

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK-ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-18

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is a summary of the major policies and procedures affecting graduate students in the Department of Sociology at Northern Illinois University. Although we have taken care to ensure the accuracy of the Handbook, it is important for students to know that they are also bound by the policies of the Graduate School and the Graduate Catalogue. If there is any inconsistency between this Handbook and the Graduate Catalogue, the policies in the Graduate Catalogue take precedence.

The Sociology Department at Northern Illinois University offers graduate-level courses in the discipline of Sociology and provides a venue in which students learn how to conduct original research under the supervision of faculty. The plans of study for the Master of Arts degree have been designed to offer coherent, significant, and rigorous learning experiences that provide a basis for many potential careers or the future pursuit of doctoral degrees.

All Master of Arts students receive training in sociological theory and methods. The department also offers a range of courses on substantive topics and issues. It is possible for a student to focus on a variety of areas, depending on faculty specialization (see www.sociology.niu.edu). We offer a formal specialization in Criminology. Students interested in pursuing this formal specialization should seek advance approval from the Director of Graduate Studies.

Every effort is made to maintain a personal atmosphere for graduate students and faculty. The Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, and faculty are easily accessible and you may contact them with any issues and concerns you are having in the program. Close working relationships with faculty members are encouraged through courses, thesis supervision, conference participation, and graduate assistant activities. Some graduate students conduct original research in collaboration with faculty members, which is highly encouraged. The products of such studies include scholarly papers and presentations at professional conferences.

As a department within a state university, tuition and fees are quite reasonable. In addition, department-based teaching and research assistantships are available on a competitive basis. An assistantship provides a monthly stipend and a tuition waiver scholarship that covers tuition (whether in-state or out-of-state) for the academic year and the preceding or following summer term. An assistantship does not provide payment of the student's fees, however, and thus these remain the responsibility of students. A number of other assistantships and fellowships are also available through the Graduate School and other departments and programs at the university.

ADMISSION TO THE GRADUATE PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

General Admission Requirements

Sociology majors and persons with other relevant academic backgrounds are eligible for admission to the Sociology graduate program. Before entering the program, an applicant must have attained a bachelor's degree from a four-year accredited college or university. If the degree work does not include at least one course each in sociological theory, social science research methods, and introductory statistics, these will be considered deficiencies that must be remedied either before beginning the graduate program or during the student's first term. Course credits taken for purposes of remedying deficiencies will not count toward the master's degree.

The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the Graduate Committee, examines each applicant's file. Admission to the graduate program is based on the applicant's undergraduate grade point average, performance on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), letters of recommendation, statement of career goals, and other evidence of ability to succeed in the program. Ordinarily, the department requires an undergraduate grade point average consistent with the Graduate School requirements. The department prefers applicants with a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and must provide special justification to the Graduate School if recommending admission to a student whose undergraduate GPA is below 2.75. The applicant must also take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The department prefers applicants with a minimum of 150 (450 on the old scoring system) on the verbal and 148 (600 on the old system) on the quantitative sections of the GRE.

Application for admission to the Graduate School is available on the Graduate School website (www.grad.niu.edu). Graduate Record Examination testing dates and locations are available through Educational Testing Service (www.ets.org).

Students-at-Large

A student with a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university who has not been accepted by the Graduate School may, with departmental approval, take graduate courses for credit as a student-at-large. No more than nine semester hours of such courses will be applied to the master's program in Sociology. The prospective student should be aware of the regulations regarding student-at-large status as detailed in the Graduate Catalogue. The Department of Sociology is not obligated to accept a student-at-large for the master's program, even if they have successfully completed graduate courses in Sociology. All students-at-large who intend to take sociology courses must obtain approval from the Director of Graduate Studies and the course instructor.

International Students

International students should examine the special instructions for admission in the Graduate Catalogue. Those whose native language is not English should note in particular the requirements concerning the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

English Proficiency

Graduate students whose native language is not English are required to take an examination of their English language skills by the end of the second semester. Those whose skills are deficient or marginal will be required to take and pass the two-course sequences, ENGL 451 and ENGL 452, or the single course, ENGL 453, depending on the results of the proficiency test. These courses do not carry graduate credit, and are not applied toward the master's degree. These courses are free of charge to graduate students in good standing. Students should contact the Department of English or the International Student and Faculty Office for the testing schedule.

