

**New Mexico State University**

**Department of Sociology**



**Graduate Program Handbook**

**2022-2023**

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## Department of Sociology Overview

The Department of Sociology at New Mexico State University has a mission to serve the University, state, United States/Mexico border region, and beyond through: 1) courses and curricula based on a core value of theoretical and social diversity, 2) scholarship and creative activity that advances knowledge and promotes a more just society, 3) service to the university, the discipline, and the community, and 4) outreach activities focused on social, economic, and cultural issues of concern to people locally, nationally, and globally.

The department offers a diverse curriculum covering a wide range of topics, and all graduate students receive a thorough grounding in theoretical and methodological aspects of sociology. NMSU's unique location attracts faculty and students who are interested in peoples of the southwest, particularly Hispanics/Latinos and American Indians. In addition, the University's proximity to the U.S./Mexico border provides an ideal context for the examination of such issues as globalization, transnational migration, and the consequences of border development. Faculty routinely examine the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in both research and teaching. Based on current course offerings, research endeavors, and faculty specializations, the department has three main areas of focus:

- Inequality
- Environment/Development
- Institutions and Organizations
- Research Methods

The Graduate Program in Sociology offers a terminal Master's Degree that can be pursued either in an on-campus or online format. There are two tracks possible for the on-campus program: thesis or comprehensive written exam. Online students are only able to participate in the comprehensive exam track at this time. The Department typically has between 50-60 graduate students enrolled in our graduate programs. There are currently 11 full-time, tenure-track faculty, as well as several adjunct faculty who together work with students to foster a high level of interaction, learning, and mentoring. The graduate program's goal is to prepare students both professionally and personally to pursue further study in a doctoral program or a future career using sociological tools. We have a low student-to-faculty ratio, which allows for maximum student-faculty interaction, smaller seminar classes, and quality mentorship for those students who wish to complete a Master's Thesis.

The Department also offers a Graduate Minor in Sociology for students currently enrolled in other graduate programs at NMSU.

Sociology graduate students are valued, active participants in intellectual discussions and research pursuits. We have had students work as research assistants on faculty grants, collaborate with faculty members to co-author publications, and present papers at professional meetings.

The department awards 6-7 Graduate Assistantships (GAs) each year to new and current students. Graduate Assistants can be funded for up to four semesters, and are usually employed for 10 hours a week. Graduate Assistants are assigned an office within the Department, and have access to computers and printers. General graduate students are also invited to use graduate student-designated office space, and also have access to computers and printers.

*Several resources were adapted in the creation of this handbook of graduate program guidelines, namely from Ohio University, the University of Oklahoma, and the Departments of Psychology and Anthropology at NMSU.*

## Department of Sociology and NMSU Guidelines

### **2. POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND DEGREE REQUIREMENTS**

The Master of Arts degree in sociology is a 36-credit hour program designed through tracks that require students to work toward either a thesis or a written comprehensive exam. Further, the MA program is structured through two different options: an on-campus MA cohort or an entirely online MA cohort. On-campus MA students may choose from either the thesis track or comprehensive exam track. The thesis track is typically selected by students who intend to pursue a doctoral degree, while the comprehensive exam track is commonly pursued by students desiring immediate employment. Online MA students are only able to pursue the comprehensive exam track at this time.

Both the thesis and comprehensive exam tracks require core courses (SOC 5110, SOC 5153, SOC 5157, SOC 5163, SOC 5165) that must be taken within the first 27 hours of graduate credits. It is recommended that students take the core courses as early as possible. A grade of B- or better is required to receive credit for each core course.

The thesis track also has six required master's thesis credits (SOC 5999) that should be taken after successful defense of the master's thesis proposal. A student may take more than six thesis credits; however only six may be used to satisfy departmental graduation requirements.

Both the thesis and comprehensive exam tracks require additional 5000 level Sociology courses (15 credits for on-campus thesis track; 21 credits for on-campus comprehensive exam track; 21 credits for online comprehensive exam track) for completion of the degree. Within Sociology, courses at the 4000 level are considered undergraduate courses and do not count toward your elective requirements.

Thesis track students must successfully defend a master's thesis in their final semester in the program. Comprehensive exam track students must successfully pass a final master's written examination on required coursework once all core classes have been completed with a grade of B- or better earned in each course.

#### **On-Campus Program vs. Online Program**

The on-campus and online MA programs are distinct, and have separate cohorts that begin in the fall of each academic year. Once a student is admitted into the on-campus or online program, the student is expected to remain in that program through degree completion. If a student wishes to switch, the student must discuss this with the Graduate Director. Online courses are usually reserved for online program students, and on-campus courses are intended for on-campus students. On occasion, online students may wish to take an on-campus course, or on-campus students may wish to take an online course. The student must make a formal request, in writing, to enroll in such course to the Graduate Director.

#### **Graduate Coursework**

A typical graduate student course load is 9-credit hours (usually three 3-credit courses). On occasion, students may wish to enroll in more credit hours; however, the academic and personal demands of graduate school can often be overwhelming if students take more than three classes in a semester. The department has a typical plan of study, which is noted on the following page, for on-campus students. Online students are urged to follow a similar plan of study so that degree requirements can be fulfilled in a timely manner. Full-time students are expected to complete all degree requirements by the end of the fourth semester of study.

It is not unusual for online students to take fewer than 9 credits per semester. These students often choose to take 6 credits a semester for one or more of the following reasons 1. Nine credits hours is excessive for individuals who have

significant employment and/or family responsibilities 2. Six credits is usually the minimum number of credits needed to qualify for financial aid (consult with the financial aid office for your particular circumstances) 3. Six credit hours a semester results in a reasonable time to degree (6 semesters).

### Master's Degree Plan of Study

The following plan of study is based on 36 credits required for both on-campus and online students pursuing the Master's Degree in sociology. Students are welcome to take summer courses, however core required courses are not offered in the summer (only elective courses are offered, and only as university funding allows).

