

Mississippi State University

Department of Sociology

Graduate Handbook

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1. INTRODUCTION

The procedures and requirements in this document supplement those published in the official catalog of the Office of the Graduate School at Mississippi State University (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>). It presents specific departmental requirements for graduate degree programs in Sociology. All graduate students should retain both documents and consult them frequently, but should use the department-specific requirements outlined in this handbook to guide their progress through the program. It is the student's responsibility to meet all applicable requirements. The faculty welcomes the opportunity to work with students and stands ready to help them meet their degree and career objectives. Questions and concerns about curriculum and policies outlined in this handbook or the MSU Graduate Catalog should be referred to the Department of Sociology Graduate Coordinator.

2. ADMISSIONS

A. Criteria

University requirements for admission to graduate study include a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.75 on a 4.00 scale on the last two years of undergraduate course work and a 3.00 on all graduate course work. A student applying for admission to the Sociology graduate program will be evaluated on the basis of evidence that might indicate success in graduate study, including all transcripts of previous post-secondary course work, the quality and strength of letters of recommendation, an academic writing sample, and the student's statement of purpose for seeking entry into graduate study. Additional requirements for international students are outlined in the MSU Graduate Catalog.

B. Procedures for Application

Inquiries concerning admission to the graduate program in Sociology may be directed to either the Office of the Graduate School or the Department of Sociology.

C. Types of Admission

Both the Office of the Graduate School and the Department of Sociology will evaluate the application. The Office of the Graduate School will notify the applicant of the outcome of the screening process. If accepted, students may receive one of three types of admission: (1) regular, (2) provisional, or (3) contingent. Students meeting all requirements are normally granted *regular* admission.

Students can be admitted on a *provisional* basis, if recommended for admission by the degree program, even though they do not meet the minimum grade point average. Provisional students must receive a 3.00 grade point average on the first nine hours of courses taken at Mississippi State University (transfer hours will not apply) in order to achieve regular status. In addition, provisional students may be required to complete prerequisites specified by the department (such as courses in sociological theory, research methods, or social statistics). If a 3.00 grade point average is not attained, the provisional student will be terminated from the

program.

Students may also be admitted on a *contingent* basis. Students who have not completed a master's thesis at the time of application to the doctoral program will be admitted *contingent* on the students' defense of a master's thesis. If students begin the doctoral program without having completed their master's degree, they will be put on probation immediately. If the thesis is not completed by the end of their first semester, they will be dismissed from the program at that time.

Students with a master's degree not in sociology (or a closely related field) must apply to the master's program. Students with *any* master's degree that did not culminate in an independent research project (i.e., a master's paper or thesis) generally must apply to the master's program.

3. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

A. Availability

Financial assistance for graduate study is available on a competitive basis from several sources, each requiring a separate application. All prospective students who apply by the departmental deadline will be considered for funding. Continuing students who wish to be considered for funding should state this in their annual review, which is due each spring at a date specified by the Graduate Coordinator.

B. Criteria

Although the criteria for each source may differ somewhat, basic expectations are similar. New students should meet the established university and departmental requirements for admission. Graduate assistantships are professional internships with explicit obligations. Assistantships are thus considered to be half-time jobs (20 hours per week). Students on assistantships are required to take a course load of at least nine hours per semester and are encouraged to avoid additional outside employment, which may hinder adequate progress toward the degree.

C. Continued Appointment

Continued appointment is based on satisfactory performance of assistantship duties as determined by standing departmental procedures (described below) as well as adequate progress toward the degree. In addition, beginning in their second year, students must maintain at least a 3.00 GPA to retain an assistantship. Financial support awarded by or through the department, regardless of the source, is limited to two years for students who are pursuing a master's degree and to three years for students who have earned a master's degree and are pursuing the doctoral degree, for a total of five years for students pursuing both. Students needing additional support must submit a written request to the Graduate Coordinator and the Admissions and Support Committee for consideration. Students who receive two Cs will be placed on academic probation and lose their funding beginning the semester after receipt of the second C. Receipt of a third C will result in dismissal from the program, even if a 3.00 grade point average is

maintained. Students may retake one course per degree program of study. A *Request to Retake a Course Form* is available from the Office of the Graduate School. Students must complete and submit this form as directed. Any student who receives a C or lower in a Core class must use the retake for that course and must retake it the next time it is being offered. Upon receipt of a second C or lower in a Core class, the student will be dismissed from the program. A grade of a D or an F in any course is unacceptable and will result in immediate probation and loss of funding (if the only sub-B grade) or dismissal (if in concert with other sub-B grades). More than one U grade for thesis or dissertation hours will result in dismissal.

