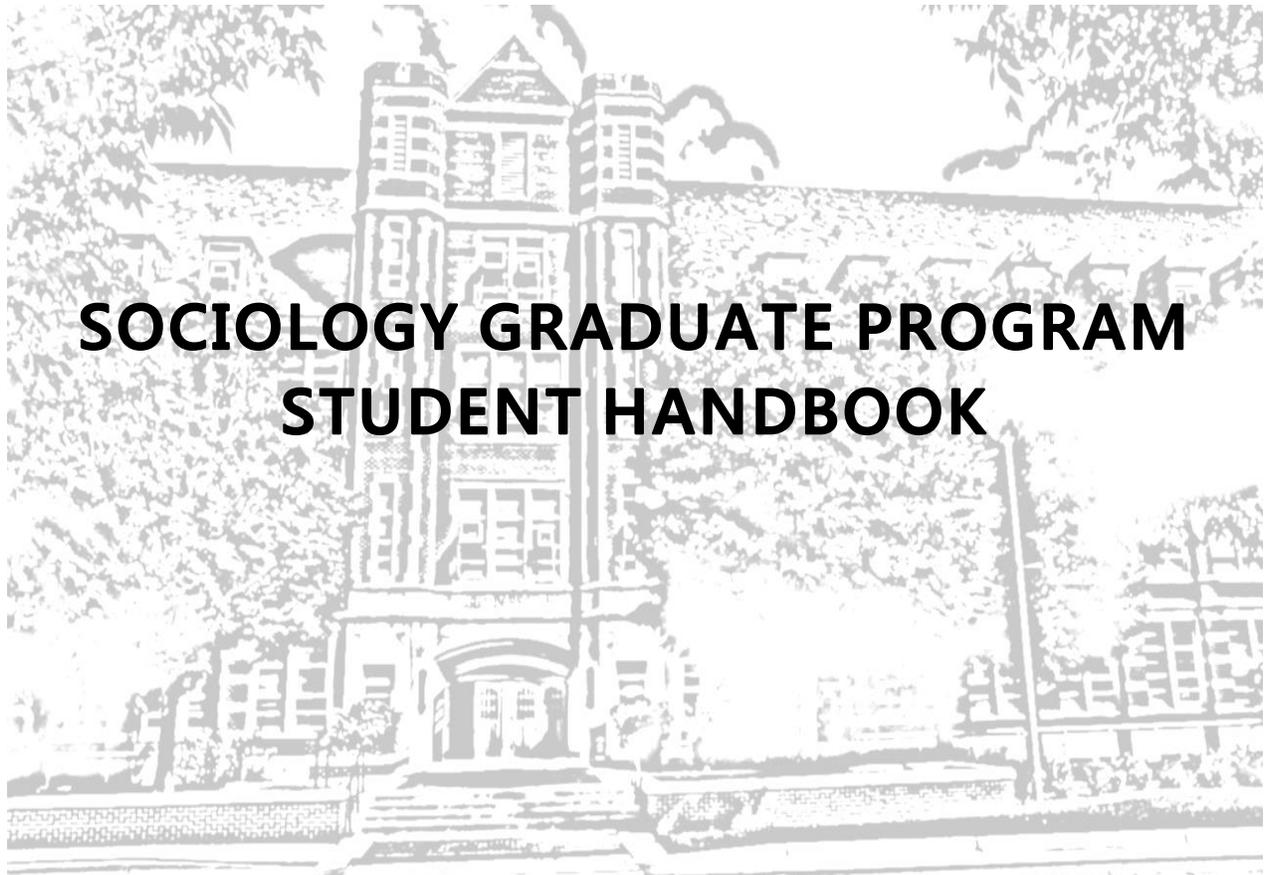


# **MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC YEAR 2016-2017 (REVISED 8/16)**



## **SOCIOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAM STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**Dean Rehberger, PhD**

Interim Chair, Department of Sociology

**Sandy Marquart-Pyatt, PhD**

Director, PhD Program, Department of Sociology

**Aaron McCright, PhD**

Associate Chair, Department of Sociology

## Table of Contents

1. Welcome and Statement of Purpose .....	1
2. Introduction.....	2
3. Program Overview .....	3
4. Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology Degree Requirements .....	6
4.1. Coursework .....	7
4.2. Qualifying Paper and Presentation.....	7
4.3. The Comprehensive Exam.....	7
4.4. The Dissertation and SOC 999 (24-36 credits).....	8
4.5. Participation in Teaching Assistant Workshops and Professional Development Workshop Series .....	8
4.6. Responsible Conduct of Research Certification .....	8
5. Annual Progress Report Guidelines and Time to Degree.....	9
6. Graduate Advisor and Guidance Committee .....	10
7. Qualifying Paper Description and Guidelines .....	11
8. Guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination .....	12
8.1. Comprehensive Exam Models .....	13
8.2. Examination Procedures .....	14
8.3. Grading .....	14
9. Dissertation .....	15
9.1. The Dissertation Proposal .....	15
9.2. Dissertation Process .....	16
10. Academic Standards.....	17
10.1. Time to Degree Completion.....	17
10.2. Grade Point Average Requirements, Course Waivers and Substitutions .....	17
10.3. English Requirements For International Students .....	18
11. Student Responsibilities.....	18
11.1. Academic Honesty, Integrity of Scholarship and Grades .....	18
11.2. False information .....	18
12. Appendices - Important Policies Related to Graduate Education.....	19-21

## **1. Welcome and Statement of Purpose**

Welcome to the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University!

On behalf of my colleagues in the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University, I would like to welcome you to our graduate program. We are pleased you have selected our doctoral program as part of your professional development.

Members of the Department of Sociology recognize that developing an understanding of key social issues and problems requires grounding in the discipline of sociology's core, including its epistemological origins, classical and contemporary theories, and methodologies. We also promote the development of depth in sociological knowledge through our graduate program's signature substantive fields: environment, health and medicine, and migration. We expect our doctoral students to adhere to the ethical standards of our profession and to exhibit qualities that demonstrate a dedication to strengthening the sociological enterprise. Recent graduates from MSU's sociology doctoral program comprise an extensive network of alumni in faculty positions around the world.

