

**SOCIOLOGY**  
**GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**September 2019**

## **SUMMARY**

Princeton's Sociology Department offers graduate training across a range of specialty areas to students seeking the Ph.D. Students are encouraged to work with the full range of department faculty and to tailor programs of study that will suit their individual needs and aspirations. The program offers a structured set of experiences that help students become independent scholars as early as possible in their graduate careers. Students take a series of required courses in theory and methods, participate in a second-year research workshop in which they produce a publishable piece of empirical research, and usually engage in several teaching and research apprenticeships with members of the faculty.

### **Admissions**

The program is of moderate size (cohort sizes in recent years have ranged from about eight to seventeen new students) and admissions is highly selective (with admission offered to fewer than six percent of applicants). An undergraduate major in sociology is not a prerequisite, but applicants must have achieved a record of academic excellence in their previous work. The program is primarily designed for students interested in pursuing academic careers, but it also provides research skills that may be used in government and the private sector. The formal application and review process is organized by Princeton's Graduate School. Prospective students should consult the Graduate School web site for application forms and for information about the application process (<http://gradschool.princeton.edu/admission/applicants/>), as well as visit the Sociology Department's web site <http://sociology.princeton.edu/GraduateProgram/>. Every applicant must complete the application form available at the Graduate School website, take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) (the subject test in sociology is not required), and provide transcripts of all graduate and undergraduate courses taken elsewhere, one or more papers, letters of recommendation, and a personal statement indicating why she or he is interested in pursuing doctoral work in sociology at Princeton. Applicants whose native language is not English should carefully read the material at [http://gradschool.princeton.edu/admission/applicants/applying/toefl\\_ielts](http://gradschool.princeton.edu/admission/applicants/applying/toefl_ielts), since they may face additional requirements.

### **The Program**

Instruction is provided in a variety of forms, including courses, small seminars, year-long workshops, tutorials, reading courses, department-wide colloquia, and various forms of independent study. Intellectual exchange is enhanced by a deep commitment on the part of the faculty to working closely with graduate students, by selecting students whose interests overlap with those of other students and with academic strengths of the department, and through various centers and interdepartmental affiliations that make interdisciplinary study possible. Students are encouraged to take advantage of all the resources of Princeton University. Dissertation committees often include a member of another Princeton department.

The Princeton graduate program is designed to encourage completion of the doctorate in a time that is consistent with rigorous scholarly preparation. The program reflects an

educational philosophy that from the first views the student as a potential contributor to the discipline rather than as a passive repository of knowledge. It rests on the conviction that scarce time is better utilized in preparing manuscripts of a type suitable for publication than in writing conventional term papers. The department's philosophy is that learning at the graduate level takes place best in a semi-structured environment that combines individual freedom with a supportive intellectual community. Individual freedom is encouraged by keeping the program sufficiently small (about 35 students are in residence each year) to ensure flexibility, and by providing students with a wide variety of options with which to pursue their scholarly interests. Students meet regularly with members of the faculty to consult about their plans and progress, and, rather than receiving letter grades, are given qualitative written evaluations. A supportive intellectual community is encouraged by an atmosphere of informality and collegiality between faculty and students, and through formal activities such as on-going workshops, symposia, colloquia, and gatherings in the department lounge.

### **The Wider Community**

The university and the wider community also contribute significantly to the department's emphasis on semi-structured learning. Princeton University is a world-class research institution, and yet it is relatively small, because it includes only a few professional schools, focusing instead on liberal arts training at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Students and faculty are thus able to become acquainted and to work together, not only within departments, but across departments as well. In a real sense, the university is the unit of instruction at Princeton, and the Sociology Department seeks to capitalize on this fact by providing interdepartmental learning experiences. For example, students are encouraged to take courses outside the department, as well as inside the department, and dissertation committees often include faculty from other departments. Some possibilities for learning outside the university are also available through cooperative arrangements with Columbia University, Rutgers University, and the University of Pennsylvania, and through a formal exchange program with more than a dozen universities throughout the country.

