Handbook for Graduate Studies in Sociology

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Middle Tennessee State University
MTSU Box 10
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
615-898-2508

Revised: August 2013
# Table of Contents

I. Welcome to the Master’s Program in Sociology at MTSU .............................................. 3  
   Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) and Murfreesboro, TN .................................. 3  
   The Sociology MA Program at MTSU ........................................................................ 3  
II. Graduate Faculty and Staff .......................................................................................... 4  
III. Application and Admission ..................................................................................... 5  
   A. Criteria for Admission ............................................................................................ 5  
   B. Conditional Admission .......................................................................................... 5  
   C. Readmission .......................................................................................................... 5  
   D. Application Materials ............................................................................................. 5  
   E. Deadlines for Application ..................................................................................... 5  
IV. Funding Opportunities ............................................................................................ 6  
   A. Graduate Assistantships (GAs) ............................................................................. 6  
      i) Criteria for GA Assignment ............................................................................. 6  
         ii) Applications ................................................................................................. 6  
         iii) GA Responsibilities and Rights .................................................................. 6  
   B. Travel to Professional Meetings ............................................................................ 7  
   C. Assistance with Research Costs ............................................................................ 8  
V. Graduate Student Association .................................................................................. 8  
VI. Graduate Student Listserv ..................................................................................... 8  
VII. Graduate Courses ................................................................................................ 8  
   A. Required Coursework ........................................................................................... 8  
   B. Electives ............................................................................................................... 9  
   C. Scheduled Offering of Required Courses ............................................................ 9  
   D. Scheduling of Thesis Credit Hours ....................................................................... 9  
   E. Suggested Course Selection/Rotation .................................................................... 9  
   F. Filing a Degree Plan .............................................................................................10  
   G. Acceptable Course Grades and Minimum GPA ................................................... 10  
   H. Filing an Intent to Graduate ................................................................................ 10  
VIII. The Thesis ........................................................................................................... 10  
   A. Selecting a Thesis Topic ...................................................................................... 10  
   B. Selecting a Thesis Committee ............................................................................ 10  
   C. Thesis Options – Traditional and Applied ..........................................................11  
      i) The Traditional Thesis Option ...................................................................... 11  
         ii) The Applied Thesis Option ..................................................................... 11  
   D. The Research Proposal ....................................................................................... 12  
   E. Notifying the College of Graduate Studies of Advancement to Candidacy .......... 13  
   F. Obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval ....................................... 13  
   G. Writing the Thesis .............................................................................................. 13  
   H. Defending the Thesis and Getting Committee/Departmental Approval ............ 14  
   I. Submitting the Thesis to the College of Graduate Studies .................................... 14  
   J. Progress Checklist ............................................................................................... 14
I. Welcome to the Master’s Program in Sociology at MTSU

Welcome!

Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) and Murfreesboro, TN
MTSU is the largest undergraduate public university in the state of Tennessee, with more than 20,000 undergraduates and more than 2,500 graduate students who come from throughout Tennessee, the southeastern region of the U.S., nearly all 50 states, and more than 70 countries. MTSU is a Tennessee Board of Regents Institution and a Carnegie Doctoral Research Intensive university. Located in a vibrant and rapidly growing part of middle Tennessee (one mile from the geographic center of Tennessee), the University is in Murfreesboro, a city of over 100,000 a short distance south of the major metropolitan area of Nashville, Tennessee.

The Sociology MA Program at MTSU
The Department of Sociology and Anthropology at MTSU offers a master’s degree program in sociology for students who intend to pursue doctoral-level studies or seek employment in nonacademic (applied) settings. With relatively small classes and a low student-faculty ratio the program provides students with the intensive interaction between students and faculty and the research and theoretical training necessary to become successful. Students on the academic track are rigorously prepared for doctoral programs, have a high rate of acceptance at such programs, and have dozens of academic publications. Students on the applied track have gone on to direct state agencies and multimillion dollar federal programs; serve as federal, state, and local investigators, researchers, and consultants; and coordinate a variety of social programs. We offer specialized training and expertise in applied sociology, community building, criminology/deviance, medical sociology, research methods, sex and gender, social gerontology, and work and organizations. The program supports both full-time and part-time students.

