

# GUIDE TO GRADUATE STUDY

## INTERDEPARTMENTAL GRADUATE PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY AUBURN UNIVERSITY

### *Overview*

The Master's degree in Sociology and Rural Sociology is offered as an Interdepartmental Program between the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Social Work (College of Liberal Arts, AU) and the Department of Agricultural Economics & Rural Sociology (College of Agriculture, AU). The Program is administered by two Co-Directors, one from each Department.

### *Admissions Requirements*

The Graduate School at Auburn University and our Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology (known here after as the Program) welcomes applications from serious students. Auburn University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer/equal opportunity educational institution.

Admission to our Program involves two steps: (1) application to the Graduate School, and (2) review of completed applications by the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee. The application process is online. Information about the application may be obtained directly from the:

Graduate School  
Hargis Hall  
Auburn University, AL 36849-5122  
Phone: (334) 844-4700  
Web: <http://graduate.auburn.edu>

The Graduate School requires that applicants provide all transcripts from all college or university work. The Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology recommends that applicants take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), but it is not required. All transcripts and official GRE scores should be sent directly to the Graduate School. Three letters of recommendation from academic references who can comment on your likely success as a graduate student in our program should be submitted on-line through the Graduate School application system. A statement of interest and resume or curriculum vitae should also be submitted via this on-line system, as well. For international students, additionally required is the TOEFL score which should be sent directly to the Graduate School.

Regarding GPA, we are generally looking for at least a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. The GRE is not required as part of the application, but it is recommended and it may aid in the review process. The GRE underwent a significant change in 2011. We continue to accept and review GRE scores from before 2011. Under the old scoring system, we generally are looking for minimum scores of 450 for the verbal and 320 for the quantitative components of the GRE. Under the new scoring system, we are looking for minimum scores of 150 for the verbal and 140 for the quantitative components. In addition, we consider the written portion of the GRE. Such skills are important because of the number of research papers (and of course the thesis) that will be written as a graduate student. Students admitted into our program with a score of 3.5 or less on the written portion of the GRE, or any other evidence suggesting that the student's writing skill may be insufficient, may be required to take and earn at least a grade of B in ENGL 4000 (Advanced Composition). International students will be asked to take, and must pass, INTL 1800 (Oral Proficiency in

English for International Students) and INTL 1830 (Writing Proficiency in English for International Students).

For international students, the Graduate School requires a minimum score of 550 for the paper version of the TOEFL (range = 310-677). For the computer version of the TOEFL, the required minimum score is 213 (range = 0-300). For the iBT TOEFL, the Auburn minimum is 79 (range = 0-120). The Graduate School may also require an applicant take, and pass, INTL 1800 (Oral Proficiency in English for International Students) and INTL 1830 (Writing Proficiency in English for International Students).

Once a completed application has been received by the Graduate School, the application is forwarded to the Program Co-Directors for review. As suggested, there several pieces of information that we use in making decisions on admission – GPA, GRE scores, letters of recommendation from an academic source, resume or curriculum vitae, and your statement of interest. For international students, we also consider the TOEFL score.

We use all this information in making recommendations for admission. The Co-Directors will inform the Graduate School of their recommendation regarding admission to our Program. The final decision on admission to the Graduate School is made by the Dean of the Graduate School.

In some cases, students applying to the Program have had limited undergraduate course work in Sociology. Where this is so, students may be required to take certain undergraduate or graduate courses to fill the gaps. The Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology is particularly concerned that students have appropriate grounding in our three core areas: Social Statistics, Methods of Social Research, and Social Theory. If a prospective student has not had one or more of these courses as an undergraduate (or appropriate equivalents as determined by the Co-Chairs of the Program) they may be required to pass corresponding undergraduate course work, or specific graduate courses, with a grade of at least a B before being allowed to take any of the required graduate courses.

### **Thesis and Non-Thesis Options**

#### ***Thesis Option - Master of Science (M.S.) in Sociology or Master of Science (M.S.) in Rural Sociology***

1. Graduate students pursuing the thesis option are guided through their program by an Advisory Committee consisting of at least three faculty members. Selection of this Committee, including the Committee Chair, is the student's responsibility. Students should work with the Chair of their Graduate Advisory Committee to select other committee members. Students are strongly encouraged to form four person Committees that have faculty representation from both participating departments.
2. Once a student has established an Advisory Committee, the student is required to complete the Plan of Study listing the courses that the student will take to meet the requirements of the degree. After the Plan of Study has been completed (see instructions at <http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/committee-selection-form-and-plan-of-study/>) each member of the Advisory Committee will electronically approve the Plan of Study.
3. Revisions to the Plan of Study and/or to the composition of the Advisory Committee are possible should the need arise.