The town of Princeton is a community of approximately 50,000 residents. It, in turn, is part of the demographically diverse and rapidly growing central New Jersey metroplex, with a current population of more than one million. The immediate area includes a rich variety of cultural activities, including one of the nation's best repertory theaters, numerous vocal and instrumental musical companies, bookstores, record stores, movie theaters, and restaurants of all kinds. Princeton has one of the oldest and largest concentrations of survey research firms, many of which employ advanced graduate students in sociology. It is the location of the internationally renowned Institute for Advanced Study, which brings dozens of visiting social scientists to the area each year. The area is notable for diversity of many kinds: Princeton is still surrounded by working farms (not to mention copious suburbs); and rich urban environments are just miles away in Trenton (a small city and the capital of New Jersey, just eight miles southwest) and New Brunswick (about fifteen miles to the north). The town of Princeton itself is racially and ethnically diverse, and the immigration

of the 1980s and 1990s has produced vibrant ethnic communities of many kinds in the surrounding cities and suburban communities. Moreover, New York and Philadelphia are only an hour away by commuter train or bus.

## **DETAILS**

### ***Objectives***

The graduate program in sociology seeks to fulfill three primary academic objectives:

1. provide students with the basic theoretical, methodological, and statistical skills needed to be successful sociologists;
2. expose students to a breadth of knowledge in sociology so that they can be competent teachers, colleagues, and consumers of the sociological literature; and
3. develop in-depth expertise in one or more areas of specialization, thereby ensuring that students can contribute original research in these areas.

Students achieve these objectives in a variety of ways, depending on their previous training, interests, and preferred style of learning.

### ***Basic Skills***

These are generally acquired during students' first year in the program. Students generally take a two-semester sequence in classical and contemporary sociological theory, a two-semester sequence involving one general course in statistics and one course in social statistics that emphasizes sociological applications, and a course on research design covering a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods. Students are asked to do short written exercises in the theory courses, computational exercises in the statistics courses, and a short research proposal in the methods course. Students may also opt to fulfill the basic skills requirements by passing examinations given by instructors in charge of the relevant courses or, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies, by proposing alternative seminars or reading courses in the department or in other departments.

### ***Breadth of Knowledge***

This is usually obtained in the first and second years of the program through a combination of formal coursework (both full-semester courses and half-semester "mini-seminars") and independent study. Students are expected to take a total of 14 courses or their equivalent during their first two years in the program.

Students in their first two years take four courses or course equivalents each semester. Courses or course equivalents include:

- a. regular graduate courses, with two mini-courses equal to one regular course, including courses in other departments that contribute to the student's progress towards her or his degree;
- b. reading courses, or directed research under the supervision of a Sociology Department faculty member;
- c. service as a preceptor (2 precepts equivalent to one course)

Students identify three areas of specialization that are sufficiently wide in scope and autonomous from one another that, collectively, they represent command of a broad set of areas within sociology. Students prepare a “contract” (by the end of their second year) by stating briefly their justification of the fields, by indicating the various seminars and reading courses they will take or have taken, and by appending a detailed reading list that gives an idea of how they are approaching each field. Fields should be submitted for the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies early in the process. Contracts themselves must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies for approval and are intended as a preview, subject to later revisions, of what the student plans to do, rather than a retrospective statement of what the student has already done. Students must acquire a faculty examiner with whom to work in preparing for each of the areas. These fields then become the basis for the General Examination.