The faculty are strongly committed to teaching, advising, career placement, and collaborative research with students. Our faculty members have won teaching and research awards and serve as journal editors and on editorial boards. They have assumed leadership positions in regional and national sociological associations. A highly productive department, our faculty have had hundreds of publications including numerous ones with graduate students and its work has been represented in all of the major journals in sociology as well as numerous other social science and interdisciplinary journals.

For additional information about graduate study at MTSU, see the College of Graduate Studies website at:  [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/index.php](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/index.php).

## II. Graduate Faculty and Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Office Phone</th>
<th>e-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ron Aday</td>
<td>TODD 303</td>
<td>898-2125</td>
<td><a href="mailto:raday@mtsu.edu">raday@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Amey</td>
<td>TODD 334</td>
<td>898-2697</td>
<td><a href="mailto:famey@mtsu.edu">famey@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate Program Director</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Breault</td>
<td>TODD 336</td>
<td>898-2696</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kbreault@mtsu.edu">kbreault@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Canak</td>
<td>TODD 326</td>
<td>898-5361</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wcanak@mtsu.edu">wcanak@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Carter</td>
<td>TODD 329</td>
<td>898-2517</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ccarter@mtsu.edu">ccarter@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith Huey Dye</td>
<td>TODD 331</td>
<td>898-2690</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mdye@mtsu.edu">mdye@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology Club Co-Advisor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Eller</td>
<td>TODD 344</td>
<td>898-2509</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jaeller@mtsu.edu">jaeller@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chair</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Hinote</td>
<td>TODD 325</td>
<td>494-7914</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bhinote@mtsu.edu">bhinote@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Program Director</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky MacLean</td>
<td>TODD 332</td>
<td>898-2692</td>
<td><a href="mailto:vmaclean@mtsu.edu">vmaclean@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Mertig</td>
<td>TODD 328</td>
<td>904-8349</td>
<td><a href="mailto:amertig@mtsu.edu">amertig@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon Wallace</td>
<td>TODD 330</td>
<td>898-5976</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jbwallae@mtsu.edu">jbwallae@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gretchen Webber</td>
<td>TODD 305</td>
<td>898-2519</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gwebber@mtsu.edu">gwebber@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executive Aide</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansey Carter</td>
<td>TODD 342</td>
<td>898-2508</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pcarter@mtsu.edu">pcarter@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secretary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Hidalgo</td>
<td>TODD 327</td>
<td>898-5602</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jhidalgo@mtsu.edu">jhidalgo@mtsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Application and Admission

A. Criteria for Admission
   - A baccalaureate degree
   - An undergraduate grade point average of at least 2.75
   - A satisfactory score on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE)
   - A minimum of 18 undergraduate hours in sociology or a closely related field, including a course in each of the following: sociological theory, social research methods and statistics
   - Approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies
   - Approval of the Admissions Committee and Graduate Program Director in Sociology

B. Conditional Admission
   Conditional admission may be granted to applicants who do not meet some of the criteria for admission. This is typically granted for those who lack undergraduate coursework in sociological theory, social research methods or statistics. If conditional admission is granted, the student has one semester from the time of initial enrollment to address the conditions of their admission (e.g., to take and pass with a grade of C or higher any of the missing undergraduate coursework).

C. Readmission
   Students who have been admitted to the program and who have not officially enrolled for one semester or more must apply for readmission. Readmission can only occur with approval of the departmental Admissions Committee and the Graduate Program Director. Successful readmission is dependent on past performance in the program and the degree of progress already made toward the Master’s degree. The application can be found at: http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/apply.php (no additional fee is required).

