student's engagement is insufficient.

Change of Adviser Procedures

Students should consult with the Director of Graduate Studies if they believe a change of adviser is appropriate. This may occur at any time, but the optimal time for this is when the student is asked for their preference for next academic year's assistantship assignments (late spring).

Bridge funding

The program does not link funding to specific advisers, but if a student cannot assemble the necessary faculty for a milestone (e.g., thesis, comprehensive exam, dissertation), due to the inability to find appropriate faculty or to adapt their research to the expertise of the available faculty, the student's funding will not be continued.

Student Conduct Standards:

For students to succeed professionally, they must develop the skills for conducting themselves appropriately. Disruptive behaviors in the office, classroom, or professional meetings and activities do not demonstrate the level of professionalism and maturity expected of graduate students. Disruptive behaviors are likely a violation of the Student Code of Conduct (https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/support-safety/conduct/student-code-conduct), which may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for possible disciplinary action. If a physical or mental health issue is preventing a student from meeting these expectations, they must consult Student Disability Resources (SDR) and discuss whether accommodations may be provided.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Penn State is committed to providing access to students with disabilities to the University's

graduate programs. The Office for Student Disability Resources (SDR) offers support specifically tailored to the needs of graduate students. The office considers the need for accommodations in the following areas: 1) graduate assistantship accommodations; 2) coursework accommodations; 3) lab, fieldwork, and clinical work accommodations; 4) qualifying and comprehensive exams accommodations; 5) thesis/dissertation accommodations. An overview of disability resources specific to graduate students can be found here: https://equity.psu.edu/offices/student-disability-resources/graduate-students-with-disabilities

To be considered for reasonable accommodations, students **are required** to contact the SDR office, participate in an intake interview, provide documentation, and complete the registration process. Students should be aware that it may take time to go through the intake process, and that they may not know in advance whether accommodations will be needed either for their coursework or for their milestone exams. We thus recommend that students register with SDR for any eligible disabilities in advance, ensuring that all documentation is in place should accommodations be needed at any point during their graduate program. Students can register with SDR and choose not to request accommodations once registered.

Once registered, students can approach course instructors (for course accommodations) and/or the Director of Graduate Studies (for accommodations to other program requirements, including benchmark examinations) to request accommodations. For milestone examinations, this process is **required** for **each** milestone examination for which you request accommodation. Specific accommodations are determined through an interactive process and tailored to each student's needs with the goals of upholding rigor and disciplinary expectations in each of the distinct components of graduate education.

Students who would like accommodations for academic events (such as non-course-based department colloquia or seminars) that are not covered under the official SDR categories are encouraged to express these needs to the program leadership (e.g., DGS, PIC, or program head) and/or SDR.

Additional University Requirements

This sociology program handbook is supplementary to the University's **Graduate Bulletin**. The student is responsible for knowing the requirements of the Fox Graduate School concerning thesis deadline dates, payment of fees, filing diplomas, time limitations on degree qualifying, and so on.