Our graduate program's principal goal is to foster the development of the next generation of professional sociologists who will serve the broader society as creative research scholars, educators, and practitioners. If you have questions beyond the information covered in this handbook or other documentation available in the Sociology Department, please talk with your faculty advisor, members of your guidance committee, the Graduate Secretary, or the Director of Graduate Studies. We strongly encourage you to be proactive in obtaining information that you need to develop your program of study to ensure successful completion of our graduate program. Developing your program of study with guidance from this handbook and from faculty in the Sociology Department, and in accordance with college and university policies and procedures is essential for your success in graduate school and your scholarly development. I wish you great success with your studies!

### **Sandy Marquart-Pyatt, PhD**

Associate Professor of Sociology

Director of Graduate Studies

Department of Sociology

Michigan State University

## **2. Introduction**

The Department of Sociology is in the College of Social Science at Michigan State University (MSU). This graduate handbook provides information about policies pertinent to the Department, the College, and the University that provide guideposts for students as they embark on their doctoral study. Students should also actively seek out information from other documents that are essential to their doctoral study and professional careers. Examples of these sources are online on MSU's general website ([www.msu.edu](http://www.msu.edu)), Spartan Life (<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/>), Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities, University Regulations, and Academic Freedom for Students at Michigan State University. Being familiar with these sites in addition to information from the Council of Graduate Students (COGS), MSU Graduate Studies, and MSU Academic Programs is strongly encouraged prior to entering the doctoral program and during the first years of enrollment at the University.

The Graduate Program Director is responsible for assisting students with policies and procedures outlined in this handbook. This is especially important in the first year of enrollment in the graduate program. The student should take the initiative during this first year to learn more about the doctoral program and its faculty. This will provide opportunities for professional socialization and scholarly development early on that students will be able to build upon as they complete their doctoral study and embark on professional careers.

Being aware of the program requirements is essential for success in the graduate program in Sociology at MSU. The contents of this handbook outline the doctoral program's structure, course requirements, expected timing of program benchmarks, student responsibilities, expectations regarding academic performance and professional integrity, and career development as a sociologist. Familiarity with all facets of the doctoral program in sociology, along with related college and university policies and procedures is a vital component of professional development.

**Department of Sociology**  
509 E. Circle Dr.  
316 Berkey Hall  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 4824-1111 USA  
phone: 1.517.355.6640  
fax: 1.517.432.2856  
email: [soc@msu.edu](mailto:soc@msu.edu)

### 3. Program Overview

Sociology is the scientific study of social relations and institutions. Sociologists investigate a wide range of topics, emphasizing the critical role of contexts and how structure and agency interact in a variety of social settings. The discipline of sociology examines society and how contexts shape individuals' life chances through analysis of how individuals are simultaneously embedded in numerous cross-cutting social groups corresponding with layers of aggregation in the social world—spanning scales from the individual to the global.

Upon completion of the Doctoral Program in Sociology in the College of Social Science at Michigan State University, degree recipients will be able to:

1. effectively convey and critically assess the contribution of sociological knowledge to the wider scientific communities and a range of lay audiences;
2. employ the critical skills necessary to advance sociological understanding of contemporary issues through the application of sociological theories, methods, and analytical techniques; and
3. articulate how core sociological principles can be enhanced through rigorous empirical examination of the social world and by developing expertise in one or more sociological fields.

The Sociology graduate program's principal goal is to develop the next generation of professional sociologists who will be creative research scholars, educators, and practitioners.

#### *3.1. Program Description*

The PhD program in sociology is designed to prepare sociologists for professional positions encompassing scholarly activities in research, teaching, service, and engagement. The program emphasizes core disciplinary training in theory, methods, and statistics and depth acquired in at least one field or area of concentration, thus providing a firm grounding in sociology's history, epistemology, and philosophy while simultaneously pursuing expertise in a specific substantive field. Signature fields where we have considerable faculty expertise are environment, health and medicine, and migration. A graduate student's specific program of study is designed jointly by the student and their guidance committee. Students will complete courses on the disciplinary core of sociology and in their selected field. Along with the required coursework for the doctoral program, students must complete a qualifying paper, a comprehensive examination, a dissertation proposal, and dissertation that reflect their sociological grounding and substantive field(s). Throughout the doctoral program, the student will work closely with their advisor and guidance committee in designing their program of study from coursework through comprehensive exams to the successful completion of the dissertation.

#### *3.2. Graduate Faculty*

Maria Isabel Ayala •Assistant Professor. Ph.D., Texas A&M University, 2007. Racial and Ethnic Minorities, Latina/o sociology, educational attainment, identities. (Migration)

Broman, Cliff•Professor, Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1984. Stress, substance abuse and mental health, racial and ethnic relations. (Health and Medicine)

Soma Chaudhuri•Assistant Professor, Ph.D., Vanderbilt, 2008. Gender and Violence, Social Movements, Witch Hunts, South Asia, Qualitative methods.

Jualynne E. Dodson• Professor, Ph.D. University of California-Berkeley. Religion and Culture of African Descendants in the Americas, the African Diaspora, Sociology of Religion.

Stephen Gasteyer•Associate Professor, Ph.D., Iowa State University, 2001. Community development, community capacity, environment, water, social justice. (Environment; Community/Urban)

Steve Gold•Professor, Ph.D., University of California-Berkeley, 1985. International migration, ethnic economies, ethnic community development and qualitative field methods. (Migration; Community/Urban)

Craig Harris•Associate Professor, Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1978. Sociology of food and agriculture, environmental sociology, sociology of fisheries. (Environment).

Ning Hsieh•Assistant Professor, Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, 2014. Sociology of mental health, global/comparative health, aging, sexuality. (Family; Health and Medicine)

Raymond Jussaume•Professor, Ph.D., Cornell University, 1987. Development Sociology, Sustainability Theory and Practice, Agri-Food Sociology, Mixed Methods. (Environment)

Linda Kalof•Professor. Ph.D., The American University, 1989. Animals and society, environmental sociology. (Environment)

Hui (Cathy) Liu•Associate Professor. Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008. Population health and mortality, family and marriage, bio-demography of aging and the life course, LGBT population, sexuality, and quantitative methodology. (Family and Health)

Sandy Marquart-Pyatt•Associate Professor. Ph.D., The Ohio State University, 2004. Quantitative methodology, environmental sociology, political sociology, comparative social change. (Environment)

Rubén Martínez•Professor. Ph.D., University of California-Riverside. Social inequality and social stratification, race and ethnic relations, neoliberalism and Latinos, minority education and diversity leadership.