D. Sources

1). Departmental Research or Teaching Assistantships

Requests for funding will be considered by the departmental Graduate Admissions and Support Committee with recommendations submitted to the Department Head. Independent teaching assistantships are limited to students with a master's degree in sociology or a master's degree in another field and 18 hours of graduate level course work in sociology. The minimum requirement for a research assistantship is a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.

2). Social Science Research Center

Application forms for Research Assistantships may be obtained from the Social Science Research Center (<https://ssrc.msstate.edu/about/employment-opportunities/>) Both master's students and doctoral students may apply for SSRC research assistantships.

3). Fellowships

Information and applications can be obtained from the Office of the Graduate School (<https://www.grad.msstate.edu/funding-tuition/fellowships>)

4). Student Loans

Guaranteed Student Loans are available through the Department of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<https://www.sfa.msstate.edu/loans/>) Students should request an MSU Financial Aid Package and follow the instructions for Graduate Students. (Note: Graduate Students are *not* eligible for Pell Grants).

4. ENTERING THE PROGRAM

A. Orientation of New Students

Students will schedule their fall courses with the assistance of the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator and Department Head will also determine assistantship

responsibilities, if applicable, of new students and will be in communication with them about these responsibilities before the fall semester begins. All new graduate students are required to attend a yearly retreat in August, which may be scheduled before the first day of classes. At this time, they will meet the Department Head, Graduate Coordinator, faculty, and other students.

B. Selection of Major Professor

The Graduate Coordinator will advise students for the first semester of the program. Students should select a Major Professor in their area of expertise during the second semester of study. Once a Major Professor has been selected, the *Major Professor Form* should be filled out and submitted to the Sociology Department. This form, available on the department website or from the main office, must be on file by the end of the second semester of study.

C. Department Defense Policy

Defenses of proposals, theses, and dissertations are expected to take place in person on campus. Exceptions may be granted in rare cases of extenuating circumstances. To request a virtual defense, students must fill out the Request for Virtual Defense form, complete with documentation, and have it signed by their Major Professor(s), the Graduate Coordinator, and the Department Head. Approval of the request is not guaranteed or automatic. Requests must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the date of the defense in question.

5. MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM

A. Master of Science Options

The Department offers the Master of Science Degree. Students must maintain a grade point average of 3.00 or above on all course work completed. Students who receive two Cs will be placed on academic probation and lose their funding. Receipt of a third C will result in dismissal from the program, even if a 3.00 grade point average is maintained. Students may retake one course per degree program of study. A Request to Retake a Course form is available from the Office of the Graduate School. Students must complete and submit this form as directed. Any student who receives a C or lower in a Core class must use the retake for that course and must retake it the next time it is being offered. Upon receipt of a second C or lower in a Core class, the student will be dismissed from the program. A grade of a D or an F in any course is unacceptable and will result in immediate probation and loss of funding (if the only sub-B grade) or dismissal (if in concert with other sub-B grades). More than one U grade for thesis hours will result in dismissal. The graduate degree will not be granted if the GPA requirement is not met.

The Master of Science program has both a thesis and a non-thesis option.

1). Thesis Option

The thesis option requires 24 hours of course work and 6 hours of thesis.

2). Non Thesis Option

The non-thesis option requires 36 hours of course work: 24 hours of sociology and no more than 12 hours in two other related disciplines. Thesis hours (SO 9000) do not count toward this degree program.

B. Course Work

Required core courses in the master's degree are: (a) SO 8103 Graduate Theory I, (b) SO 8213 Research Design, and (c) SO 8274 Graduate Social Statistics I. In addition, students are required to take the Professionalization Seminar in the first semester. The student may choose the remaining courses in consultation with the Major Professor.