Typical Schedule for M.A./Ph.D. Students in Sociology

	Courses	**Requirements**	**Objectives**
Year One: Fall	SOC 500 (Intro Grad Studies) SOC 502 (Theories of Society) SOC 574 (Statistical Methods for Social Research) SOC 5XX Elective course		Get oriented to the program
Year One: Spring	SOC 503 (Contemporary Sociology) SOC 575 (Statistical Models for Non-experimental Research) SOC 5XX Elective course		
Year One: Summer			Assemble M.A. committee
Year Two: Fall	SOC 513 (Research Methods) SOC 5XX Elective course(s) SOC 600 Thesis Credits		Develop M.A. thesis proposal
Year Two: Spring	SOC 591 (Teaching Sociology) SOC 5XX Elective course SOC 600 Thesis Credits		Complete and defend M.A. thesis
Year Two: Summer	SOC 600 Thesis Credits	Defend M.A. Thesis	Develop/submit thesis for publication
Year Three: Fall	SOC 5XX course(s) Elective course(s) SOC 600 Thesis Credits	Pass Qualifying Examination	Develop/submit papers for publication; Develop dissertation idea
Year Three: Spring	SOC 592 Writing for publication (fall or spring) SOC 5XX course(s) Elective course(s) SOC 600 Thesis Credits		Continue working on research papers; Begin preparing for comprehensive examination
Year Three: Summer	SOC 600 Thesis Credits		Prepare for and pass comprehensive examination; Dissertation proposal development
Year Four: Fall	SOC 5XX or Elective course(s) if needed SOC 600 or SOC 601 Thesis/Dissertation Credits	Pass Comprehensive Examination	Dissertation proposal development
Year Four: Spring	SOC 601 Dissertation Credits		Complete dissertation proposal; Dissertation research
Year Four: Summer	SOC 601 Dissertation Credits	Dissertation Proposal Hearing	Dissertation research; Job market preparation
Year Five: Fall	SOC 601 Dissertation Credits		Dissertation research; Job search
Year Five: Spring	SOC 601 Dissertation Credits	Dissertation Defense	Complete dissertation; Job search

Appendix A. Checklists for Students Who Enter the Program with a B.A. Degree

M.A. Requirements

Course Requirements (37 credits)		**Course name (if elective)**	**Course Num**	**Sem/Yr completed**
SOC 500	Introduction to Graduate Studies (1 credit)			
SOC 502	Theories of Society (3 credits)			
SOC 503 or CRIM 512	Contemporary Sociology or Criminological Theories (3 credits)			
SOC 513	Sociological Research Methods (3 credits)			
SOC 574	Statistical Methods (3 credits*)			
SOC 575	Statistical Models for Nonexperimental Research (3 credits*)			
SOC 600	M.A. thesis (6 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx or XXX 5xx	Elective in Sociology or other department (3 credits)			

Electives must be at the 500 level or higher, unless the course below the 500 level is needed for a dual-title or other requirement.
For cohorts entering before fall 2025, 2 of 5 (rather than 4 of 5) electives must be Sociology (SOC 5XX)
* Depending on the instructor, a 1-credit lab may also be required

M.A. Thesis Title:	
Committee Chair, sociology (name)	
*Other Committee Members	1)
	2)
Thesis approved by all committee members (date)	
Semester/year degree conferred	

*Committee must include three members, at least two in sociology.

Ph.D. Requirements

Course Requirements (19 credits)		Course Name and number (if elective)	Substan-tive elective?	Sem/Yr completed
SOC 591	Teaching Sociology (1 credit)		N	
SOC 592	Writing for publication (3 credits)		N	
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx or XXX 5xx	Elective in Sociology or other department (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx or XXX 5xx	Elective in Sociology or other department (3 credits)			

Of the 5 elective courses: No more than one 3-credit course may be for Individual Studies (SOC 596 or another program's 596). At least 3 must be substantive sociology courses. Substantive sociology courses must be taken from an approved list or approved by the graduate committee. The approved list includes SOC 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 535, 537, 533, 534, 538, 544, 546, 551, 553, 557, 560, 579, and 580. SOC 597's will also be approved unless the course focuses primarily on methods or statistics.

Qualifying Exam (date passed)	
Ph.D. Committee Chair (name)	
Ph.D. Committee Members	1)
	2)
	3)
Comprehensive exam and proposal defense (date approved)	
Final dissertation defense (date approved)	
Dissertation Title:	
Semester/year degree conferred	

Appendix B. Checklist for Students Who Enter the Program with an M.A. Degree

Core Courses (required if no equivalent from student's M.A. program)		**Requirement waived? (yes/no)**	**Penn State course** (if not waived)	
			Course Number	**Semester/ Year Completed**
SOC 500	Introduction to Graduate Studies (1 credit)			
SOC 502	Theories of Society (3 credits)			
SOC 503	Contemporary Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 513	Sociological Research Methods (3 credits)			
SOC 574	Statistical Methods (3 credits)			
SOC 575	Statistical Methods for Nonexperimental Research (3 credits)			