Aaron M. McCright•Associate Professor. Ph.D., Washington State University, 2002. Environmental sociology, sociology of science and technology, social movements. (Environment)

Daniel Menchik•Assistant Professor. Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2012. Medical sociology, professions, organizations, science, theory, qualitative methods. (Health and Medicine)

Brendan Mullan •Associate Professor. Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1986. Demography, international migration, globalization, inequality, research methods/statistics. (Migration).

Stephanie J. Nawyn•Associate Professor. Ph.D., University of Southern California, 2006. Migration, gender, refugees, economic incorporation. (Migration)

Aaron Ponce•Assistant Professor. Ph.D., Indiana University, 2016. International migration and immigrant reception, political sociology, welfare state, global social change. (Migration)

Xuefei Ren•Associate Professor. Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2007. Urban Sociology, Historical-Comparative Sociology (Community/Urban).

Barbara Schneider•John A. Hannah and University Distinguished Professor. Ph.D., Northwestern University, 1979. Social context of schools, families, work.

Carl S. Taylor•Professor. Ph.D., Michigan State University, 1980. Community development, gangs and threat groups, internal migration, urban environment. (Community/Urban)

Logan Williams•Assistant Professor. Ph.D., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2013. Political sociology of science, sociology of technology, development sociology, ethnography. (Health and Medicine, Environment)

Wynne Wright•Associate Professor. Ph.D., University of Kentucky, 1999. Agrifood System change, political sociology, gender, social movements. (Environment)

Zhenmei Zhang•Associate Professor, Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 2003. Aging and the Life Course, Health Disparities, Marriage and Family, Chinese Gerontology (Health and Medicine, Family).

#### 4. Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology Degree Requirements

The sociology doctoral program provides students with a strong foundation in the disciplinary core of sociological theory, methodology, and statistics along with substantive expertise in a disciplinary field. Students must meet departmental, college, and university requirements. These requirements include core and elective courses, workshop attendance, training in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR), a qualifying paper, comprehensive examination, dissertation proposal defense, and dissertation. These program requirements are shown in Table 1 below, along with the expected timing that students complete their program of study.

**Table 1. Graduate Program Requirements for the Doctoral Degree in Sociology**

<b>Program Requirements</b>	<b>Credit Hours</b>	<b>Expected Timing</b>
SOC 815, SOC 816, SOC 881, SOC 882, SOC 885	15	Years 1 and 2
SOC 985 or SOC 986 or SOC 883 or SOC 884 or SOC 989 Topics in Methodology Course	3	Year 2
Substantive Field Electives: 6 courses	18	Years 1 and 2
Total Coursework	36	
24 SOC 999 Dissertation Credits*	24*	
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	
Participation in Teaching Assistant workshop		Year 1
Qualifying Paper and Presentation		Year 2
Comprehensive Examination		Year 4
Dissertation Proposal Defense		Year 5
Dissertation Oral Defense		Year 6
SOC Professional Development Workshop Series		Years 1-3; as needed Years 4-6
Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Certification**		update annually

\*The maximum number of dissertation credits allowed is 36.

\*\*RCR training involves university, college, and departmental requirements.

#### 4.1. Coursework

##### Core Courses in Theory, Statistics, and Methods

All doctoral students are required to complete SOC 815: Classical Sociological Theory, SOC 816: Contemporary Theory, SOC 881: Analysis of Sociological Data I, SOC 882: Analysis of Sociological Data II, and SOC 885: Methods of Sociological Inquiry. Students must earn a 3.0 grade or higher in each of these courses to obtain the PhD.

##### Additional Requirement in Methods

All doctoral students are required to complete one specialized methods course. Available options include: SOC 985: Qualitative Field Research, SOC 986: Survey Research Principles, SOC 989: Topics in Sociological Methodology, SOC 883: Multi-equation Quantitative Models, SOC 884: Longitudinal Analysis, or another 800- or 900-level specialized methods course approved by the student's Guidance Committee.

##### Substantive Field Electives

All doctoral students are required to complete six courses in their substantive field. Some courses may be from outside the Sociology Department. Graduate students and their Guidance Committees jointly decide course selection for the student's program of study.

#### 4.2. *Qualifying Paper and Presentation* (Additional details in Section 7)

Within their first two years in the program, students will produce a high-quality scholarly research paper suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal and/or presentation at a professional meeting. Consistent with the department's emphasis on research and promoting the scholarly development of graduate students, the qualifying paper engages talents and skills for organizing conceptual material and analyzing empirical data beyond the typical course term paper. This qualifying paper must engage sociological theory and be empirically based, reporting the results of rigorous data analysis. Students should aim for a final manuscript of approximately 9000 words (not counting tables and figures). Research for this qualifying paper must be consistent with Responsible Conduct for Research guidelines for the university, college, and department. For primary data collection and secondary data analysis including human subjects, researchers must obtain approval of the Human Research Protection Program (<http://hrpp.msu.edu/>). Students must deliver a 15-20 minute oral presentation of this paper at a Sociology Department colloquium. The department schedules two such colloquia a year, once each semester. See the department calendar for exact dates each semester.

#### 4.3. *The Comprehensive Exam* (Additional details in Section 8)

The comprehensive examination provides doctoral students the opportunity to demonstrate their sociological knowledge; their ability for independent scholarship; and their writing skills, including the ability to organize, synthesize, and critique sociological scholarship. As a crucial benchmark, the comprehensive examination offers an important opportunity for a student's

guidance committee to evaluate the extent to which the student has attained mastery in their sociological field(s). Students work closely with their advisor and guidance committee to determine the timing of the exam within their program of study. For students entering the program with a Bachelor's degree, the exam should be taken by the fourth year of the program. University guidelines require that the exam must be taken within five years of entering the program. Students must be enrolled in the graduate program during the semester in which the comprehensive exam is conducted and evaluated by the committee.

