

**Department of Sociology and
Corrections**

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Graduate Student Handbook

Contact Information

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND CORRECTIONS

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COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

**115 Alumni Foundation Center
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Mankato, MN 56001**

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Introduction

This handbook is an informal guide to acquiring a master's degree from our department. You should also become familiar with the formal requirements of the Department, the Graduate College, and University policies for international students. See below for more information. Dept. requirements: <http://sbs.mnsu.edu/soccorr/graduateprogram/>. Graduate College requirements: <http://grad.mnsu.edu/>.

Online application: <https://secure.mnsu.edu/GSR/GAApp/Default.aspx/>.
International: <http://grad.mnsu.edu/applying/internationalletter.html/>.

This guide is intended to supplement those requirements and help you navigate through the process.

Degree Programs

The department offers four master's degrees:

- 1) M. A. in Sociology.
- 2) M. A. in Sociology: College Teaching Emphasis.
- 2) M. S. in Sociology: Corrections.
- 3) M. S. in Sociology: Human Services Planning and Administration.

All four degrees provide a common grounding in academic sociology through core seminars, but then diverge into different emphases. The M. A. degree allows more extensive coursework in academic sociology and its subfields; it can serve as a terminal degree or a stepping-stone to a Ph. D. program in sociology at another institution. The M. A. degree with a College Teaching Emphasis adds training and an internship to prepare people to teach at the community college level. The M. S. degrees have a more applied focus and typically serve as terminal degrees for professionals already working in corrections or human services or for traditional-age students seeking professional positions.

Application and Admission

Application information and admission requirements are posted at the departmental website listed above.

In addition to these formal specifics, the following informal suggestions may be helpful. If your GPA is borderline, your academic career has gaps, or your past coursework does not closely match our requirements, you may want to address these issues in your purpose statement or an introductory letter. This can often help us “read between the lines” of a formal transcript of coursework.

The writing sample is meant to allow us to evaluate your ability to complete a capstone project (thesis or alternate plan paper). You should ideally submit a sample of academic writing with sociological content that best displays your skills.

Letters of recommendation should ideally come from professors or other academics in a position to comment on your academic and sociological skills. Letters from supervisors in professional work settings are also helpful. The most common reason for delays in processing applications is the late arrival of letters of recommendation. To expedite the process, you should get solid commitments from people writing letters on your behalf and follow up to make sure they do so on a timely basis. Departmental forms for these letters may be found through the departmental website under “application procedures.”

Applicants who meet our requirements are routinely admitted on a year-round basis and may begin coursework as soon as they are admitted. You should allow at least two weeks from the time we receive all application materials to the time we arrive at a final decision during the semester; over summer and during breaks the decision may take longer.

Students who do not fully meet all the admission requirements may be provisionally admitted and be asked to complete required coursework and/or maintain at least a 3.0 GPA in their early graduate coursework before being fully admitted to the program. If you have any questions about your eligibility for admission, contact the graduate coordinator. Once you are admitted, it is usually a simple matter to switch from one degree program to another if your interests or goals change over time.

Coursework

Required core seminars, program specific requirements and number of elective credits may be found on the website. M. A. students must complete a thesis and take at least 30 credits of coursework and 3 thesis credits for a total of 33 credits. M. S. students may follow the thesis plan as above or the alternate plan paper route by taking 32-33 credits of coursework and 1-2 APP credits for a total of 34 credits. Under either plan, at least half of your course credits must be at the 600 level (excluding capstone credits).

Students are strongly encouraged to consult with their advisor in planning their program. Advisors can often provide information on when certain courses will be offered, suggest substitutions when appropriate, approve electives from outside the department, decide whether graduate credits from other universities can be used to meet program requirements, and the like.

Students are also strongly encouraged to complete the core seminars and then program specific requirements earlier rather than later in their program. This provides a solid academic foundation for later work and creates more flexibility in choosing electives later in your coursework.

Full-time students seeking to complete the program in two years are strongly encouraged to take three courses in their first two semesters and two or three courses in their last two semesters along with capstone credits. Frequent consultation with your advisor is especially important in meeting this timeline.

Part-time students may take one or two courses a semester as their schedule permits, but still must complete all course requirements and the capstone project within six years of their first graduate credits.