Ph.D. Course Requirements (19 credits total)		**Course Name and Number** (if elective)	**Substan-tive elective?**	**Semester/ Year Completed**
SOC 591	Teaching Sociology (1 credits)		N	
SOC 592	Writing for publication (3 credits)		N	
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx	Elective in Sociology (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx or XXX 5xx	Elective in Sociology or other department (3 credits)			
SOC 5xx or XXX 5xx	Elective in Sociology or other department (3 credits)			

Of the 5 elective courses: No more than one 3-credit course may be for Individual Studies (SOC 596 or another program's 596). At least 3 must be substantive sociology courses. Substantive sociology courses must be taken from an approved list or approved by the graduate committee. The approved list includes SOC 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 535, 537, 533, 534, 538, 544, 546, 551, 553, 557, 560, 579, and 580. SOC 597's will also be approved unless the course focuses primarily on methods or statistics.

Qualifying Exam (date passed)	
Ph.D. Committee Chair (name)	
Ph.D. Committee Members	1)
	2)
	3)
Comprehensive exam and proposal defense (date approved)	
Final dissertation defense (date approved)	
Dissertation Title:	

Semester/year degree conferred	

Appendix C. Dual-Title Degrees

Dual-Title Ph.D. in Sociology and Demography

A special dual-title Ph.D. program is offered in sociology and demography. Details can be obtained from the Sociology DGS or director of the graduate program in demography. Information is also available at **demography.psu.edu/**.

Students pursuing the dual-title Ph.D. in sociology and demography select demography as their major area of specialization for the comprehensive exam. They take additional courses in demographic topics to fulfill requirements as indicated by the demography dual-title program. Some of these courses must be completed in disciplines outside the Department of Sociology. As long as they are recognized by the dual-title program, demography courses taken within the sociology department count toward both the sociology and demography degrees.

A minimum four-member faculty committee is required for dual-Ph.D. students. Students must pass the qualifying examination in both sociology and demography. The chair of the student's dual degree committee must be on both the sociology and demography program faculty. At least one other committee member must be on the demography program faculty. Note that the second demography program faculty can be from outside sociology. The dissertation of dual-degree students addresses a problem and draws on the research and scholarship of both the disciplines of sociology and demography.

Dual-Title Ph.D. in Social Data Analytics (SoDA)

The full detailed requirements for students pursuing the dual-title Ph.D. in sociology and social data analytics (SoDA) are available at **soda.la.psu.edu/programs/graduate-program/**. In addition to completion of the requirements of sociology, dual-title Ph.D. students must complete additional coursework to meet requirements as indicated by the SoDA dual-title program. Due to overlap with Sociology program requirements, these coursework requirements often overlap.

Students must pass the qualifying examination in both sociology and SoDA. A member of the SoDA Graduate Faculty must be on the qualifying examination committee. Students must pass a comprehensive exam (as defined by Sociology) assessing mastery of sociology and SoDA, as well as preparation for dissertation research. A member of the SoDA Graduate Faculty must serve as chair or co-chair of the dissertation committee. Finally, the student must defend a dissertation with substantial content in SoDA.

Appendix D. Certificates

Quantitative Methods Certificate

The Penn State sociology and criminology programs have exceptional strength in quantitative research methods and statistical analysis techniques, both in their graduate faculty and in their consequent course offerings. Capitalizing on these strengths, students in sociology and criminology can earn a certificate in Quantitative Methods (QM) in place of a minor (with approval from their program's Graduate Committee). To earn a QM certificate, students must (1) complete three approved methods/statistics courses (9 hours) beyond SOC 513, 574, and 575 (see below); (2) include a quantitative methodologist on the Ph.D. dissertation committee and have one of the areas covered in the comprehensive exam be in quantitative methods; and (3) complete a practicum in which the student demonstrates proficiency in the application or teaching of methods/statistics (e.g., by teaching a statistics/methods course, lab or workshop; authoring or co-authoring a paper on methods/statistics; or completing an internship at an applied research agency such as the U.S. Census Bureau).