D. Application Materials
   Submit the following materials to the College of Graduate Studies at MTSU:
   - Online application for graduate study (available at: http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/apply.php)
     - This includes an application fee
     - Record of immunization is required prior to registration
   - All transcripts
   - GRE scores
   - Letter of intent: one-page narrative demonstrating an interest in sociology, as well as career goals and aspirations
   - An example of written, scholarly work (e.g., a paper written for a course)
   - Three letters of recommendation

E. Deadlines for Application
   Applications are accepted throughout the year. To ensure consideration for admission and funding for an upcoming academic year (Fall/Spring), applications must be completed by April 1st of the preceding academic year.
IV. Funding Opportunities

A. Graduate Assistantships (GAs)

Graduate assistantships are available to selected students. These assistantships include payment of tuition and some fees (but not all), and a monthly stipend. GA assignments are typically provided for both Fall and Spring semester of the year they are awarded, unless a GA fails to meet expectations for their assignment in Fall. Occasionally, GA openings also occur for a single semester only (usually for the Spring semester).

i) Criteria for GA Assignment

- Unconditional admission to the Master’s program
- No more than two semesters of prior GA funding in the department (no more than three semesters of prior funding if applying for a single semester GA)
- A minimum GPA of 3.0 (graduate GPA can be used once 9 semester hours are completed at the graduate level)
- Approval of the College of Graduate Studies
- Approval of the Sociology graduate faculty
- Although not a requirement, a verbal score of at least 153 and quantitative score of at least 144 on the GRE are desirable for a competitive application
- GAs must register for at least 6 credit hours each semester they have a GA (unless they are in their last semester)

ii) Applications

Application for GA assignment can be made directly to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology or to the College of Graduate Studies. Applications are due by April 1 for full-year (Fall/Spring) consideration. Application deadlines for single (Spring) semester consideration are announced when openings become available. The application form is available at http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/GraduateAsstApp.pdf.

When applying for a GA, it is also helpful to apply for other financial aid (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/). Occasionally, the department has a “work study” GA position which can only be given to a student who has completed a financial aid form (FAFSA) and demonstrated financial need.

iii) GA Responsibilities and Rights

**Responsibilities:**

- GAs should complete all contract forms as soon as possible after notification of receipt of the assistantship. Your contact for this information is the department executive aide, Ms. Pansey Carter.
- GAs should attend all GA meetings with the College of Graduate Studies or with the Graduate Program Director
  - At the beginning of each semester, the Graduate Program Director will call an orientation meeting for all GAs and faculty supervisors.
  - During each semester, the Graduate Program Director may call meetings to discuss GA activities.
- GAs will be assigned to a professor (in some cases two professors) who is expected to provide some office space or other working area. Specific assignments may change between Fall and Spring semesters.
• GAs must keep in communication with their assigned professor(s) regarding expectations and work hours. Failure to communicate adequately and/or failure to perform work assignments may result in suspension of assistantship.

• GAs should expect to work approximately 20 hours per week, starting the week before classes begin and ending with the last Friday before graduation each semester. These hours may be spent at the office, at home, or “on location” depending upon assigned tasks. Each GA will be required to design a work schedule with his/her assigned professor, one that is acceptable to both parties.

• The intent of the assistantship is to provide financial assistance to the student, assistance to the graduate faculty, and perhaps most importantly, an opportunity to develop professional skills and resources. Therefore, GAs should expect to do some of the following:
  o Assist with preparation of lectures, exams, study guides, or outside projects
  o Prepare and present an occasional lecture
  o Organize and lead study sessions for a given class. This may include the requirement to attend the class on a regular basis.
  o Monitor an exam
  o Read class material and assist with grading of exams and/or assignments
  o Assist the professor with research projects (data collection or analysis, library searches, editing, etc.) which may include the preparation and/or presentation of a paper at a professional meeting or the development of a manuscript for publication. (Note: Professional ethics will always apply when considering credit for assisting in the development of a presentation or publication. Professor and student must come to an agreement as to the extent of this credit. Please discuss with the Graduate Program Director if an acceptable agreement cannot be reached.)
  o Fill in for an absent professor when or if schedules permit.

