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I. Orientation

Welcome to the PhD program in the department of Sociology at USC. This guidebook explains the procedures and requirements of the PhD program, but the Student Services Coordinator (Stachelle Overland) and the Director of Graduate Studies (Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo) are available to assist you in dealing any of the complexities and confusions that may arise in this graduate program. As you enter the PhD program, a faculty mentor and a graduate student mentor will also be assigned to you. You should turn to them for advice, suggestions and seek their guidance any time you encounter difficulties. The faculty mentor is chosen on the basis of compatibility of research interests, and that faculty mentor may serve as your dissertation advisor. While you may end up working continuously with the same faculty mentor during your graduate student years, it is also possible for you to change advisors and to invite a different faculty mentor to supervise your work and to serve on your committees. Section IV of this guidebook explains more about this process and offers important tips on how to seek mentorship.

At the beginning of the fall semester, an orientation with the Student Services Coordinator and the Director of Graduate Studies will provide an overview of the graduate program. This will be followed about a week later by an informal reception, held on campus, which will provide an opportunity to meet and chat with faculty, staff and graduate students. There is a dinner for the first year cohort at the DGS’s home, and a departmental fall party at the home of the Chair, so there will be many opportunities for informal socializing. During your first semester, you will also be attending a weekly Proseminar, where faculty will discuss their research. This will offer many opportunities to meet department faculty, but be proactive. Don’t be shy about visiting faculty during office hours to introduce your self and to discuss research interests or ask questions.

We strive to maintain a friendly, supportive and collegial environment. There are several shared spaces: the main office; the collective TA room; the kitchen and eating area; the Sociology Center (where colloquia and many seminars are held); and the graduate lounge. Use these common spaces. Much of what you will learn in graduate school will come from conversations with others. As the first year cohort, you will also be in charge of keeping up the graduate lounge.

Graduate students are represented by four elected representatives (representing first, second, third and “fourth and beyond” year graduate cohorts). These representatives are expected to attend the monthly faculty meetings and graduate meetings, except when personnel or admissions matters are discussed. USC Sociology graduate students also have a vibrant tradition of organizing professionalization workshops, colloquia, and invited speakers. There is also a newly re-formed AKD chapter, and sociology graduate students are represented on the Graduate and Professional Student Association at USC.

Sincerely,

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo  Stachelle Overland
Professor, and Director of Graduate Studies  Student Services Coordinator
II. Core Courses

Please consult the university catalogue for the full list of requirements for the Ph.D. in Sociology. Please note that you are expected to be a full-time student, meaning that you will take at least 8 units per semester until your formal coursework is finished. Many students are currently taking 12 units per semester, prior to taking Qualifying Exams. You are required to take 7 core courses (including the Proseminar). You are required to complete a total of 60 units by the time you complete the Ph.D.

The department currently offers two sequences of methodology courses. All students must take at least one course from both sequences, and all students must choose one of the two-semester sequences in order to acquire professional-level research skills in the methodologies most appropriate for the student’s emerging research interests.

The two-semester sequences are:
Sociology 521-621: Quantitative Methods and Statistics I and II
Sociology 520-524: Participant-observation and Interviewing I and II

During selected years, students interested in participant-observation and interviewing may take one or both semesters of Ethnography of Organizations, in place of Sociology 520 and Sociology 524, to satisfy methodological training requirements. This course will be offered concurrently with Sociology 520-524, the years that it is offered. Students may not take solely the second semester of Ethnography of Organizations without having taken the first semester of that course. In the future we hope to expand methodological training further, depending on faculty availability. Core courses and the recommended sequence in which you should take them during the first two years are stipulated on the following page:
Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fall semester</th>
<th>Spring semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year I</td>
<td>510 Sociological Theory</td>
<td>610 Sociological Theory II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>664 Survey of Research Methods</td>
<td>521 Quantitative Methods and Statistics I (<em>required of all students</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>525 Soc. Proseminar</td>
<td>Elective seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year II</td>
<td>520 Participant-observation and Interviewing I (<em>required of all students</em>) OR Ethnography of Organizations I when available</td>
<td>524 Participant-observation and Interviewing II (<em>only for students choosing the 520-524 sequence</em>) OR Ethnography of Organizations II when available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>621 Quantitative Methods and Statistics II (<em>only for students choosing the 521-621 sequence</em>)</td>
<td>Elective seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elective seminar</td>
<td>*523 Adv. Methods: Quantitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to follow a sequence other than those recommended above, please consult with the graduate director to plan your schedule.

Note: Students admitted conditionally must follow a sequence approved by the graduate director until restrictions on the student’s admission are removed. Please keep two criteria in mind:

1. Before taking Sociology 521, you must have successfully taken an undergraduate statistics course. If you have not met this prerequisite, you will need to take and pass Sociology 314 (undergraduate statistics) before enrolling in Sociology 521.
III. Screening

Every PhD student in the program will be screened by the Graduate Committee at the beginning of the third semester, and thereafter, by the entire faculty towards the end of every spring semester. Screening allows both the faculty and the graduate students to evaluate student progress and goals, and identify opportunities as well as problems.

Third Semester Screening
The first screening, the one that occurs at the beginning of the third semester, is part of a mandatory university policy. The first year of graduate study is, in effect, a probationary period. Graduate students should have completed at least four required courses before this screening. To facilitate the screening, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) gathers the grades from the coursework, and obtains informal written feedback from the sociology faculty who have taught the students. This information is discussed confidentially in the Graduate Committee meeting, and the DGS then synthesizes this information in a letter to the graduate student. This narrative assessment may include suggestions for how a graduate student might participate more actively in seminar discussion, or it might be a frank assessment of the student’s intellectual strengths or weaknesses, or perhaps feedback on the student’s work habits. Grades will be considered, but we are generally seeking a more nuanced screening. The Graduate Committee will make a recommendation as to whether the student should continue in the program, or consider other options. After the graduate student receives the letter, she or he makes an appointment to meet individually with the DGS. This is a time to talk about any concerns, and begin thinking ahead to the student’s emerging field of specialization, and the formation of the Guidance Committee. At this meeting, you should be ready to identify the two areas of specialization that you intend to pursue. The DGS will want to know which faculty you intend to have on the Guidance Committee. The process sounds daunting, so if you are worried about it, talk to other graduate students who have gone through the process.

Forming the Guidance Committee
The semester in which you are screened is also the time to form your five-person Guidance Committee. This will consist of your chair, three other faculty members from the department, and one faculty from outside the department. You will want to begin cultivating these faculty relationships during your first year in graduate school. To establish the committee you will need the sociology department form “Appointment of Ph.D. Guidance Committee.” The Guidance Committee is there to offer guidance in your studies, course selection, reading lists, etc., and they will advise you about how to best prepare for the Qualifying Exams. The Guidance Committee, and particularly your chair, can help advise on when you are ready to take the Qualifying Exams. Ideally, these should be taken in the spring semester of the third year, and no later than the first semester of the fourth year. The Guidance Committee should include at least one faculty member from each of your specialty areas. After you have passed the Qualifying Exams, it is likely that you will ask three of the Guidance Committee members (two from
sociology, and an outside member) to supervise your dissertation. Keep this in mind as you put the Guidance Committee together. And once again, remain proactive in staying in contact with your faculty advisors. The Guidance Committee is there for your benefit, but it is your responsibility to seek guidance from them.