At least one-half of the course work in the degree program, exclusive of thesis credits, must be at the 8000 level. Approved 7000 Special Topics courses count toward 8000-9000 level requirements. *No more than six semester hours* of graduate credit may be earned in 7000-level special topics courses. Students may transfer up to six (6) semester hours of courses from other accredited degree programs. Courses that have already been counted as part of a degree program that resulted in graduation with a master's or PhD cannot be reused at Mississippi State. Only courses above and beyond what was required for a previous degree can be transferred. Generally speaking, only electives will be transferred in from other programs; all required coursework must be taken at Mississippi State University. Students who wish to have transfer courses considered must present a syllabus to the Graduate Coordinator, who will submit it to the graduate curriculum committee for review. The graduate curriculum committee will decide whether the course content is an equivalent substitute. All transfer requests must be filed, and paperwork completed, by the end of your second semester of study.

C. Examinations

1). Thesis Option

For the Master of Science thesis option degree program, the successful defense of the thesis constitutes the final comprehensive examination. For students pursuing the thesis option, Statistics II and/or Qualitative Analysis should be taken as part of their elective course of study. These decisions should be made in concert with the Major Professor. More details on the Master's Thesis are in part D below.

2). Non-Thesis Option

In the last semester of the required course work, the candidate will take a single written exit examination covering two areas: (1) Methods and Statistics and (2) Theory. This examination will be the comprehensive final examination. Questions will not be limited to course-specific contents. Students may take up to five hours to complete the examination. An exit examination committee composed of three faculty members will be selected from the faculty. This exit examination committee will be responsible for writing and evaluating the

entire examination. A study guide containing questions and related literature will be available to students on the Department of Sociology's web page. If the exit examination committee wishes to update the study guide, they will do so during the academic year (i.e., August to May). The modified document will then be posted by the last day of the spring semester and will take effect the following fall semester. If modifications are made during the summer, the new document will not take effect the following semester (i.e. beginning immediately in August), but rather the *next* academic year.

Exit examinations are offered twice per year on or about the 8th week of fall and spring semesters. The Graduate Coordinator will publicize the official date of the examination during the first full week of spring and fall semester classes. No exit examinations are offered during the summer. Students must notify the Graduate Coordinator in writing of their intention to sit for the exit examination no later than the end of the second week of the semester they plan to take the exam. The exam will be graded as pass-fail based on a majority vote by the examining committee. If unsuccessful on the first try, a student will be allowed one repeat examination, for a total of two attempts. A *Report of Exam Form* and the *Graduation Checklist* will be filed with the Graduate School by the department.

Students failing the exit examination will be required to register for the next regularly scheduled examination. Students failing a portion of the exit examination on their first attempt may be allowed to retake that portion of the exam during the following semester. Failure of the retake exit examination will result in termination from the master's program.

D. Master of Science Thesis

1). Thesis Committee

The Thesis Committee consists of the Major Professor as chair and at least two other departmental Graduate Faculty members. Graduate Faculty members from outside the department may serve on thesis committees in addition to the three departmental members. A *Committee Request Form* is to be filled out containing the signatures of the student's committee along with the signature of the Graduate Coordinator and Department Head as soon as a committee is established, no later than the end of the third semester of study. This form is sent to the Graduate School.

2). Thesis Proposal

The development of a thesis proposal is the initial step in the writing of the thesis. The student should present a thesis proposal to their Major Professor no later than the beginning of the last semester of course work. The Major Professor will distribute the Thesis Proposal to the Thesis Committee and schedule an oral defense of the Thesis Proposal.

The Thesis Proposal must be formally and unanimously approved by the student's Thesis Committee after an oral defense. This should occur no later than the end of the last semester of course work. A *Proposal Approval Form* may be obtained from the Department of Sociology and must be signed by the Thesis Committee members, the Graduate Coordinator, and the

Department Head. The Thesis Proposal must include the elements listed in Appendix A.

3). Thesis Defense

The thesis proposal defense and the thesis defense may not occur in the same semester; therefore, the thesis defense cannot take place earlier than the first day of the next semester after the proposal defense. Upon completion of the writing of the thesis, the student will submit an intended final draft to the Major Professor and the other members of the student's committee.

An intended final copy of the thesis will be placed on file in the departmental office for review by interested faculty at least one week prior to the scheduled defense.

Oral Defense

The Major Professor will schedule the oral defense of the thesis. The Major Professor will then inform the Graduate Coordinator of the time and date of the defense.

All departmental faculty must be invited to the thesis defense via email at least one week prior to the occasion. The thesis defense is open to all parties desiring attendance.