Fall Semester I	Spring Semester I
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Perspectives on Sociology (5110)*</li> <li>➤ Classical Sociological Theory (5165)*</li> <li>➤ Qualitative Research Methods (5157)*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Quantitative Research Methods (5153)*</li> <li>➤ Issues in Quantitative Analysis (5163)*</li> <li>➤ Sociology Elective</li> </ul>
<i>9 total credit hours</i>	<i>9 total credit hours</i>

Fall Semester II	Spring Semester II
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sociology Elective**</li> <li>➤ Sociology Elective</li> <li>➤ Sociology Elective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Sociology Elective**</li> <li>➤ Sociology Elective</li> <li>➤ Sociology Elective</li> </ul>
<i>9 total credit hours</i>	<i>9 total credit hours</i>

*\*Denotes required courses (15 credits total) that must be taken within the first 27 hours of Graduate credit. A grade of B- or better is required to receive credit for each core course.*

*\*\*Denotes thesis hours (6 credits total) required for the Thesis Track*

## **General Graduate Student Responsibilities**

The Department of Sociology admits a select number of competitive students each academic year for the graduate program. It is important to note that the department has clear expectations for all graduate students, in addition to making adequate progress toward (and eventually completing) the Master's Degree. The following are general graduate student responsibilities:

- Attend classes and be in contact with professors regularly
- Complete all assignments, papers, and exams for classes
- Resolve incompletes within two semesters
- Choose a thesis or comprehensive track
- Be available for NMSU and departmental communication
- Use NMSU email addresses at all times
- Be respectful with fellow students, faculty, and staff
- Follow up with any outstanding assignments in a timely manner
- Participate in departmental opportunities and events
- File all necessary paperwork for theses, exams, and graduation
- Practice professional communication at all times
- Strive to problematize, contextualize, synthesize, analyze, articulate, dialogue, and critique in your academic efforts
- Report issues and concerns directly to the Department Head
- Be the best graduate student possible

All graduate students can use one of the offices designated for graduate student use as a quiet space to study, prepare for class, use computers, or print assignments. Check with the Graduate Director for which offices are available, and please be respectful of fellow students and faculty in close proximity.

## **Graduate Assistant Evaluations and Assistantship Renewal**

At the end of each academic year, the graduate committee will meet to formally evaluate each graduate assistant in terms of overall performance in coursework, progress toward degree completion, timely development of thesis requirements or progress toward completion of comprehensive exam, handling departmental responsibilities, maintaining positive working relationships with fellow students and faculty, fulfillment of Graduate Assistant responsibilities, engaging in professional communication with others, and growth as a professional. The committee will consider the student's performance as exceptional, adequate, problematic. The committee will also discuss the graduate assistant's progress reports, faculty insights, and any additional formally documented information in recommending either renewal or nonrenewal of the Graduate Assistantship. The Graduate Director will forward the recommendations to the Department Head for further consideration.

## **Sociology Graduate Student Organization**

The Sociology Graduate Student Organization (SGSO) is a university-sanctioned organization for sociology graduate students. The SGSO is a great way to meet and socialize with fellow colleagues, participate in university/local service, and obtain funding for research and academic conferences. The SGSO usually meets twice a month, and has both organizational and social meetings. Officers are elected each year, and the SGSO is open to both on-campus and online students who wish to attend.

## **Advisement**

The Graduate Director will be assigned as the advisor for all incoming graduate students. After students arrive, they are encouraged to seek out sociology faculty as advisors who students have research ideas in common. Advisors correspond with the Graduate Director as needed regarding registration, programmatic questions, departmental policies/procedures, progress toward degree completion, and graduation requirements. For thesis-track students, the thesis chair serves as the advisor.

## **Incompletes**

According to the NMSU catalog "Instructors may assign *I* grades only if the student is unable to complete the course due to circumstances beyond the student's control that develop after the last day to withdraw from the course. Examples of appropriate circumstances include documented illness, documented death or crisis in the student's immediate family, and similar circumstances. Job related circumstances are generally not appropriate grounds for assigning an *I* grade. In no case is an *I* grade to be used to avoid the assigning of *D*, *F*, *U*, or *RR* grades for marginal or failing work."

Upon agreement that the student is eligible for an Incomplete, the student and instructor must agree on the requirements for the removal of the *I* and complete the *I* grade information form. Per NMSU policy, incompletes must be resolved within one year.

## **Provisional Acceptance**

In certain cases, graduate students who do not meet the admission requirements of the department may still be accepted provisionally. The student is accepted for a probation period of one semester wherein the student must earn at least an A- in each sociology graduate course taken. Subsequently, written documentation must be submitted from each course instructor demonstrating support of the student being permanently accepted into the program. Students admitted with an undergraduate GPA below 3.0 are automatically assigned provisional status by the graduate school.

## **Professional Communication Expectations**

The department expects all graduate students to behave professionally in the classroom (on-campus and virtual), around departmental offices, and at department and university-sponsored events. Thanks to a technologically savvy, social media-centered culture, students should also be aware that they are representatives of NMSU and the Department of Sociology even when they are not in classes, on university property, or engaging in graduate program duties. Online photos, discussions, comments, and the like reflect on both the student as well as the university. Students should actively engage in professional communication on the telephone, in person, and over email between faculty, staff, and fellow students. Graduate students are advised to report any issues, concerns, conflicts, experiences with hostility, harassment, or inappropriate interactions within the department directly to the Department Head.

## **Academic and Non-academic Misconduct**

Sociology graduate students are held to NMSU policies and procedures regarding misconduct. The Student Code of Conduct defines academic misconduct, non-academic misconduct and the consequences or penalties for each. The Student Code of Conduct is available in the NMSU Student Handbook at: <http://studenthandbook.nmsu.edu/>.

Incidences of academic dishonesty, collusion, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism refers to appropriating excerpts from websites, books, journal articles, etc. without proper in-text citation referring to the original source of the material. For further clarification on what constitutes plagiarism, please refer to NMSU's library website: <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-10/?highlight=plagiarism>

### ***When violations of academic integrity or plagiarism occur in sociology graduate courses:***

The Professor of record will meet with the Graduate Director and Department Head to determine if any violations of academic integrity or plagiarism did, indeed, occur. If they determine it occurred, the incident will be referred to the Chief Academic Officer for NMSU and NMSU protocols will be followed. <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-10/>. Based upon the decision by the Chief Academic Office, the infraction may result in failing the course or being removed from the program without the option to complete the degree.