Rights:
• To be given the opportunity to develop skills as a professional sociologist
• To expand teaching and research skills
• To be treated with respect and not merely as a paid servant
• To discuss with Graduate Program Director grievances with assigned professor
• To discuss with the department chair any grievances with the assigned professor or the Graduate Program Director
• To be advised in a timely fashion of any failures to meet GA expectations
• To be candidly evaluated by assigned professor(s) and Graduate Program Director
• To be given assistance and/or advice on employment or continuing graduate studies

B. Travel to Professional Meetings
All graduate students, but particularly GAs, are encouraged to attend at least one professional meeting each year. For travel to professional meetings, especially if you are presenting a paper:
• You may apply for a $500 stipend from the College of Graduate Studies. The application form is available at: http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/StuTravelAppl.pdf
• As funds are available, the department may assist in expenses.
C. Assistance with Research Costs
The department has limited funds that can be used to help with costs related to graduate student research. Please see the Department Chair for further information.

V. Graduate Student Association
All MTSU graduate students are automatically members of the MTSU Graduate Student Association (GSA). The GSA represents all graduate students at MTSU. See https://mtsu.collegiatelink.net/organization/mtsugsa for further information.

The MTSU Department of Sociology and Anthropology also has a very active undergraduate Sociology Club that welcomes graduate student involvement. See https://mtsu.collegiatelink.net/organization/mtsusocclub for further information.

VI. Graduate Student Listserv
The Graduate Program Director maintains the graduate student listserv, which includes graduate students and several faculty members. When students are admitted to the Master's program they are added to the listserv membership by the Graduate Program Director. Students who feel they are not getting listserv messages or students who do not want to get them, should contact the Graduate Program Director for assistance. Only members of the listserv may post messages. The address for posting messages is: socgrad-l@lists.mtsu.edu.

VII. Graduate Courses
A. Required Coursework
   - A minimum of 36 hours in graduate-level courses, 24 of which must be graduate-level sociology courses with no more than 6 of the 36 hours dual listed as undergraduate/graduate hours (4000/5000)
     For students beginning in Spring of 2014 or later: 5000 level courses will no longer count toward completion of the Master's degree.

   - Required courses:
     - SOC 6560 – Sociological theory
     - SOC 6620 – Quantitative Research Methods
     - SOC 6675 – Social Statistics
     - SOC 6720 – Qualitative Research Methods
     - SOC 6661 – Program Evaluation
       OR SOC 6010 – Social Policy Analysis

   If you have been unconditionally admitted and have difficulty registering for a required course, please contact the Graduate Program Director.

   - 6 hours of thesis research (SOC 6640)
     MUST be taken in consultation with your thesis chair. A thesis proposal must be completed prior to enrolling in the final 3 hours of thesis research.

   Students must be enrolled in at least one credit hour, usually thesis, during the semester of graduation.
B. Electives

In addition to required courses, other graduate courses are offered each semester. Students are encouraged to take courses that fit within their desired specialty areas and/or help them frame their thesis topic.

Independent Study (SOC 6510) and Practicum (SOC 6900) are available each semester but must be planned with a particular professor prior to enrollment. Independent Study and Practicum courses should only be taken once during the student’s time in the Master’s program.

C. Scheduled Offering of Required Courses

Fall: Quantitative Research Methods; Sociological Theory
Spring: Qualitative Research Methods; Social Statistics; Program Evaluation OR Social Policy Analysis

D. Scheduling of Thesis Credit Hours

Students should wait until they have completed most of their required coursework before signing up for thesis credits. Students sign up for thesis credits with the faculty member who has agreed to serve as their thesis committee chair.

Students are expected to sign up for the first three credit hours of thesis as a means to develop their proposal. In order to sign up for remaining thesis credit hours, the student must have defended their thesis proposal and have it approved by their committee.

E. Suggested Course Selection/Rotation

The rotation of graduate courses is designed to allow unconditionally admitted students to complete their course work and thesis within a two year time frame. We encourage students to finish in two years but recognize that this does not work for all students and will especially be more difficult for students who need to take pre-requisites their first semester in the program.