Committee Decision

The Major Professor presides over the oral defense, and the decision to accept or reject the defense of the thesis is solely that of the Thesis Committee. A majority vote is sufficient for a decision to pass or fail. The Major Professor may invite questions from other faculty and students during the oral defense if time permits. If a student is unsuccessful in defending a thesis, a new defense may be scheduled no earlier than one month from the date of the original defense.

Revision and Signing of Thesis

Although a student may pass the thesis defense, they will normally be instructed to revise the thesis before submitting it to the committee members for a signature or before submitting it to the Office of the Graduate School. A *Report of Exam Form* and the *Graduation Checklist* will be filed with the Graduate School by the department. The *Committee Request Form* will be signed by members of the Exit Exam Committee.

6. DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM

A. Admission

1). Criteria

In addition to the criteria set forth by the Office of the Graduate School, the department requires applicants for graduate study at the doctoral level to submit evidence of past academic success and written communication ability (which must include a copy of the student's master's paper or thesis).

2). Admission Procedures for Continuing Students

Current master's students who wish to be considered for the PhD program are required to apply to the Office of the Graduate School for admission to the doctoral program. Master's students who wish to be considered for the PhD program may apply no earlier than the same semester in which they defend their thesis. Students who delay their thesis defense, or are unsuccessful in the defense, will not be admitted to the PhD program until they successfully defend the thesis. While new applicants (master's and doctoral) apply for a fall start date, master's students who wish to continue on for the PhD program may begin in the fall or spring, contingent on successful defense of the master's thesis. Upon receiving word from the Graduate School that the student has applied, the Graduate Coordinator will inform the Graduate Admissions and Support Committee of the application for consideration.

B. Transfer Credit

Students may transfer up to nine (9) semester hours of courses from other accredited degree programs. Only electives will be transferred in from other programs; all required coursework must be taken at Mississippi State University.

Only courses in which grades of B or higher were earned are accepted for transfer. Courses with grades of Pass/Fail or S/U are not eligible for transfer. Approval is at the sole discretion of the reviewing academic unit, which will work with the Graduate School to ensure that the equivalent of a grade of B or higher was earned for courses taken at universities outside of the U.S.

Students who wish to have transfer courses considered must present an academic transcript and course syllabus in English to the Graduate Coordinator, who will submit it to the graduate curriculum committee for review. The graduate curriculum committee will decide whether the course content is an equivalent substitute. All transfer requests must be filed, and paperwork completed, by the end of your second semester of study.

C. Course Levels

One-half or more of the doctoral program of study, exclusive of dissertation credits, must be in 8000-9000 level courses. Approved 7000 Special Topics courses count toward 8000-9000 level requirements. *No more than six semester hours* of graduate credit may be earned in 7000-level special topics courses.

D. Curriculum

An outline of the doctoral curriculum is as follows.

Outline of Ph.D. Curriculum

- 1) **Core:** *Sociological Tools* [7 courses; 23 hours]

THEORY:	Graduate Theory I; II
RESEARCH METHODS:	Research Design Quantitative Analysis Qualitative Analysis
STATISTICS:	Graduate Statistics I; II

- 2) **Specialization:** *Substantive Focus* [15 hours]. Hours must be selected jointly with the Major Professor.

- 3) **Optional Minor or Electives:** [12 hours of graduate courses] chosen in consultation with the student's Major Professor. As part of their electives, students are required to take the Professionalization Seminar in the first semester and Teaching Sociology (if they intend to teach in the department) before they begin teaching. Students who have not taken Teaching Sociology will not be assigned independent courses.

- 4) **Specialization:** *Dissertation* [20 hours]

7. DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY EXAMINATION

Upon completion of: (1) all course work and (2) an approved program of study, the doctoral student is eligible to take the preliminary examination. The preliminary examination tests the student's substantive knowledge of a declared area of specialization within our doctoral program. Preliminary examinations are offered in the following three areas: (1) Communities, Environment, and Health; (2) Crime, Deviance, and Social Control; and (3) Social Inequalities. In exceptional cases a student, in consultation with their major professor and doctoral committee, may petition the Graduate Coordinator to be tested in a specialization of sociology other than the three listed above. The Graduate Coordinator may grant permission only after: (1) finding an intellectually compelling rationale for the petition; (2) determining whether at least three sociology graduate faculty members have demonstrated expertise (have published and/or taught graduate courses) in the petitioned area in order to form an examination committee and (3) receiving majority approval from the Graduate Curriculum and Policies Committee (the Graduate Coordinator may split a tied decision from the Committee).