Toward the end of your program you will sign up for 3 thesis credits (699) or 1-2 APP credits (694) in consultation with your advisor. These credits are somewhat more flexible than standard course credits. Students often complete a substantial part of their capstone project before they actually register for those credits and they occasionally register for

capstone credits earlier and complete the bulk of the work after the semester in which they take the credits. In either case, students typically receive a grade of “In Progress” until they complete the capstone project and these credits are then converted to a letter grade. Students must complete all degree requirements within a six-year period.

Twin Cities Program (Suspended)

Due to the increasing number of courses being offered online, inconsistent student demand for on-site courses, and ongoing challenges in staffing these courses, the Twin Cities Program has been suspended. If you have questions about the future status of the program, please contact steve.buechler@mnsu.edu

Graduate Assistantships

The department offers a limited number of graduate assistantships to eligible students. These positions typically require a 20 hour per week work commitment during fall and spring semesters. The assistantships pay up to \$9,000 per academic year as well as a tuition waiver for up to 9 credits per semester. While applications are accepted throughout the year, these positions typically begin in fall semester and continue through spring semester. Given this cycle, interested applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with the graduate coordinator no later than February 1st if they intend to apply for a position to begin in the fall semester.

Thesis Guidelines

A Master's thesis should be an original contribution to sociological knowledge. The student plans and conducts their research in consultation with an academic advisor and a thesis committee.

Although a thesis can take many forms, the final product is often organized as follows.

Chapter One: Introduction. This chapter introduces the thesis in brief, non-technical language, identifies the importance of the topic, and “locates” it in the broader field of sociological knowledge.

Chapter Two: Literature Review. This chapter demonstrates the student's familiarity with existing sociological knowledge about their topic. It may emphasize the historical context of the study, the role of various theoretical concepts in the study, or existing research already done on the topic. This chapter often ends with a statement of the problem or the research questions the thesis seeks to answer.

Chapter Three: Methodology. This chapter discusses general issues of methodology in sociology and provides a rationale and a description of the methods that were followed as the student conducted their research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis. This chapter reports the results of the research and proceeds to analyze those results in response to the research questions, methodological procedures, and theoretical concepts introduced in the literature review.

Chapter Five: Conclusions. This chapter summarizes the most significant results of the study, discusses their implications for existing knowledge and theoretical issues in the discipline, and may suggest policy implications or directions for future research.

Thesis development occurs through several stages that connect the student and their work with the Department and the University. These stages include:

1) Advisor and thesis committee: All graduate students are assigned to the graduate coordinator as their initial advisor. As your program progresses, you should be looking for a more appropriate advisor on the basis of your thesis topic. You will eventually need to form a thesis committee consisting of a major advisor and a second committee member from the department, as well as a third committee member from outside the department. Identifying an advisor often involves an extended process of talking with several faculty members until you find a good match with your topic and interests. Once an advisor is identified, they can often help in the selection of another departmental member and an outside member of your committee. In any event, you should try to link up with a major advisor as soon as possible, and work on rounding out your committee from there.

2) IRB approval: If your research involves human subjects, you will need to apply for approval from the University's Institutional Review Board. The purpose is to identify any potential risks to your research subjects that might arise from your research and to indicate how you will minimize these risks. Your advisor will sign your IRB proposal, and you should work closely with your advisor in its development. You should not formally collect data until receiving IRB approval. Therefore you should begin working on the proposal well in advance of actual data collection. See the Graduate College website for specifics.

3) Thesis Proposal Defense: The Sociology and Corrections Department also requires a defense of the thesis proposal before collecting data. The proposal typically includes working drafts of the first three chapters (Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology), but the exact form of the proposal can be negotiated with the committee.. The proposal defense serves several purposes. It demonstrates the student's familiarity with their subject matter. It brings the entire committee together with the student to formally approve the data collection phase. Finally, a successful proposal defense creates a semi-contractual agreement between the student and the committee and clarifies what the student needs to do to complete the requirements for the thesis. Upon completion of the thesis proposal defense, the student should fill out the Department's Master's

Plan of Study and Capstone Proposal Defense Form with signatures from all committee members. While there is no precise timetable, you should defend your proposal at least one semester before you intend to graduate to allow time to gather data and complete writing the thesis.