The contract summarizes the work you have done up to the point of taking the oral part of the general exam. It should not be a task that takes a lot of time, but is important for putting together in one document the details of what you have accomplished (in this respect, the ‘contract’ is in practice a retrospective statement more than a prospective one). It serves the department as well as you and your committee as a check point to make sure you’ve fulfilled the pre-generals requirement and for the department to have records of who is working with which faculty and in what areas with which formats of the general exam. It consists of two main parts: (1) a list of the courses you’ve taken to fulfill theory, methods, statistics, and RCR, other courses, and precepting; and (2) reading lists for each area of your general exam. For a written essay exam, the reading list is what you have prepared for the exam; for the syllabus and literature review options, the reading lists are likely to be cut-and-paste from those documents. (Examples of students’ contracts are available on the internal graduate program website or from the Graduate Program Administrator.)

The General Examination should be taken in the spring of the second year or the fall of the third year. It includes both a written and an oral component. The written component in each area may take the form of (a) an essay written during a specified period in response to a question or question from the faculty member supervising the area, (b) a course syllabus as described below, or (c) a dissertation-relevant literature review.

The oral component ordinarily consists of an oral examination of approximately 90 minutes administered by the faculty advisors for each of the areas. (Students in the demography program prepare only two fields in this manner, receiving credit for the third through special examinations in demography at the end of their first year.)

The rules governing the syllabus option are as follows:

The syllabus should be thought of as a course guide that includes information that students see and information only for the instructor explaining the overall objectives and approach of the course, why this approach was selected and how it differs from other approaches as well as a brief “mini essay” for each of the twelve weeks explaining that week’s objectives, emphases for lecture and discussion, and

justification for each of the assigned readings. It must include:

- A one or two paragraph overview of the course. This should explain the course to prospective students and serve as background for the instructor's use.
- Three to five core learning objects for the course (What are the key things that students need to learn in the course?)
- Schedule for 12 weeks of class meetings (once or twice a week): each class meeting must have a title and a list of readings. Readings should be carefully selected at an appropriate level for the class and total no more than 200 pages.

In addition to the syllabus, which would be something that your students will see, you should also create a detailed guide to your course. The course guide must include:

- For each class meeting, a list of the main goals of that meeting and a discussion of why you picked the readings that you picked to achieve those goals. Further, if there are other readings that you will discuss in class or specific problems that you will pose to the students, those should be included as well.

Other notes:

- You are allowed (and even encouraged) to look at other syllabi, but in your detailed guide please cite the syllabi that influenced you. Also, your syllabus should be sufficiently different from any existing course.
- You should decide with the professor supervising the exam how many weeks the syllabus would be and have the topics approved before you launch seriously into the readings; you should also review the proposed list of readings for each of the topics with your advisor.
- Unless you have taken a course in the department on that field, you should consider taking a reading course with the professor during or in advance of working on the syllabus.
- Please send your advisor a draft after you have completed the first three weeks so that he or she can make sure that you are on the right track. This draft is due no later than two weeks before the exam is due.
- There will be an oral examination on the content of your syllabus and course guide so you should be prepared to explain and defend your decisions, both what you have decided to include and what you have decided to exclude.
- Your syllabus and course guide will be submitted along with your other written general exam materials to all members of your committee, and your oral exam will be at the same time as your oral exam for your other generals.
- You are still responsible for knowing all the materials on your reading list.

Please note:

Any student who is requesting an extension beyond the deadline for a departmental requirement (e.g., approval of the empirical paper or passing of the general exams, defense of a dissertation proposal) needs to write a brief (one-page or less) memo to his/her advisor and to the DGS specifying on what grounds the extension is being requested (e.g., family emergency or health issue).

### ***Specialization***

To fulfill the requirement of gaining in-depth specialized knowledge in one or more fields, students must submit a major paper of publishable length and quality using quantitative data. The paper is written in conjunction with the Seminar in Empirical Investigation and is supervised by the instructor in charge of that seminar and advised, as well, from start to finish by a second reader. The paper must be single-authored and approved by both the primary advisor and the second reader. Both readers must be members of the Princeton University faculty (unless other arrangements have been made in advance with the Director of Graduate Studies).

