

FAQ SHEET for Graduate Applicants



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Frequently Asked Questions about the M.S. Program

What is the duration of the M.S. Program?

The M.S. program is designed to be completed in 2 years and funded M.S. students receive 2 years of funding if they remain in good academic standing. Occasionally, thesis students have taken an additional semester to complete their thesis.

What are program requirements for the M.S. degree?

The non-thesis option consists of 36 hours of coursework and an Exit Exam taken in the final semester that covers Theory, Statistics, and Research Methods. The thesis option consists of 24 hours of coursework, 6 thesis hours, and completion of a thesis proposal defense and thesis defense.

What are the required core courses in the M.S. Program?

There are four core courses in our M.S. Program: 1) Graduate Theory I; 2) Statistics I; 3) Research Design; and 4) the Professionalization Seminar.

What are the areas I can specialize in upon entering the M.S. Program?

Our department offers three areas of specialization: 1) Criminology; 2) Communities, Health, Environment; and 3) Social Inequalities (Race/Gender/Class). Our faculty are able to supervise both quantitative and qualitative thesis projects.

When do I select a Major Professor who will guide me during my time in the M.S. Program?

Students select a Major Professor near the end of the first semester based on similar research interests, methodological expertise, faculty availability, etc. We will go over faculty introductions with you during the Professionalization Seminar you take in your first semester. **You do NOT need to contact faculty or find a major professor (or advisor) before starting the program.**

Where can I find more detailed information about the M.S. Program?

For more detailed information, please check out this FAQ sheet from the Graduate School: [FAQ/Policies | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Ph.D. Program

What is the duration of the Ph.D. Program?

Depending on the number of credit hours you take each semester, available funding, and your topic and methods choice for your dissertation, you will be in the program between 5 and 8 years.

What are the requirements for the Ph.D. Program?

The requirements of the Ph.D. Program are a minimum of 50 hours of coursework, the Preliminary Exam, the Dissertation Proposal, and the Empirical Dissertation.

What are the required core courses in the Ph.D. Program?

There are eight core courses in our Ph.D. Program: 1) Graduate Theory I; 2) Graduate Theory II; 3) Research Design; 4) Statistics I; 5) Statistics II; 6) Quantitative Analysis; 7) Qualitative Analysis; 8) Professionalization Seminar.

What is the Preliminary Exam and when do I take it?

The Preliminary Exam is the exam you take after completing all your coursework to determine your Candidacy status in the department. You prepare yourself for this exam

with two reading lists. The primary reading list consists of readings selected by faculty members, in one of the three areas of specialization we offer. The secondary reading list consists of readings selected by you and your Major Professor, based on your specific dissertation topic.

The Preliminary Exam is a single day, closed note and closed book exam divided into two sessions: you answer three questions in the first session (8am-12pm), then you have an hour break, and answer three questions in the second session (1pm-5pm). You cannot take this exam more than twice. Upon passing this exam and transitioning from Ph.D. Student to Ph.D. Candidate, you will be able to work on and defend your Dissertation Proposal.

What are the areas I can specialize in upon entering the Ph.D. Program?

Our department offers three areas of specialization: 1) Criminology; 2) Communities, Health, Environment; and 3) Social Inequalities (Race/Gender/Class).

When do I select a Major Professor who will guide me during my time in the Ph.D. Program?

Students select a Major Professor near the end of the first semester based on similar research interests, methodological expertise, faculty availability, etc.. We will go over faculty introductions with you during the Professionalization Seminar you take in your first semester. **You do NOT need to contact faculty or find a major professor (or advisor) before starting the program.**

Where can I find more detailed information about the Ph.D. Program?

For more detailed information, please check out this FAQ sheet from the Graduate School: [FAQ/Policies | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Frequently Asked Questions about Applying

What is the deadline for applying to your Graduate Programs?

For both the M.S. Program and the Ph.D. Program, the deadline to apply is **February 1st** for a Fall start date and to be considered for **funding** from our department. You can only start our Graduate Programs in the Fall, as we do not offer a Spring start date given the required courses you have to take in your first semester.

What are the requirements for applying to your Graduate Programs?

Students applying to one of our Graduate Programs must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 (or something equivalent to this, for example in the case of international students), provide us with academic transcripts (we accept unofficial transcripts, but copies of official transcripts need to be submitted at some point upon acceptance into the program), 3 letters of recommendation, a writing sample, a statement of purpose (SOP), and a CV. Taking the GRE exam is no longer required. Unfortunately, waivers are not available for the application fee.

Students specifically applying to the Ph.D. Program *must* have a master's degree to apply, as **there are no direct admissions into the Ph.D. Program**. Those applying to the Ph.D. Program must have conducted original empirical research (typically the thesis) and submit this as their writing sample. We do not encourage students to submit a co-authored writing sample.

What are you looking for in students applying to your Graduate Programs?

We look for students with a strong academic performance ('A's'), excellent writing, clear research interests and goals that fit within our department areas of expertise, detailed, positive letter of recommendations, and previous research experience (especially in the case of Ph.D. applicants).

In your statement of purpose, you should explain who you are as a scholar, what qualifies you for graduate study, what you plan to study, who at MSU can mentor you, and how our program at MSU can help you to achieve your goals. You can also use the statement of purpose to account for any weaknesses in your transcript.

Can I apply for one of your Graduate Programs if I don't have a background in Sociology?

Yes, you can apply to either our M.S. Program or our Ph.D. Program if you don't have a background in Sociology. Just make sure that you explain in your statement of purpose (SOP) why your choice of Sociology makes sense for your interests and goals and how your intended research project is sociological.