THE DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Each entering graduate student must consult with the department's Director of Graduate Studies. The Director will serve as students' temporary advisor in their first year in the program, ensuring that students are satisfactorily completing required first-year courses in sociological theory and methods. The Director is available throughout the student's graduate career at NIU and should be consulted about any question or issue related to the program.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Application Procedure

The department awards a number of assistantships to qualified graduate students for helping faculty members in their teaching and research. Students who wish to receive an assistantship should complete an "Application for Graduate Assistantship" form and submit it to the department by the priority application deadline of February 1.

Students requesting assistantships are also required to apply for Work-Study funding. Such funds supplement general-revenue support for assistantships, enabling the department to increase the number of assistantships and/or the amount of the stipends.

First-year graduate assistants in good standing (i.e., those with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher and satisfactory evaluations from their assigned faculty members) may be reappointed as graduate assistants for a second year. A student who is not in good standing on the start date of appointment will not be approved for an assistantship. At the end of each semester, the Director of Graduate Studies will ask faculty supervisors to evaluate their assistants' performance. Unsatisfactory evaluations by faculty supervisors may result in termination of a student's assistantship.

Rights and Responsibilities of Graduate Assistants and Faculty

The graduate-assistant/faculty relationship is a professional, collegial one. Its purpose is to further the education of graduate students and to advance knowledge through original research. Thus, graduate assistants often help faculty members in performing their duties as teachers and scholars. In turn, the work given to graduate assistants by faculty is “on-the-job training” in preparation for their own careers. Assignments given by faculty to assistants must be related to a faculty member’s professional work. Assistants should not be asked to undertake tasks of a personal nature as part of their assistantship duties.

Substitute lecturing

Graduate assistants should *not* be asked to serve routinely as substitute lecturers without the presence of a faculty supervisor. However, faculty occasionally provide voluntary teaching assignments that are designed to provide graduate students with an opportunity for acquiring teaching skills. Faculty should give graduate students sufficient notice of such teaching assignments. Our department encourages faculty to offer these assignments and encourages graduate students to avail themselves of these opportunities.

Hours of work

Generally, graduate assistants should not be expected to be present for work before and after regular hours—i.e., 7:45 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Unusual requests should be made far enough in advance so that compliance will not require unreasonable adjustments in the assistant’s schedule.

Outside employment

Graduate assistants are not allowed to be employed on campus for more than 20 hours per week, although minor exceptions are sometimes made in temporary and unusual circumstances. In addition, in order to allow enough time for their studies and the duties of their graduate assistantships as well as their own studies, full-time graduate assistants (20 hours/week) are discouraged from outside employment while they are employed as GAs.

Unutilized hours of an assistant’s work-load in a given week should not carry over to her/his work-load for the following week, especially for those who have split assignments with different faculty. However, because of the uneven flow of academic work (e.g., midterms, finals), extra time—to a maximum of 25 hours per week—may be required from time to time.

Toward the end of a semester, the work schedule of graduate assistants should be adjusted to help them take care of their examinations and other assignments as students. It is strongly urged that the faculty supervisor and graduate assistant discuss such adjustments far enough in advance so that the mutual needs of both may be fulfilled. As GAs may split their 20 hours with two faculty members, these discussions are especially necessary to avoid an unreasonable burden being placed on a graduate assistant.

Assistants' files

Graduate assistants have the right to see the evaluations of their performance by faculty supervisors and to respond in writing to the evaluations. Such responses will be attached to all copies of the graduate students' evaluations. Any further correspondence, either by the faculty supervisor or the graduate assistant, should be directed to the Director of Graduate Studies.

Notification of reappointment

"Continuing" graduate assistants should be notified in writing as soon as possible, and should notify the Director of Graduate Studies of acceptance or rejection within a reasonable time period.

Period of employment

The period of employment, typically August 16 through May 15, is specified in the letter of appointment. Graduate assistants are expected to notify the department as to where they can be reached during the first week of the employment period and to be present at the initial meeting of the faculty and graduate assistants prior to the beginning of fall classes. Graduate assistants are expected to be available for assignments no later than the week prior to the beginning of classes. The graduate assistants' employment terminates at the end of the contract period, although normally little or no work is required after the end of examinations. However, the graduate assistant and the faculty supervisor will determine what work, if any, is required after the examination period.

Tuition and other fees

Graduate assistants who are employed at least part-time (10 hours) receive tuition remission for the semesters in which they are employed. If a student is a graduate assistant in a Spring semester, they will receive tuition remission for the Summer term.

Graduate assistantships do not cover applicable course fees or the costs of textbooks.