A quantitative methodologist is defined as a faculty member who teaches graduate-level quantitative methods and/or who has a publication record in quantitative methods. The department's directors of graduate studies will determine which faculty meet this criterion. Committee members outside of the Department of Sociology and Criminology may also meet the qualifications to serve as the quantitative methodologist on the Ph.D. dissertation committee. The Director of Graduate Studies from the student's program must approve any outside members who are requested to serve in this role.

Courses listed below can be used to meet the three-course requirement mentioned above. Additional courses will also be considered, and new ones will be added as they become available. Institute for Social Research Summer Institute courses can also be used upon the approval of the student's Director of Graduate Studies (one-week workshops are excluded).

ECON 500 Mathematical Economics
ECON 501 Econometrics
ECON 502 Microeconomic Analysis
ECON 503 Macroeconomic Analysis

STAT 500 Applied Statistics
STAT 501 Regression Methods
STAT 502 Analysis of Variance and Design of Experiments

STAT 503 Design of Experiments

STAT 504 Analysis of Discrete Data
STAT 505 Applied Multivariate Statistical Analysis
STAT 506 Sampling Theory
STAT 509 Design and Analysis of Clinical Trials
STAT 510 Time Series Analysis

SOC 518 Survey Methods I: Survey Design
SOC 519 Survey Methods II: Analysis of Survey Data
SOC 572 Foundations of Causal Analysis in the Social Sciences
SOC 573 Demographic Techniques
SOC 576 Applied Mathematical Demography
SOC 577 Event History Analysis
SOC 578 Multilevel Regression Models
SOC 579 Spatial Demography
SOC 597 Advanced Structural Equation Models
SOC 597 Categorical Data Analysis
SOC 597 Measurement Issues in Social Data

HDFS 517 Multivariate Study of Change and Human Development
HDFS/PSY 526 Measurement in Human Development

Other courses not listed above may be approved to meet the QMC course requirement by the student's Director of Graduate Studies. To promote consistency across programs, the sociology and criminology Directors of Graduate Studies are urged to have identical approvals and processes, as much as possible.

A student who has met the requirements for the QM certificate must write a letter to the Director of Graduate Studies specifying how they have been met and requesting the award of the certificate. Students who are approved will receive a letter confirming the completion of all requirements.

Appendix E. Guidelines for Criminology Students Pursuing Degrees in Sociology

The sociology and the criminology programs offer parallel, and partially integrated, courses of study. Occasionally, students will decide after receiving the M.A. degree in CRIM to complete the Ph.D. in Sociology. The two programs have developed a process for expediting such transfers.

Criminology students who wish to receive sociology degrees will be transferred to the sociology program. This requires the signature of the Sociology Director of Graduate Studies, who has the discretion to decline the request if they judge that the student's performance is not up to standards or that the student's interests are not appropriate

to the sociology program.

Course Requirements
A student who completes the criminology M.A. and Ph.D. requirements can complete the sociology Ph.D. course requirements by adding the sociological theory course (SOC 502), Writing for Publication (SOC 592 or an equivalent criminology course), and at least one substantive sociology course. Substantive sociology courses must be taken from an approved list or approved by the graduate committee. The approved list includes SOC 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 535, 537, 533, 534, 538, 544, 546, 551, 553, 557, 560, 579, and 580. SOC 597's will also be approved unless the course focuses primarily on methods or statistics.

Ph.D. Qualifying Examination
Criminology students pursuing the sociology Ph.D. will be reviewed by both the sociology and criminology qualifying committees. The criminology committee will assess the student's potential to successfully complete the program and produce a high-quality dissertation. The sociology committee will review the student to assess the extent and breadth of their coursework in sociology.