Frequently Asked Questions about Funding

Am I being considered for funding once I am admitted into the M.S. Program or Ph.D. Program?

Yes, all students who are admitted to one of our Graduate Programs after applying before the February 1st deadline will be automatically considered for departmental funding in the form of Graduate Teaching Assistantships. There are typically between 5-8 GTA positions available each year, which are awarded competitively. It is possible that you will be put on a funding waitlist if accepted. In this case, you will typically be notified by funding availability by the end of May.

What is a Graduate Teaching Assistantship and what does it include?

A Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) requires the eligible student to work 20 hours a week assisting one or more faculty members with their teaching responsibilities. In order to be eligible for a GTA, you have to be a full-time student, which means that you are enrolled in 9+ credit hours each semester. For your work for our department, you will receive 100% tuition remission (excluding a few fees), and \$12,000 (M.S. Program) or \$14,000 (Ph.D. Program) through during the 9-month academic year (Aug-May) paid as a biweekly stipend. Health insurance is not covered for GTAs but is available to purchase at MSU (~\$1,600/year).

For how long will I be able to receive funding through the department?

For students in the M.S. Program, the Sociology department can typically provide 2 years of Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) funding, while students in the Ph.D. Program can typically receive 2-3 years of GTA funding, assuming good academic standing. Ph.D. students then transition into Lecturer positions, although they may also look for another Graduate Assistantship outside the department (Research or Service Assistantship).

What is a Lecturer position and what does it include?

A Lecturer position requires Ph.D. students to teach 2 courses per semester, for which you will receive \$3,750 per course per semester. You will receive a 100% tuition remission (excluding a few fees) for 6 credit hours each semester. So, you will be considered a part-time student. You will also receive health insurance and some other benefits, such as retirement benefits.

What are other funding opportunities outside of the department?

When you are not eligible for a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) in our department, or if you do not want to work as a Teaching Assistant, there are other funding opportunities. There are several Research and Service Assistantship availabilities across campus, as well as fellowships. For more information about these different funding opportunities, please check out the Graduate School: [Assistantships | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#), The Division of Student Affairs: [Graduate Assistantships | The](#)

[Division of Student Affairs | Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#), and the Social Science Research Center: [Employment Opportunities | Social Science Research Center \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Frequently Asked Questions for International Students

Can I apply to the M.S. Program with a 3-year bachelor's degree from an international school?

Yes, you can apply to our M.S. Program with a 3-year bachelor's degree, as long as you meet our M.S. Program requirements.

Are there departmental funding opportunities available for International Students?

Yes, all international students who are admitted to one of our Graduate Programs after applying before the February 1st deadline will be automatically considered for our Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) departmental funding the same as domestic students. International student GTAs have the same work responsibilities and benefits as domestic students.

For how long will International Students be able to receive funding through the department?

Just as for any other student, for international students in the M.S. Program, the Sociology department can typically provide 2 years of GTA funding, while students in the Ph.D. Program can typically receive 2-3 years of GTA funding, assuming good academic standing.

Once Ph.D. students are not eligible for GTA funding anymore, they transition into Lecturer positions. However, Ph.D. students in Lecturer positions only get 6 credit hours covered tuition-free (part-time status), while visas may require international students to be enrolled in 9 credit hours (full-time status). In this case, students need to cover the costs for the remaining 3 credit hours.

What are other funding opportunities outside of the department for International Students?

When you are not eligible for a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) in our department, or if you do not want to work as a Teaching Assistant, there are other funding opportunities. There are several Research and Service Assistantship availabilities across campus, as well as fellowships. For more information about these different funding opportunities, please check out the Graduate School: [Assistantships | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#), The Division of Student Affairs: [Graduate Assistantships | The Division of Student Affairs | Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#), and the Social Science Research Center (SSRC): [Employment Opportunities | Social Science Research Center \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Besides from the requirements listed for your Graduate Programs, are there any additional requirements for International Students?

Yes, depending on the country you are from, you might need to take an English proficiency test. Official English proficiency tests MSU accepts are: TOEFL ibt, TOEFL Essentials, IELTS, and PTE. We will accept scores that are within 5 years from the test date. You have to send these scores to *Mississippi State University – The Graduate School*. If needed, the school code is 1480. For more information on test scores, please check out: [Test Scores | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Is health insurance required for International Students?

Yes, health insurance is required for international students. All international students are automatically enrolled in the UnitedHealthcare policy here at MSU, unless they provide

proof of comparable coverage. For more detailed information about health insurance at MSU, please check out: <https://www.healthcenter.msstate.edu/insurance>

Where can I find more detailed information for International Students?

For more detailed information, for example when it comes to housing or getting a Social Security Number (SSN), please check out our Information for Incoming International Students Guide: [Microsoft Word - Information for Incoming International Students Final.docx \(msstate.edu\)](#), and visit the website for the MSU International Institute: www.international.msstate.edu

Other Resources

Departmental Funds: Loftin Fund (travel, methods training and data collection awards); Departmental Conference Travel Fund.

College of Arts & Sciences Travel Fund: [Home | Travel Support Graduate Student | College of Arts and Sciences | Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Graduate School Travel Fund: [TAGGS | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Graduate Student Association (headshots; social events; Preparing Future Faculty; Graduate Research Symposium): [Graduate Student Association | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Graduate School Resources: [Resources | The Graduate School - Mississippi State University \(msstate.edu\)](#)

Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) chapter (Sociological Honor Society) provides a life-time membership after a 1-time 50 dollars payment: [Become a Member – Alpha Kappa Delta](#)

Social Science Research Center (SSRC): [Home | Social Science Research Center \(msstate.edu\)](#)