The assistantship also does not cover the costs of health insurance, which all students are required to have. The university offers a student health insurance plan. If a student is already covered by another health insurance policy, they do not need to purchase health insurance.

Conflict resolution

If a graduate student is having an issues with the faculty supervisor(s) in which they have been assigned, they should document and report these issues to the Director of Graduate Studies as soon as possible. The Director will work with the Graduate Committee and the Chair of the Department to try to come to some resolution of these issues that will satisfy all parties involved.

Title IX training

“In compliance with the Illinois Preventing Sexual Violence in Higher Education Act (110 ILCS 155), all employees must complete annual Title IX/Sexual Misconduct training. Such training should include, but is not limited to, the Title IX Policy, effects of trauma on a survivor, consent, retaliation, reporting options, available support services, and strategies for bystander intervention and risk reductions.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 et seq. provides in part: No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. Northern Illinois University has jurisdiction over all Title IX/Sexual Misconduct complaints occurring at NIU.

Academic and employment decisions based upon sex or gender and/or acts of sexual misconduct are forms of illegal sex discrimination under Title IX, additional federal and state laws, and are prohibited under this and other policies of Northern Illinois University. The university does not discriminate on the basis of sex, gender or gender identity in any phase of its educational or employment programs; the university is required by Title IX and other applicable laws to not so discriminate.

The university will not tolerate sex discrimination in the form of sexual misconduct. If the university knows or reasonably should know of possible sexual misconduct, a thorough, impartial, and confidential investigation will be conducted in as prompt a manner as possible to determine if there has been a violation of this Policy. If, as a result of that investigation, it is determined that any act of sexual misconduct has occurred, appropriate discipline will be imposed, and the university will take the necessary steps to address and stop the sexual misconduct, prevent its recurrence, and remedy its effects.

This Policy applies to all students, employees, and third parties, regardless of race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, religion, age, physical and mental disability, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, political affiliation, or any other factor unrelated to professional or educational qualifications, and is in coordination with the *Non-Discrimination /Harassment Policy and Complaint Procedures for Employees and Students*, which prohibits discrimination at the university. However, this Policy serves, primarily, as the governing document for Affirmative Action and Equity Compliance (AAEC) to conduct investigations of sexual misconduct involving employees and students.

This Policy also applies to *all* conduct in any academic, educational, extra-curricular, athletic, or other University program and activity, whether those programs and activities occur in University facilities, on or off campus. Even if the sexual harassment and/or misconduct did not occur in the context of an education program or activity, NIU will consider the effects of the off-campus sexual harassment when evaluating whether there is a hostile environment on campus or in an off-campus education program or activity. Accordingly, the university will investigate all complaints, regardless of where the alleged conduct occurs. Should the university become aware that any contractor, vendor, partner, or other affiliate engages in sexual misconduct, it will take appropriate action, up to and including termination of the business relationship or partnership.”

Source: NIU Affirmative Action and Equity Compliance Office

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Department of Sociology and the University take academic integrity seriously. NIU's Graduate Catalog states that "students are considered to have cheated, for example, if they copy the work of another or use unauthorized notes or other aids during an examination or turn in as their own a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them."

All forms of cheating or plagiarism will be handled strictly and swiftly. If a student is found to have cheated or plagiarized in course work, comprehensive exams, or thesis, they will be brought before NIU's judicial board. See the NIU Graduate Catalog's statement on Academic Integrity, which explains that graduate students found to have violated academic integrity can expect to be suspended or expelled. If said student has a graduate assistantship, they can expect that funding to be rescinded once the judicial process has run its course.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Students attain their graduate requirements through course work, passing a comprehensive examination, and writing a thesis consisting of original research or completing an internship.

Course Work

A minimum of 33 semester hours of credit is necessary (including 6 semester hours for the thesis or internship) for obtaining the Master's degree.

The department considers sociological theory and sociological research methods as the core components of the M.A. program. All students must be knowledgeable in these areas. To satisfy the theory requirement, the student must take Classical Sociological Theory (SOC 670) and Contemporary Sociological Theory (SOC 671). To satisfy the methods requirement, the student must take The Research Process in Sociology (SOC 674), Sociological Statistics (SOC 675), and Qualitative Research Methods (SOC 677). Students must take these courses within the first year. Students must earn a grade of at least a B- in these courses.

In addition to the 15 hours in core courses, each candidate for the master's degree must complete 12 hours in additional, substantive courses. Courses should be selected to focus on one or two fields represented by faculty specializations. The Graduate Director and students' thesis chairs will help each student to design a cohesive plan of course work.