#### *4.4. The Dissertation and SOC 999 (24-36 credits) (Additional details in Section 9)*

Students are required to complete a dissertation proposal and successfully deliver a public presentation of this proposal within one year of completing their comprehensive exam. Students are required to complete at least 24 dissertation credits to earn their PhD. The maximum number of dissertation credits allowed is 36. The proposal defense typically takes place during the fifth year in the sociology doctoral program. University guidelines require that the proposal must be taken within five years of entering the program. The dissertation should be defended by the sixth year of the program. The dissertation must be defended within eight years of acceptance into the program according to the Graduate School requirements.

#### *4.5. Participation in Teaching Assistant Workshops and Professional Development Workshop Series (Additional details in Section 12)*

All first-year students are required to participate in all days of the Sociology Department's Teaching Assistant (TA) Workshop held prior to the start of fall semester. International TAs also must attend the university-wide International TA Program usually in early to mid-August. Graduate students are required to participate in the professional development workshop series offered in Sociology.

#### *4.6. Responsible Conduct of Research Certification (Additional details in Section 12)*

RCR training involves university, college, and departmental requirements. To comply with MSU's requirements for training in the responsible conduct of research, all graduate students in the Department of Sociology in the MSU College of Social Science (SSC) engaged in research must complete four hours of Initial RCR education in their first year. The topical modules in CITI include: Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research, Authorship, Plagiarism, and Research Misconduct.

In addition, after completion of the initial RCR, all graduate students must complete six hours of discussion-based training at any time during their program of study. Students are strongly encouraged to complete these before necessary program benchmarks, and are especially encouraged to complete these prior to their comprehensive exams. This information will be tracked in GradPlan.

By the end of their second year of enrollment in the Sociology doctoral program, students will complete three additional MSU online training manuals. Two of these must include CITI Data Management and the Human Research Protection/IRB Certification. We encourage students to

complete CITI Collaborative Research and CITI Peer Review. The full list of choices includes: CITI Collaborative Research, CITI Conflicts of Interest, CITI Financial Responsibility, CITI Mentoring, CITI Peer Review, and Rigor and Reproducibility Course. Details regarding completion of this requirement will be recorded in SABA.

Beginning in Year 3 of the Sociology Doctoral Program, students must complete 3 hours of RCR annual refresher training. Students may either 1) complete additional online CITI courses that are not being used to cover the training courses outlined in the above, 2) participate in the Departmental Professional Development Series Workshops covering aspects of the publishing process (i.e. publication practices, responsible authorship and peer review), navigating mentor/trainee responsibilities, and writing about research methods and protection of human subjects, 3) discussion/training in required coursework, or 4) discussion/training with advisor. Details regarding completion of these requirements will be included in GradPlan.

## **5. Annual Progress Report Guidelines and Time to Degree**

Annual progress reports are conducted for all students in the Sociology doctoral program every year, typically in the spring semester. These reports review students' academic progress and performance, evaluating professional potential in relation to the successful completion of specific benchmarks in the program summarized in Table 1 (i.e., the qualifying paper, comprehensive exam, dissertation proposal, etc.). Once a year, students will complete the progress report and submit it to the Graduate Secretary for review by the student's advisor and the Graduate Program Director.

A student's progress will be evaluated as either satisfactory or not satisfactory with regard to meeting sociology program requirements in a timely manner toward degree completion. For those students making satisfactory progress, the student and advisor will meet to review the student's progress, goals, and timeline to meeting program objectives and requirements. Students are also encouraged to request feedback from other guidance committee members and the Graduate Program Director.

For students determined not to be making satisfactory progress toward completion of program requirements, the student, advisor, and Director of Graduate Studies will meet to discuss the student's progress to date and jointly outline a course of action to move toward meeting the requirements of the doctoral program. Formal, signed documentation of this meeting will be placed on record in the student's file in the Sociology Department Graduate Office. The student, advisor, and Director of Graduate Studies are jointly responsible for monitoring whether the student meets the objectives outlined in the work plan during this probationary period in the program. Failure to adhere to the work plan in terms of deadlines and objectives within the specified time frame will result in dismissal from the graduate program.

Expectations for normal progress assume students enter the program with a bachelor's degree in sociology or a related field. Meeting department requirements for program benchmarks regarding progress is necessary for securing departmental funding as a Teaching Assistant (TA) or Research Assistant (RA). Departmental requirements include successfully presenting the qualifying paper in your second year in the program, completing your comprehensive exams by

the end of your fourth year in the program, completing your dissertation proposal within one year of your comprehensive exams (e.g., your fifth year in the program), and successfully defending your dissertation within one year of passing your proposal defense (i.e., typically the sixth year of the program). Note that with regard to time to completion, your advisor and guidance committee may have a modified set of expectations to facilitate your degree completion in a timely manner to secure post-graduate school employment prospects. Meeting University requirements is necessary for final degree conferment.

## 6. Graduate Advisor and Guidance Committee

Students are assigned temporary advisors upon entering the sociology graduate program. During the spring semester of their first year, students must select their graduate advisor who will serve as the chair of their guidance committee. This individual may, but need not, be their temporary advisor. The student must add their remaining guidance committee members by the beginning of their third semester of graduate study, with consultation from their graduate advisor. Prior to forming their guidance committee, the student—in consultation with their temporary or graduate advisor—will work out a tentative list of all courses to be taken each semester throughout their program of study. Immediately after forming, the guidance committee will meet to discuss and formalize the student's program of study. After such formalizing, the student will enter this program of study information (i.e., courses to be taken, comprehensive exam topics, dissertation topic, guidance committee members, etc.) into GradPlan ([gradplan.msu.edu](http://gradplan.msu.edu)). A student's program of study may be revised at any time during their graduate study.