### ***Opportunities for Teaching***

Experience in teaching is an important part of preparation for a scholarly career. All undergraduate and graduate courses at Princeton are taught by members of the faculty. The typical undergraduate course is divided between lecture and discussion (or “precept”) sessions, the latter of which are usually conducted by graduate students with appointments as Assistants in Instruction (AIs) (known at Princeton as “preceptors”). All graduate students are required to serve as AIs on several occasions (most recently six hours while in residence, ordinarily in their second and third years). In order for their precepting to count toward the departmental requirement, the courses students’ precept for must be sociology courses, or must be cross-listed with sociology. AIships carry small stipends over and above fellowship support and are excellent ways of preparing to teach as well as gaining additional competency in a subject area. Princeton University’s McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning provides training for graduate students prior to their first term as an AI. They also offer a range of services to graduate students wishing to improve their teaching skills, including additional instruction in teaching skills for foreign students through a mentoring program prior to the fall semester, a university-wide learning laboratory, and support for training sessions for faculty and AIs in large courses. Additional programs have often been organized by the department’s graduate students. In addition to teaching at Princeton, advanced students have often taught courses in other colleges and universities in the Princeton area.

### ***Research Apprenticeships***

Although students are not required to work as research assistants for department faculty, many students choose to do so. Research assistantships are often excellent ways to learn about aspects of research practice not covered in formal classes from accomplished and experienced researchers. Department faculty work closely with graduate student research assistants, and such relationships have often culminated in collaborative publications. In recent years, demand for student research support has been high, and all students wishing to work have been able to do so. The Director of Graduate Studies will assist students in finding research assistantships when necessary.

### ***Admission to Candidacy***

Students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. upon the successful execution of their academic contract (required coursework, General Examinations, and qualifying paper) and any other department requirements. The Graduate School will not be notified that the student has completed the General Examination (i.e. the student will not be certified as having been admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D.) until all requirements have been completed.

### ***Dissertation***

Upon completion of the General Examination, students turn their full attention to writing a dissertation. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about dissertation topics during the first year of graduate study, and to focus their readings and papers as ways of doing background work relevant to the dissertation. They should select a dissertation committee chair and two or more other members of their dissertation committee in their second year or early in their third year, and work with those faculty members to prepare a dissertation proposal (prospectus) for approval. A draft must be submitted by October 15 and approved by May 15, of the third year for the student to be eligible for fourth-year reenrollment. Once a well-developed prospectus has been submitted, the dissertation committee chair will call a meeting of the committee members and the student to discuss and approve the dissertation proposal. (The dissertation committee ordinarily consists of three members, though committees of four or even five members are permitted. The chair must be a member of the Princeton Sociology Department. Faculty from other Princeton academic units [e.g., the Woodrow Wilson School or the History Department] may also be on the committee. Under extraordinary circumstances, and with the approval of the committee chair and the Director of Graduate Studies, faculty from other universities may serve if they provide expertise that is (a) essential and (b) not available at Princeton.) The proposal (a document of at least 20 pages) includes a statement of the problem to be studied, an explanation of its theoretical relevance to sociology, a survey of pertinent literature, a tentative statement of the main thesis or hypotheses, a discussion of the data and methods to be employed, and a detailed timeline. (Copies of sample dissertation proposals are available on the internal graduate program website or from the Graduate Program Administrator.)

Two options are available for the format of the dissertation: (a) the traditional format of a single document divided into chapters, or (b) three separate but thematically related papers of publishable length and quality. Selection of the options is done in consultation



with the student's dissertation committee and with the committee's approval.

A final public oral examination (often referred to as a "dissertation defense"), given by a least two members of the dissertation committee and two other members of the Sociology Department faculty (referred to as "outside readers" because they are "outside of" the dissertation committee), is the last requirement for the achievement of the degree.