A "Program of Courses" form must be completed, usually by the beginning of second year, specifying the courses to be used to satisfy degree requirements. The form (officially called "Courses for a Graduate Program Other than a Doctoral Program") is available from the Sociology Department office or the Director of Graduate Studies. The program of courses is developed in consultation with, and must be approved by, the Director of Graduate Studies. Students' degree progress is maintained by the graduate school in the MyNIU system.

Thesis or internship credit hours

Six of the credit hours necessary to receive the degree are thesis credit hours (SOC 699) or internship credit hours (SOC 602). Once a student has reached 27 credit hours, they should only enroll in SOC 699 or SOC 602 until they have completed the final requirement for their degree (successful defense of thesis or final internship paper).

During a master's program students may register for an unlimited number of thesis hours. However, only the last 6 hours completed will count toward the degree. The internship requires 240 hours total to be taken in 3 credit hour units (120 hours=3 credit hours). The Director of Graduate Studies enrolls students in SOC 699 (thesis) or SOC 602(internship). Thesis hours are graded as "In Progress," "Satisfactory," "Unsatisfactory"; internship hours by letter grade.

Comprehensive Examination

Comprehensive examination will be administered and assessed in conjunction with the thesis defense or preceding an internship. The comprehensive exam will be given twice a year for those pursuing an internship to test knowledge of theory and methods. For the thesis option the comprehensive exam is the oral defense. Comprehensive examinations are evaluated along four dimensions: (1) Completeness and breadth of answers; (2) Accuracy and depth of answers; (3) Effective and appropriate use of evidence in answers; (4) The logic and organization of answers.

GPA and course grade requirements

Students must maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher in their coursework.

If a student's cumulative GPA drops below 3.00, the student will be placed on academic probation for up to 9 hours, until the student's GPA is raised to 3.00 or above (see the section on "Academic Standing" in the Graduate Catalogue for details). If the student fails to return the GPA to 3.00 or better within this time, s/he will be dismissed from the program.

The accumulation of 6 hours of D, F, U, or WF will also result in dismissal from the Graduate School, regardless of the overall GPA. Only courses in which a C (or an S) is earned carry graduate credit and can be applied toward the degree. Thus, required courses in which a D or F is earned must be repeated.

Incompletes

When special circumstances prevent a student's completing the requirements of a course, the instructor may, at her or his discretion, assign a grade of "Incomplete" (I). However, students should diligently strive to avoid such grades by completing all of the required work in their courses by the end of the semester. An incomplete, if the work is not completed prior to the beginning of the next semester, adds to the student's workload, and thus is likely to have a negative cumulative effect on the student's progress in the program.

If the work is not completed by the date specified by the university each semester (120 days from the end of the semester in which the Incomplete is taken; see www.niu.edu for a calendar of dates), the grade is changed to an "F."

Course loads

The department recommends that graduate students ordinarily take no more than 9 hours per semester in the Fall and Spring, and no more than 6 hours in the Summer. It is advised that individuals who are employed outside the university full time should not enroll for more than 6 hours per semester. Similarly, full-time graduate students (9 credit hours in Fall or Spring, 6 in summer) should not be employed for more than 20 hours per week.

A graduate assistant is required to take 9 semester hours during Fall and Spring, and 6 hours in the Summer if receiving a summer stipend. A graduate assistant may request permission from the department to take an underload, enrolling for only 6 semester hours in the Fall or Spring, or three hours in the Summer. Such requests will normally be approved only for a student's final semester, and only if the underload will not delay the student's graduation. The approval of an underload is at the discretion of the chair, in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies. To enroll for less than 6 hours, students must make a request to the Graduate School.

International students on F-1 or J-1 visas are required by the Graduate School to register for a minimum of 9 hours during the Fall and Spring semesters.

Dropping and withdrawing from courses

All drops of or withdrawals from courses must be accomplished before the applicable deadlines. Schedule change deadlines and drop and withdrawal procedures are available on the Graduate School website.

It is possible for a student to drop a course prior to the start of or early in the course. When a course is dropped, no record of the enrollment appears on the student's record. After the drop deadline, a period is specified during which the student may withdraw from the course with the course remaining on the student's record with a grade. A student who withdraws from all courses in which they are enrolled in a given term is considered to have withdrawn from the university for that term. For each graduate course in which a student is doing passing work (C or better in a graduate course) at the time of withdrawal, as assessed by the instructor, a WP will be received; for any course in which the instructor determines that the student is not doing passing work, a WF will be assigned. Transcript entries of WP and WF are not included in the computation of the graduate GPA. Transcript entries made in connection with withdrawals from undergraduate courses will be W or F in accordance with the undergraduate grading system; the withdrawal procedures and deadlines, however, will be those applicable to graduate-level students and courses.