The Guidance Committee must consist of at least four tenure-system faculty members with regular appointments in their respective departments at Michigan State University. The composition of the committee must include three sociology faculty members, one of whom serves as the graduate advisor. One committee member must be from outside of the sociology department. In some cases, sociology faculty members holding majority appointments in other departments or programs may serve as the outside committee member. The Ph.D. Guidance Committee composes and evaluates the students' comprehensive examinations, meets with the student to consider the proposed dissertation, reviews the dissertation, and conducts the final oral examination.

**Note:** A student may change guidance committee members, including their graduate advisor, at any time during their graduate study using GradPlan. All committee members—old and new—need to approve of this change in GradPlan. Retired and emeriti faculty are only available to serve on guidance committees during the first two terms of their retirement. Faculty not in the tenure-system or faculty who have been retired for more than two semesters may only serve on committees in addition to the required four tenure-system members.

For more information on advising and mentoring, please see the [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook of the Graduate School](#).

## 7. Qualifying Paper Description and Guidelines

Within their first two years in the program, students will produce a high-quality scholarly research paper suitable for publication in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal and/or presentation at a professional meeting. This qualifying paper must engage sociological theory and be empirically based, reporting the results of rigorous data analysis. Students should aim for a final manuscript of approximately 9000 words (not counting tables and figures). Research for this qualifying paper must be consistent with Responsible Conduct for Research (RCR) guidelines for the university, college, and department. For primary data collection and secondary data analysis including human subjects, researchers must obtain approval of the Human Research Protection Program (<http://hrpp.msu.edu/>). Students must deliver a 15-20 minute oral presentation of this paper at a Sociology Department colloquium. The department schedules two such colloquia a year, once each semester. See the department calendar for exact dates each semester.

Students will prepare a polished draft of their qualifying paper and submit it to their advisor and members of their guidance committee for consideration. The committee reviews the submission to determine sufficient content and suitability for presentation; committee approval means only minor revisions to the paper are required. Once the committee approves of the submission, the student submits the signed 'Graduate Student Qualifying Paper Approval Form' to the Sociology Graduate Program Secretary. Upon submission of this form, the student will be permitted to deliver the oral presentation of the paper. Student is required to practice the talk with her/her committee before the Qualifying Paper Presentation.

Students must give a presentation of this paper at a department colloquium. The audience will be Sociology department faculty and graduate students. The verbal presentation of the material in the paper is in the form of a talk that would be given at a professional meeting and includes appropriate ancillaries (e.g. PowerPoint slides, handouts, etc.). The presentation is expected to be roughly 15 minutes; a short question and answer period will follow the talk. Presentations will be given twice a year, once each semester; usually in the 10<sup>th</sup> week of the semester in a department-wide colloquium. See the department calendar for exact dates each semester. Once the final version of the qualifying paper is complete, a form or letter with a final grade for the paper must be submitted and signed by the chair and two other members of the guidance committee. Students will be expected to submit an electronic copy of their Qualifying Paper to the department for departmental records.

Upon successful completion and presentation of the qualifying paper, students may choose to submit this qualifying paper to the [Graduate School](#) to obtain an M.A. degree. See Appendix (Section 12) for more information. [For those students who do intend to obtain an M.A. degree, the qualifying paper serves for what the university calls a masters' thesis. The program of study requires enrollment in at least (4) credits of SOC 899 (maximum of 8 credits) to obtain this credential during the student's program of study. Submission of the paper must be in line with requirements of the Graduate School and includes electronic submission and formatting specifics. Note students are responsible for paying the required fees for M.A. degree processing and electronic. See the [Graduate School website](#) for detailed information. For all students, the completion of the qualifying paper is a time of evaluation. Each student's guidance committee

must recommend to the department whether or not the student should be allowed to continue in the program.

Students entering the graduate program in sociology at Michigan State University can request to have the qualifying paper requirement waived if they have written a Master's Thesis in Sociology or in a related field. The GPD will select two SOC faculty members to evaluate the thesis and submit their written assessment to the GPD of whether the thesis meets the expectations of the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University.

## **8. Guidelines for the Comprehensive Examination**

The comprehensive examination's purpose is to give doctoral students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of general and specialized areas of sociology, ability for independent scholarship, and writing skills, including the ability to organize, synthesize, and critique sociological scholarship.

In preparation for the comprehensive exam, students convene a meeting of their Guidance Committee to determine the three areas in which they will be tested and their selected model from three possible options. The comprehensive examination should be the nexus for 1) foundational works in sociology and/or specific subfields of sociology; and 2) frontier works that redirect thinking. The accomplishment of this goal is the responsibility of individual students and committee members, acknowledging that the areas designated should be neither too broad (e.g., structural inequality or conflict) nor too narrow (e.g., sociology of German-Catholic farm families). American Sociological Association's sections provide examples and guidance regarding what constitutes an area ([www.asanet.org](http://www.asanet.org)).

The comprehensive examination can be designed according to the 'Pyramid', 'Venn', or '3 question' model. Once the areas and model are agreed upon, the student will prepare statements that delineate the essential nature of each and meet as necessary with her/his chair to refine them. A chair may suggest that a student work with another committee member who has special expertise in one or another of a student's areas. Each of these three 1-3 page statements should provide a narrative that outlines 1) central issues/debates in the area, 2) the student's focus within the area, 3) rationale for the types of literature included on the reading list; and 4) questions/issues to be addressed in preparing for the examination.

We strongly encourage students to prepare an introduction to the statements wherein fields and sub-fields are described and the relationships among the three areas chosen are shown. Students will prepare reading lists for each area, ensuring that key synthetic texts are incorporated, to provide depth to the written statements. A useful guideline for each is that each list should include about 50 pieces of literature (i.e. both articles and books), recognizing that some areas may require a greater or lesser number of works than others.

Once the student's advisor has approved the statements and reading lists, these materials should be distributed to all members of the Guidance Committee for review, who may request clarification or otherwise amend statements and/or add literature to the reading lists. Once tentative agreement has been reached on these, a student should convene a meeting of all

Guidance Committee members. At this meeting, guidance committee members will approve the statements and reading lists, determine a date for the examination, agree on a division of labor and timetable for finalizing the exam, and discuss any concerns the student may have. After approval, students begin preparing for their examination. The Advisor (i.e. Chair of the Guidance Committee) will complete necessary documentation about the meeting and provide dates for the comprehensive examination. This form will be given to the Graduate Program Director or Graduate Secretary and retained in the student's file.