Annual Review
The annual full-faculty review of graduate students occurs late in the spring semester. The department began this process in 2008 due to the problem of several graduate students taking too long to complete the PhD (7 years+), but it provides a useful collective assessment of all the graduate students. The intention of the review is to help provide you with feedback that will advance your progress in the program. During the annual spring screening, the entire tenure track and tenured faculty meet to discuss the progress of each student, and the faculty mentor or chair is responsible for preparing some brief remarks about the particular student’s progress, promise and any problems that may be arising. Based on this screening, a student will normally be recommended for continuation in the program, and informed if she/he is making satisfactory progress. The DGS will communicate this information to the graduate student via a letter. The letter will usually include some frank assessments and directives that are intended to help the student (e.g., become less involved in student and professional organizations; make timely progress on finishing the empirical paper/dissertation proposal, etc.). There may also be concerns expressed about the student’s slow pace in the program, or questions raised about the quality of work. In these cases, a student may be told that she or he is not making satisfactory progress, and if this occurs, the student may be advised to reach a particular benchmark goal by a particular date in order to remain in the program (e.g., successfully finish the empirical paper, or take Qualifying Exams by a certain date, etc.).

Seven Years and Beyond
The Deans in the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences have recently begun to require a mandatory “Plan for Dissertation Completion” for all PhD students who have been in the program for seven years or more. This requires the student to fill out a schedule for completing the dissertation, in consultation with the dissertation chair. The Student Services Coordinator and DGS review these, and these are then sent to the deans. Students who take seven years or longer to complete the PhD will be closely monitored by both the Graduate Committee and the Deans, and will be under pressure to make timely progress.
IV. Mentorship, Advising, Faculty Committees

The Sociology Department will assign you a main advisor before you begin your first year of graduate school. Your responsibility is to meet with your advisor each semester as you’re deciding about your classes, and then as many times as is necessary during the year to update her/him about your progress. In most cases, your advisor is the person within the department who has the most expertise in your primary field. It’s also important to talk with other faculty as well as your advisor, to broaden your perspective in ways that will help your work speak to more subfields in the discipline of sociology. Spend time talking with various professors. Read their publications and take graduate seminars with different faculty, as these are important ways to develop intellectual relationships. If it is not possible to take a graduate seminar with those with whom you’d like to work, consider asking faculty about the possibility of doing a Directed Reading with them focused around your common interests. It is wise to develop working intellectual relationships with people early in your graduate career, as this will also help you constitute your various committees. While your advisor is responsible for keeping communication open between the two of you, and guiding you through each phase of your graduate degree, it is your responsibility to keep her/him updated about your developing project and course progression.

Your advisor will serve as the Chair of your guidance committee and, in many cases, will also be the Chair of your dissertation committee. The Guidance Committee is a committee of 5 people who help you prepare for the Qualifying Exam. Decide during the second year what your fields will be and then use this decision to build your committee. It is possible to make changes to your committee—up to and including your advisor—at any time prior to filing the paperwork to take your qualifying examinations. In fact, your guidance committee does not become official until you actually request to take the qualifying examinations. Students typically stay with the first year advisor, but this is not always the case. A student’s intellectual directions or research interests may shift, or occasionally it may be difficult for student and faculty chair to fashion a working relationship that works well for both. At the end of the first year, students should assess their relationship with their advisor, and if it seems necessary, discuss any concerns with the Director of Graduate Studies, and ideally, with the advisor too. If you are going to make a shift, do it as early as possible to avoid delay in your progress.

The Dissertation Committee consists of three people who oversee the dissertation process. You will be working under the direction of your Dissertation Committee chair for roughly two years, an occasionally even longer. Find out well before your qualifying exams if this is indeed a good scholarly match for you. Indeed, this is the primary person with whom you will be working and under whose guidance your work will flourish. It is not necessary to bombard this person with questions and visits, however make sure that you check in at least once during a semester and be in touch with this person about academic opportunities such as conference participation, publishing venues, and fellowship possibilities, especially after the qualifying exam. Again, while you may change a dissertation chair it is generally rare to do so; relationships take time to develop and you ought to discuss a change thoughtfully with a potential new chair, and ideally with your current chair, before making a change.
Your Faculty Mentor

You and your Ph.D. mentor share the responsibility for establishing a relationship that contributes to the successful pursuit of your graduate degree. Your mentoring relationship should reflect mutual respect, fairness, collegiality, honesty and open communication. The following guidelines outline the ideal responsibilities of each party in the mentoring relationship. Of course, both you and your mentor must expect a degree of real-world accommodation to these specifications.

The Ideal Mentor:

Reads and returns work promptly, with constructive comments.
Develops with the student a list of short- and long-term research and professional goals.
Clarifies expectations and policies.
Communicates regularly about research progress, scheduling changes, and workshops or seminars that will aid in the student’s professional development.
Provides students with opportunities to develop and practice professional skills required for research, teaching and service.
Helps students develop an innovative dissertation topic.
Helps students develop a marketable job dossier.
Supports the variety of professional interests a student may have in research, industry, teaching and service.
Facilitates networking.
Knows course and milestone requirements.
Treats students respectfully as future colleagues.
Encourages students, and provides emotional and moral support.
Acknowledges that students have responsibilities outside the academy.

The Ideal Student:

Chooses his or her mentor thoughtfully and wisely by becoming familiar with the professor’s research and professional interests.
Has developed short- and long-term professional and research goals, and shares these goals with his or her mentor.
Is aware of his or her own strengths and weaknesses.
Submits work promptly and comes to meetings prepared with specific goals, questions and tasks to be accomplished in that meeting.
Communicates regularly with faculty about his or her progress, changes in focus, and professional needs.
Asks for clarification of the mentor’s expectations and policies.
Respects the mentor’s time and reputation.
Asks the mentor for information and advice about workshops that will enhance
professional development.
Knows the requirements for the degree program, and asks the mentor for help in
successfully completing those requirements.
Takes the mentor’s advice seriously.

These guidelines were created for a workshop offered by The Graduate School during the
fall 2008 Graduate Student Orientation. For further information, see:
Mentoring Relationships for USC Graduate Students brochure.
V. Areas of Specialization

In addition to satisfying the core requirements, you will be expected to specialize in two areas or subfields of sociology, one of which will be a standard area in which the department offers a concentration (e.g., culture, demography, family, gender, immigration, race/ethnicity, social inequality, religion, etc.). The second qualifying exam area will be your “Customized” area. This is intended as an opportunity for you to develop particular strengths that will enable you to develop a strong dissertation. Think of the customized qualifying exam area as an opportunity for you to read and think about the scholarship that will serve as the foundation for your dissertation. Often, the customized area brings together more than one focus, and past topics have included “gender and work,” “family and LGBT sexualities,” and “race and urban inequality.” The Custom Qualifying Exam topic should not overlap significantly with the Standard Qualifying Exam. For example, a student selecting “gender and work” for the Custom Qual area should not select “gender” for the Standard Qual area. You will develop the parameters of this customized area by working closely with faculty, especially with your faculty mentor. The customized area is subject to the approval of your guidance committee.

Carefully read the section on Qualifying Exams included in this guidebook. That section specifies the steps and requirements for the Qualifying Exams. Feel free, of course, to raise questions with Student Services Coordinator, your faculty mentor, and the Director of Graduate Studies.
VI. The Empirical Paper

By now, you have heard about “the empirical paper.” In other departments and universities, this is sometimes called “the MA thesis” or “the qualifying paper.” Why do we have this requirement? This is intended to give you experience in formulating an original research question, and in conducting original research, analysis and writing. Think of it as a dry run to conducting in-depth dissertation research.