### ***When violations of academic integrity or plagiarism occur on a thesis:***

The Thesis Committee will meet with the Graduate Director and Department Head to determine if any violations of academic integrity or plagiarism did, indeed, occur. If they determine it occurred, the incident will be referred to the Chief Academic Officer for NMSU and NMSU protocols will be followed. <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-10/>. Based upon the decision by the Chief Academic Office, the infraction may result in the student being removed from the program without the option to complete the degree.

### ***When violations of academic integrity or plagiarism occur on the comprehensive written exam:***

The graders and Department Head will meet to determine if any violations did occur. If they determine it occurred, the incident will be referred to the Chief Academic Officer for NMSU and NMSU protocols will be followed. <https://arp.nmsu.edu/5-10/>. Based upon the decision by the Chief Academic Office, the infraction may result in the student being removed from the program without the option to complete the degree.

## **Ethical Research Conduct**

Graduate students who conduct empirical research while at NMSU shall uphold the New Mexico State University's standards for responsible research. Therefore, incidences of unethical or dishonest behavior while designing or engaging in research will not be tolerated and may result in dismissal from the program. Students are responsible for obtaining Human Subjects Training and must comply with research regulation monitored by the Office of Research Compliance. Students are also responsible for obtaining approval from NMSU's Institutional Review Board for involvement in any original or collaborative research projects.

Graduate students in the Department of Sociology are ultimately responsible for upholding specific ethical standards as established through the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics: maintaining professional competence; behaving with integrity in research, teaching, practice, and service; upholding professional and scientific responsibility; maintaining respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity; and engaging in application and service with regard to social responsibility.

## **Graduate Minor**

The Sociology MA program, with the permission of the graduate advisor, allows for an approved graduate minor. A minimum of 9 credits of graduate work is necessary for a minor at the master's level. Please access the most current graduate catalog to see if a department has an approved minor and consult with the minor department for specific requirements. To record a minor on a student's permanent record, the minor must be listed on the "Program of Study for Master's Students" and this form must be signed by the head of the department offering the minor program. For sociology graduate students pursuing a thesis, either the Dean's Representative or additional committee member must come from the minor department in forming the thesis committee. Minors are suggested only for those students who demonstrate a clear academic and/or career need that can be met with a particular minor.

## **NMSU General Policies for Graduate Students**

The NMSU Graduate Catalog has detailed policies regarding adding/dropping courses, auditing courses, substitutions and waivers, challenging graduate courses, changes in registration, residency requirements, leaves of absence, appeals, student behavior, and general requirements for all graduate students enrolled at New Mexico State University. Please access the most current catalog for general policies at: <https://catalogs.nmsu.edu/nmsu/>



## **Leave of Absence / Readmission Policy**

The Graduate School has specific policies regarding leaves of absence and readmission. Usually, students who have extenuating circumstances are able to apply for up to one year of absence, provided the student requests the leave of absence in writing. A graduate student who fails to register for one calendar year without obtaining a leave of absence from the Graduate School will be considered withdrawn from the university. If more than two semesters have passed since a student has enrolled in sociology courses, the student must reapply to the sociology graduate program based on current departmental application procedures and deadlines.

Students who would like to request a leave of absence, should send an email request to the Graduate Director, who will then work with the student to submit the necessary paperwork to the graduate school. Departmental and University policy allows for leaves of absence up to two consecutive semesters. After two semesters, the student must formally reapply to the program based on current application procedures and deadlines.

The graduate program leading to the master's degree must be completed within seven years (or eight successive summers) including completion of the master's thesis or comprehensive exam. Any coursework more than seven years old at the time of the thesis defense or comprehensive exam has expired and will not be applied toward the degree.

## **Graduate Student Forms**

Graduate School forms (Change of Admission Semester, Program of Study (needed to declare a minor), Master's Examination Fee (Written Exam only), Request for Transfer of Credit, Master's Final Exam (Thesis only), Degree Audit Exception) are available on the Graduate School website: <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/Graduate%20Forms.html>. Departmental Forms can be found with the Graduate Director.

## **Transfer of Credit**

A maximum of 9 credits total from outside the program can be applied to your NMSU sociology MA degree. These sources include transfer from other institutions, undeclared credits and other departments within NMSU. A student may transfer up to 9 total graduate credits taken from another university to New Mexico State University (with approval from the Department of Sociology), provided the credits were earned on the campus of an accredited institution and not used to obtain another degree. Up to 6 credits earned from a second master's degree at NMSU and up to 9 graduate credits earned as an undeclared student at NMSU may count toward the Sociology degree if the credits fulfill a 5000-level sociology elective.

Students may not transfer any credits to be used to fulfill the core course requirements for the program (SOC 5110, 5153, 5157, 5163, 5165) as these courses are the basis for the comprehensive exam structure at NMSU. "Request for Transfer of Credit" forms are available from the NMSU Graduate School.

## **Funding Opportunities**

NMSU Sociology is an approved member of the Western Regional Graduate Program (WRGP). This means that students who reside in a member state of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, ND, NV, OR, SD, UT, WA, WY, Guam and the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) are eligible for New Mexico resident rates for up to 6 semesters. For renewal students must maintain a semester GPA of 3.0 or better and pass 5 or more credit hours per semester.

There are some scholarships available for Sociology Graduate Students. Scholar Dollar\$ is the singular application used by students at NMSU. To apply please go to the Scholar Dollar\$ website: <https://scholarships.nmsu.edu/>. The Graduate School offers awards, assistantships, and fellowships to qualified graduate students. All awards require faculty nominations. For more information, please visit the Graduate School website: <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/Awards%20and%20Funding.html>

The Graduate School ([https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/Conference\\_Travel\\_Award.pdf](https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/Conference_Travel_Award.pdf)) offer travel funds for graduate student research, conferences, etc. There are also opportunities to apply for travel funds from the student governing body, ASNMSU through the sociology graduate student organization (SGSO) and our chapter of the sociology honorary society (AKD).

