

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

Excerpt from
Sociology Department
Graduate Program Handbook
Part III. Student Support
Section 7.0 Financial Aid and Assistantships

Part III

STUDENT SUPPORT

7.0 Financial Aid and Assistantships

7.1 Sources of Financial Aid

Financial aid for graduate study is limited and more often awarded on the basis of merit alone than on need alone. There are three chief sources of aid available through the university, fellowships, assistantships, and employment on faculty grants.

Fellowships. Fellowships are occasionally awarded by the university. Fellowships may have special registration requirements. They offer the student a stipend.

Assistantships. Assistantships are more widely available than fellowships, but these awards are limited as well. The department regularly awards a number of teaching and research assistantships. Faculty members with internal and external grants and other sources of funding also may award research assistantships.

Teaching assistantships provide financial support for nine months. Teaching assistants are usually assigned to assist a professor in course work. Advanced students may teach one three-hour course, under the supervision of appropriate faculty. Summer assistance is sometimes available.

Research assistantships vary in term. Department assistantships are normally for the 9 month academic year.

All fellowship recipients and graduate assistants are exempt from paying out-of-state tuition rates.

Faculty Employment. Individual faculty members or institutes sometimes hire graduate students with funds from their research grants or operating budgets. The amount of financial support provided and the duties to be performed vary widely by assignment.

Those hired as graduate assistants by faculty or institutes are also exempt from paying out-of-state tuition.

7.2 Procedures and Criteria for Assigning Departmental Procedures

GENERAL ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURES

A. Organizational Recommendations

1. A "Graduate Admissions, Evaluation, and Appointment Committee" should be formed. It will perform the admissions functions of the current "Graduate Recruitment Committee" and the function of evaluating continuing students for assignment of departmental assistantships.

2. The admissions function and the function of evaluating continuing students are both substantial burdens. Therefore, the size of the Admissions, Evaluation, and Appointment Committee should be sufficient to allow the formation of separate recruitment and evaluation subcommittees if appropriate.
3. Department policy regarding the procedures for the allocation of department assistants to support faculty efforts involves, but is not exclusive of, the following:
 - a. the number of students taught,
 - b. teaching SOCI 420 and SOCI 631 (1/95), and
 - c. department needs and special commitments.

B. General Procedures for Reviewing Continuing Students

1. Continuing students wishing to be considered for departmental assistantships must apply to the Graduate Admissions, Evaluation, and Appointment Committee using standard application forms to be distributed to all students in the second week of December.
2. Completed application forms are to be returned to the graduate office by the end of the second week of the spring semester. It is solely the responsibility of the graduate student to submit a completed form with accompanying evidence of completion of various requirements.
3. By the end of the sixth week of the spring semester (four weeks from the application deadline), the committee will
 - a. review the graduate students using criteria outlined below;
 - b. establish a ranking of applicants;
 - c. make decisions on appointments to departmental assistantships; and
 - d. notify students of the decisions.
4. Faculty members on the graduate admission/evaluation committee are to excuse themselves from scoring for departmental assistantship evaluation of graduate students who were assigned to them for the previous semester (Fall) as departmental assistant or for whom they are chairperson of either a thesis or dissertation committee. (12/96)

C. Appeals Process

1. A student wishing to appeal a decision should meet first with the chair of the committee to review the decision.
2. If the student wishes to pursue the appeal further, she or he should meet with the Department Head who may appoint an independent appeals committee to review the decision.

SPECIFIC PROCEDURES

A. Assignment of Assistantships to Newly Admitted Graduate Students

1. Newly admitted graduate students should be ranked for departmental assistantship awards giving approximately equal weight to the following criteria.

a. Quantitative Information including

- Graduate Record Examination scores
- Grade Point Average
- TOEFFL scores (foreign applicants)

b. Qualitative and/or Supplemental Information including but not limited to

- letters of recommendation
- examples of student writing
- applicant's statement of interest and intent

2. At least 50 percent of the Departmental Graduate Teaching Assistantships that are allocated to incoming students each year will be allocated for at least two years. (04/2007)

B. Assignment of Assistantships to Continuing Students

1. To be eligible for consideration for a departmental assistantship, a student must be in good standing with the graduate school and the department.