Suggested two-year plan for students starting in the Fall semester (shift accordingly depending on starting semester):

1. 1st semester – Quantitative Research Methods; Sociological Theory; 1 elective (9 hours)
2. 2nd semester – Qualitative Research Methods; Social Statistics; 1 elective (9 hours)
3. Summer – 1 elective (3 hours)
4. 3rd semester – Thesis; 2 electives (9 hours)
5. 4th semester – Program Evaluation; Thesis (6 hours)
6. Summer – Thesis (1 hour or as needed)

A full time graduate student load is 9 credit hours (3 courses) a semester. A full time graduate student load for those with a graduate assistantship is 6 credit hours (2 courses).
F. **Filing a Degree Plan**

Students must file a Degree Plan with the College of Graduate Studies prior to the completion of 21 semester hours. Students should consult an advisor or the Graduate Program Director for assistance with completing this form. The Degree Plan form can be found at: [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/DegPlan_Soci.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/DegPlan_Soci.pdf).

After you have initially filed a Degree Plan, any changes that you make in your coursework (electives) need to be filed with the College of Graduate Studies using the Revision to Degree Plan form available at: [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/DegreePlanReviseALL.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/DegreePlanReviseALL.pdf).

G. **Acceptable Course Grades and Minimum GPA**

All graduate coursework must be completed with a B- grade or higher; no grades below B- will be accepted. Students may repeat up to only two courses where a B- or lower has been received. Unsatisfactory (U) grades on thesis credit hours do not count toward the required 6 credits of thesis work.

If a student’s GPA drops below a 3.0 at any time, they are put on probation by the College of Graduate Studies. Students are given three semesters in which to improve their GPA. At the end of the three semesters, students can appeal their probation status.

H. **Filing an Intent to Graduate**

An Intent to Graduate form must be filed with the College of Graduate Studies by the end of the second week of the semester in which the student plans to graduate. This form is available at: [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/IntentToGraduate_201180.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/IntentToGraduate_201180.pdf).

**VIII. The Thesis**

A. **Selecting a Thesis Topic**

During the first two semesters of enrollment in the program, students should be considering a potential topic for their thesis. Students are strongly encouraged to consult with several faculty members to help clarify their interests and objectives. Students are further encouraged to focus their coursework toward developing a researchable thesis topic. The actual topic is decided by the student but can be based on faculty interests. Students may wish to focus on a topic that can be addressed through the use of datasets already available to the department (see relevant faculty members for assistance in locating datasets) or they can choose a topic that will involve original data collection that can be done in a reasonable amount of time and with a minimal amount of funds. Of course, students are encouraged to apply for project funding should their project necessitate this.

B. **Selecting a Thesis Committee**

By the end of the second semester of enrollment, a student should have identified a faculty member willing to serve as thesis chair. In consultation with his/her thesis chair, a student must identify a potentially publishable thesis problem and secure the willingness of a minimum of two additional graduate faculty to serve on the thesis committee. At least two members of the thesis committee must be graduate faculty within Sociology.
C. Thesis Options – Traditional and Applied

i. *The Traditional Thesis Option*

The traditional thesis option involves an original project that allows the student to demonstrate her/his ability to integrate theory and research to address a problem/issue in sociology. It should be coordinated with the student’s major interests, coursework, and practical experience to allow the development of an area of specialization. The audience of the traditional thesis is generally others in the discipline of sociology. The product of the traditional thesis option should have the potential to be presented at a professional conference and/or published in a professional journal. The Thesis must conform to the University Guidelines for Masters Theses, but should be in an article format using ASA guidelines.

**Objectives:**

(1) To demonstrate an ability to articulate a problem or research question in the field of sociology.

(2) To determine the role of theory and methodology appropriate to the investigation of the chosen problem/issue.

(3) To develop a proposal to address the investigation of the chosen problem/issue incorporating both the relevance of the problem/issue and potential benefit of its investigation.

(4) To demonstrate good writing and communication skills.