## **Graduate Assistantships**

The Department awards 6-7 Graduate Assistantships (GAs) each year to new and current on-campus students. Graduate Assistants can be funded for up to four semesters, and are usually employed for 10-hours a week. Certain fellowships and tuition waivers are available through the Graduate School that are associated with GAs in the department. Please access the Graduate School webpage for a detailed list of opportunities. These applications are usually due in mid-March during the admission process. If you believe you are eligible please notify the graduate coordinator.

Prospective students interested in a GAship should submit a cover letter and CV online when applying to the Department of Sociology for admission. While current Graduate Assistants do not need to reapply for future GAships, please note that renewal of a GAship is not guaranteed. Current graduate students who have not been awarded a GAship but would like to be considered should submit a cover letter and CV directly to the Graduate Director.

The Department considers a number of factors in awarding and renewing GAships, such as a graduate student's overall GPA, graduate coursework, professional conduct, progress toward degree completion, faculty evaluations of GA work and effort, number of outstanding incompletes, thesis proposal approval, and comprehensive exam timeline. The Graduate Director works with the Department Head to award GAships, allocate hours, and assign GAs to faculty within the department each semester. GA assignments may stay the same from semester to semester, or they may change based on the needs of the department, faculty, or GA.

## **Graduate Assistantship Responsibilities and Duties**

NMSU requires that all Graduate Assistants complete a university-wide orientation, which is usually administered online by the Graduate School. The Department of Sociology also requires all Graduate Assistants participate in a departmental GA training session, held by the Graduate Director. Failure to participate in both these orientation training sessions may result in a student losing their GAship.

Graduate Assistantships start on the faculty report date (usually the Monday before classes start), and end when final grades are turned in (usually the Tuesday after finals week). GAs must be geographically present to begin the semester as of the official faculty/GA report date, and are responsible for contacting the faculty member to initiate a meeting before classes begin. GAs must also be geographically present at the end of the semester until grades are turned in and the faculty member no longer needs the GA to complete course duties.

Graduate Assistants are required to complete a "Faculty/Graduate Assistant Contract" with their assigned faculty member at the start of each new semester. This will allow both the student and the faculty member to exchange contact information, clarify expectations, and resolve any issues before classes begin. Contracts must be turned in to the Director of Graduate Studies by the end of the second week of classes.

The norms for each GA are different since the expectations and needs of each faculty are different. The faculty to whom the GA is assigned should discuss the requirements of the position while completing the faculty/graduate assistant contract. All GAs in the Department of Sociology are expected to:

- Provide instructional support for faculty
- Grade assignments, exams, and papers
- Hold at least 1 office hour per week
- Be present in class/lecture (as requested)
- Tutor students

- Proctor exams (as requested)
- Serve as a conduit between students and the professor
- Attend to bureaucratic responsibilities in a timely manner
- Set a positive example for others
- Complete contracts with assigned faculty
- Be the best graduate student possible

# REQUIREMENTS FOR MA SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS

## On-Campus Thesis Track

### **Required Core Coursework:**

SOCI 5110: Perspectives on Sociology (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5163: Issues in Quantitative Analysis (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5165: Classical Sociological Theory (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5153: Qualitative Sociological Research Methods (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5157: Qualitative Sociological Research Methods (3 cr.)

### **Required Thesis Credits:**

SOCI 5999: Master's Thesis (6 cr.)

### **Elective Credits:**

15 credits in 5000 level sociology courses

### **M.A. Completion Requirements:**

Successful defense of an acceptable master's thesis.

## On-Campus Comprehensive Exam Track

### **Required Core Coursework:**

SOCI 5110: Perspectives on Sociology (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5163: Issues in Quantitative Analysis (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5165: Classical Sociological Theory (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5153: Qualitative Sociological Research Methods (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5157: Qualitative Sociological Research Methods (3 cr.)

### **Elective Credits:**

21 credits in 500 level sociology courses

### **M.A. Completion Requirements:**

Successful passing of a final master's written examination on required coursework.

## Online Comprehensive Exam Track

### **Required Core Coursework:**

SOCI 5110: Perspectives on Sociology (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5163: Issues in Quantitative Analysis (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5165: Classical Sociological Theory (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5153: Qualitative Sociological Research Methods (3 cr.)  
SOCI 5157: Qualitative Sociological Research Methods (3 cr.)

### **Elective Credits:**

21 credits in 500 level sociology courses

### **M.A. Completion Requirements:**

Successful passing of a final master's written examination on required coursework.

## Important Deadlines for Master's Students

Below is a list of important departmental and university deadlines. These deadlines are the responsibility of the student, and should be discussed with the student's advisor and/or thesis chair when necessary. Specific university dates and deadlines are updated annually and can be found on the Graduate School website.

### THESIS TRACK DEADLINES (all forms are indicated in *bold italics*)

- 1) During your final semester of study, apply for graduation using the ***Application for Degree*** through the student records tab on myNMSU. This is usually due without a late fee by the Friday of the first full week of the semester.
- 2) File the ***Master's Final Examination Form*** at least 10 working days before the thesis defense with Graduate Student Services. Verify thesis defense deadlines by semester/academic year with the Graduate School.
- 3) Hold the thesis defense by the deadline established through the Graduate School.
- 4) Complete the ***Thesis Intake Form*** to submit with the thesis for review to the Graduate School.
- 5) Submit three required copies of the thesis to the Branson Library by the deadline set through the Graduate School.
- 6) Submit one required copy of the thesis to the Department of Sociology by the last day of finals in the graduating semester.
- 7) Complete a ***STAR Degree Audit*** verifying that all departmental and university requirements have been satisfied (work with your advisor to verify this).

