

# M.A. in Sociology with an emphasis in Applied Social Research

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## Guideposts to Graduate Study

### FIRST SEMESTER:

1. Orientation session (usually Friday before starting fall semester). Discussion of "Graduate Student Responsibilities."
2. During the first semester, students should review possible areas of concentration for the application of their research. In the process, they might consult the Faculty Interest Document (FID) to solicit advice from specific professors on elective course selection for the second semester. Students should select an advisor at this time.

### SECOND SEMESTER:

3. By March 15th of the second semester, students should meet with the Graduate Committee to discuss their "Plan of Study." The appropriate form calls for choice of three area electives (as approved by Committee), brief description of the applied focus of their study and, finally, selection of a Graduate Program Committee, including designation of Chair.
4. Once the above process has been completed, students are strongly encouraged to meet regularly with their Chair to design a Prospectus (see Guidelines for Prospectus) to be formally approved by all members of their Committee. If this process can be completed before the end of the second semester, students will be in a position to use the summer months for data collection and/or analysis. If not, progress toward timely completion of the requirements for the degree surely will be delayed.
5. The "Plan of Study" document must be completed, signed and submitted to Eberly College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Records Office.
6. Spring student evaluation. By the end of the second semester, all students must meet with the Graduate Committee to discuss their academic and/or T.A. performance, progress toward their degree, problems to be addressed and prospects for continuation.

### THIRD SEMESTER:

7. Midterm deadline for all students to have Prospectus signed by all members of their Program Committee and research begun. Application for graduation is due to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Records Office.

### FOURTH SEMESTER:

8. Shuttle sheet requests are due to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Records Office at least two weeks before presentation of oral defense. Completion of Masters Thesis; Formal approval by Program Committee and Division Chair. Copy of final paper must be presented to Committee Chair and ETD library requirements must be met before degree is granted.

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## Guidelines for Preparation of Prospectus

It is imperative that all students have their Prospectus signed by all members of their Program Committee before they begin their research. The Prospectus constitutes a working agreement binding on both the Committee and the student. If the student carries out the research outlined in the Prospectus, the requirements for the study will have been fulfilled, regardless of the findings. If the research requires a change in direction, the Prospectus can be revised by the mutual consent of the student and his/her Committee.

This procedure is intended to save students from investing in research whose objectives are unclear or that lacks the approval of their Committee. Final approval might require several drafts of the Prospectus. However, the Graduate Committee strongly believes that time spent in conceptualizing and planning the research will save even more time later. The Prospectus should be roughly 5-10 pages in length and include the following elements:

1. **STATEMENT** of and justification for the research **PROBLEM**. What is it you seek to learn, to whom would the findings be important and why?

**THESIS.** Empirical research is addressed to a problem identified by scholars in a field. An attempt is made to test, confirm, disconfirm, revise and/or elaborate a theory by bringing to bear new evidence. While the Applied Social Research Report is advisory to clients, the Thesis is advisory to other researchers. The justification for the problem in term of possible uses of the findings and/or recommendations is critical for approval of the prospectus.

2. Citation of relevant **LITERATURE** and other resources to be consulted.
3. Discussion of the **STUDY DESIGN** (sample survey, experiment or quasi-experiment, case study) and why you consider it most appropriate for producing the kind of evidence your problem requires.
4. Concrete discussion of **METHODS** to be used for **COLLECTING EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE** (e.g., informant or respondent interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, review of historical or cross-cultural records, etc.). Depending on choice of method, be specific about relevant choices. For example, if it is to be a survey, describe the population, sample design, and the length, form and content of the questionnaire to be used. If a participant observation study, indicate nature of site, how often you will visit over what period of time and what kinds of things you will do while there.
5. Concrete discussion of the specific **STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR ANALYZING AND PRESENTING THE EVIDENCE**: How you will convert the raw data (e.g. completed questionnaires, field notes, interview transcripts, etc.) into specific findings and how you will present such findings to the reader (e.g., tables, charts, field notes or interview excerpts, etc.). This is a useful exercise early in the process to try and visualize the final product—what readers will see when they look at your manuscript.
6. Finally, there must be some estimate of the **TIME** each step of the research cycle will require, including when the first draft of the paper should be expected.