The empirical paper should represent a piece of original empirical research and analysis, and it must be written in a format appropriate for submission to a professional publication (Note: the requirement is that the paper should be “publishable,” but not published. Several recent empirical papers have been published in well-regarded sociology journals). Additionally, there is an oral component, as you must present this research paper at a professional conference or an academic setting. This is to give you experience in sharing your research with others.

The empirical paper is supervised by an “Empirical Paper Committee” (2 tenured or tenure track faculty in the department). You will begin the empirical paper in either the Participant Observation and Interviewing I&II course sequence (or Ethnography of Organizations, if it is offered), or the Quantitative Methods and Statistics I & II course sequence. The two supervising faculty should come from your Guidance Committee (the committee of 5 faculty which you will form in your second year). One faculty member should be someone who may likely serve as your dissertation advisor; the second faculty reader should be someone who provides a “fit” with the area of specialization or the method used.

You should begin thinking about what you intend to research during the first year of graduate school. During the fall semester of your first year in the Proseminar class, you will be writing a literature review. This is an opportunity to begin framing the social issues you are interested in researching. During the first year of graduate school, as you identify an area of focus for your empirical paper, begin speaking to faculty who might supervise your research by serving on the empirical paper committee. Tell them what interests you, and get their advice on how this research interest could transform into a research project. Ask them if they think particular research methods are suitable for the types of questions you wish to pose. You won’t begin actively researching the empirical paper until spring of the first year if you are doing a quantitative project, or fall of the second year if you are doing an ethnographic and/or interview study, but it’s good to have a foundation before beginning.

How do you shape a research question and project?

- Devise a research question grounded in a theoretical debate
- Use particular methods that allow you to collect empirical data that will answer this question
- Prepare and submit an IRB Human Subjects application
- Collect, analyze and interpret the data
- Write a paper that communicates what you have learned
- Present the paper in a professional conference or setting that encourages critical commentary and feedback

People often choose research questions based on personal biography and passion, and also because they want to provide a social good, or stimulate social change. Those are perfectly valid and reasonable places from which to start, but you also want to formulate a research question that is engaged with relevant theoretical debates.

Choose something that really interests you, as you will be working on this research project for at least one year. It will require lots of initiative on your part, but this will not be an entirely solo endeavor. You will be working on the empirical paper under the supervision of a classroom instructor, and with your Empirical Paper faculty chair. You should also discuss it with your peers, inside and outside of the classroom.

What should the final written paper look like? It should be a relatively short paper (approximately 30 pages), and article-like in both length and form. Discuss prospective journals with your advisor, and peruse articles in particular journals to get a sense of these parameters.

Who doesn’t have to do the Empirical Paper? If you completed an MA thesis in another program prior to beginning the PhD in Sociology at USC, or if you have published a paper based on original empirical research, you may want to submit that paper for consideration in meeting this requirement. That will still require the approval of two faculty members constituting the Empirical Paper Committee, and an oral presentation at a conference or similar setting. The paper must be written in clear English. If it is accepted (and this may require some revisions), it will not be necessary for you to complete a new study.

Here are the steps for submission and approval of the Empirical Paper (regardless of whether it is new or previously completed elsewhere).

1. Recruit your 2 faculty member “Empirical Paper Committee” during your first year.

2. Ask these 2 faculty members to sign “The Empirical Paper Sign-Off Record” form. **Obtain their signatures, agreeing to supervise, by the end of your first year.** These forms are available at the end of this booklet, and from the Student Services Coordinator. Once signed, return the form to the Student Services Coordinator.

3. Formulate your research question and study, and conduct the research in the context of the appropriate courses. This begins spring of the first year if you are doing a quantitatively-oriented paper, and fall of the second year if you are doing an ethnography and/or interview study.
4. Stay in contact with your Empirical Paper Committee, discussing the project as it progresses. When they read and approve the final paper (by the very latest, fall of your third year), ask these two faculty to sign the form again. Return the form and one copy of the final paper to the Student Services Coordinator.

5. Present the paper at a professional conference or setting. It’s a good idea to present a “paper in progress” at the Pacific Sociological Association annual meetings, which are usually held in a west coast city during the month of April. You must submit an abstract of the paper in October in order to be considered on the program for April. If your paper is accepted into the program, you can generally count on department support to help cover the costs of conference attendance and travel. It’s perfectly fine and perhaps even advisable to present a conference paper before it is completed and accepted for final approval. This way, you can receive feedback that may be helpful for revisions. After you present the paper, be sure to get the Empirical Paper Committee members to sign your form.

Alternative venues for presenting the paper:
As already noted, to present your paper at the Pacific Sociological Association (PSA) in April, you will usually need to submit a paper abstract to session organizers in October. If you are unable to do this, you might consider other venues, such as the USC-UCLA Thinking Gender Annual Conference; the American Sociological Association Annual Meetings in August (this usually requires an entire paper be submitted in January, and it’s generally more competitive to get accepted than the PSA program); or you may be able to make a presentation at another professional meeting or perhaps at one of the research centers at USC, such as the Center for Religion and Civic Culture; or the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, if there is an upcoming conference.

Advisable, but not Mandatory
If you write a strong paper that represents original research, you should try to get it published. Talk to your faculty advisors about this possibility. It’s usually a long process, and one that involves rethinking, and revising the paper substantially. It can be very gratifying to have your work published. In terms of your career, it is also very useful for you to have a solo-authored publication based on your empirical paper research. Regardless of whether you pursue publication, be sure to get your Empirical Paper signed off by the fall of your third year.

What to do after the Empirical Paper?
After you have completed the Empirical Paper and gathered both faculty members’ signatures of completion, remember to give the Empirical Paper Sign-Off Record form back to the Student Services Coordinator. Turn this form in before the semester in which you expect to take Qualifying Exams. Next, you turn your attention to studying for Qualifying Exams.
VII. The Qualifying Exams

Each student in the program must take 2 Qualifying Exams (a Standard, and a Custom one) during one semester, preferably the 2nd semester of the third year. The purpose of the Standard and Custom Qualifying Exams is to allow students to show their competence in multiple areas of sociological inquiry, theory, and empirical research.

Graduate students must complete at least eight units in each of their Standard and Custom Qualifying Exam areas, and must complete a total of at least 32 units before taking the Qualifying Exam. For example, if a student is taking the Standard Qualifying Exam in Race and Ethnicity, she is required to complete at least two four-unit courses on race and ethnicity. If a student is taking the Custom Qualifying Exam in Sexuality and Immigration, she is required to complete at least two four-unit courses on gender, sexuality, and/or immigration. These requirements can be met by (1) completing graduate courses in the areas of focus within the sociology department (this is the preferred option), (2) completing graduate courses in the areas of focus in other departments (this should be limited as much as possible), or (3) completing Directed Readings with members of the Guidance Committee.

The Standard Qualifying Exam faculty committee members are selected by the Chair of the department, in consultation with the DGS. We are now striving to have three faculty members serve on each of the Standard Qualifying Exam committees. To constitute the Custom Qualifying Exam committee, the graduate student will need to approach his or her faculty mentor, and one other tenured or tenure track faculty member in the department. The Custom Qualifying Exam content is negotiated by the graduate student, and the two faculty members.