Students who fail to withdraw from a course or from the university in accordance with established procedure and by the established withdrawal deadlines, will receive an F in any affected course(s). If withdrawal is accomplished early enough in the term, there may be reduced liability for tuition and fees under the university's refund policies. Later withdrawal may leave the student wholly liable for tuition and fees.

Transfer of credit

With the approval of the department and the Dean of the Graduate School, a student may transfer a maximum of 15 semester hours of graduate courses taken from other accredited colleges and universities. Credits earned through correspondence at other institutions cannot be transferred.

Independent study

A student who has an interest in a specific topic may request to enroll in Independent Study in Sociology (SOCI 690) for one, two, or three semester hours of credit. The student will work under the close supervision of a faculty member whose expertise covers the area in which the student's interest lies.

With faculty input, the student should produce an independent study course syllabus. This syllabus should clearly state the substantive purpose of the Independent Study, assigned reading material, meeting schedule, work to be produced and assessment. The consent of the faculty member, the Director of Graduate Studies, and the Department Chair must be obtained before registering for SOCI 690.

No more than 6 hours of credit may be earned through Independent Study in Sociology.

Internships

Internships can be an added experience for those pursuing the thesis or a non-thesis option. They provide an opportunity for students to obtain work experience, involving at least 120 clock hours of work for *each* three semester hours of credit and a total of 240 hours for the non-thesis option. A student pursuing an internship must have the site of the internship approved by the supervising graduate committee or faculty member, who must be a member of the graduate faculty. The student is required to obtain an evaluation of their work by a supervisor at the work site, or to provide the graduate committee or faculty member with contact information so that they may solicit such an evaluation. A student is then required to write a scholarly paper based on the work experience, the design of which is to be negotiated with the graduate committee or faculty supervisor. Students' internships are assigned a letter grade.

Grade appeals

A student may formally appeal a course grade alleged to have been assigned capriciously. The definition of capricious grading is limited to (a) the assignment of a grade to a particular student on some basis other than performance in the course, (b) the assignment of a grade to a particular student by more exacting or demanding standards than were applied to other students in that course, or (c) the assignment of a grade by a substantial departure from the instructor's standards announced during the first fourth of the course. A grade appeal may not be based upon disagreement with the judgment of an instructor in assessing the quality of a student's work. The student must submit a formal written appeal to the departmental Grade Review Board, through the chair of the department offering the course, by the end of the fourth week of the fall or spring semester immediately following the term for which the course grade was assigned.

Thesis

A thesis consists of empirical research that involves the original collection and/or analysis of data to answer a question not yet answered in the sociological literature. Working in conjunction with faculty members, students will develop a research question, collect and/or analyze data that will answer this research question, and present this research in the form of a scholarly manuscript.

The following are the steps students should follow to complete their thesis:

1. Develop a research question

A student's research question should be something that interests him or her and can be completed in a reasonable amount of time. A research question will often define the methodology the student will use to collect and analyze data (e.g., in-depth interviewing, participant/observation, survey analysis, experiment, content analysis). A student's research question should answer a question that has heretofore gone unanswered, and the student must answer this question with data that they collect and/or analyze. The purpose of reviewing the literature is to find this unanswered question.

Students should consult with faculty early and often about their research interests and what research question they would like to answer. If a student is unsure of the research question they want to answer, students should meet with faculty who do research in their areas of interest for help in developing a research question. Students should have a developed research question for their thesis by the end of their first semester in the program.

2. Select a thesis committee

The thesis committee is made up of a chair and two other members of the faculty. Once a student has developed their research question, they should find a faculty member who will help and guide the student through the process of answering this question. This person is the thesis chair. A student's thesis chair should be someone who is knowledgeable in the subject matter of the student's research question and/or should have some expertise in the methods the student proposes to use to answer the research question.

With the consultation of the thesis chair, students need to choose two other faculty members who will be on their thesis committee. These people will also have expertise on the subject matter of your research question and/or the methods you propose to use to answer your research question. On occasion, students can select a faculty member from another department to be on their thesis committees. However, these faculty members must be on the graduate faculty at NIU. Once students have selected their thesis committee chair and two other committee members, students should complete the *Thesis Committee Approval Form* (<http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/audience/pdf/forms/2012/Thesis%20Committee%20Approval%20Form.pdf>) and submit it to the Sociology Office. This form requires the signatures of all the members of the thesis committee.