### COMPREHENSIVE EXAM TRACK DEADLINES (all forms are indicated in *bold italics*)

- 1) File the ***Comprehensive Exam Registration Form*** at the beginning of the exam semester, and no later than one month prior to the exam date. This form is filed with the Department of Sociology. The Master's Final Examination Form is not needed for the Comprehensive Written Exam.
- 2) The student must be enrolled in at least 1 credit during the exam semester.
- 3) Complete a ***STAR Degree Audit*** verifying that all departmental and university requirements have been satisfied.

## II. MASTER'S THESIS TRACK PROCEDURES

The master's thesis is an original research project conducted under the supervision of a faculty committee. The length varies depending upon the subject matter, methods used in the research, and expectations of the thesis chair.

There are several steps involved with the Thesis Track. First, a student secures a thesis chair, and then works with the chair to form a thesis committee. Next, the student works with the chair and committee to write a thesis proposal, which involves a rationale for conducting the proposed research and details the intended research design. Third, the student holds a "Master's Thesis Proposal Approval Meeting" to obtain committee approval for conducting the research. Finally, the student completes the research and writing of the thesis, and subsequently holds a

“Master’s Thesis Defense” to finalize the thesis and complete the requirements for the Master’s Degree in Sociology through the department and the university. See the Graduate School Dissertation/Thesis Guidelines for more details on the requirements for formatting and submission: <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/thesis-and-dissertation.html>

### **Master’s Thesis Chair and Committee**

A student should ideally choose a thesis chair by the end of the first semester of study though this does vary. The thesis chair must be designated graduate faculty (<https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/For%20Faculty%20and%20Staff/department-coordinators.html>) through the university, as well as be tenure-track faculty in the Department of Sociology. In some cases, a student may have co-chairs, but only as necessitated by the research or mitigating circumstance. The master’s degree committee must consist of a minimum of three members. The thesis chair serves as the committee chair, and the second committee member must also be graduate faculty but can either be tenure-track or college-track faculty in the Department of Sociology. A third member serves as the Graduate School Dean’s Representative, and must be from a different department. The Dean’s Representative ensures that the Graduate School policies and procedures are followed throughout the thesis process. The Dean’s Representative is not required to participate in the thesis proposal meeting. If the student has an approved graduate minor, either the Dean’s Representative or an additional committee member must come from the minor department. A student may elect to have more than (but not fewer than) three thesis committee members.

The thesis chair works with a graduate student toward proposal approval and thesis defense. A thesis chair ultimately directs the student’s research activities, such as: choosing a topic, initial research design, suggestions for further reading, developing a theoretical foundation, completing the IRB process, providing critical feedback on emerging analysis and scholarly writing, and guiding both the proposal and defense process. A student is responsible for initiating a timeline with the thesis chair, and the chair should work with the student as much as possible to adhere to the timeline. Thesis chairs are not responsible for writing a graduate student’s thesis, or investing more time and energy into the thesis than does the student. Thesis chairs are not responsible for student work during the summer months, therefore it is important to plan for any defense meetings, writing progress, and mentorship to occur during the academic year.

It is important to recognize that faculty do have different mentorship styles; therefore, it is the student’s responsibility to choose a thesis chair who will provide the ideal context for thesis completion based on compatible working/mentorship styles. Students should also be aware of a faculty member’s plans for sabbatical leave in choosing a thesis chair.

### **Master’s Thesis Proposal**

The purpose of a thesis proposal is to provide a clear and concise formal description of the proposed study, as well as indicate the study’s scholarly and sociological significance. A proposal serves as a “contract” between the student and committee members regarding the nature and scope of the study. Proposals usually take two to four months to write, and range in length. The proposal usually develops through several drafts, with guidance from the thesis chair and committee members. The student is responsible for giving the final proposal draft to the committee at least 14 days before the proposal approval meeting.

The thesis proposal must be successfully approved at least one semester before the actual thesis is defended. The Department has established an internal proposal approval deadline of October 31<sup>st</sup> in order for the student to be considered for Spring/Summer thesis defense, or by April 30<sup>th</sup> to be considered for Fall thesis defense. If a student does not meet the deadline to hold a thesis proposal approval meeting, the student may be forced to take the written

comprehensive exam instead of completing a thesis, as per the department's expectations of a student making adequate progress toward degree completion. In some cases, a student may petition in writing the Director of Graduate Studies and/or the Department Head for special consideration should the thesis proposal approval deadline not be met.

During the thesis proposal approval meeting, the student will present a formal talk on the proposed research (length is determined through discussion with the thesis chair, though expect 15-25 minutes). The committee will then discuss the proposal through questions and comments before making a committee decision to either: *approve the thesis proposal*, *approve the thesis proposal contingent on recommended modifications*, or *not approve the thesis proposal*. If a student's thesis proposal is approved, the student can then begin the thesis research. If a student's thesis proposal is approved contingent on recommended modifications, the student's thesis chair will summarize the required modifications and set a date with the student to finish the modifications and obtain approval before commencing the thesis research. If a student's thesis proposal is not approved, the student will work with the committee to find resolution in rewriting the proposal or consider the comprehensive exam in lieu of writing a thesis. Thesis proposal meetings usually last between 1-2 hours. These can be attended by others if the student and thesis chair approve.

The thesis proposal must be approved before an application is submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of research using human subjects. The student must have approval from IRB before engaging in any data collection or data analysis with human subjects. There are rarely IRB exceptions for sociological research, and the student is responsible for ensuring the thesis research receives IRB approval and notifying the thesis chair that IRB approval has been obtained.

### **Thesis Proposal Structure**

The structure for the thesis proposal may vary in format and organization, depending on the student's research questions, hypotheses, theoretical/research orientations, and overall intent. Some theses chairs have additional, specific requirements for what is included in a thesis proposal document. However, the department expects that the following elements be present in all proposals. It is customary to utilize section headings throughout the actual thesis proposal (with the exception of the title page):

#### ***Title Page (1 page)***

The title page should have an appropriate title for the master's thesis that reflects the specific nature of the proposed study. It should also have the student's contact information, as well as the names of the committee members.