Students who enter with a B.A. or B.S. will not ordinarily receive more than five years of funding. Students who enter with a M.S. or M.S. will not ordinarily receive more than four years of funding. Exceptions may be made in the case of extreme departmental need, or if there are other extenuating circumstances, if funding is available. The criteria to assign departmental assistantships on a competitive basis are specified below. (04/2007)

2. Continuing graduate students in good standing will be ranked with respect to awarding departmental assistantships according to the following four criteria: Progress in the Program, Grade Point Average, Teaching/Research Assistantship Evaluation, and Professional Potential.

a. Progress in the Program

Graduate students entering with a B.A. or a B.S. are expected to finish the program in five years and will be evaluated based on the following standard of progress in the program.

- At the end of 2 semesters, the student is expected to complete their required theory and methods courses.
- At the end of 4 semesters, students are expected to complete their master's thesis
- At the end of 7 semesters, students are expected to complete their comprehensive exams.

- At the end of 8 semesters, students are expected to complete their dissertation proposal.
- At the end of 10 semesters, students are expected to complete their dissertation.

Graduate students entering the program with a M.A. or M.S. are expected to finish the program in four years and will be evaluated based on the following standard of progress in the program.

- At the end of 2 semesters, the student is expected to complete their required theory and methods courses.
- At the end of 5 semesters, students are expected to complete their comprehensive exams.
- At the end of 6 semesters, students are expected to complete their dissertation proposal.
- At the end of 8 semesters, students are expected to complete their dissertation.

Consideration may also be given to information provided to the committee that impede students' progress in the program (e.g., unusually time-consuming data collection, severe illness), and the following factors:

For all students: hours of coursework, completion of required courses, timely completion of incompletes (carrying two or more incompletes over two semesters is grounds to disallow participation).

For masters' students: formation of thesis committee and identification of a committee chair, defense of proposal, and progress on the thesis (as reflected in letters from the chair of the student's advisory committee).

For doctoral students: identification of specialty areas, completion of specialty coursework, formation of dissertation committee and identification of a committee chair, approval of a degree plan, approval of relevant readings lists, defense of dissertation proposal, and progress on the dissertation (as reflected in letters from the chair of the student's advisory committee).

b. Grade Point Average (GPA)

c. Teaching Assistant / Research Assistant Evaluations

The committee will evaluate student performance in previous departmental assistantships and previous non-departmental research assistantships (for students holding an assistantship only).

Assistantship evaluations are scored using a form provided as Appendix 2 to this section.

d. Professional Activity

When graduate students receive their Ph.D. they are expected to have demonstrated professional activity in the areas of teaching and research.

- Professional activity in the areas of research will be evaluated based on students' progress in demonstrating the capacity to publish a peer reviewed sociology article.
- Professional activity in the area of teaching will be evaluated based on the students' progress in demonstrating the capacity to competently teach a college or university course.

The Committee will also consider the following types of professional activity:

- submitting a grant or fellowship proposal,
- obtaining funding from outside the department but within the university,
- obtaining funding from outside the university,
- taking advanced methods courses in other departments, and
- engaging in collaborative analysis with faculty.

The Graduate Recruitment & Retention Committee will place primary emphasis on professional activity during the year of the evaluation, but can consider the entire record.

Guidelines for the Graduate Research and Retention Committee

The Graduate Research and Retention Committee will use the following guidelines when assigning a score to graduate students for professional activity. (In these guidelines, semester is defined as a regular academic semester (i.e., spring and fall, it does not include the summer semester).) There are two implications of the expectations described in these guidelines:

- Overtime, graduate students are expected to become competent teachers and researchers.
- Graduate students at later stages of their graduate career will not receive the same credit for the same activities as graduate students who are earlier in their graduate career (e.g., presenting a paper at a regional conference or annual meeting, guest lecturing in a faculty members' class).

Research

In addition to Department research requirements, graduate students entering the program with a B.A. or a B.S. are expected to do the following to demonstrate professional activity in the area of research.

- At the end of 6 semesters, students are expected to present a paper at a conference (i.e., regional, national, specialty) or a department brown bag. (This paper might be developed from their Master's thesis.)