The reading lists are considered final after this meeting and are valid for six months. If the exam is not taken within six (6) months of the meeting, Guidance Committee members will review the reading lists and modify accordingly. Exam dates may only be changed under exceptional circumstances—contact the Graduate Program Director and Graduate Secretary for details.

A student's approved statements, reading lists, and draft questions serve as guidelines for the Guidance Committee members to use in finalizing the exam. Although the examination will not require knowledge of literature outside of the reading lists, a question may ask a student to analyze one (1) new article, a copy of which will be appended to the exam.

Guidance Committee members will submit questions to the chair of the committee at least two weeks before the scheduled beginning of the examination. The Chair of the Guidance Committee will circulate the complete exam to all members of the committee for review before giving it to a student. After consensus, the chair will submit the final examination to the Graduate Secretary. Students should contact the Graduate Secretary the morning of their examination to receive it and must return the completed examination to her/him at the designated date and time of completion. The Graduate Secretary is responsible for distributing students' answers to the members of a students' Guidance Committee. Fifteen working days after the student submits the examination, not counting semester breaks and university holidays, the Chair of the Guidance Committee notifies the student of the Committee's decision about the exam.

### *8.1. Comprehensive Exam Models*

Two main models are currently used to design comprehensive examinations. A third, emerging model is being developed: the '3 question' model.

The Triangle Model begins with an exploration of master works in a student's field of concentration (e.g., environmental sociology or health and medicine). This exploration is followed by specification and exploration of an area within the field, one that has a discrete topical or empirical orientation (e.g., natural resource conflict or women's health). Finally, a particular well-developed locus of concern (e.g., labor versus environmental movements or marriage, technology, and health) is articulated and critiqued. Approximately fifty works from the field, fifty from the area, and fifty from the locus are listed and the rationale for their inclusion discussed. The dissertation is anticipated to focus on the locus of concern.

The Venn Model begins with three analytically discrete areas that intersect and overlap. Within each field, a student must define and show an understanding of key texts, explain how and why certain areas of concern in these texts matter, and locate these moments in particular exchanges

or empirical issues. Often the central areas within field will reflect overlap between fields, and the particular locus of concern will be the place where all three fields overlap. The dissertation is anticipated to be oriented around multiple perspectives on, or synthetic views of, sociological phenomena within the three fields.

In the Venn model, the three fields might be the sociology of agriculture, environmental sociology, and science and technology studies. After exploring key historical texts, the sociology of agriculture field might be narrowed to focus on the areas of agricultural environment and agricultural tech, finishing by examining a locus centered on agricultural-tech-environment relations. The same process would be followed in the remaining two fields. The environmental sociology statement would end with an exploration of how a particular orientation to environment or agriculture of technology generates different concerns. The science and technology statement would indicate the alternative loci coming from that perspective. Another example might be the fields of the sociology of development, migration, and work on community. The number of texts across the three fields in the Venn model would be similar to those in the Triangle model (approximately 50 in 1, 50 in the second, and 50 in the third). The final number of texts is determined by the student, major professor and guidance committee.

## *8.2. Examination Procedures*

Students will have a total of 15 consecutive days to spend writing answers to the exam. The comprehensive examination will require a student to answer a total of three (3) questions, and she/he will have some choice among questions. In answering questions, students should keep in mind that each should be no more than 25 double-spaced pages in length, not including the references, and that each answer will be evaluated according to three criteria: content, style, and originality.

Students may not consult with other individuals in writing their answers, although they may ask the chair of the committee or designated committee member to clarify the meaning of a question. Students must be enrolled during the semester they begin the comprehensive exam.

## *8.3. Grading*

Each of the exam answers will be evaluated according to the following three criteria regarding content, style, and originality. Regarding content, the answers will be critiqued according to the question of the extent to which the discussion of the area encompass its breadth and depth, the degree to which works are compared synthetically or integratively with regard to describing relations between and among them, and whether the answer demonstrates the capacity to conduct independent scholarship. In terms of style, evaluative criteria include the answer's organizational structure (i.e. introduction, discussion, conclusion) and the extent to which it is written in a clear, concise, and direct manner. The final evaluative criterion is originality, which encompasses the degree to which the answers suggest new directions for thinking about an issue and evaluation of how interesting and engaging the answer is.

There are 3 possible results for the comprehensive exam: 1) Pass: answers to all three questions are satisfactory and no additional writing is required; 2) Pass with Distinction: answers to all

three questions are original, interesting, and engaging; and 3) Fail: one or more of the three answers contains major deficiencies and is not considered a passing answer. All results are reported to the GPD.

Grading the exam is the responsibility of the entire Guidance Committee. Each member of the committee reads the entire exam and prepares a written evaluation of it; specialists in one or more areas are expected to prepare substantive evaluations for the questions they wrote. The reported results reflect the committee's joint decision. If a majority of the members (i.e., three people) vote to pass an answer, it is automatically considered a pass. If two of the four members consider the answer a fail, it is automatically considered a fail. In such an instance, committee members may meet to attempt to reconcile their different opinions. The chair of a student's Guidance Committee is responsible for notifying the Graduate Program Director (GPD) and the student of the results of the examination simultaneously. The results must be communicated within 15 working days of when she/he turned in the exam. Note that between term breaks and summers do not count as working days.

When a failing grade is earned, the results report for the answers will include the area(s) and question(s) in which a deficiency was shown, detailed feedback indicating deficiencies in the answer(s) was/were deficient, and conditions regarding taking the exam a second time. Students may retake the complete comprehensive exam or the parts they failed once. The question(s) given for a retake exam will be new questions and not simply a revision of a previous answer. Students who retake part of the exam will have the specified amount of time according to how much of the exam is being retaken. That is, a student will have five days to answer one question, ten days to answer two questions, and fifteen days to answer three questions. When a student retakes all or part of an exam, the only possible outcomes are Pass and Fail, either of which is reported to the University. A student who fails all or part of the comprehensive examination two times will be removed from the graduate program, i.e., she/he will no longer be a candidate for the Ph.D. degree. When a student must retake part or all of the exam but does not retake it within six (6) months of when the reading list was approved, the members of the Guidance Committee may make changes to the reading list. Students should also bear in mind College and University deadlines for completion of the comprehensive exam.