\*Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exemption may be necessary prior to starting any research activity. Consult with your committee. Exemption applications are available in the main office.

Students may choose their own problem and their own evidence, or they may conduct a secondary analysis of a data set already available. In both cases, a comprehensive review of relevant literature is expected. The Prospectus, when based on secondary analysis of data should address:

- A detailed discussion of how and for what purposes the original data was collected and in what form they are now available for analysis.
- A critical discussion of what kinds of analyses are possible and preferable, given the definition of the problem and the nature of the data.
- A tightly reasoned argument as to how the findings obtained will illuminate or solve the research problem as formulated.

An approved prospectus must be kept in the student file until completion of thesis. (Students must provide this information to the graduate secretary.)

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## Guidelines for Masters Thesis

This document is intended to provide guidance for graduate students and faculty regarding procedures and criteria relevant to the completion of a Masters Thesis.

### COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

1. Three faculty must be selected by the student to compose his/her Research Committee. No more than one member may be from outside the Division. The student must designate a Committee Chair from among the Sociology graduate faculty.
2. Substitution of Research Committee members may occur at the request of either student or faculty. Substitution is permissible providing it is done with the written approval of both the student and the Committee Chair. Such amendment would be processed in the same manner as the above.
3. Substitution of Research Committee Chair may occur at the request of either student or faculty. It is permissible providing it is done with the written approval of the student and the Graduate Committee Chair. Such amendment would be processed in the same manner as the above.

### RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS

1. Students are strongly encouraged to submit a Prospectus to the Committee at least by the end of the second semester.
2. The Prospectus for the Thesis or Applied Social Research Report must be signed by all three members or the Research Committee at a common meeting at which the student is present. The approved Prospectus also must be signed by the student.
3. One copy of the Prospectus is entrusted to the Committee Chair, one to the student, and one placed in the student's academic file.
4. The Prospectus constitutes a working agreement binding on both the Committee and student. If a student carries out the research indicated in the Prospectus, the requirements for the study will have been fulfilled, regardless of the findings of the research. Sometimes, however, it is not possible to follow the Prospectus exactly, and the research may have to take a different direction than originally planned. In such cases, the Prospectus may be amended. This is perfectly acceptable, but it does require the written consent of all the original signers. Such amendment would be processed in the same manner as the original agreement.

### THESIS PREPARATION

1. It is imperative that Committee members respond to draft submissions by the student with explicit commentary as soon as possible. The Chair, in consultation with his/hers colleagues, indicates when he/she considers a public presentation appropriate.
2. In order for a completed Thesis to receive final approval, it must be signed by all members of the Committee after a successful, public presentation by the student. Students preparing a thesis must refer to requirements detailed in the WVU Graduate Catalog (p. 40): "Theses and dissertations should be presented to the student's graduate advisor or committee chairperson **at least one month** before the end of the enrollment period in which completion of all requirements is expected."
3. Students preparing a thesis must follow the form and general guidelines proscribed under the WVU Graduate School "Regulations Governing the Preparation of Theses," available from the Graduate Records Office, 103 Woodburn Hall (293-2505). Chairperson of the student's Research Committee is to assist the student in applying these general requirements to styles appropriate in the field of Sociology.
4. Students preparing a thesis must consult with the Eberly College of Arts & Sciences Graduate Records Office, 103 Woodburn Hall (293-2505) for regulations on deadlines and dates for submission of final copies of the thesis. Contact the Library Business Office, Wise Library for any questions regarding Electronic Thesis (ETD).
5. All WVU Graduate School rules and regulations must be observed.
6. All students are welcome to consult the Chairperson of the Division of Sociology and Anthropology about any of the above matters at any time.