Preliminary examinations consist of two four-hour components taken within a single day. Preliminary examinations will be offered twice each year on or about the 7th week of the semester. The Graduate Coordinator will publicize the official date of the examination during the first full week of the spring and fall semesters. No preliminary examinations are offered during the summer. Students must notify the Graduate Coordinator in writing of their intention to sit for a preliminary examination no later than the end of the second week of the semester they plan to take the exam.

Standing preliminary examination committees will be comprised of three graduate sociology faculty members who have scholarly expertise within the concentration and one additional graduate sociology faculty member. Standing committee members will be selected on an annual basis, typically at the beginning of the academic year during the annual retreat. The

standing committees will update the concentration reading lists. Updates shall include, at a minimum, approving the list, updating the date at the top of the list, and updating the names of the committee members that approved it. Committee members may also add or subtract readings if they so choose, but the approved list must have a weighted total of readings between 200 and 225. No more than 10% of the list shall be changed annually. Articles and chapters count as 1 reading toward the weighted total, while books count as 3 readings toward the weighted total. A concentration reading list will be available to students on the Department of Sociology's web page. If the standing examination committee wishes to update the concentration reading list, they will do so during the academic year (i.e., August to May). The modified document will be posted by the last day of the spring semester and will take effect the following fall semester. If modifications are made during the summer, the new document will not take effect the following semester (i.e. beginning immediately in August), but rather the *next* academic year.

To prepare the exams, the standing committee will use the concentration reading list, as well as a secondary reading list dedicated to a more specialized area within the discipline that the respective student's dissertation will potentially address. The purpose of the secondary list is to better prepare students to write a dissertation by jumpstarting their literature review and prompting them to integrate readings from the concentration list with literature on their future dissertation topic. The secondary list will be comprised of a weighted total of 15-25 readings. Articles and chapters count as 1 reading toward the weighted total, while books count as 3 readings toward the weighted total. The preliminary exam must include one question based on the secondary list that the student is required to answer.

The secondary list will be developed and approved by the student and a graduate faculty member within the Department (henceforth referred to as "The Expert") who is an expert on the topic that the respective student's dissertation will potentially address. If The Expert is not the student's major professor, their major professor must also approve the list. The process of list development and approval must be finalized by the end of the semester preceding the semester during which the preliminary exam is scheduled to be taken. The *Secondary List Approval* form signed by the student, The Expert, and the student's major professor (if they are not The Expert) must be submitted at this time with the reading list attached.

If The Expert is not on the standing examination committee, The Expert will also act in a non-voting, advisory capacity to the committee in two key respects. First, The Expert will be responsible for developing the preliminary exam question based on the secondary reading list. Second, The Expert will advise the standing committee on the quality of the student's answer to the question tailored to their secondary list. If The Expert is a member of the standing committee, they will develop the question focused on the secondary reading list, act in an advisory role if the committee has any questions regarding the student's utilization of their secondary list, and carry out their standard committee duties.

The preliminary examination will be graded on a pass-fail basis. After the members of the preliminary examination committee have read and critically evaluated the examination, the committee will meet and make a final decision on the student's exam. The committee will provide the results of their evaluation along with a written summary of the strengths and

weaknesses of the student's performance to the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator will notify the student in writing as to whether they passed or failed the examination; the examination committee's summary comments will also be included in this letter. Students will be notified of the results of the examination by the Graduate Coordinator no later than fifteen (15) working days after the examination has been administered. Students failing the preliminary examination should register for the next regularly scheduled exam. Failure to take the preliminary examination at the second opportunity will result in a failing grade on the preliminary examination. Two failures on this examination will result in the dismissal of the student from the Ph.D. program.

For students who are granted extended time to take the preliminary exam through Student Support Services, the Graduate Curriculum and Policies Committee will accommodate the student's request in the following manner: students must have two consecutive days as determined by the graduate coordinator to complete the exam.

Any deviations from the preliminary examination structure outlined above must be approved by the Graduate Coordinator in consultation with the Graduate Curriculum and Policies Committee.