The Standard Qualifying Exam

The Standard Qualifying exam gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of a general area of sociological study (e.g., gender, race, culture, or immigration). In effect, students show that they are prepared to teach introductory and more specialized courses in the area, and that they have a foundation on which to develop more focused research. Standard Exam questions should balance core knowledge in the area of focus with the many alternative pathways that more specialized interests might follow.

The format of the Standard Exam typically consists of 4-6 questions, with the option for students to choose from questions on the exam (i.e., the exam may consist of six questions of which the student will answer three). The student will either write three 8 page, double-spaced, typed essays, choosing from the six questions, or two 8 page, double-spaced, typed essays, choosing from 4 questions. If the committee and the student agree on the latter option, the student will also prepare a syllabus. Although the
questions on the Standard Exam may be quite similar to those on exams from previous years, these questions will not be given to the student in advance.

The Standard Qualifying Exam process usually works like this:

- Before taking the Standard Exam, the student should take the graduate seminar in their area of focus (e.g., Sociology of Sex and Gender) as well as at least one other four-unit course in the area of focus.

- The student meets with the Guidance Committee chair and the other faculty member who will be grading the Standard Exam in her area of focus. The student does not choose who grades her Standard Exam; the department determines the two graders for each area of focus in advance. Ideally, both examiners should be members of the student’s Guidance Committee, but this is not a formal requirement.

- The student develops a detailed reading list, organized by topic, and discusses it with the members of the Guidance Committee who will be overseeing the Standard Exam. When constructing the reading list, a good place to start is the required and recommended readings on the syllabus of the graduate seminar offered in the area of focus. To gain exposure to an array of topics and readings currently taught in the area of focus, the student should peruse a variety of syllabi in the area of focus, as well as articles that are published and distributed on the American Sociological Association Teaching Resources Center website. The student should also look at articles and “review essays” on the area of focus in sociological journals.

- The examiners point out gaps in the reading list and suggest additional readings or specific topic areas.

- The student adapts the reading list to reflect the examiners’ feedback and submits a finalized reading list (including complete citations) to the examiners. Within each topic area, the student should outline (in a few sentences or paragraphs) the issues or questions she considers to be most important and interesting in that body of literature. Although it is not required, it may be helpful for the student to construct the reading list as an annotated bibliography. The reading list should be submitted to the examiners at least five weeks before the exam date.

- While reading and thinking about the reading list, the student should meet with the examiners to get an idea of what sorts of questions may come up on the exam. The student should also review the questions on Standard Exams in their area of focus from previous years (these are available in the Sociology office), as well as read fellow graduate students’ responses to previous Standard Exam questions.
• Although it is not a requirement, the student may choose to write outlines or preliminary responses for potential questions in preparation for the exam.

• The student receives the final Standard Qualifying Exam questions on Friday and hands them in on Monday (usually during the first or second weekend of October or March). The questions may be quite similar to the questions on exams from previous years; however, the examiners may adapt the questions to push the student to think beyond the answers she may have prepared, encourage her to think on her feet, and so on.

The Custom Qualifying Exam

The Custom Qualifying Exam gives students an opportunity to create an exam with their Guidance Committee chair and one or two other Guidance Committee members that will help launch their Dissertations. Often, the Custom Exam involves the intersection of two sociological areas (e.g., families and immigration, nationalism and race, or technology and culture). Although these kinds of couplings are not a formal requirement of the Custom Exam, they often reflect the areas in which students want to situate their dissertations. Students might decide to craft other subfields, and should discuss options with their faculty advisors. The Custom Exam may be related to the Standard Exam, but it should cover a distinct area of study. The department expects that the Guidance Committee chair and examiners will ensure that the Custom Exam calls for comprehensiveness, proficiency, and expertise in an important sociological area within which the student’s dissertation research will be based.

Unlike the Standard Exam, the format of the Custom Exam is determined by the student and the examiners. For example, the Custom Exam can have two broad questions with no choice, four more specific questions with no choice, two or four questions with choices, and so on.

The Custom Qualifying Exam process generally works like this:

• Before taking the Custom Qualifying Exam, the student must take at least two four-unit courses in the area(s) of focus. Although it is not a requirement, it may be helpful for the student to complete one or more Directed Readings with Guidance Committee members that focus on the student’s specific area(s) of interest.

• The student approaches her Guidance Committee chair and one or two other Guidance Committee members (from inside or outside the department) with a general idea for the Custom Qualifying Exam and, by extension, the Dissertation. The examiners that the student chooses for the Custom Exam may be the same examiners she had for the Standard Exam, although they do not have to be.
• The student compiles a reading list, organized by topic, that covers the various bodies of literature she wants to include in her Custom Exam.

• The Guidance Committee chair, along with the other selected examiners, offer suggestions on how these general ideas and reading lists might be shaped, made more cohesive, whittled down, and/or formatted to fit department expectations.

• Following this feedback, the student writes and submits various potential Custom Exam questions to the examiners.

• The examiners review these questions, then either approve the questions or offer suggestions on how to improve the questions.

• Through a collaborative effort, the student and the examiners reach a point of agreement on the Custom Exam questions. The Guidance Committee chair is responsible for ensuring that there is not too much overlap between the Custom Exam questions and those on the student’s Standard Exam.

• The student receives the final Custom Qualifying Exam questions on Friday and hands them in on Monday (2-4 weeks after completion of the Standard Exam, usually in November or April). The final questions may look exactly like the questions agreed upon by the examiners and the student, or they might look similar to those questions but with some changes added by the examiners to push the student to think beyond the answers she has prepared, encourage her to think on her feet, and so on.

The Custom Qualifying Exam has a number of distinct features:

• On the Custom Exam, **students are expected to take the lead**. They need to be proactive in developing an idea that is cohesive and that meets the Guidance Committee chair’s understanding of a promising sociological area of research for the Dissertation. Students are responsible for presenting the idea to the Guidance Committee chair and selecting one or two other Guidance Committee members to serve as examiners. Students should submit a draft of potential questions, and they are responsible for reviewing, revising, and resubmitting these questions to meet the expectations of the examiners. The payoff is that students get to study what they are most passionate about and, in the process of taking the Custom Exam, will produce material that should be directly useful for beginning their Dissertations.

• The Custom Exam is a process that takes a good deal of time. Students have to figure out the area(s) they want to specialize in, secure examiners from the Guidance Committee, write and edit questions, get them approved—and then, of course, study for the exam itself. Students need to begin this process **at least one year before they expect to take the Custom Exam.**
• The structure of the Custom Exam has fewer formal requirements and constraints than that of the Standard Exam. This is purposeful, intended to give students and their Guidance Committee members more freedom to shape an exam that maximizes students’ career interests and Dissertation goals.

• The Guidance Committee chair is typically the most important faculty member in the Custom Exam process because the student expects her to also serve as the Dissertation Committee chair. Guidance Committee chairs are expected to help students shape and fine-tune their goals and questions for the Custom Exam as well as help students negotiate any concerns among the other examiners.

• The 8 required units that count toward the Custom Exam need to be especially carefully considered, discussed, and agreed upon by the student and the Guidance Committee chair (and, ideally, the 1-2 other Guidance Committee members who will participate in the Custom Exam process). This assures that students have received sufficient training and study in the area(s) that they wish to pursue in their Dissertation research.