Students should select their thesis committee by the middle of their second semester in the program at the very latest.

3. Prepare a thesis proposal

In consultation with the thesis chair and the other two thesis committee members, students should prepare a written thesis proposal. The proposal should lay out the research question the student intends to answer, the theoretical framework in which they are working from, a review of previous literature on the subject of the student's research question, and an explicit account of the methods the student will use to collect and/or analyze data that will allow the student to answer the research question. Students should submit drafts of your proposal early and often to their thesis chair and committee members so that they can provide feedback to improve the proposal.

Once the thesis chair has approved the student's thesis proposal, the student is required to complete an oral defense of the proposal. This consists of answering questions about the proposal asked by your committee members. This is an opportunity for students to get additional feedback on their proposals. To set up an oral defense of the thesis proposal, students will have to coordinate a date and time in which all three members of the committee can meet for about one hour.

Students must be registered to defend the thesis proposal.

Once a student has set a date, time, and place to conduct the oral defense of the thesis proposal, the student should complete the *Schedule a Proposal Defense* form. This form requires the signatures of all the members of the thesis committee.

Once a student has successfully defended the thesis proposal, the chair and committee will complete the *Thesis Proposal Defense Form* at the conclusion of the meeting.

At the conclusion of your defense, students will be either given approval to go forward or be required to make revisions to their proposals. The thesis committee members will inform students of any revisions they will need to complete and who will evaluate these revisions.

Students should defend their thesis proposals by the end of the summer after their second semester at the latest. The sooner students defend your proposal, the sooner they can start collecting and/or analyzing data to answer their research questions.

Once a student has successfully defended their thesis proposal, they can register for thesis credit hours (SOCI 699). Students are required to complete 6 credit hours of SOCI 699 for their course requirements. If a student has completed 6 credit hours of SOCI 699 but has not completed the Master's degree, continuing enrollment in at least one hour of SOCI 699 per term (including summer) is required until the degree is completed.

4. Complete IRB Requirements

Students may have to get permission from NIU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to collect and/or analyze the data for their thesis projects. The thesis chair will let students know if they will need to seek this permission. Any data collection that involves interviewing or observing human subjects will require IRB approval. Analysis of secondary data and cultural objects often does not need IRB approval.

Once students have successfully defended their thesis proposals, students should complete the *IRB Inquiry Form* (<http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/audience/pdf/forms/IRB%20Inquiry%20Form.pdf>). This form requires the signature of the thesis chair. This form needs to be completed and submitted whether or not students actually need their thesis proposals reviewed by the IRB.

If students need to permission from the IRB to do their thesis research projects, they must first submit an application to the IRB. Students can find details about this process here: http://www.niu.edu/orci/human_research/applications/new_app.shtml. The thesis chair will help students complete this application.

Students will need to complete the Human Subjects Research tutorial before submitting their application if they have not already done so. More information about this training can be found here: http://www.niu.edu/orci/human_research/applications/new_app.shtml.

5. Collect and/or analyze data to answer a research question

After students have successfully defended their thesis proposal and received IRB approval to conduct their research (if needed), then they may begin collect and/or analyze the data they need to answer their research questions. Students should consult with members of their thesis committee—especially the thesis chair—frequently and regularly as they collect and analyze their data. If a student encounters any challenges or issues during this phase, the thesis committee will be able to offer advice and suggestions for how to deal with these issues.

6. Write the thesis

Once students have analyzed data and developed an answer to their research questions, students need to write up the results of their research in a thesis format. There is no one right way to write up a thesis, and particular faculty members will have their own sets of expectations for how students should structure their thesis. Even with this in mind, most theses include an Introduction, Background/Literature Review, Methods, Results, and Discussion/Conclusion sections.

Students should submit drafts of the thesis early and often to the thesis chair and members of the thesis committee. They will provide students with valuable feedback on their writing, helping students express their ideas as clearly as possible.

When writing the thesis, students should follow the formatting guidelines established by the Graduate School, which can be found here: <http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/thesis/index.shtml>. STUDENTS SHOULD NOT IGNORE THESE GUIDELINES! Students will not be able to submit their thesis to the Graduate School and thus complete their degree requirements if their thesis does not adhere to these guidelines. The thesis will be checked by someone in the Graduate School to make sure that the thesis adheres to these guidelines.