After five years in the program, students no longer receive Princeton fellowship support, but are eligible for two years of DCE (Dissertation Completion Enrollment) status in which they remain enrolled with health insurance and access to university resources in return for a modest fee. Arrangements can ordinarily be made for students to defer payment of loans and (if applicable) to retain visas for educational purposes during these years, as well. Limited sixth-year funding is available on a competitive basis.

## **Summary of Program Requirements by Year**

### **First Year**

Take two statistics courses (SOC500 and SOC504, or POL571 and POL572) – Fall, Spring

Take Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory (SOC501 and SOC502) – Fall, Spring

Take Techniques and Methods of Social Science (SOC503) – Spring

Satisfy the IRB Responsible Conduct of Inquiry requirement (in SOC503).

Take Proseminar (meets weekly for an hour and a half) – Fall

Attend departmental colloquia.

### **Second Year**

Take the Empirical Seminar (SOC505) – Fall, Spring

Have Empirical qualifying paper approved by two readers by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Complete 6 hours of precepting for the sociology department (can also be completed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year).

Pass general exam, ideally in May of second year, no later than the fall of third year.

Attend departmental colloquia.

### **Third Year**

Work on dissertation research; have prospectus approved no later than May 15.

### **Fourth Year**

Work on dissertation research.

### **Fifth Year**

Finish dissertation.

## **Fellowships and Financial Support**

Graduate students requiring financial support and making satisfactory progress toward the doctorate are ordinarily provided with financial support during the period in which they are enrolled. In recent years, all students have received five years of full tuition grants and 12-month fellowships support. Many have supplemented the stipend with teaching assistantships, or research assistantships as well. Applicants are informed of the level of financial awards at the time of notification of admission. Applicants for admission should also explore the fellowships awarded to individuals on a national competitive basis. Grants administered by the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Health, the Social Science Research Council of Canada, the Population Council, and other such agencies may provide support.

The Graduate School has a limited fund to which students may apply for support to present papers at professional meetings. The department chair also has some discretionary funds available for this purpose. The Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies makes funds available for comparative research. East Asian Studies and Latin American Studies provide support to some students for language study. The Center for the Study of Religion has some funds for stipends and research expenses for students actively involved in its programs. The University Center for Human Values administers a series of dissertation fellowships, as does the Wilson Society of Fellows. A wide range of other university fellowships for dissertation-year study are listed on the Graduate School website. Students interested in applying for these various funds should begin well in advance (usually in the fall) by contacting their faculty advisor, the Graduate Program Administrator, the Director of Graduate Studies, or the Graduate School.

Graduate students in the department receive summer support as part of their fellowships and by working as research assistants on the many funded research projects currently being directed by department faculty, by serving as teaching assistants in the department by taking research jobs at private firms in the area, and by serving as adjunct instructors at Rutgers University, The College of New Jersey, Rider University, or many of the other colleges in the surrounding region.

Graduate students should register with PIVOT [<http://pivot.cos.com>] for comprehensive searchable information about external sources of funding and awards.

Opportunities for sixth-year funding include Honorific Fellowships, Dean's Completion Fellowships, and support through various specialized programs such as the Wilson Scholars, PIIRS, and the Center for Human Values. Students in their fourth and fifth years should consult with the DGS and Graduate Program Administrator to obtain details about these opportunities.

**For Further Information**

This edition of the departmental handbook may include revisions of the sociology program that are not yet reflected on the Graduate School website. Nevertheless, the Graduate School website should be consulted for additional information on the university, the graduate school, housing, and financial assistance.

<http://gradschool.princeton.edu/admission>

Inquiries about the departmental program are welcome and should be addressed to:

Professor Dalton Conley  
Director of Graduate Studies  
Department of Sociology  
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Princeton University  
Princeton, New Jersey 08544

He may also be reached by e-mailing [dconley@princeton.edu](mailto:dconley@princeton.edu). A current edition of this handbook, as well as information about faculty and news of departmental events, is available on the Department of Sociology website:

<http://sociology.princeton.edu/>