- At the end of 8 semesters, students are expected to have submitted a single authored article or two coauthored articles to peer reviewed sociology journal(s).
- At the end of 10 semesters, students are expected to have published a single authored article or two coauthored articles in peer reviewed sociology journal(s).

In addition to Department research requirements, graduate students entering the program with a M.A. or M.S. are expected to do the following to demonstrate professional activity in the area of research.

- At the end of 4 semesters, students are expected to present a paper at a conference (i.e., regional, national, specialty) or at a department brown bag.
- At the end of 6 semesters, students are expected to have submitted a single authored article or two coauthored articles to peer reviewed sociology journal(s).
- At the end of 8 semesters, students are expected to have published a single authored article or two coauthored articles in peer reviewed sociology journal(s).

Teaching

In addition to Departmental teaching requirements, graduate students entering the program with a B.A. or a B.S. are expected to do the following to demonstrate professional activity in the area of teaching.

- At the end of 6 semesters, students are expected to complete a teaching workshop or similar teaching activity. (This may include workshops available on campus.)
- At the end of 8 semesters, students are expected to attend teaching activities (e.g., workshop, sessions that focus on teaching) at a professional conference or guest lecture in a faculty members' class.
- At the end of 10 semesters, students are expected to have competently taught a sociology course at a college or university.

In addition to Department teaching requirements, graduate students entering the program with a M.A. or M.S. are expected to do the following to demonstrate professional activity in the area of research.

- At the end of 4 semesters, students are expected to complete a teaching workshop or similar teaching activity on campus. (This may include workshops available on campus.)
- At the end of 6 semesters, students are expected to attend teaching activities (e.g., workshop, sessions that focus on teaching) at a professional conference or guest lecture in a faculty members' class.
- At the end of 8 semesters, students are expected to have competently taught a sociology course at a college or university.

3. Scoring Individual Items and Computing Final Evaluation Scores

Applicants will be scored on each of the *relevant* items (i.e., Progress in the Program, Grade Point Average, Teaching/Assistantship Evaluation, and Professional Activity) on a scale of 1 to 5 where a score of 5 indicates the highest evaluation. Scores will be assigned by all members of the committee and averaged across committee members. The assignment of scores will be left to the judgments of committee members with the exception of grade point average which will convert the GPA to a 5-point basis using a formula noted below:

Progress in the Program. Applicants will be scored on their progress in the program based on the following:

- 5 well beyond the guidelines
- 4 beyond the guidelines
- 3 on track with guidelines
- 2 lagging behind guidelines
- 1 substantially behind guidelines

Grade Point Average. Applicant's will be scored on their grade point average according to the following.

Applicant's grade point ratio will be scored as $GPA * 1.25$.

Example 1 - a student with a GPA of 4.0, is scored $4.0 * 1.25 = 5.000$.

Example 2 - a student with a GPA of 3.5, is scored $3.5 * 1.25 = 4.375$.

Grade point average is computed for all coursework including courses outside of the department (it is not limited to degree plan courses).

SOCI 685 Directed Studies courses *are not included* when computing grade point averages.

Grades are obtained by department staff from official university records (e.g., SIMS). Recent grade changes must be documented to be considered.

Incompletes must be resolved within one semester. Incompletes that have not been resolved convert to F and *are* included in the calculations. They carry a grade point of 0 and thus impose a significant penalty on GPA.

Teaching Assistant / Research Assistant Evaluation. Applicants will be scored on assistantship performance based on the Teaching Assistant / Research Assistant Evaluation Form (i.e., Appendix 2) that is filled out by the faculty member supervising the graduate student holding the GTA.

The mean score of the responses from Appendix 2 will be the research assistantship score.

Graduate students are responsible to provide the faculty members that supervised their GTA with the evaluation forms two or more weeks in advance of the deadline for submitting them to the Department.

Professional Activity. Applicants will be scored on professional activity based on the following:

- 5 very high activity
- 4 high activity
- 3 average activity
- 2 low activity
- 1 little or no activity

4. After scores on individual items are obtained for each student, a weighted sum of the item scores will be computed as follows.