The Qualifying Exam Oral Defense

The purpose of the Qualifying Exam Oral Defense is to allow your Guidance Committee members to ask questions and provide feedback regarding students’ responses to their Standard and Custom Qualifying Exams. The Oral Defense is also an opportune time to discuss possible directions for future research and the preliminary stages of the Dissertation. The Oral Defense process usually works like this:

• Before taking the Standard and Custom Qualifying Exams, the student arranges a date/time/place for the Oral Defense. This meeting should take place about a month after the completion of the Custom Exam (usually early December or early May). All five members of the Guidance Committee need to be present at this meeting, so the student needs to plan ahead in order to accommodate multiple busy schedules.

• All members of the Guidance Committee, including the outside faculty member, must receive copies of the exam essays at least two weeks in advance of the meeting.

• The student meets with her Guidance Committee and responds to any questions, comments, or concerns about her Standard and Custom Exams. This is also an opportunity to discuss plans for the dissertation research, and a preliminary dissertation proposal may be circulated in advance and discussed at this time.

• Following the Oral Defense, the student selects her Dissertation Committee and begins preparation of the Dissertation Prospectus.
VIII. The preliminary dissertation proposal
In the months of preparation leading up to the qualifying exams, you may find it difficult to think in detail about your dissertation project. If you succeed with the written quals, however, you have to be ready to discuss your dissertation plans almost immediately. It’s useful to think of the period following the completion of coursework and your empirical project as “the time to develop a dissertation project and study for the quals.” You rob yourself of useful and time-saving dissertation advice if you arrive at the oral portion of your quals without a thoughtful, though preliminary, proposal for the dissertation research. These meetings can be very fruitful, as you will have five faculty focusing their attention on you and your work. You can make the most of it by circulating a short document, outlining potential plans of research, prior to the meeting. Seek guidance from your faculty chair in preparing this document.

Life at the Post-Qualifying Exam Stage
Remember to continuously enroll for at least two units in the fall and spring semester while you are working on the dissertation.

Choosing Your Dissertation Topic
Choosing your dissertation project is probably the most consequential decision you’ll undertake in graduate school. For some students, the choice is easy, based on existing interests as well as future goals. For others, it can be painful to narrow one's broad conceptual ambitions into a manageable project. There is no single way to make this choice. In conversation with your advisers, think through the following questions:

- Are you passionate about this topic? You will be living with this project not only for the rest of your graduate career, but mostly likely several years beyond - so the topic should be something you care about deeply.

- Can the project be accomplished within a realistic time frame? While your topic should be ambitious, a key factor in your success will be your ability to delimit the project so that you can accomplish the research, data analysis and write-up within a reasonable amount of time.

- What contemporary conversations in sociology will your dissertation contribute to? Think about the specific sub-fields that this work will engage with, and the kinds of work that count as "contributions" to this sub-field.

- To what extent does the project lend itself to the methodological approaches and theoretical orientations you are most invested in? Is this a project that your advisers will be able to help you with?

In addition to discussions with advisers and fellow students, it is useful to look for models of what a successful completed project looks like. Read some recent dissertations by USC students or dissertations on topics related to your interests that were written elsewhere. You may also want to look at the first books of scholars you admire, which are typically based on their dissertations.
IX. The Dissertation

Writing the dissertation and defending it are the final steps in the program. Like the empirical paper, the dissertation testifies to your ability to conceptualize, conduct, and report the results of original empirical research. Since your goal is a good position in the discipline, you should undertake this process with the goal of publication.

*Remember,* each of the following steps should be taken with close advisement from your dissertation committee chairperson, as well as your larger committee.

**Forming the Dissertation Committee**

By this time, you already have formed your five-member *guidance* committee for the purpose of preparing for and completing the Qualifying Examinations (Q.E.s). After successful completion of the Oral Q.E. you will form a three-member *dissertation* committee: a chairperson, another member from sociology, and an outside member. The dissertation committee typically consists of select members of your larger (and now obsolete) guidance committee. If you desire, more than 3 members may be included. Co-chairs are also permitted.

Reducing the five-person *guidance* committee to the smaller *dissertation* committee can be easily done at the time of the Oral Q.E. The members of the guidance committee are assembled at that time, and there is space on the Q.E. reporting form to record the composition of the dissertation committee. If your final dissertation committee membership is still in question for you at that time (because your project is insufficiently advanced or members are uncertain of their availability), *take note* that when the changes are made you will need to file a CHANGE OF COMMITTEE form with the Graduate School.

Remember that you will have wanted to cultivate a relationship with a faculty member outside of the department who can serve on your dissertation committee.

**The Dissertation Proposal**

In consultation with your dissertation chairperson and committee, you are to develop a formal dissertation prospectus. The prospectus is expected to be ready to defend within six months of the completed Q.E. This proposal should, ideally, be suitable for submission to a foundation for a grant and it is expected that some students will, in fact, submit their proposals for such consideration. For advice on the writing of a proposal see part A in the Appendix.
The Dissertation Proposal Hearing

When the members of the committee agree that the prospectus is ready to be defended (or in some cases, where a second defense is necessary), a formal prospectus defense is scheduled. Since it is officially a departmental event, the defense date: 1) must be scheduled and on the department calendar at least two weeks prior to the defense, 2) must be approved by the graduate director, and 3) must take place at least one semester prior to the actual dissertation defense date. In the rare case of a proposal oral taking place during the spring or winter break or during the summer, the announcement must take place at least three weeks in advance. Unlike your Oral Q.E. and your eventual dissertation defense, your proposal defense is open to all USC faculty and graduate students.

The outcome of the dissertation proposal hearing will be “Acceptance” or “Rejection” of the proposal by the dissertation committee:

“Acceptance” of the proposal may be straightforward, or it may be conditional upon modifications to be later approved by the committee. After their final approval of the proposal the committee members must sign the form entitled “APPROVAL OF DISSERTATION PROSPECTUS”, which you must obtain in advance from the student services coordinator, who will assist you in filing the final, signed copy.

“Rejection” of the proposal calls for a second hearing at a later time, following the same scheduling rules of procedure as the first hearing.

Once the prospectus has been approved, remember that if your research involves human subjects, an on-line application must be approved by the USC Institutional Review Board (IRB) before you can begin research.

Evaluation of the Completed Dissertation.

The official dissertation defense must be attended by all the members of the dissertation committee and may be attended by any other interested members of the USC faculty and student body. It is suggested but not required that the defense oral take the form of a seminar presentation by the candidate, followed by a question and answer session. Your committee (especially your chair) can help you decide which defense format is best for you.

Final approval of the dissertation at the defense oral is not automatic; additional revisions may be required in light of the discussion that takes place there.

The scheduling rules for your prospectus defense also apply to the final defense oral: they both must be announced in the department calendar for at least two consecutive weeks before the meetings take place. Exceptions to the rules governing the scheduling and conduct of the pre-oral and defense oral may be granted upon petition to the graduate committee. In general, exceptions will be made only when some alternative arrangement
has been made to insure that the spirit, if not the letter, of these policies has been fulfilled. You must confer closely with the student services coordinator in the scheduling of the various steps in the preparation and evaluation of the dissertation.

SOME FINAL WORDS TO THE WISE

When you reach the point that you are ready to think about your dissertation, be sure that you understand several rather tricky distinctions.

First, concerning the proposal: Remember that the requirement for the defense of a formal dissertation proposal is not satisfied by any preliminary discussion of the dissertation that takes place during the Oral Q.E.

Second, concerning faculty availability: It is important to know that many faculty members are unavailable during the summer months when they are not under contract to the University. If you expect to complete important steps in the dissertation process during these months, make sure that you have the express agreement, in advance, of the members of your committee. This agreement cannot be taken for granted.