4) Thesis Defense: The last major step is the thesis defense. After all the data have been gathered and drafts of all the chapters have been written, committee members typically make suggestions for revision. In consultation with the advisor and committee members, these revisions should be incorporated into a “defensible” draft. The defense is an oral examination by all committee members. A common outcome is a provisional acceptance of the thesis. In such cases, students may be asked to make some final revisions to be approved by the advisor before the student submits the thesis to the graduate school. When you prepare the final draft, you should closely follow the Graduate College guidelines for submitting the final copy of the thesis. You should schedule your defense at least six weeks before the end of the semester in which you intend to graduate. This will allow some time for final revisions after the defense. The Graduate College requires a completed final copy at least one month before the end of the semester in which you intend to graduate.

Alternate Plan Paper Guidelines

MS students in the Sociology: Human Services Planning and Administration and Sociology: Corrections Programs have two capstone options: A traditional thesis, or an Alternative Plan Paper (APP). The APP route offers two tracks: academic and applied.

An **academic** APP (1) is a comprehensive review of empirical research (2) as well as an application of relevant theory that (3) provides critical examination of existing knowledge, theory and research, and (4) identifies gaps in knowledge and offers original insight.

An **applied** APP involves the application of academic knowledge to solve practical problems. An applied APP (1) uses existing theory to identify and clarify key or central issues and dynamics to better understand practical or community problems; (2) uses empirical research to identify possible solutions; (3) is accountable to both the academy and community

through (a) an academic paper and defense process for departmental degree requirements and (b) submission of gained knowledge (a paper, a presentation) to relevant community members/groups who may benefit from that knowledge.

Students following either APP plan must recruit an advisor and an APP committee, obtain IRB approval if their project involves research on human subjects, complete an APP proposal defense before their committee, and defend the final product before their committee as well as meet the APP community accountability requirement (if they choose the applied APP option).

Capstone Tips

Successful completion of a capstone project requires an unusual balancing act. In many respects, you are “on your own” and must work independently. In other respects, there are formal requirements and informal norms that you must learn and implement as you proceed. There is no “formula for success,” but many people have benefited from the following practices. These suggestions are directly geared to a thesis project, but many of them are also applicable to an APP project.

-Be Proactive: A capstone project requires you to take the initiative to get started, create the time, do the work, and follow through. Others can help along the way, but it is your project from beginning to end.

-Keep a Journal: Start keeping a capstone journal where you record ideas, suggestions, references, and tasks to pursue. Make weekly entries incorporating new material and modifying previous entries.

-Talk and Read Widely: Talk about your ideas with anyone who will listen. Read anything that stimulates your thinking. But also read strategically. Skim, browse and review as much as you can to clarify your thoughts and develop your project.

-Learn the Formal Regulations: Become familiar with Graduate College and Departmental requirements for the capstone project.

-Learn the Informal Norms: Talk with faculty and other students who can share information about every aspect of the project. Learn what has worked and what hasn't worked from those in the know.

-Work with your Committee: Stay in touch and communicate regularly with your advisor/committee. Keep them apprised of your plans, progress and deadlines. If you submit work for their review and comment, allow at least two weeks for them to respond. Don't begin revising a draft while committee members are still spending time reading and commenting on it; wait for all comments before undertaking a revision.

-Read Existing Theses: Students in this department have written hundreds of theses over the years. They're in the library. Check with faculty for references and go read some examples to clarify your task.

-Use Your Coursework: Select courses that will help you move your project forward, whether these are substantive courses in your area, theoretical courses, or methods courses. Think about all the courses you take in terms of what they can contribute to your thesis and how you can design projects within the course to advance your thesis.

-Think Conceptually: As you develop your ideas, ask yourself how and why your topic is sociologically interesting. Identify and use theories, concepts, or ideas that link your research to the broader field and use them to help shape your project.

-Think Empirically: Remember you have to collect data for the thesis (if not for the APP). Define a project so that you can have practical access to forms of data that will allow you to answer your research questions on the basis of empirical evidence.

-Write and Rewrite Often: From the first journal entry to the last revision of the project, you will do a lot of writing. Practice makes perfect. Write early and often, and be prepared to rewrite often. Don't say "it's all in my head" because what's in your head may be mush. Writing is intimately

connected with thinking clearly. Most people have to write to know if their thinking makes sense.

-Get a Support System: Identify and cultivate relationships with people who can give you support. You will need emotional and psychological support as well as professional advice. Figure out who these people are in your life and don't hesitate to talk to them.