## **9. Dissertation**

### *9.1. The Dissertation Proposal*

A student works with his/her major advisor to develop a dissertation proposal, including details regarding its structure, length, and content. At a minimum, however, the proposal must include the following five elements: introduction, literature review, research questions, research plan, and contribution of this project to the discipline.

The introduction and statement of the proposed research includes relevant literature and noting the gaps in current scholarship. The theory and literature review provides background material necessary for defining the parameters of your proposed topic and its significance for sociological scholarship. The third element, research questions and specific aims of your research, includes hypotheses to be tested and how you will empirically assess your substantive topic. The fourth,

the research plan, includes data to be gathered, proposed methods of data collection, timeline for data gathering and, where appropriate, details regarding specific analytical techniques to be employed. Information about obtaining human subjects approval also needs to be included. The fifth element is discussion of the contribution the dissertation makes to the discipline and necessary resources required to complete the project, including description of the importance of the dissertation as well as its theoretical, methodological, and substantive contributions.

The student works with the advisor to determine when the dissertation proposal will be distributed to the full guidance committee. Committee members will have at least two to three weeks to review the proposal prior to the meeting with the full committee and student to discuss the proposal. This meeting will take the form of a proposal defense where the student makes a public presentation of the proposed dissertation topic to all members of the guidance committee and the Sociology Department. Upon successful completion of the dissertation proposal defense, the student will submit the necessary departmental paperwork and may then officially begin data collection and analysis for the dissertation project.

## *9.2 Dissertation Process*

The student typically works under the direction of the advisor on their dissertation project. The general outline of the dissertation proposal, as described in the previous section, will be expanded in substantial detail according to the expectations of the major professor and the guidance committee on the chosen substantive topic. The student is expected to work closely with the advisor and designated committee members on specific topics and chapters in the dissertation project and submit work periodically in a structure agreed upon by all involved parties. Although there is variability, it is important to adhere to a specified timeline for completion of specific tasks related to the full dissertation project to ensure timely progression to complete the degree.

Students should contact their advisor and guidance committee members to work out a timeline for submission to allow for careful review of the dissertation. A minimum of two to three weeks notice prior to the scheduled defense is required; in some cases a longer timeline is appropriate and preferred between submission of the material to the committee and the defense.

A multi-article dissertation is an alternative to the dissertation described above that is assumed to be on a single substantive topic. With full committee approval and support, students also have the option to write 3 or more separate papers or articles in a multiple manuscript dissertation. The major professor/committee chair and guidance committee members determine the suitability of these manuscripts as stand-alone publishable articles. Students selecting this model must also complete an introductory chapter to the dissertation that provides the general theme and structure of the dissertation and a conclusion that integrates the key findings of the three empirical studies. When selecting this option, each of the chapters proposed as an article must fulfill the standards acceptable for publishing an article in a reputable sociological journal. That is, each manuscript must conform to the expected article format and include a literature review, data and methods section, results or findings, discussion, conclusion, tables and figures (as appropriate), and references.

## 10. Academic Standards

### *10.1. Time to Degree Completion*

The doctoral degree program in sociology is designed to take six years to complete. Program benchmarks and expected timing related to advisor selection, guidance committee composition, the qualifying research paper, comprehensive exams, the dissertation proposal and dissertation, are outlined in Table 1 of this handbook. In addition to these departmental expectations, the MSU Graduate School provides deadlines that are maximum allotted time to complete degree requirements. University guidelines mandate that all requirements for the degree must be completed within eight years of acceptance into the program and that comprehensive exams must be successfully completed within five years of entry into the doctoral program. If the eight year time limit is not met for degree completion, the student will be dismissed from the program. Note that further details regarding program benchmarks are located in Table 1 and Section 5 of this handbook. Under extraordinary extenuating circumstances that are documented and verifiable, and with the support of their advisor and the Graduate Program Director, a student may apply for an extension to their program of study. This request must be requested prior to the university-mandated eight year deadline for degree completion.

### *10.2. Grade Point Average Requirements, Course Waivers and Substitutions*

To receive a Ph.D. degree in sociology, a student must have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0. In addition, the Sociology Department requires students to have a GPA of at least 3.0 in the core courses of SOC 815, SOC 816, SOC 881, SOC 882, SOC 885, the second methods course, and grades less than 3.0 in no more than two of the six elective courses required for the degree. Courses where the minimum grade of 3.0 is not met must be retaken; students must earn a 3.0 or better for the course retake.

Deferred grades may be given if work has been satisfactory, but has not been completed because of extenuating circumstances. When giving a DF-Deferred grade in a course, the required work must be completed and a grade reported within six months with the option of a single six-month extension. If the required work is not completed within the time limit, the class will have to be retaken. This rule does not apply to graduate thesis or dissertation work credits. Unfulfilled deferred grades delay a student's rate of progress in the program and places students at risk of not meeting the requirements for making satisfactory progress. This may also reduce one's chances on obtaining departmental financial aid in the form of a teaching assistantship (TA) and/or research assistantship (RA).

Substitutions are possible for required sociology courses and are considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to review once a semester by the Graduate Program Director in consultation with the Graduate Education Committee. Course waivers and substitutions require approval of the advisor, committee approval, and approval of the MSU faculty member who has recently taught the graduate course in the SOC department curriculum. Students must provide a copy of the syllabus and materials submitted for course requirements for the outside course they are seeking to have count in their MSU SOC graduate program for evaluation of content. Official documentation will consist of a memo outlining the details of the request, evaluation process,

and decision completed by the student and advisor in consultation with the guidance committee. This memo will be placed on file in the SOC Department office and also in GradPlan. Students should contact their advisor or the Graduate Program Director to discuss.