8. CANDIDACY

A student will be admitted to candidacy after the student has passed the preliminary examination. The Office of the Graduate School will use the *Report of Exam Results Form* submitted by the department on the student's behalf to determine candidacy.

9. THE DISSERTATION

A. The Dissertation Committee

Upon successful completion of the preliminary doctoral examination and admission into doctoral candidacy, the student will then establish a Dissertation Committee for their dissertation research.

A Dissertation Committee will be comprised of a Major Professor who must be both designated as Graduate Level I Faculty and a full member of the Sociology Graduate Faculty. In addition to the Major Professor, the Dissertation Committee must be comprised of a minimum of three committee members who are designated as either Graduate Level 1 or 2 Sociology Faculty. Full members of the Sociology Graduate Faculty are individuals who make on-going contributions to the Sociology Graduate Program by at minimum serving on programmatic committees (i.e., Preliminary Examination Committee; Graduate Admissions and Support Committee; Graduate Curriculum and Policies Committee; and Graduate Appeals Committee). Sociology Graduate Faculty who are not full members may serve as dissertation committee members. Non-Sociology Graduate Faculty may serve as additional dissertation committee members upon approval of the Graduate Coordinator. A dissertation *Committee Request Form* is to be filled out containing the signatures of the candidate's committee and submitted before the student plans to defend their dissertation proposal.

Some dissertation committees may elect to designate one of the committee members as a co-dissertation director. A co-dissertation director should be used when the Major Professor has had little or no experience directing dissertations. The role of the co-director is to provide specialized advice to the Major Professor to assist with the management of the dissertation process. Some candidates who have completed a formal minor subject area may elect to include a minor professor on their dissertation committee. The minor professor would serve as a fifth dissertation committee member.

Selection of a Major Professor and the decision to agree to serve as a Major Professor should be made only after careful consideration. However, a primary consideration should be given to whether the Major Professor has substantive expertise in the area of intended dissertation research. Selection of dissertation committee members should be made by the student in consultation with the Major Professor. Committee members are expected to make valuable contributions to the candidate's dissertation research, which will enhance the quality of the final product. Therefore, selection of committee members and the decision to agree to serve as a dissertation committee member should be based on the potential for constructive contributions to the dissertation research. Consideration should be given to those faculty members who either have expertise in the area of intended dissertation research, expertise in a complementary area to the intended dissertation research, and/or theoretical and/or methodological expertise that can be directly applied to the intended dissertation research. Individuals outside of the Sociology Graduate Faculty should be selected to serve on a dissertation committee only when it can be demonstrated that their expertise will greatly enhance the quality of the dissertation and that no current member of the Sociology Graduate Faculty who is available to serve duplicates that expertise. The candidate must petition the Graduate Coordinator for approval of an outside member, and three committee members must still be from within the Sociology Graduate Faculty. The Graduate Coordinator will render a decision in consultation with the Graduate Curriculum and Policies Committee.

Situations may arise where candidates may need to make a change in the membership of their dissertation committee. These situations may occur when either the student wishes to make a change of membership or a dissertation committee member wishes to remove themselves from the committee. In the latter case the Dissertation Committee member should provide a letter to the candidate and copies to the other dissertation committee members informing them of their decision and reason for stepping off the committee. The candidate may initiate a change of dissertation committee membership by submitting a written petition explaining the reason for the change and the appropriate *Change of Committee Form* to the Graduate Coordinator for approval. Candidates should only change their committee after careful consideration and consultation with the entire committee. While a candidate may request a change of committee membership at any time during candidacy, only in extremely compelling cases will approval be granted after a dissertation proposal has been defended and approved.

Once the Dissertation Committee is established the Major Professor must articulate to the other members how the committee will operate with regard to the review and evaluation process. The operational procedure identified by the Major Professor should facilitate full and reasonable input from all members of the committee. Major Professors should also periodically report to the

committee about the candidate's progress toward completion of the dissertation research.