4. Graduate students pursuing the thesis option are required to earn a minimum of 30 graduate-level semester hours, of which 6 credit hours are required of SOCY 7990 (Research and Thesis) or RSOC 7990 (Research and Thesis). Most graduate courses are 3 semester hours, meaning that the minimum credit requirement usually can be met by taking a total of 8 courses.
5. There are three required core courses for all graduate students in the Interdepartmental Program: SOCY 7000 (Advanced Sociological Theory), RSOC 7700 (Research Methods in Sociology), and SOCY 7100 (Statistical Analysis of Survey, Aggregate, and Large Data Sources).
6. A grade of B or better must be earned in each of the three core courses listed above.
7. Should any undergraduate courses be taken, they will not count for graduate course credit.
8. Students interested in additional coursework in statistics may want to consider STAT 7000 (Experimental Statistics), ERMA 7300 (Design and Analysis in Education I), or ERMA 7310 (Design and Analysis in Education II). Students interested in developing an expertise in qualitative research methodologies might consider taking ERMA 7210 (Theory and Methodology of Qualitative Research) and ERMA 7220 (Applied Qualitative Research).
9. In addition to the three core graduate courses, students must take at least three additional courses earning a total of at least 9 semester credit hours within the program area, which is defined as ANTH, RSOC, SOCY, and SOCI. Exceptions to this requirement may be granted with approval of the Co-Directors of the Graduate Program if supported by the student's advisory committee.
10. No more than 6 credit hours of directed readings, including SOCY 7930 (Directed Studies) and RSOC 7960 (Special Problems in Rural Sociology), or comparable courses in other departments, will be accepted to meet the required minimum of course hours earned.
11. Graduate students are required to develop a research proposal for their thesis research and to present this to their Advisory Committee for review and counsel. Research proposals typically include a statement of the problem, a set of clear research objectives, a preliminary review of the relevant literature, and a discussion of the proposed research methodology. Only when the proposal has been approved by the Advisory Committee will the graduate student be considered ready to begin thesis research.
12. Graduate students are encouraged to present their proposals as part of a periodically scheduled program colloquia where several students will discuss their proposed research projects.
13. Once the thesis is complete and Committee members have had an opportunity to review and comment on its contents, a thesis defense is scheduled which is open to any interested person. After passing the thesis defense, final changes required by the Committee are made and the thesis is turned into the Graduate School. It is the responsibility of each graduate student to meet all Graduate School requirements regarding the final version of the thesis. It is also the responsibility of the student to know and understand due dates for final submission of the thesis to the Graduate School.

***Non-Thesis Option - Master of Arts (M.A.) in Sociology or Master of Science (M.S.) in Rural Sociology***

1. Graduate students pursuing the non-thesis option are required to earn a minimum of 36 graduate level semester hours. Most graduate courses are 3 semester hours, meaning that the minimum credit requirement usually can be met by taking a total of 12 courses. Students following the non-thesis option cannot include SOCY 7990 (Research and Thesis) or RSOC 7990 (Research and Thesis) to meet the total credit hour requirement.
2. Students following the non-thesis option are required to take the same core graduate courses as thesis option students (see above). The remaining course work is selected by the individual student in consultation with the student's Graduate Advisory Committee.
3. Graduate students pursuing the non-thesis option are required to complete a Plan of Study (<http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/committee-selection-form-and-plan-of-study/>) listing the courses that the student will take to meet the requirements of the degree. This needs to be completed by the end of their first year. Revisions to the plan of study are possible should the need arise.
4. A grade of B or better must be earned in each of the core courses referred to above.
5. Undergraduate courses do not count for graduate course credit.
6. No more than 6 credit hours of directed readings, including SOCY 7930 (Directed Studies) and RSOC 7800 (Special Problems in Rural Sociology), or comparable courses in other departments, will be accepted to meet the required minimum of course hours earned.
7. Graduate students pursuing the non-thesis option are guided through their program by a member of the graduate faculty selected by the student who will serve as the student's major faculty advisor. An initial advisor will be assigned at time of admission. Students may select a different advisor at any time during the first year.
8. Graduate students pursuing the non-thesis option will work together with their major faculty advisor to select two additional members of the graduate faculty to serve on her or his advisory committee. We strongly encourage selection of faculty from each of the units within our Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology.
9. Graduate students pursuing the non-thesis option will prepare a major "capstone" paper of approximately 8,000 words (including references, tables and other materials). The student will make a formal presentation of this paper to their advisory committee followed by discussion by the committee and the student, and an evaluation by the committee of the paper's acceptance as a "capstone" paper. The timing of this examination will generally be in the student's last semester of course work and after all three of the core course requirements have been met.

## Financial Assistance

A variable number of Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs) are available on a competitive basis to support graduate students in the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology. Generally, assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis. Strong preference is given to funding students pursuing the thesis option.

Admission to our program is done collectively by the Co-Directors of the program (see below) but funding decisions are made by individual departments. To be considered for funding, please complete the assistantship section on the on-line application. Applicants seeking funding in the form of a GTA, to ensure full consideration for such awards for Fall admissions, should complete the application by March 1<sup>st</sup> to be included in the review process regarding funding decisions for the following academic year. Most assistantship awards are made in the Spring for the following academic year. However, occasionally, funds for GTA positions may become available later in the year and applications are then reviewed accordingly. To ensure full consideration for awards that may be offered for Spring semester, students should complete their application by September 15<sup>th</sup>. Most GTA and GRA positions involve the commitment of 13-15 hours of work per week. Given these responsibilities, graduate students holding GTA and GRA positions are expected to take no more than 9 hours of graduate credit coursework per semester. Experience indicates that a heavier course load leads to an erosion of performance both on the job and in the coursework.

GTA positions are associated primarily with the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Social Work (College of Liberal Arts) and involve working with faculty teaching in the undergraduate core curriculum. Students seeking funding in the form of a GTA are to have a completed application by March 1st to be included in the review process regarding funding decisions for the following academic year. However, occasionally, funds for GTA positions may become available later in the year and applications are then reviewed accordingly.

GRA positions are associated primarily with the Department of Agricultural Economics & Rural Sociology (College of Agriculture) and involve working with faculty members who are conducting research on a variety of topics dealing with agrifood systems, natural resources and environmental issues, and rural and community development. Funding from competitively awarded grants to faculty members becomes available at different times of the year. There are also some limited funds available for GRA positions through the Department, and these awards generally are made March 1st.

### **For additional information, please contact one of the Co-Directors of the Graduate Program:**

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Social Work  
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