Comprehensive Exam Requirements
The comprehensive exam requirements of both programs have the same basic form, which is two days of in-house exams, followed by an oral exam. Doctoral committees are responsible for writing the exam questions and evaluating the written and oral answers. In both programs, the doctoral committee is free to determine the content covered by the comprehensive exam, though in criminology there are recommended areas of coverage: criminology, criminal justice, methods and statistics, and specialization area. Thus, a single exam can satisfy the comprehensive exam requirements of both programs. The exam questions for criminology students seeking sociology degrees would not be limited to the study of crime. At a minimum, they should also include noncriminological themes from their area of specialization in sociology.

Doctoral or Master's Thesis Committee
The doctoral or master's committees of criminology students earning sociology degrees should be chaired by (or co-chaired by) a criminology faculty member with a joint title in Sociology. Doctoral and master's committees should include at least one criminology faculty member (typically the chair) and at least one noncriminology member of the sociology faculty.

Graduate Committee Oversight of Students' Programs
The Criminology Director of Graduate Studies and Graduate Committee will take primary responsibility for the oversight of all Criminology students regardless of which degree they seek. This includes functions such as conducting annual reviews and judging whether students are making satisfactory progress to warrant continued

funding. For criminology students who are seeking sociology degrees, the Sociology Director of Graduate Studies and Graduate Committee will have secondary oversight with authority to overrule their criminology counterparts on all matters except funding from the criminology budget. (In other words, the sociology graduate committee will delegate direct oversight to the criminology graduate committee, which will act in the capacity of the criminology specialty area of sociology. But "final authority" will still reside in the Sociology graduate committee since these will officially be sociology students.)

Appendix F. Guidelines for Sociology Students Pursuing Degrees in Criminology

All sociology students are eligible to choose criminology as their major or minor area, even if they were not originally admitted as criminology students. Any students originally admitted to sociology who complete the requirements of the criminology program will have the option of earning either degree. The Criminology Director of Graduate Studies will have signature authority and discretion for students transferring to the Criminology degree program. For students transferring from sociology to criminology, the two Directors of Graduate Studies and department head will negotiate funding and oversight on an individual basis.

Appendix G. Links to Program Resources

a. **General information**
b. **Program professional staff**
c. **Students in need**
d. **Professional development opportunities**
e. **Career development opportunities**
f. **Conflict Resolution**
g. **Grievance/Appeals**

Appendix H. Links to College-Specific Resources for Graduate Students

h. **Undergraduate student organizations**
i. **Graduate Alliance for Diversity and Inclusion**
j. **Financial aid**
k. **Research and conference travel funding opportunities**

Appendix I. Links to Fox Graduate School and University resources

a. General
   - **Graduate student resource library**
   - **University Libraries**
   - **Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of**

the Fox Graduate School

b. Academic Resources
   - **Fox Graduate School Academic resources**
   - **Master's Thesis and Doctoral Dissertation Requirements**
   - **Graduate Writing Center**
   - **Fox Graduate School Ombudsperson Office**
   - **Avenues for addressing graduate student concerns**

c. Career and Professional Development
   - **Graduate Exhibition**
   - **Three Minute Thesis**

d. Funding
   - **Financial aid including Office of Student Aid**
   - Research and Conference Travel Funding Opportunities
     - **International Travel Grants**

e. Health and Well-being
   - **Health Insurance / SHIP**
   - **Graduate Student Parental Leave**
   - **Mental health support**
   - **Child Care at Penn State**
   - **Students in crisis**

f. Special Populations
   - **Adult Learner Programs and Services**
   - **Student Disability Services**
   - International Students
     - **Penn State Global ISSA**
     - **English for Professional Purposes Intercultural Center (EPPIC)** *support for language skills*
   - **Military students**

g. Clubs and Organizations
   - **Graduate and Professional Student Association**
   - **Discover** – for finding graduate student organizations

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