Appendix

Department of Sociology and Corrections

Graduate Student Checklist

In order to receive a Master's degree from the Department of Sociology and Corrections, you must do the following:

- _____ Apply for admission to one of our four programs
- _____ Be fully admitted to the program or meet any provisions on admission
- _____ Complete all credits (33 for thesis; 34 for APP) including core seminars, program-required courses, relevant electives and capstone credits
- _____ Develop a capstone proposal in conjunction with a committee consisting of an advisor and second member from the Department and an outside member of the University
- _____ Defend the capstone proposal before the committee (typically consisting of working drafts of introductory, literature review and methods chapters but format is negotiable with committee)
- _____ File the Departmental Master's Plan of Study and Capstone Proposal Defense Form upon completion of the proposal defense
- _____ Receive IRB approval for thesis research on human subjects (if applicable)
- _____ Apply for Graduation with the Graduate College (approximately one semester before intended graduation date)
- _____ Defend the thesis or APP before your committee
- _____ Submit final copies of the thesis or APP to the Graduate College (approximately one month before intended graduation date)
- _____ Submit the Recommendation for Awarding the Degree form to the Graduate College (after the capstone defense and approximately one month before the intended graduation date)

Appendix
Department of Sociology and Corrections
Master's Plan of Study and Capstone Proposal Defense Form

Name _____ Tech ID _____

Local Mailing Address _____

Email Address _____ Phone _____

Degree: _____ MA: Sociology (___check for College Teaching Emphasis)
 _____ MS: Sociology: Corrections
 _____ MS: Sociology: Human Service Planning and Administration

Program Coursework:

Dept/ Course #	Title	Credits
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Total Credits: _____

Tentative Thesis/APP Title: _____

Date of Thesis/APP Proposal Defense: _____

1. _____ 3. _____
 Advisor/Chair of Committee Third Committee Member

2. _____ 4. _____
 Second Committee Member Dept. Graduate Coordinator

Department of Sociology and Corrections Graduate Faculty

- Afroza Anwary, Ph. D., Professor, U. of Minnesota.
Social Movements, Social Organization, Comparative/Historical Sociology.
- Emily Boyd, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Florida State.
Social Psychology, Sex and Gender, Qualitative
Methodology. Steve Buechler, Ph.D., Professor, SUNY-Stony Brook.
Theory, Social Movements, Political Economy.
- Barbara Carson, Ph.D., Professor, U. of New Hampshire.
Corrections, Victimology, Violence.
- Jeffery Dennis, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, Stony Brook
Univeristy. Penology, Criminology, Sexual Identity
- Don Ebel, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Duke University.
Aging, Religion, Work.
- Catarina Fritz, Ph. D. Associate Professor, Boston University.
Migration/Immigration, Race and Ethnic Relations, Education.
- Carol Glasser, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, University of California, Irvine
Applied Sociology, Gender, Human-Animal Studies, Social Movements.
- Diane Graham, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Southern Illinois U, Carbondale.
Program Evaluation, Applied Statistics, Human Services.
- Vicki Hunter, Ph. D. Associate Professor, Kent State University.
Qualitative Methodology, Race, Class and Gender, Social
Psychology. Barbara R. Keating, Ph.D., Professor, U. of Nebraska.
Family, Family Violence, Research Methods, Gender.
- Luis Posas, Ph. D., Professor, Kansas State University.
Social Change, Urbanization, Social Demography, Race, Ethnicity and Culture.
- Paul Prew, Ph. D. Associate Professor University of Oregon
Development, Environmental Sociology, Political Economy
- James E. Robertson, Professor, J.D., Washington U,; Dip. Law, Oxford
U. Correctional Law, Penology.
- Sarah Nell Rusche, Ph. D. Assistant Professor, North Carolina State University
Social Psychology, Race, Class and Gender, Teaching and Learning.
- Pedro Thomas, Ph. D. Professor, Washington State
U. Deviance, Criminology, Social Control.
- Sherrise Truesdale-Moore, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Howard University.
Criminology, Criminal Justice, Deviant Behavior.
- William Wagner, Ph. D. Professor, Washington State University.
Criminology/Delinquency, Qualitative Methods, Quantitative Methods.
- Dennis Waskul, Ph. D., Professor, Oklahoma State University.
Social Psychology, Sexuality, Cultural Sociology.