B. The Dissertation Proposal

The first phase of the dissertation research is the development of a dissertation proposal by the candidate. The dissertation proposal must include the elements listed in Appendix A. When the Major Professor is satisfied that the dissertation proposal is ready to be defended, copies of the proposal will be given to the other committee members. After an appropriate period of time for review (approximately two weeks), the Major Professor will schedule an oral defense of the dissertation proposal. Candidates are required to make a formal presentation of their intended research and answer questions from the Dissertation Committee. The proposal defense is a closed meeting with only the candidate and their Dissertation Committee in attendance. Immediately after the conclusion of the candidate's oral defense, the Dissertation Committee will deliberate to determine whether the dissertation proposal is acceptable. The dissertation proposal must be unanimously approved by the Dissertation Committee. The candidate will be informed of the Dissertation Committee's decision by the Major Professor immediately following the proposal defense deliberations. The Major Professor is also obligated to inform the Graduate Coordinator of the outcome of the proposal defense. Written comments will be provided by the Dissertation Committee for the candidate to consider as they progress toward completion of their dissertation research.

Approval of the dissertation proposal indicates that the Dissertation Committee is in agreement that the candidate has adequately identified a sociological research topic which merits investigation and the candidate has provided an appropriate plan to carry out that research which will likely lead to a unique and relevant contribution to the field of study. It is important to note that approval of a dissertation proposal does not ensure that future substantive and/or methodological revisions will not have to be made.

After the dissertation proposal is accepted, candidates are expected to work closely with their Major Professor throughout the remaining dissertation research. Candidates should regularly seek and heed the advice of their Major Professor. Candidates and Major Professors should periodically inform the members of the Dissertation Committee of the status of the dissertation research, as well as solicit their advice regarding aspects of the dissertation research.

Students must successfully defend a dissertation proposal within two calendar years from the end of the semester in which they passed the preliminary exam. Otherwise, the student will be referred by the graduate coordinator to the graduate school for dismissal.

C. The Dissertation Defense

When the Major Professor deems a candidate's dissertation draft is ready for defense, the draft is circulated to the other Dissertation Committee members for review (a Major Professor may also submit earlier drafts to the committee for advice and recommendations).

1). Examination

The Major Professor is responsible for scheduling the Final Examination, or oral defense, of the dissertation.

An intended final copy (as stipulated above) of the dissertation will be placed on file in the departmental office for review by interested faculty members and students, at least one week prior to the scheduled defense. All members of the department will be invited to attend the dissertation defense by a written memorandum at least one week prior to the examination.

2). Committee Decision

Only the student's Dissertation Committee will participate in decisions concerning the Final Examination. Majority vote is sufficient for a decision. A student who fails the Final Examination cannot apply for another until a period of six (6) months has passed from the date of the original examination. Two failures on the Final Examination will result in the student being dropped from further consideration as a doctoral candidate. A *Report of Exam Form* and the *Graduation Checklist* will be filed with the Graduate School by the department.

3). Student's Responsibility

Although students may successfully pass the Final Examination, the student may be required to revise the dissertation before it is submitted to the Office of the Graduate School.

10. SOCIOLOGY AS A MINOR FIELD OF STUDY

Students whose major is not sociology may select sociology as a minor field of study. To qualify, the students must take 12 graduate credit hours of sociology course work and pass a written examination prepared by the minor professor.

11. APPEALS COMMITTEE

An Appeals Committee will be established which will review all aspects of the graduate examination process and serve as an appeals committee in any dispute or disagreement concerning any aspect of the graduate program. The committee will consist of three members and one alternate elected at the beginning of each school year from faculty having graduate teaching responsibilities; that is to say, full or associate members of the graduate faculty. If any party involved in the graduate process, student or faculty member, disagrees with a decision or feels that a practice is in some way unfair, unethical, or violates established rules, that party has the right to present a written petition to the review committee stating the nature and the details of the grievance.

The Review Committee will inform all parties involved in the situation as to the nature of the grievance and solicit information deemed necessary to make a judgment. The Review Committee will replace any member of the committee having a conflict of interest in any particular case with the elected alternate during that particular appeal. If any party involved in

the process disagrees with the decision rendered by the committee, that party has the right to appeal to the graduate faculty as a whole. The graduate faculty as a whole will hear the evidence and render a decision by secret ballot. If for some reason the matter is not resolved, the individual(s) involved in the dispute has the right to pursue the university grievance procedure.