Third, last-minute horrors: Be alert to the fact that a lot of work remains to be done after your dissertation has been “signed off” by the dissertation committee. You still have graduation and publication deadlines to satisfy, fees to pay, and final revisions to accomplish. Read the Catalog and the Thesis/Dissertation Submission Guidelines found on the USC Graduate School website: http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_thesis_dissert.html

Note in particular that the final typed copy of the approved dissertation is due in the publications office three weeks before the end of the semester. When the Graduate School says “finish by the end of the semester,” this does not mean “defend the dissertation on the last day of the semester.” It is your responsibility to be aware of these last minute details and budget sufficient time for them so that the evaluation of the dissertation by the faculty is not compromised. It is good advice to try to finish everything at least one semester before your time for completing the degree expires (six years if you entered with a Master’s degree, eight years if you entered with a Bachelor’s degree).
X. Additional Sources of Information

This guidebook should answer many of your questions about the graduate program in the USC department of sociology. Below are additional sources of information that you can consult:

**Graduate Assistant Handbook**
http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_guidelines_forms.html

**Degree Related Forms, and Childbirth and Adoption Accommodation Policies**
http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_guidelines_forms_04.html#childbirth

**Dissertation Submission Deadlines and Guidelines**
http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_thesis_dissert.html

**SCampus Student Guidebook**
http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/
Appendix A.

Suggestions for Writing the Dissertation Proposal

Before you begin your PhD research, your Dissertation Committee must approve your formal dissertation proposal. A written proposal of the dissertation must be completed and orally presented to the Dissertation Committee within six months of passing the Oral portion of the Qualifying Examination. If needed, you will also need to prepare a request for approval of research involving human subjects.

Seek guidance from your dissertation chair, and other faculty members of your committee. Some graduate students will be writing dissertation proposals that test hypotheses, while others may frame their research more broadly. You should view a variety of dissertation proposals (ask your chair, and other advanced PhD students in the department to share these with you). While the dissertation proposals will vary, most of them will include a statement of the research problem which the dissertation addresses, and rationale or significance of the study; a comprehensive, theoretical literature review; clear research questions; a clear description of the methods of data collection and analysis; and a proposed schedule for completion of the dissertation, with an indication of support required to complete it on schedule.

The formal proposal should be submitted to the dissertation committee at least two weeks prior to the proposal defense meeting. Of course, your chair will have probably seen several drafts of the dissertation proposal prior to this.

You will be responsible for scheduling the meeting and arranging for a room for the discussion and defense of the formal dissertation proposal with the committee. This will include your dissertation chair, another faculty member in the department, and one USC tenured or tenure track faculty member from outside of the department. It is difficult to coordinate faculty schedules despite everyone’s good will, so begin trying to set the date as soon as you have the go ahead from your dissertation chair. This can be frustrating, so plan ahead. Once you have found a date and time, the Sociology staff can help reserve a room. The meeting will generally take one and a half, to two hours.

After the dissertation committee has met and approved the proposal, you must get the committee members’ signatures. So before the meeting, see the Student Services Coordinator to obtain the proper form. You should also obtain a “dissertation packet” from the Graduate School online, at http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_thesis_dissert_03.html

This includes formatting instructions and other forms, and list of deadlines and documents necessary for completing the dissertation.
Appendix B.

Suggestions for Quantitative Students

Graduate students seeking additional course work in quantitative sociology may take courses at UCLA under the USC-UCLA Cross Enrollment Agreement. If a graduate student plans to take the Standard Qualifying Exam in Demography, he or she in consultation with the Qualifying Exam faculty advisors may choose from the following courses.

Course Options for Standard Qualifying Exam in Demography
The following courses are offered at UCLA under the USC-UCLA Cross Enrollment Agreement.

1.) SOC 226A. Introduction to Theory and Major Empirical Research in Social Demography (4 units)
Lecture, two hours; discussion, one hour. Requisite: course 210A. Survey and critical examination of population theories and related major empirical research. Emphasis on interrelation of cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic factors. Introduction to elementary demographic methods utilizing microcomputers. S/U or letter grading.


2.) SOC 212A. Survey (Quantitative) Data Analysis (4) using STATA
Lecture, three hours. Requisites: courses 210A, 210B. Course 212A is enforced requisite to 212B. Analysis and interpretation of primarily nonexperimental quantitative data, with focus on sample survey and census data. Extensive practice at utilizing statistical methods encountered in previous courses, culminating in term paper in style of American Sociological Review or similar journal article. Topics include simple tabular analysis, log-linear analysis, ordinary least squares regression, robust regression, binomial and multinomial logistic regression, and scale construction. Logic of analysis and problems of statistical inference, including diagnostic procedures and methods for handling complex sample survey designs. In Progress grading (credit to be given only on completion of course 212B).

4.) SOC 212B. Survey (Quantitative) Data Analysis (4) using STATA
Lecture, three hours. Enforced requisite: course 212A. Analysis and interpretation of primarily nonexperimental quantitative data, with focus on sample survey and census data. Extensive practice at utilizing statistical methods encountered in previous courses, culminating in term paper in style of "American Sociological Review" or similar journal article. Topics include simple tabular analysis, log-linear analysis, ordinary least squares regression, robust regression, binomial and multinomial logistic regression, and scale construction. Logic of analysis and problems of statistical inference, including diagnostic procedures and methods for handling complex sample survey designs. S/U or letter grading.

5.) SOC M213A. Introduction to Demographic Methods (4 units)
(Same as Biostatistics M208, Community Health Sciences M208, and Economics M208.) Lecture, four hours. Preparation: one introductory statistics course. Introduction to methods of demographic analysis. Topics include demographic rates, standardization, decomposition of differences, life tables, survival analysis, cohort analysis, birth interval analysis, models of population growth, stable populations, population projection, and demographic data sources. Letter grading.

6.) SOC M213B. Applied Event History Analysis (4 units) using STATA
(Same as Statistics M213.) Lecture, three hours. Preparation: exposure to binary response models. Requisites: courses 210A, 210B. Introduction to regression-like analyses in which outcome is "time to event." Topics include logit models for discrete-time event history models; piecewise exponential hazards models; proportional hazards; nonproportional hazards; parametric survival models; heterogeneity; multilevel survival models. S/U or letter grading.

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**Dissertation Format Options for Quantitative Sociology and Demography Students**

All Sociology Department and Graduate School dissertation proposal and dissertation requirements as outlined in the graduate handbook apply. The options presented here are intended to provide quantitative sociology and demography students with a dissertation format that is conducive to continued success in their chosen fields after the Ph.D. is granted.

**A. Optional Dissertation Proposal Format**

Quantitative sociology and demography students can choose the option of submitting a dissertation proposal that adheres to the format and length of a standard research proposal submitted to the National Institutes of Health. Students can obtain information on this format from the NIH website, [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html).

Note that while this option contains a standardized format, the key elements of an effective dissertation proposal listed in Appendix A. are contained within the NIH format.