Students who *are holding* a departmental assistantship.

- 50% Progress in the Program
- 20% Grade Point Average
- 20% Assistantship Evaluations
- 10% Professional Activity

Students who *are not holding* a departmental assistantship.

- 60% Progress in the Program
- 25% Grade Point Average
- 15% Professional Activity

Graduate students at early stages of the graduate program are not evaluated on the professional activity criteria because they are expected to focus on obtaining sociological knowledge through their academic work (e.g., courses, writing a thesis) to prepare them to teach and conduct research. (The *Guidelines for the Graduate Research and Retention Committee* herein identify graduate students who are not evaluated on professional activity.)

When profession activity does not apply, students *with* an assistantship will be evaluated based on:

- 60% Progress in the program
- 20% Grade point average
- 20% Assistantship evaluation

When profession activity does not apply, students *without* an assistantship and will be evaluated based on:

- 70% Progress in the program
- 30% Grade point average

Examples of Scoring

Student A with GPR 4.0 (scored $4.0 \cdot 1.25 = 5.000$) and other scores. This student is a doctoral student who held an assistantship. They are evaluated on all four items.

	Item Score	Item Weight	Contribution
Progress in the Program	5.000	50%	2.500
Grade Point Average	5.000	20%	1.000
Assistantship Evaluations	4.000	20%	0.800
Professional Activity	4.000	10%	0.400
Score based on Sum			4.700

Student B with GPR 3.7 (scored $3.7 \cdot 1.25 = 4.625$) and other scores. This student is a doctoral student who did not hold an assistantship in the previous year.

	Item Score	Item Weight	Contribution
Progress in the Program	4.000	60%	2.400
Grade Point Average	4.625	25%	1.156
Assistantship Evaluations	*	*	*
Professional Activity	4.000	15%	0.600
Score based on Sum			4.156

Student C with GPR 3.4 (scored $3.4 \cdot 1.25 = 4.250$) and other scores. This student is a masters student and is not evaluated on professional activity.

	Item Score	Item Weight	Contribution
Progress in the Program	4.000	60%	2.400
Grade Point Average	4.250	20%	0.850
Assistantship Evaluations	4.000	20%	0.800
Professional Activity	*	*	*
Score based on Sum			4.050

Student D with GPR 3.8 (scored $3.8 \cdot 1.25 = 4.750$) and other scores. This student did not hold an assistantship in the previous year. This student is a masters student and is not evaluated on professional activity.

	Item Score	Item Weight	Contribution
Progress in the Program	3.000	70%	2.100
Grade Point Average	4.250	30%	1.275
Assistantship Evaluations	*	*	*
Professional Activity	*	*	*
Score based on Sum			3.375

5. Reporting Guidelines. Graduate students are responsible for ensuring that the Graduate Program and Recruitment Committee receives the following.

- a. An updated and accurate copy of Appendix 1: Information Sheet: Graduate Students' Progress in the Program.
- b. Documentation on accomplishment with regard to professional activity.
- c. When appropriate (i.e., for graduate who held a GTA and were assigned to a faculty member), a Teaching Assistant / Research Assistant Evaluation Form (i.e., Appendix 2) from each faculty member they assisted.
- d. When appropriate (i.e., for graduate students who taught a course): (1) teaching evaluations, and (2) average grade assigned to the students in the class(es) taught.

In addition, graduate students may include a statement describing their progress in the program, professional activities, and, when appropriate, GTA responsibilities.

6. Continuing students will be ranked based on the weighted sums of item scores. Assistantships will be offered to the highest ranked student. This process will continue until all available assistantships are assigned and accepted.

7. In the event of ties in the ranking, preference should be given to students who have the fewest years of departmental support. Otherwise, the committee will make a good faith attempt to differentiate fairly between the tied students.

8. Exceptions to the allocation process outlined here can be made to accommodate important departmental needs (e.g., specific departmental teaching needs, departmental needs to provide assistants to research projects to fulfill "matching" obligations, etc.).

Addendum

Notes Regarding the History of Department Revisions to Procedures and Criteria for Assigning Departmental Assistantships

The basic guidelines outlined in this section were first adopted by faculty vote in the Spring of 1993 after a lengthy period of faculty discussion and review.