12. IMPLEMENTATION AND MODIFICATION OF THESE PROCEDURES

A. Implementation

These policies and procedures will take effect in the semester following their approval and will be required of all students whose initial registration in the M.S. or Ph.D. program is in that semester or a subsequent semester. Students previously enrolled in the M.S. or Ph.D. program may write the Graduate Coordinator requesting that the new rules apply to them. In this event, all new rules will apply to the student's entire program. When M.S. students working for the degree under the old rules complete the degree, the new rules will apply to their Ph.D. programs.

B. Modification of this Document

This document may be changed by a majority vote of the departmental faculty. The proposed changes must be emailed to the faculty at least one week prior to voting. Changes may be made only during the academic year. Any business not voted on by the end of the academic year may be reintroduced as a new proposal during the next academic year.

APPENDIX A: ELEMENTS OF A THESIS PROPOSAL OR DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS

The following is intended to serve as a guide for the development of a thesis proposal or a dissertation prospectus. This outline contains many of the essential elements for designing a research project for a thesis or dissertation. Although it may be appropriate for the majority of students, it may be expected that the content and organization of proposals may vary according to the nature of the particular research problem proposed. The student should contact their committee if questions arise concerning the form, content, and organization of the proposal. The general outline of the elements to be included in a thesis proposal or dissertation prospectus is presented below.

A. Statement of the Problem

This section should present a theoretically concise statement of the sociological problem to be addressed by your research. It should state the significance of the research, (i.e., how your work will contribute to and expand on previous research in this area.) Since the sociological questions will be elaborated in more detail throughout the proposal, this section should provide sufficient information to set the stage for the remaining sections of the proposal.

B. Review of the Relevant Literature

This section of the proposal should include a brief review of the theoretical and empirical literatures relevant to your research problem. It should illustrate your familiarity and knowledge of the most important literature as well as your ability to interpret substantive research from a recognized theoretical framework. You should concentrate your attention on only the empirical and theoretical works that are directly relevant to your proposed research problem. In this section you should provide the theoretical rationale that will guide your entire research project.

C. Statement of Hypotheses

For quantitative studies, a statement of the hypotheses derived from the review of the literature should be presented in this section. The hypotheses may be stated in more or less formal terms; for example, predictions of the expected effect of an independent variable(s) on a dependent variable; a resolution of competing theoretical issues. You should consult with your Major Professor regarding the nature and type of formulation appropriate for your particular research problem. The independent and dependent variables of your research should be clearly identified in this section.

D. Description of Methodological Procedures

A statement of the methodological procedures to be followed in the conduct of your research should be stated in this section. The description of the methods to be used will usually include the following:

A description of the sample and/or data gathering techniques, for survey or interview research; the case(s) selected, for case studies; or participatory events, for ethnographic studies.

The description of the sample should indicate how the sample or case will be selected, whether you will be collecting your own data or using secondary data, the number of cases that will be selected or the length of time you will be in the field collecting ethnographic data, and the safeguards employed to guarantee the protection of human subjects (if applicable).

A description of the variables or themes to be examined in your research and the proposed measurement procedures, or operationalization of concepts should be included. Include here a discussion of how the variables or themes will be coded or classified, whether you will use single or multiple indicators of your concepts, and how you will combine items to develop indices or scales (if applicable).

A description of the analytic strategy or statistical techniques used to examine your research problem should be included. This should include a discussion of the statistical procedures (bivariate or multivariate) or coding procedures, etc. to be used. Provide a brief statement indicating how the analytic strategy you have chosen will permit you to address the substantive and theoretical issues underlying your proposal. Speculate on how your findings may “feed back” to your evaluation of the theoretical framework employed for your research.

E. Bibliography

Present a complete listing of books and articles (with complete citations) that are the basis of your research problem.

F. Preparing and Submitting Dissertations and Theses

As outlined in the Graduate Catalog, the student must meet the initial and final submission requirements and deadlines set by the program, college, MSU Libraries, and the Graduate School. The student must be enrolled in at least one graduate credit hour and LIB 9010 at MSU during the semester(s) of both the initial and final submissions to the Library. A student submitting in the summer semester may be enrolled in any summer term. The student submits the thesis electronically through CANVAS as part of LIB 9010. The final submission must be in Portable Document Format (PDF) and uploaded to the Library's Institutional Repository (Scholar's Junction) database.

APPENDIX B: AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS

You can find the Code of Ethics by going to the following web site:
<http://www.asanet.org>.