#### ***Introduction (2-5 pages)***

The overall goal of a thesis proposal is to describe a specific, interesting, and feasible research problem, and then explain how the research problem will be addressed through the student's efforts. In the introduction, the general topic is presented and its sociological relevance noted. Introduce the specific scope of the research, and address the overall research question, actual research questions, and/or hypotheses. Also note what data will be used to address the research questions/hypotheses. Conceptual definitions of key terms could be presented in this section. The introduction sometimes includes a discussion of the theoretical perspective(s) that will be taken (if it will not be addressed in the literature review). Briefly introduce the research methods and provide a sort of map of the thesis proposal...what will come first, second, third, etc.

#### ***Literature Review (5-25 pages)***

This section should be a well-organized overview of the research most closely related to the thesis. This may include dominant debates, theoretical approaches, a history of previous research on the problem/issue, and methodological research designs used by others. Address the existing sociological research on the proposed topic or question, noting how the thesis will contribute to the literature. This section should demonstrate the student's familiarity with what research has already been done in the area and it should be constructed in a way that draws on sociological language

and context. Literature reviews are often divided into sections or subsections based on the thesis research questions and/or hypotheses, or relevant themes/debates in the literature. Make sure to explicitly tie the literature to the research problem the thesis intends to address.

### ***The Research Problem / Research Questions / Hypotheses (1-2 pages)***

This section may be included in some capacity throughout the literature review, or may stand on its own in presenting in detail the overall research problem, followed by the study's research questions, hypotheses, and/or study's purpose/aim/rationale. This section may also include the main argument of the proposed thesis. It is important to have research questions/hypotheses that are framed sociologically and can be addressed in the course of a one-year research project.

### ***Methodology (5-7 pages)***

Although this section may vary depending on overall research design, it is probably the most important component of the thesis proposal. Include the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used, and why they are being chosen. The goal is to specify the proposed methodological approach for addressing **how** the study will address the research questions and/or hypotheses. Using future tense, explain in detail (step by step) the research process from inception to finish. How will the data be gathered? Who is the sample, and how will it be obtained? How will access to the sample be gained? How will research sites be chosen? What incentives will be used, and how will consent be obtained? Use appropriate terminology to describe the sampling process. How many surveys will be administered or interviews conducted? What kinds of questions will be asked during the interview or on the survey? How will the interviews be recorded and transcribed? How will the data be coded? What kind of statistical program will be used analyze the data? Be very specific, thorough, and detailed in the description of the methodology. Make sure to also include the limitations of the proposed study. All research has some sort of limitations; it is better to acknowledge them and explain why the study is still important to complete. Also, include any ethical concerns. How will voluntary participation be ensured? How will informed consent be obtained and how will the confidentiality and safety of the research subjects be ensured? How will the data be stored? When will IRB be obtained? Acknowledge the budget (if applicable) and required resources in this section. Also, it may be appropriate in the section (depending on the research) to acknowledge one's positionality; especially when employing feminist methodologies.

### ***Timeline (1-page)***

Provide a reasonable timeline with key deadlines for data collection, analysis, and completion of writing the thesis. This may also be provided as a figure, table, or chart. Consider the departmental and university deadlines for thesis filing, defense, and completion, as well as graduation deadlines from the Graduate School. Be realistic about the timeline!

### ***Preliminary Results/Discussion or Expected Findings (1-3 pages)***

This section may be relevant if there is a pilot study associated with the thesis, or preliminary data has already been collected. The thesis chair may suggest not having this section. However, if agreed upon, use this section to present the preliminary data/results, and discuss how the thesis will build up, extend, rectify, or engage the preliminary results.

### ***Conclusion (1-2 pages)***

Briefly recap the thesis proposal (the research problem, research questions/hypotheses, proposed methodology) and reference the research's sociological and general significance. Articulate again the proposed argument of the thesis, if applicable, and address any expectations with the data. Acknowledge expected findings and how the thesis will contribute to sociology as a discipline.

### ***Works Cited (2-4 pages)***

List all sources that are cited throughout the thesis proposal. Follow the guidelines of the American Sociological Association in formatting the works cited. The reference list for the thesis proposal usually ranges from 25-75 sources.



### **Appendix (1+ pages)**

Include all research tools, such as surveys, interview guides, consent forms, coding categories, and other details about data sources. Include any additional tables, graphs, or charts referred to in the proposal. In some cases, the timeline for the thesis research is included in the appendix and referred to in the body of the proposal.

### **General Considerations in Writing the Thesis Proposal**

Proposals should be typed with an appropriate font, double-spaced, and use 1” margins. In writing every sentence and paragraph, consider both its relevance to the overall research problem as well as what purpose it serves in the proposal. Make sure each section is clearly written, uses future tense, and successfully serves its purpose. Also, consider how what is written fits into the overall proposal’s argument and development. Provide roadmaps throughout each section, as well as write transitions between sections. First person language is perfectly acceptable, especially in the methods section.

### **Master’s Thesis Defense**

A student will work with the thesis chair and committee to determine when the thesis is ready for defense. The student must demonstrate at the thesis defense that the research project approved at the proposal stage has been successfully completed to the satisfaction of the thesis chair and committee members. While the thesis defense should ideally be pro forma, in that the thesis committee will have all seen and had the opportunity to comment on drafts of the thesis before the defense, there is an opportunity at the start of the defense for the committee to adjourn the meeting if the committee members decide the thesis is not ready to be defended. The student may be asked to make revisions to the thesis at the defense, which are normally minor changes, before submitting final copies of the thesis to the department and university. Students are responsible for giving the final thesis draft to the committee at least 14 days before the thesis defense.

The thesis proposal serves as the overall format for writing the actual master’s thesis. All components of the proposal should be represented in some capacity in the actual thesis. There are also specific formatting guidelines established through the Graduate School. Students should access examples of other students’ theses, work with the thesis chair and committee to formulate an appropriate thesis structure, and recognize that the average thesis is roughly 60-80 pages.