Revisions were adopted by faculty vote in the Fall of 1994.

Additional revisions were adopted by faculty votes in 1995 and 1996.

Substantial revisions to the evaluation scoring of students applying for graduate assistantships were adopted by faculty vote in Spring 2007 and Fall 2007.

Appendix 1: Information Sheet: Graduate Students' Progress in the Program

Semester and year of admission to the graduate program _____

_____ Entered the graduate program with a B.A or B.S.

_____ Entered the graduate program with a M.A or M.S.

Required Coursework

Enter N/A if you entered the graduate program with a M.A. or M.S. and have been formally exempted from taking a required course. Note: formal exemption requires a memo signed by the Graduate Advisor and Department Head.

Completion of required theory courses (N/A if exempt).

_____ 611 Classical Sociological Theory Semester Completed: _____

_____ 615 Contemporary Sociological Theory Semester Completed: _____

Completion of required methods courses (623, 631, and either 607 or 624; N/A if exempt).

_____ 607 Comparative and Historical Methodology Semester Completed: _____

_____ 623 Measurement of Sociological Parameters Semester Completed: _____

_____ 624 Qualitative Methodology Semester Completed: _____

_____ 631 Seminar in Sociological Research (Quantitative) Semester Completed: _____

Other M.S. Requirements; Name of M.S. Committee Chair _____

_____ M.S. degree plan approved Semester Completed: _____

_____ M.S. thesis completed Semester Completed: _____

Courses in Major Area of Doctoral Study; Name of Major Area is _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

Courses in Minor Area of Doctoral Study; Name of Minor Area is _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

Other Doctoral Requirements: Name of Ph.D. Committee Chair _____

_____ Ph.D. Degree plan approved Semester Completed: _____

_____ Completion of comprehensive exams Semester Completed: _____

_____ Semester Completed: _____

_____ Completion of dissertation proposal Semester Completed: _____

Completion of dissertation
_____

Semester Completed: _____

Appendix 2: Teaching Assistant / Research Assistant Evaluation Form

Section to be filled out by student applicant.

Name of Assistant: _____

Name of Professor: _____

Course/Project: _____ Semester/Year _____

Section to be filled out by Professor for whom student served as TA/RA.

Please answer the following questions regarding the student's performance as a teaching or research assistant in relationship to standards that are consistent with that of a responsible future faculty member or professional sociologist.

1. Did he/she carry out the duties assigned to them?

- 5 Excellent
- 4 Above Average
- 3 Average
- 2 Below Average
- 1 Poor

2. Did the student finish assignments in a timely manner?

- 5 Excellent
- 4 Above Average
- 3 Average
- 2 Below Average
- 1 Poor

3. Did the quality of the student's work live up to your expectations?

- 5 Excellent
- 4 Above Average
- 3 Average
- 2 Below Average
- 1 Poor

4. Did the student make original contributions of their own? (Please note if the opportunity was not available)

- 5 Excellent
- 4 Above Average
- 3 Average
- 2 Below Average
- 1 Poor

5. Did the student meet with you on a regular basis as expected and keep appointments with others (e.g., students or project members)?

- 5 Excellent
- 4 Above Average
- 3 Average
- 2 Below Average
- 1 Poor

Other Comments: Please add any additional comments you believe are relevant to a fair evaluation. This might include more specific information about accomplishments or extenuating circumstances relevant to less than expected performance. Use the reverse side or include an attachment.

Checklist of Materials to Include with Your Application

1. Assistantship Application form.
2. Student Information Form (Appendix 1).
3. Assistantship Evaluation Forms (Appendix 2). Where appropriate the form should be provided to the relevant faculty members. Note the faculty members you have asked to submit evaluation forms.
4. Documentation of Professional Activities. This may be an updated CV, or a statement, or both.
5. Documentation of recent grade changes or resolutions of incompletes (these may not be reflected in official records).
6. A statement providing information regarding unusual circumstances that have impeded progress in the program (e.g., serious illness requiring temporary withdrawal from the university). Please note that financial need is not considered in assistantship evaluations and thus statements speaking to this cannot be taken into account.