The formal proposal must include a comprehensive, critical literature review indicating how the research will add to current gaps in the literature. This requirement is meant to give candidates research and writing experience while undertaking the initial phase of the dissertation process. The review allows candidates to demonstrate proficiency in organizing and formulating research in an area relevant to a critical issue in sociology or demography. The literature review should clarify the contribution of the proposed study to knowledge in the area. Although candidates may fill out any and all applicable parts of the formal application, they must fill out the face page, include the project summary and statement of relevance, and address several sections of the research plan which should be negotiated with their committees. A standardized set of instructions accompanies each section of the proposal and dictates, among other things, page limits. [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html)

Candidates choosing this option should address the following sections in the NIH proposal and any other sections their committee chair deems necessary. Not all of these sections may apply to a student’s dissertation; students should consult with their committee members to agree on a final format.
B. Optional Dissertation Format

The culmination of the Ph.D. program is the writing of a dissertation. A dissertation is an original contribution to current knowledge in the chosen field and a demonstration that the Ph.D. candidate has achieved sufficient mastery in the field to pursue independent research.

Quantitative sociology and demography students may elect to write a dissertation that includes: 1) three separate but thematically related, theoretically grounded, empirical papers; 2) an integrated introduction; and 3) a synthesizing conclusion. Each paper will follow the format, content, and length of a professional peer-reviewed research journal article and, at minimum, should be considered publishable in a peer-reviewed journal in the candidate’s specialty area.

Candidates choosing this option must write an NIH-style dissertation proposal as described in the previous section. The Summary and Relevance sections must encompass all three papers as a coherent whole. The Specific Aims and Research Strategy sections should contain specific details for each of the three papers. The dissertation proposal provides a vehicle to ensure that each of the three empirical papers investigates an original research question, grounded in the literature and employs the appropriate methods to do so. It also ensures the papers are thematically
C. Transfer Credit

The Degree Progress Department in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar, on the advice of the sociology faculty, determines whether course work taken elsewhere is appropriate for transfer credit. The DGS, in consultation with department faculty who teach particular courses, determines whether such credit is applicable to the USC PhD in Sociology, and this is subject to the approval by the deans. The maximum number of transfer credits which may be applied toward the PhD is 30 units (but most graduate students who have done this in recent years have generally received somewhere between 4 and 12 units).

The process begins when a new graduate student, who may have completed a master’s degree program elsewhere, approaches the DGS about the possibility of receiving transfer credit. She or he must show transcripts from an accredited graduate school, and the relevant syllabi. The DGS then circulates these syllabi to the faculty who teach the comparable courses in Sociology at USC. In the past, graduate students have received credit for statistical methods and various elective classes, but the department prefers that new PhD students take both classical and contemporary theory with their cohort. Also, the transfer work must have been completed within ten years of admission to the USC PhD program.

Once the credit transfer is approved by the faculty, the Student Services Coordinator helps to ensure that the various forms and signatures will go to the Degrees Progress Department in the Office of Academic Records and Registrar. Graduate students who want to be considered for transfer of course work should begin this process in the first or second year. The final decision should be made no later than the second year of the doctoral program.

Please see the 2010 Graduate and Professional Education website for additional information on transfer credit: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/cat2010/graduate/cwte_transfer.html
D. Suggested Program Schedule

FIRST YEAR

Required Courses:

- SOCI 664 Survey of Research Methods
- SOCI 510 Sociological Theory I
- SOCI 525 Proseminar
- SOCI 521 Quantitative Methods II
- SOCI 610 Sociological Theory II
- Elective Seminar

Activities:

- Establish a professional relationship with at least two faculty members
- Identify an area of focus for your Empirical Paper
- Attend sociology department colloquia
- Select two faculty members to supervise your Empirical Paper
- Submit “Empirical Paper Sign-Off: Part One” form to coordinator

Required Forms:

- “Empirical Paper Sign-Off: Part One” (to be signed by two sociology faculty who agree to supervise your Empirical Paper)

SECOND YEAR

Fall Semester Required Courses:

- SOCI 520 Participant Observation and Interviewing I (or Ethnography Orgs)
- SOC 621 Quantitative Methods and Stats II (only for students in 521-621 sequence)
- Elective Seminar(s)

Fall Activities:

- Begin research for your Empirical Paper
- Select a chairperson for your Guidance Committee
- Establish professional relationships with faculty who you would like to be on your Guidance Committee
- Meet with Director of Graduate Studies to discuss second-year screening
- Submit abstract of Empirical Paper for presentation at a professional conference (submission deadline for April PSA meetings is in October)

Fall Semester Required Forms:
• “Appointment of Ph.D. Guidance Committee” (to be signed by four sociology faculty and one outside member who agree to supervise your research and Qualifying Examinations)

Spring Semester Required Courses:
• SOC 524 Participant-Observation and Interviewing II (only for students choosing 520-524 sequence, OR Ethnography of Organizations II, when available)
• Elective Seminar
• SOC 523 Advanced Methods: Quantitative (when available, only for students choosing this training)

Spring Activities:
• Continue working on Empirical Paper
• Present Empirical Paper at a professional conference (e.g., PSA)
• Submit “Empirical Paper Sign-Off: Part Two” form to coordinator

Spring Semester Required Forms:
• “Empirical Paper Sign-Off: Part Two” (to be signed by two faculty who can verify the presentation of your Empirical Paper at a professional conference)

Summer Activities:
• Complete Empirical Paper
• Revise and submit Empirical Paper for publication in a journal
• Submit completed “Empirical Paper-Sign Off: Part Three” form to coordinator

Summer Required Forms:
• “Empirical Paper Sign-Off: Part Three” (to be signed by two faculty who approve of a final draft of your Empirical Paper)

THIRD YEAR
OPTION #1
(Students taking Qualifying Exams during Third Year Spring Semester)

Fall Semester Required Courses:
• Specialty Concentration

Fall Activities:
• Identify standard and custom areas for Qualifying Exams
• Identify Guidance Committee members to oversee your standard and custom Qualifying Exams
• Compile reading lists and study for Qualifying Exams
• Submit “Request to Take Qualifying Examination” form to coordinator
Fall Semester Required Forms:

- “Request to Take Qualifying Examination” (to be signed by staff and Guidance Committee who agree that you are ready to take Qualifying Exams)

Spring Activities:

- Take and pass the Standard and Custom Qualifying Exams
- Schedule a date/time for your Qualifying Exams oral defense (all five members of the Guidance Committee should attend this meeting)
- Meet with Guidance Committee to orally defend your Qualifying Exams
- After you pass and defend the Qualifying Exams, select a Dissertation Committee (two sociology faculty and one outside member)
- Submit “Request for Change of Committee” form to coordinator

Spring Semester Required Forms:

- “Request for Change of Committee” (to be signed by three members from your Guidance Committee who agree to continue to supervise your Dissertation research)

Summer Activities:

- Prepare your Dissertation Prospectus
- Plan for future employment (attend ASA, present papers, submit journal articles, familiarize yourself with the job market, prepare a CV)

THIRD YEAR
OPTION #2
(Students taking the Qualifying Exams in the Fourth Year Fall Semester)

Fall Semester Required Courses:

- Specialty Concentration

Fall Semester Activities:

- If Empirical Paper has not been completed, make this your priority

Spring Semester Courses:

- Specialty Concentration

Spring Semester Activities:

- Identify standard and custom areas for Qualifying Exams
- Identify Guidance Committee members to oversee your standard and custom Qualifying Exams
- Compile reading lists and study for Qualifying Exams
- Submit “Request to Take Qualifying Examination” form to coordinator
Spring Semester Forms:

- “Request to Take Qualifying Examination” (to be signed by staff and Guidance Committee who agree that you are ready to take Qualifying Exams)

Summer Activities:

- Study for Qualifying Exams

FOURTH YEAR
OPTION #1
(Students beginning the Dissertation during Fourth Year Fall Semester)

Fall Activities:

- Schedule a meeting with your Dissertation Committee for final discussion and approval of your Dissertation Prospectus (no later than six months after completion of the Qualifying Exams)
- Work on Dissertation following the steps outlined in your Prospectus
- Keep in close contact with your Dissertation Chairperson
- Advise entire Dissertation Committee about problems and progress
- Submit “Approval of Dissertation Prospectus” to coordinator

Fall Semester Required Forms:

- “Approval of Dissertation Prospectus” (to be signed by Dissertation Committee)

FOURTH YEAR
OPTION #2
(Students beginning the Dissertation during Fourth Year Spring Semester)

Fall Activities:

- Take and pass the Qualifying Exams
- Meet with Guidance Committee to orally defend your Qualifying Exams
- After you pass the Qualifying Exams, select a Dissertation Committee (two sociology faculty and one outside member)
- Prepare your Dissertation Prospectus
- Plan for future employment (attend ASA, present papers, submit journal articles, familiarize yourself with the job market, prepare a CV)
- Submit “Request for Change of Committee” form to coordinator

Fall Semester Required Forms:

- “Request for Change of Committee” (to be signed by three members from your Guidance Committee who agree to continue to supervise your Dissertation research)
Spring Activities:

- Schedule a meeting with your Dissertation Committee for final discussion and approval of your Dissertation Prospectus (no later than six months after completion of the Qualifying Exams)
- Work on Dissertation following the steps outlines in your Prospectus
- Keep in close contact with your Dissertation Chairperson
- Advise entire Dissertation Committee about problems and progress
- Submit “Approval of Dissertation Prospectus” form to coordinator

Spring Semester Required Forms:

- “Approval of Dissertation Prospectus” (to be signed by Dissertation Committee)
E. Money Matters:  
Continuing GA Support,  
Stipends for Travel and Dissertation Research,  
Fellowships for Continuing Students

Continuing GA Support

Upon admission, graduate students are generally offered a five-year package of support that includes two years of fellowship, and three years of Graduate Assistantship. The amount of the stipends varies, and should be stipulated in the admissions letter. During the years a student is awarded a Graduate Assistantship, she or he is expected to work a maximum of 20 hours per week while the semester is in session. You may download the Graduate Assistant Handbook at:  
http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/current_guidelines_forms.html. Most graduate students work as Teaching Assistants, but some are able to acquire Research Assistantships. If you are interested in the latter, talk to your advisor and other faculty about these options in advance. If you will need summer funding, you should also begin talking to faculty and other graduate students in the department to learn of possible summer jobs.

Stipends for Conference Travel and Research

In recent years, the Sociology Department has been able to offer conference travel stipends (a maximum of $500 each) for graduate students. This is a continuing, ongoing program that graduate students may apply for anytime, year-round. Highest priority is given to requests for funding graduate students to present paper(s) that have been accepted at professional conferences. Graduate students in good standing, and who are making good progress also receive priority. Applications to attend conferences to make poster presentations, or serve as a discussant are given lower priority. If you want to apply for a travel award, you will need to follow these guidelines:

1) Complete the attached SOCIOLOGY TRAVEL APPLICATION form (these are also available in the office).

2) ATTACH A SEPARATE SHEET describing the conference or event, and your role in it, including paper title, session, and so on, as appropriate.

3) Place the completed APPLICATION and description in the mailbox of the Director of Graduate Studies.
4) The Director of Graduate Studies will access the application, and once an award is made, the student will be notified via email, and the paper work passes on to Lisa Rayburn-Parks, and then the College Business Office. Please submit your request four weeks in advance of the conference.

5) If you are requesting funds to attend an international conference for which you are receiving funding from other campus or fellowship sources, please list the source and the amount.
SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT TRAVEL AWARD APPLICATION

I. Your Information (please print)

Date: ________________________
Name: ____________________________ SS#:

SS#: __________ - _______ -  ______

Address: ____________________________ Phone: ( _______)

II. Conference/Event Information

Date: ________________________
Name: ____________________________
Location: ____________________________

III. Budget Information. Please provide a line item budget below, anticipating airfare, registration, hotel, and other expenses.

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Date Award Needed by: ________________________________

Sociology use only:
☐ Approved  ☐ Not approved  ☐ Need more information

Graduate Director’s Signature: _______________________________ Date:
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☐ Approved  ☐ Not approved  ☐ Need more information

Chair’s Signature: _______________________________ Date:
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Budget Verification: Okay to Pay
Administrator’s Signature: _______________________________ Date:
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USC Department of Sociology Guidelines for Graduate Student Dissertation Research and Development Awards

In recent years, the Sociology Department has been able to offer dissertation research and development awards. As long as the funds are available, this will be an ongoing program, but proposals will be considered twice each year: November 1, and March 1. The shared deadline will allow the Director of Graduate Studies to compare the various requests, and make equitable decisions in granting awards. These awards are intended to help you: 1) cover core expenses associated with your dissertation research (e.g., data sets, purchase of software or digital recorders, transcribing costs, etc); 2) take advantage of opportunities to participate in specialized training programs at other campuses, or at workshops that will improve your ability to carry out your dissertation research; and/or 3) other activities that you feel will directly enhance your dissertation research. Dissertation advisors may be contacted for additional information. Most students have been granted an award of $1000, as resources are limited.

If you would like to apply for a graduate student dissertation research and development award, please follow these GUIDELINES:

1) Complete the attached SOCIOLOGY DISSERTATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION form.

2) ATTACH A SEPARATE SHEET describing your dissertation topic, the activities that you are requesting funding for, and how those activities will improve your dissertation.

3) Place the APPLICATION and description in Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (DGS) office mailbox.

4) All students awarded dissertation research and development awards are required to submit receipts after the purchase as proof that the money was spent in accord with your proposal. Receipts should be submitted to Lisa Rayburn-Parks.
SOCIOMETRY DEPARTMENT DISSERTATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AWARD APPLICATION

I. Your Information (please print)

Date: __________________________

Name: __________________________________________ SS#: __________-

Address: __________________________________________ Phone: __________-________

II. Dissertation Research and Development Information

Attach a separate sheet describing your dissertation topic, the activities that you are requesting funding for, and how those activities will improve your dissertation. Be sure to specify the time frame and locations of the activities for which you are requesting funding.

III. Budget Information. Please provide a line item budget below.

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Date Award Needed by: __________________________

Sociology use only:

☐ Approved  ☐ Not approved  ☐ Need more information

Graduate Director’s Signature: __________________________ Date: __________
Fellowships for Continuing Students

During the spring, the USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School usually announce a series of competitions for fellowships for continuing students. These are competitive, and often slated for particular areas of study. These are announced on email, and circulated to all graduate students in the department. In recent years, some of the USC sociology graduate students have been awarded these.

In addition, there are also external fellowships. In recent years, some of the USC sociology graduate students have been awarded dissertation fellowships from the Haynes Foundation and the Ford Foundation. And there are still other external dissertation fellowship competitions, such as those offered by the National Science Foundation, or the Social Science Research Council, and many other specialized ones. You should begin looking at these possibilities early in your graduate career. Talk to your faculty advisor, the DGS, and other graduate students about possibilities, and begin looking at the announcements and criteria listed on the internet. If you anticipate being in graduate school longer than five years, having an additional year of fellowship support will help your research and dissertation progress.