When the thesis is ready to defend, the student will file the “Master’s Final Examination Form” with Graduate Student Services at least 10 working days before the intended defense date. The student will report the name and email address of the Dean’s Representative on the final examination form. The Dean’s Representative will then receive the necessary paperwork and will bring it to the defense. Keep in mind that the Graduate School has deadlines for when students can defend throughout the academic year. Make sure to consult with the Graduate School concerning these deadlines. On occasion, students who plan on completing the thesis in spring semester may opt for a summer completion date in order to have a few more weeks to finalize the defense and perform edits to the thesis.

During the thesis defense, the student will present a formal 15-30 minute talk on the thesis research. The committee will then discuss the thesis through questions and comments before making a committee decision to either: *approve the thesis*, *approve the thesis contingent on recommended modifications*, or *not approve the thesis*. If a student’s thesis is approved, the student can finalize the process for graduation. If a student’s thesis is approved contingent on recommended modifications, the student’s thesis chair will summarize the required modifications and set a date with the student to finish the modifications before finalizing the process for graduation. If a student’s thesis is not approved, the student will work with the committee to find resolution in rewriting the thesis or consider the comprehensive exam in lieu of the thesis. Thesis defenses usually last between 1-2 hours, and upon agreement of the student with the thesis chair, can be attended by others.

When the thesis is finalized, the student will complete the “Thesis Intake Form” and submit it with a copy of the thesis for review to the Graduate School. The student is also responsible for submitting three required copies of the thesis to the Branson Library by the deadline set through the Graduate School, as well as submitting one required copy of the thesis to the Department of Sociology by the last day of finals in the graduating semester. It is customary for a graduate

student to present a bound copy of the thesis to the thesis chair upon successful completion of the degree.

### **III. COMPREHENSIVE EXAM TRACK PROCEDURES**

The comprehensive exam is for those on-campus students who are not completing a thesis as well as all online students. The comprehensive exam focuses on assessing student learning in three core areas: sociological theory, research methods, and quantitative analysis (statistics) and asks students to demonstrate successful synthesis of all coursework, knowledge and skills gained throughout the program. The comprehensive exam is held twice per academic year; in October during fall semester and in March during spring semester. The exam is not offered during summer. The general process for the comprehensive exam involves a student completing the required core courses with a B- or better, registering for the exam through the department, and finally taking the exam.

#### **Comprehensive Exam**

Once a student has successfully (a grade of B- or better earned) completed the core courses (SOC 5110, SOC 5153, SOC 55157, SOC 5163, SOC 5165), the student is able to register for the comprehensive exam. Please note that students must complete all core courses with NMSU in order to be eligible to take the comprehensive exam. This may or may not be the last semester in the program.

#### **Characteristics and Details of the Exam**

The exam is held over a four day period (usually Thursday through Sunday) and is executed entirely online for all students (both on-campus and online) in the comprehensive exam track. The dates for the comprehensive exam vary depending on the semester. Exams are usually held the third weekend in October for fall semester, and the first weekend in March for the spring semester. At the beginning of each semester, the Director of Graduate Studies will email all graduate students announcing the Comprehensive Exam dates and registration window. It is vital that students use NMSU email as this is the only method of communication the department uses to announce department particulars, such as for the comprehensive exam. This is especially important for students in the online program.

Once the exams have been announced, students who plan to take the exam will file a "Comprehensive Exam Registration Form" with the Graduate Director no later than one month prior to the exam date. The registration form can be obtained from the Graduate Director. Note that this is a departmental form. There is NOT an official form necessary for the Graduate School or Graduate Student Services in order to take the comprehensive exam.

A student must be registered and enrolled for at least 1 credit hour during the exam semester.

The exam will be administered through CANVAS and will be available starting at 8:00am (MST) on the Thursday of exam week. Students have four consecutive days to complete their responses to the questions, and must upload their completed exams by 8:00pm (MST) on the Sunday of exam week.

Each student will receive guidelines on what is expected in order to answer all exam questions. It is the student's responsibility to adhere to the guidelines in order to pass the exam. While the exam is administered in a four-day block, each set of questions should really take no more than 3-5 hours to complete. Students have flexibility in terms of when they can complete the questions throughout the four-day block, as personal/professional responsibilities may arise. However, all exams must be turned into CANVAS by the deadline.

#### **Preparing for the Comprehensive Exam**

While individual faculty may, at times, assist in preparing for the exam, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to prepare for the exam. Preparation requires responsible and dedicated independent study; it is the student's interest to retain syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, and readings from the core classes and electives completed within the department. These generally provide valuable reference material in preparing for the comprehensive exam. Students are encouraged to form study groups and work with fellow graduate students to prepare for the exam. This can happen between all students, regardless of on campus or online program status.

Students who have registered for the exam will receive a study guide via email at least one month before the exam is scheduled to begin. The study guide is meant to give the student direction on the type of questions asked on the exam, and is not meant to be an exhaustive list of actual exam questions. Further, the study guide is not meant to limit the student's preparation to only the questions/examples/information provided.

### **Comprehensive Exam Grading Procedures**

There are three sections to the comprehensive exam: sociological theory, research methods, quantitative analysis (statistics). Each student must write a passing response to all questions for each of the three sections. Each section of the exam is graded as either: *pass with distinction*, *pass*, or *not pass*.

The Exam Administrator works with specific faculty to grade the exams over a two-week period. Exams are blind-graded by two Sociology faculty for each section of the exam. Students must receive a passing grade for each exam section from both faculty.

Students will be notified individually via email within a two-week period after completing the exam whether the exam has been passed with distinction, passed, or not passed.

The Graduate Director will notify the Graduate School when a student has passed the comprehensive exam. This serves as the official notification process for the university that the student has completed the final exam requirement for the Master's Degree in sociology. The student's final obligation is to run a STAR degree report to verify that all remaining requirements have been completed in order to graduate.

