

FAQ SHEET for Graduate Applicants



Frequently Asked Questions about the M.S. Program

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

The program is designed to take 2 years to complete.

What are the requirements for the non-thesis option and for the thesis-option?

The non-thesis option involves 36 hours of coursework and an Exit Exam in the final semester that covers Theory, Statistics, and Research Methods. The thesis option consists of 24 hours of coursework and a minimum of 6 thesis hours. The thesis option also requires 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, Environment, and Health; and 3) Social Inequalities (Race/Gender/Class).

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. 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 our Graduate Handbook, the Expectations/Suggested Course of Study Guide, the Exit Exam Study Guide, and 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, the scheduling of the Preliminary Exam, and your methods choice for your dissertation, you will be in the program for 5 to 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 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.

All Ph.D. students are required to take these core courses within the departments. Students with previous graduate coursework may transfer up to 9 credit hours of electives, subject to departmental approval. Credits must be transferred within the first semester of enrollment.

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

The Preliminary Exam is the exam you take after completing 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, Environment, and Health; 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. 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 our Graduate Handbook, the Expectations/Suggested Course of Study Guide, the Preliminary Exam Reading Lists, and 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. 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 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. Please do not 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'), who explain in their SOP who they are as a scholar, what they plan to study, who at MSU can help them, and how

they can help them to accomplish their goals. They also provide us with detailed letters of recommendation from faculty or other academic professionals, and a writing sample that showcases a strong writing and research abilities (a course paper or in the case of Ph.D. applicants, an empirical project). We prefer students who have past research experience and demonstrate a good “fit” with our department areas of expertise. Use your SOP to address any weaknesses on 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 and explain 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, everyone who is admitted to one of our Graduate Programs, after applying before the February 1st deadline, will be automatically considered for departmental funding. This departmental funding is a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA). There are between 5-8 GTA positions available each year, depending on our departmental budget. It is possible that you will be put on a waitlist and will be notified by the end of May if you will receive our departmental funding or not.

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

A Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) is a funding opportunity that requires the eligible student to work 20 hours a week, typically assisting one or more faculty members with their teaching responsibilities. In order to be eligible for a GTA position, 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 a 100% tuition remission (excluding a few fees), and \$12,000 (M.S. Program) or \$14,000 (Ph.D. Program) throughout the 9-month academic year (Aug-May) through a biweekly stipend. Health insurance is not provided but is available to purchase at MSU.

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. After 2-3 years as a GTA, Ph.D. students typically transition into Lecturer positions. 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 is another funding opportunity the Sociology department provides Ph.D. students with once they are no longer eligible to receive Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) funding. The Lecturer position requires Ph.D. students to teach 2 courses per semester at \$3,750 per course per semester. You will receive 100% tuition remission (excluding a few fees) for up to 6 credit hours each semester. So, you will be considered a part-time student. You will receive health insurance and retirement benefits.

What are other funding opportunities outside of the department?

When you are no longer eligible for a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) in our department, or if you do not want to work as a Teaching Assistant, there may be other funding opportunities available elsewhere on campus. 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 about 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. They will have the same work responsibilities and benefits just as any other student who is eligible for a GTA. This departmental funding is a Graduate Teaching Assistantship. There are between 5-8 GTA positions available each year, depending on our departmental budget. It is possible that you will be put on a waitlist and will be notified by the end of May if you will receive our departmental funding or not. For more information on the departmental GTA, please check out the FAQ about Funding.

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. Once Ph.D. students are no longer eligible for GTA funding, they can transition into a Lecturer position. **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). Students need to cover the costs for the remaining 3 credit hours, which are approximately \$2-3,000 per semester.

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

When you are no longer eligible for a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) in our department, or if you do not want to work as a Teaching Assistant, there may be other funding opportunities available elsewhere on campus. 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 subscribed to 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 \(msstate.edu\)](#)