7. Defend the thesis

Once the thesis chair believes that a thesis is completed, students are ready to conduct an oral defense of the thesis. Students will answer questions about their research project, such as major conclusions, how students came to these conclusions, and the implications of these conclusions for the substantive topic of the research and sociological theory.

To set up an oral defense of the thesis, students will have to coordinate a date and time in which all three members of the thesis committee can meet for about one to two hours. Students must be registered in SOCI 699 (Thesis) to defend their thesis.

Once students have set a date, time, and place to conduct the oral defense of the thesis, students should complete the *Request for Oral Defense of Thesis* form (<http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/audience/pdf/forms/2012/Request%20for%20Oral%20Defense%20of%20Thesis.pdf>). This form requires the signatures of all the members of the thesis committee.

After the oral defense, the thesis committee will determine whether students receive a Pass or Fail. If students receive a Pass, then they have successfully defended the thesis. If students receive a Fail, students will need to revise their thesis and orally defend the thesis again. Even if students receive a Pass, they may still be required to revise the thesis before receiving final approval from the thesis chair and thesis committee members. The committee members will inform students of any revisions they will need to complete and who will evaluate these revisions.

Students should make sure that the thesis committee completes the *Results of Oral Defense of Thesis or Dissertation* form and Sociology Department's *Assessment of Thesis* form.

An approved thesis is submitted to the Graduate School, along with a signed thesis-approval form. The procedures and requirements for submitting the thesis to the Graduate School are available on the Graduate School website.

Time Limit to Complete Requirements for Degree

Dating from the first course applied toward the requirements of the master's program, a student has a maximum of 6 consecutive years in which to complete all requirements for the master's degree. This includes all work taken as a student-at-large, as well as any transfer credit accepted toward the degree.

GRADUATION

Graduation Deadlines

There are several deadlines that students must be aware of if they intend to graduate in a particular semester. There are application deadlines for 1) applying for graduation (see below), 2) submitting the request for oral defense of thesis, 3) defense of thesis or completion of internship paper and 4) submitting thesis to Graduate School for review. These dates can be found at <http://www.niu.edu/grad/thesis/deadlines-dates-masters.shtml>.

Applying for Graduation

Students must apply for graduation to receive their degrees officially. Students apply for graduation for the semester in which they will submit their thesis to the Graduate School or finish their internship paper. The deadline is usually very early in the semester. If it is missed the student will have to wait a semester to graduate.

Students use the myNIU system to apply for graduation. To do so, log in into myNIU and navigate to Self-Service > Degree Progress/Graduation > Apply for Graduation. There is a one-time fee per degree. After completing the graduation application process in MyNIU, this fee will automatically be charged to the student's account. The fee is \$35.

Deferring Graduation

If a student applies for graduation in a particular term but realizes that degree requirements will not be met or otherwise fails to graduate at the end of that term, the student must submit a "Deferral of Graduation Request" available at www.niu.edu/grad/resources/graduation.shtml.

IMPORTANT DATES

Graduate students are responsible for ascertaining and meeting all of the deadlines imposed by the department or the Graduate School. These dates may be obtained from the Director of Graduate Studies, the Office Manager, or the Graduate School (<http://www.grad.niu.edu/grad/audience/pdf/Graduation%20Deadlines.pdf>).

Deadlines for submission of the following items are particularly important:

- Application for graduation, including Director of Graduate Studies' signature and Bursar's Office receipt for fee payment
- Post-defense version of thesis
- Department's report of the thesis defense
- Department's report of the results of the comprehensive exam
- Three final corrected copies of the thesis, *after* receiving Graduate School approval to produce these copies

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

Attendance, Religious Observances, and the Academic Schedule

Students are encouraged to attend classes regularly, but individual instructors determine attendance policies for their own classes. The university recognizes that on occasion examinations or other scheduled academic activities may conflict with the religious observances of some members of the academic community, and accordingly encourages the instructional and administrative staff to make reasonable accommodations to minimize the resulting difficulties for individuals concerned. Students faced with such conflicts should notify the appropriate instructor or administrative area as much in advance of the examination or other activity creating the conflict as possible. Students believing that they have been unreasonably denied an educational benefit due to their religious beliefs or practices may bring the matter to the attention of the department chair for resolution; if for any reason this route would not be appropriate, the matter may be brought to the college dean or dean's designee.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Center for Access-Ability Resources, (2) meet with the Center for Access-Ability Resources to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Center for Access-Ability Resources will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Center for Access-Ability Resources in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Center for Access-Ability Resources at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu.