There are several reasons for receiving a "not pass" grade: failure to directly address the question(s) asked, failure to answer each part of the question(s), incorrect use of terms and concepts, failure to illustrate depth or comprehension in formulating a response, inadequate use of materials and/or sources, responses are not uploaded before the deadline. In the event that a student receives a "not pass" grade on any section of the exam:

In this event the student will be given a one-time option to rewrite the exam section. The Exam Administrator will notify the student to what sections of the exam were not passed and will arrange a 48-hour timeframe for the student to rewrite these section(s).

If the student does not receive a passing grade for the rewrite, or if a student does not attempt to answer a section(s) of the comprehensive exam (theory, methods, statistics) in the rewrite, the student can make a second attempt during a regularly scheduled exam the following semester. However, the Graduate Committee will review the case and make a recommendation as to whether before retaking the exam the student is 1) required to retake the relevant core classes; 2) recommended to retake the relevant core classes; or 3) does not need to retake core classes.

On the second attempt, if the student receives a "not pass" grade and subsequently does not receive a passing grade for the rewrite, the student will be removed from the program without the option to complete the degree.

## GRADUATE MINOR IN SOCIOLOGY

### **Sociology Graduate Minor (Sociology Non-Majors - Officially goes into effect Fall, 2023)**

The Department of Sociology offers a Graduate Minor in Sociology to graduate students in other departments on campus at NMSU. For the minor in Sociology, students are required to complete 9 credits (3 courses) of graduate-level Sociology coursework. One course must be a core graduate Sociology course (SOC 5153, 5157, 5163, and 5165), and the remaining two courses must be elective Sociology courses. An elective Sociology course is any other non-core SOC 5000+ course except for: SOC 5110, 5998 and 5999.

#### REQUIREMENTS

Complete one course (3 credits) from the following:

- SOC 5153: Seminar in Sociological Research
- SOC 5157: Seminar in Qualitative Research Methods
- SOC 5163: Issues in Advanced Quantitative Analysis
- SOC 5165: Seminar in Classical Social Theory

Complete two courses (6 credits) from any other SOC 5000+ courses with the exception of SOC 5110, 5998, 5999.

## CHECKLIST FOR SOCIOLOGY MA STUDENTS: THESIS TRACK

### Complete by the end of the first or second semester of study:

- Select a Thesis Chair
- Select a Thesis Committee
- Finalize a thesis topic

### Complete by the end of the second or third semester of study:

- Write the Master's Thesis Proposal
- Hold the Master's Thesis Approval Meeting
- File the **Master's Thesis Proposal Approval Form** after the approval meeting (Department requirement)

### Complete by the end of the fourth semester of study:

- Implement and complete data collection, analysis, and all writing for the thesis
- Complete all required core courses (SOCI 5110, 5153, 5157, 5163, 5165)
- Complete 6 credits of SOCI 5999
- Complete 15 credits of additional graduate electives

### Complete in the final semester of study:

- Verify that all transfers of credit, course substitutions, and waivers have been applied to the degree audit
- Verify that a minor has been filed and all requirements have been satisfied for the graduate minor (if applicable)
- File the **Application for Degree** with the registrar's office through myNMSU by second Friday after starting the final semester of study (Graduate School requirement)
- Complete all components of the thesis and arrange with the thesis chair and committee for a defense
- File the **Master's Final Examination Form** at least 10 working days before the thesis defense with Graduate Student Services (verify defense deadlines by semester/academic year) (Graduate School requirement)
- Hold the Thesis Defense by the Graduate School deadline
- Complete the **Thesis Intake Form** to submit with the thesis for review (Graduate School requirement)
- Submit 3 thesis copies to the Branson Library by the deadline set through the Graduate School
- Submit 1 thesis copy to the Department of Sociology by the last day of finals (Department requirement)
- Submit 1 bound thesis copy to the Thesis Chair before leaving NMSU (Departmental requirement)
- Complete a **STAR Degree Audit** verifying all departmental and university requirements have been met
- Return all NMSU issued keys, property, and resources to the Department of Sociology

## CHECKLIST FOR SOCIOLOGY MA STUDENTS: COMPREHENSIVE EXAM TRACK

### Complete by the end of the first semester of study:

- Secure an advisor and verify with the Director of Graduate Studies

### Complete by the end of the second semester (full time) or fourth semester (part-time) of study:

- Complete all required core courses (SOC1 5110, 5153, 5157, 5163, 5165)
- Decide when the comprehensive exam will be taken (Fall semester in October or Spring semester in March)

### Complete in the exam semester (not necessarily the final semester) of study:

- File the ***Comprehensive Exam Registration Form*** at the beginning of the exam semester, and no later than one month prior to the exam date (Departmental requirement)
- Be enrolled in at least 1 credit hour.
- Take the comprehensive exam and pass all sections

### Complete by the final semester of study:

- Complete 21 credits of additional graduate electives
- Verify that all transfers of credit, course substitutions, and waivers have been applied to the degree audit
- Verify that a minor has been filed and all requirements have been satisfied for the graduate minor (if applicable)
- Complete a ***STAR Degree Audit*** verifying all departmental and university requirements have been met
- Return all NMSU issued keys, property, and resources to the Department of Sociology

## **Notice of Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action**

New Mexico State University, in compliance with applicable laws and in furtherance of its commitment to fostering an environment that welcomes and embraces diversity, does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, retaliation, serious medical condition, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, spousal affiliation, or protected veteran status in its programs and activities, including employment, admissions, and educational programs and activities. Inquiries may be directed to the Executive Director, Title IX and Section 504 Coordinator, Office of Institutional Equity, P.O. Box 30001, 1130 E. University Avenue, Las Cruces, NM 88003; 575-646-3635; [equity@nmsu.edu](mailto:equity@nmsu.edu).

NMSU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request. To request an accommodation, please contact Disability Access Services, 575-646-6840 or [das@nmsu.edu](mailto:das@nmsu.edu) or the Office of Institutional Equity, 575-646-3635 or [equity@nmsu.edu](mailto:equity@nmsu.edu). One week advance notice is appreciated. To request this document in an alternate form, please contact David G. Ortiz, Sociology, 575-646-3448, and [dgortiz@nmsu.edu](mailto:dgortiz@nmsu.edu).