### *10.3. English Requirements For International Students*

All international students are required to demonstrate competence in English sufficient for graduate study. Scores in examinations at the MSU English Language Center or TOEFL scores determine sufficient competence. Admission to the program and funding (where applicable) is automatically provisional until this requirement is satisfied. Delay in satisfying this requirement and failure to enroll in recommended English language courses are grounds for dismissal from the program. International students who wish to hold a teaching assistantship are required to meet higher English language standards than those required of other graduate students. English Language Center or TOEFL scores of sufficient magnitude must be submitted prior to any appointment as a teaching assistant.

## **11. Student Responsibilities**

### *11.1. Academic Honesty, Integrity of Scholarship and Grades*

Students in the doctoral program will be held to the highest standards of academic and professional integrity. Academic integrity refers to misrepresentation in written course assignments including plagiarism or representing another's work as one's own, submitting one's own writing as original work in more than one class, and falsifying data related to the authenticity of its collection and presentation of results. Such conduct is subject to review and may serve as grounds for dismissal from the doctoral program. Students should direct questions about issues of misconduct to their advisors and the Graduate Program Director.

When a graduate student's cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 in a semester, the student will be placed on academic probation. If the overall GPA does not rise above a 3.0 in the following semester, the student may be dismissed from the graduate program. Consistent with University policy, students will not receive academic credit for graduate courses in which a grade below 2.0 is earned; these courses will not count in a student's program of study.

[GradPlan](#) is the official website for all doctoral student program planning, guidance committee reports and changes, comprehensive and final defense reports, submission of the dissertation to the Graduate School, and the final University degree certification.

### *11.2. False information.*

Students who provide fraudulent information and misrepresentation will have this conduct reviewed, with appropriate disciplinary action to be determined by the Graduate Program Director. Examples of fraud and misrepresentation include, but are not limited to, providing false statements in financial aid applications, identifying as a student of the program when not officially enrolled and paying university fees, providing false information about program progress, and providing false statements in application materials at any point prior to and during

enrollment in the degree program. Upon review, such actions may be grounds for dismissal from the doctoral program in Sociology.

## **12. Appendices - Important Policies Related to Graduate Education**

### **[Academic Programs](#)**

Academic Programs is the listing of programs, policies and related information for all students at MSU. This link takes you to the section on graduate education.

### **[Anti-Discrimination Policy \(ADP\)](#)**

The policy outlines prohibited discrimination, and procedures for mediation and adjudication. Know the policy and the user's manual

### **[CITI Training](#)**

Regulatory Affairs has licensed hundreds of online CITI courses for the entire MSU community. Topics range from animal care, GCP, GLP, RCR.

### **[Code of Teaching Responsibility](#)**

Satisfaction of teaching responsibilities by instructional staff members is essential to the successful functioning of a university. This document dictates the expected duties and responsibilities of all instructors. It can be found in the Academic Programs guide.

### **[Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#)**

MSU is responsible for maintaining student education records and is responsible for their access to and release in accordance with FERPA. Details on MSU guidelines surrounding FERPA can be found in Academic Programs in the section called "Michigan State University Access to Student Information."

### **[Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities](#)**

The GSRR specifically addresses student conduct, academic pursuits, keeping of records, and publications. It describes procedures for formulating regulations governing student conduct and for providing due process in the adjudication of student disciplinary cases. It also defines channels and procedures for student complaints and grievances.

### **[Guidelines on Authorship](#)**

The intent of this document is to serve as a general guideline for consideration of important issues surrounding authorship as scholars construct a piece of work for public distribution. Some programs have their own written policies.

### **[Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships](#)**

The effective advising and mentoring of graduate students is the joint responsibility of the graduate degree-granting and program units, the faculty advisors, and the students. The guidelines are intended to foster faculty/graduate student relationships that are characterized by honesty, courtesy, and professionalism, and that provide students with intellectual support and guidance.

### **Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities**

Integrity in research and creative activities is based not only on sound disciplinary practice but also on a commitment to basic personal values such as fairness, equity, honesty, and respect. These guidelines are intended to promote high professional standards by everyone—faculty, staff, and students alike.

### **Human Research Protection Program**

The HRRP's primary mission is the protection of individuals who are the subjects of research. MSU has established three Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) that have oversight for all research conducted under its Federal Wide Assurance.

### **Institutional Data Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to establish minimum requirements for the appropriate stewardship of Institutional Data. Departments and labs may have their own additional requirements.

### **Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee**

The IACUC advises the University President and the Institutional Official regarding all aspects of the responsible use of animals in university research and instructional activities. The IACUC reviews protocols, and the animal care and use program, and monitors related activities to ensure compliance with standards and regulatory requirements.

### **Law Student Rights and Responsibilities**

This document and related documents (including the Academic Hearing Procedures for the MSU College of Law and the Code of Student Discipline) contain guidelines to the rights and responsibilities of law students in matters of conduct, professionalism and ethics, academic pursuits, keeping of records, and employment.

### **Medical Student Rights and Responsibilities**

This MSRR contains guidelines to the rights and responsibilities of medical students in matters of conduct, academic pursuits, keeping of records, and employment. This document describes structures and procedures for adjudicating medical student disciplinary cases, and for channeling medical student complaints, grievances, or concerns to faculty, staff, and administrators for appropriate action.

### **MSU/GEU Contract – May 16, 2015 – May 15, 2019**

The GEU contract dictates terms and conditions of employment for graduate teaching assistants at MSU, and includes agreements on rates of pay, hours, health care, and procedures for the resolution of differences.

### **Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct**

This policy provides definitions and also outlines mandatory reporting procedures. You are a mandatory reporter.

### **Procedures Concerning Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Creative Activities**

This report details the procedures for the investigation and evaluation of alleged or apparent misconduct in order to safeguard the integrity of research and creative activities at MSU.

### **Research Assistant Template Letter**

This letter is maintained and updated by the Graduate School in collaboration with HR. It contains information that must be conveyed for appointments to be processed through the MSU hiring system.

### **Responsible Conduct of Research Plans**

See page 8 of the Sociology Graduate Handbook for specific requirements for research integrity training.

### **Teaching Assistant Template Letter**

This letter is maintained and updated by the Graduate School in collaboration with HR. It meets all of the requirements of the GEU contract and MUST be used for all TA appointments.