Preferred Name Policy

Class rosters and University data systems are provided to faculty with the student's legal name and legal gender marker. As an NIU student, you are able to change how your preferred/proper name shows up on class rosters. This option is helpful for various student populations, including but not limited to: students who abbreviate their first name; students who use their middle name; international students; and transgender students. Should you want to update your preferred/proper name, you can do so by looking at the following guidelines and frequently asked questions:

<http://www.niu.edu/regrec/preferredname/index.shtml>

<http://www.niu.edu/regrec/preferredname/preferrednamefaq.shtml>

Continuous Enrollment

Students availing themselves of the services of the academic staff or the facilities of the university in any way that directly or indirectly relates to fulfilling degree requirements or receiving course credit must be enrolled. For example, a student must be enrolled in the term in which a comprehensive examination is taken. Also, once a student has begun work on a thesis under SOCI 699 or SOCI 602 Internship to graduate, it is expected that such work progress each academic term, and enrollment must be continuously maintained in SOCI 699 or SOCI 602 until a final grade is received for the activity and the required documentation of the activity is formally approved, unless a leave of absence is obtained. If such continuous enrollment in SOCI 699 or SOCI 602 is not maintained, and a leave of absence is not granted, then the student's admission to the program will be canceled.

Leaves of Absence

If circumstances prohibit continuing progress on the work, a graduate student may request a leave of absence from the office of the dean of the Graduate School. If a student interrupts registration in SOCI 699 without obtaining a leave of absence, then the student's admission to the degree program will be terminated.

Conference Travel

Students are encouraged to attend professional conferences in the discipline, such as the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, Society for the Study of Social Problems, Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, Sociologists for Women in Society, Midwest Sociological Society, and American Society of Criminology. Presenting one's research at these conferences is a great way to let others know about the work that one is doing and to get helpful feedback that will improve one's work. It also represents a great opportunity to learn about new research others are doing, get more information about doctorate programs, and meet scholars whose work you admire.

If a student is interested in attending a professional conference, the student should let their thesis chair, or graduate committee know as soon as possible. They will be more than happy to give the student advice, such as conferences that are the best fit for the student's own research.

The department tries as much as possible to help students cover travel expenses to professional conferences *if* the research is accepted for presentation. If a student's research has been accepted for presentation, the student should inform the Chair as soon as possible. Students will need to complete paperwork before and after attending the conference. The department will be able to pledge some funds, which may or may not be matched by the Graduate School and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The funds will be limited, so the department encourages students to submit their work to professional conferences that take place in locations relatively close to DeKalb, IL, such as the Midwest Sociological Society, the Midwest Criminal Justice Association, or any other professional organization that is being held in a major Midwestern city (e.g., Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Indianapolis, Detroit). Students will pay for their travel with their own funds, which will then be reimbursed.

Annual Student Awards and Recognition

The Waldo W. Burchard Award for Graduate Scholarship

This is awarded to the graduate student with the highest grade point average who has also met the following criteria: a minimum GPA of 3.5 based on completion of at least 24 hours of credit at the end of the fall semester. The student must also have completed a master's degree in the Department of Sociology in the fall or be expected to receive the degree at the end of the spring or summer semester of the award.

This endowed fund was established by family and friends to honor and memorialize Professor Waldo W. Burchard, who served as the first chair of the NIU Department of Sociology from 1961-1968.

The Frances Rowe Katz Award for Graduate Student Research

This award can go to multiple recipients and provides some modest funds to support academic scholarship, research and/or writing of a master's thesis. Funds for research expenses are generally given much greater priority than funds for summer salary.

This endowed fund was established in the name of Frances Rowe Katz and honors Dr. James E. Katz, her son, who received his bachelor's and master's degrees from NIU's Department of Sociology.

The James L. Massey Award for Social Justice

This is awarded to a graduate student or undergraduate senior in good standing who has majored or minored Sociology and who is actively involved in social justice and community activism. Eligible students must have actively participated in organizations, institutions or communities in order to enhance the climate of social justice and equality on campus or in the community.

Communication

Please use your Z-ID or A-ID to email concerning academic topics. Also please check your NIU email accounts on a regular basis, as many emails from faculty, staff or administration are time sensitive and may be extremely important to respond to right away.

Additional Information, Forms, and Materials

Additional information, forms, and other materials may be obtained from the main office, the Department of Sociology's Graduate Program website (www.sociology.niu.edu/sociology/graduate/index.shtml) or Northern Illinois Graduate School website (www.grad.niu.edu).