(5) To complete a final product (examination of basic research and theoretical issues) appropriate for the advancement of sociological knowledge. The format of the final product is determined through careful consideration and intensive interaction with the student’s thesis committee.

ii. *The Applied Thesis Option*

The applied thesis option involves an original project that allows the student to demonstrate his/her ability to apply the knowledge and skills he/she has learned in graduate school to a problem/issue related to the practice of sociology. This option requires the student to articulate a problem/issue in the field and to develop a plan for the investigation of the problem/issue. The audience is the professional group or agency for whom the student is designing the project. The product of the applied thesis option should have the potential to be presented at a professional conference and/or published in a professional applied journal in sociology or one with substantial sociological content. The Thesis must conform to the University Guidelines for Masters Theses, but should be in an article format using ASA guidelines.

**Objectives:**

(1) To demonstrate an ability to articulate a problem or an issue in an applied field of sociology, such as gerontology or criminology (i.e., organizational, practical, etc.).

(2) To determine methodology appropriate to investigation of the chosen problem/issue.

(3) To develop a proposal to address the investigation of the chosen problem/issue incorporating both the relevance of the problem/issue and potential benefit of its investigation.

(4) To demonstrate good writing and communication skills.
(5) To complete a final product (program evaluation, small-scale community study, policy analysis, etc.) appropriate for the project. The format of the final product is determined through careful consideration and intensive interaction with the student’s thesis committee.

D. The Research Proposal
The student must develop a research proposal for the thesis and have it approved by their committee. Developing an adequate research proposal demonstrates the ability to define an important problem, synthesize prior research of relevance to the problem, and design a feasible, useful and sound research project to address the problem.

Timeline
Typically, a thesis proposal is written after completion of the student’s required coursework, and after the completion of 18 hours of graduate study. Students considered in good standing should submit their research proposal by the end of their third semester of study. At the latest, part time students should submit a proposal by the beginning of their 19th hour of graduate study.

Preparation of the Proposal
The proposal that is developed for the thesis should be developed with input from the student’s thesis chair and other faculty thesis committee members. Additional input may be sought by the student from faculty/researchers with expertise in the area of study, even if these persons are not thesis committee members. It is expected that the student will work very closely with their faculty thesis chair and other members of their committee to strengthen the proposal and the resulting Master’s Thesis.

Content of the Proposal
The research proposal should follow a standard research proposal format. Such a proposal typically has three sections that address the following:
A. Introduction and Statement of the Problem
   a. What is the research question(s) to be addressed
   b. Why is this an important question to ask? Why should this be studied?
   c. How will the research proposed add to our understanding of this question?
B. Literature Review
   a. What prior research has been done of relevance to this issue?
   b. What theoretical perspective(s) has been or can be used to study this issue? (if applicable)
   c. Based on past literature what specific research questions will be addressed in the proposed project? What hypotheses will be tested (if applicable)?
C. Methodology
   a. What are the major concepts/variables to be used? How will they be defined/how will they be measured?
   b. What method and procedures will be used for collecting data?
   c. What sampling, recruitment or selection strategies will be used?
   d. How will the data be managed and analyzed?
   e. What is the proposed time-frame for completing each stage of the research?
   f. Provide a brief outline for the written thesis (optional)
   g. What are the potential ethical or sensitivity issues in the study and how will they be addressed?
   h. What are the limitations of the research?
When writing a research proposal, students should keep in mind that they need to impress the reader with the importance of the issue being addressed, with their understanding of past research or of the program being analyzed and how it relates to the issue being addressed, and their ability to undertake research to address the issue. The methodology section should be clear and specific enough to enable a reader to evaluate the soundness of the methods. Ideally, the methodology section should be clear enough that someone else could conduct the study based on the description provided.

Submission and Review of the Proposal

Upon completion of the research proposal, the student must meet with the full thesis committee to approve the proposal. Once the proposal is approved, the student is allowed to register for additional thesis hours.

E. Notifying the College of Graduate Studies of Advancement to Candidacy

Once the proposal has been approved, the student is responsible for completing the Thesis Advisory Committee and Advancement to Candidacy Form. This form must be signed by each member of the thesis committee as well as the Graduate Program Director before it is sent to the College of Graduate Studies. This form can be found at: http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisCommittee_Candidacy.pdf.

F. Obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

After obtaining approval for the research proposal, the student must submit a human subjects protocol to the MTSU Institutional Review Board (http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/index.php).

Prior to submitting a protocol, the student must take a brief online course on “human subject protection training.” Once this course is successfully completed, the student should save a copy of the certificate verifying their completion. A copy of this certificate will need to be sent along with the IRB protocol. Access to this training can be found at the following link: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/requirements.php.

In order to submit a protocol, the student will need to determine the level of review required by their research (exempt, expedited or full review). See: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/decision_guide.php.

Forms for submitting a protocol as well as templates for informed consent or assent (if needed) are available at: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/irb_forms.php.

No data can be collected prior to complete IRB approval. Approval typically takes less than a month for exempt or expedited research. Full review requires that the IRB consider the project at its monthly meeting, making the wait time for approval longer in the case of full review. If your research requires full review, you may also wish (or be asked) to attend the IRB meeting during which your protocol is being discussed. Full review is limited during the summer months so students should plan accordingly.

G. Writing the Thesis

Although the thesis chair is the primary guide, it is expected that the student will submit working drafts of the project to other committee members as progress is made. It is strongly recommended that the student meet with the full thesis committee or submit
drafts for feedback at least twice after proposal approval and before submission of the final product for the defense.

H. **Defending the Thesis and Getting Committee/Departmental Approval**
   Once the thesis chair and committee are satisfied with the product, the student must arrange a time for the oral defense. Upon successful completion of an oral defense, the student is responsible for making any requested changes, getting approval from the chair/committee, and forwarding the completed thesis to the Department Chair, if not already on the committee.
   Approval of the committee is indicated by signatures on the Approval page prepared by the student prior to the oral defense (see Appendix D at [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissertationManual.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissertationManual.pdf)).

   The Department Chair will provide additional comments for revision prior to signing the Approval page.

   During their final semester or shortly thereafter, successful Master’s students may be asked to present their research to the undergraduate Senior Seminar course in Sociology.

I. **Submitting the Thesis to the College of Graduate Studies**
   Once the thesis has been approved completely by the Department Chair and thesis committee, the student will submit the thesis to the College of Graduate Studies. The thesis is submitted electronically. The Approval page, with committee and department chair signatures, is submitted as hard copy along with a Thesis Publishing Agreement form ([http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissPublishingAgreement.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissPublishingAgreement.pdf)).

   Students should pay close attention to deadlines for the semester in which they wish to graduate. Theses must be submitted to the College of Graduate Studies on or before the deadline posted on the website at: [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/student/calendar.php](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/student/calendar.php).

   In order to ensure completion of the Master’s Degree, the student must meet the Master’s Thesis requirements of the College of Graduate Studies at MTSU. More information on formatting and other requirements for the College of Graduate Studies can be found at: [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissChecklist.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissChecklist.pdf) and [http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissertationManual.pdf](http://www.mtsu.edu/graduate/pdf/ThesisDissertationManual.pdf).

   After submission, the College of Graduate Studies will notify the student in a timely manner of any revisions that will need to be made prior to final submission of the thesis.

J. **Progress Checklist**
   The checklist on the following page is designed to help the student keep track of the major “milestones” in the MA Program. It is not a substitute for acquaintance with the Graduate Studies catalog, departmental guidelines, or information available for students through the College of Graduate Studies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Pertinent Office or Officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take GRE</td>
<td>Prior to making application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Apply for admission to program</strong></td>
<td>By 4/1 for funding consideration for fall admission</td>
<td>College of Graduate Studies (615-898-2840)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Applications taken year round.</td>
<td>Graduate Program Director (GPD) in Sociology (615-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>494-7914)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verify acceptance to Graduate Studies</td>
<td>Approx. two weeks after complete application</td>
<td>Graduate Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verify acceptance to MA program in Sociology</td>
<td>Approx. two weeks after complete application to program</td>
<td>GPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete any undergraduate pre-requisites, or other deficiencies</td>
<td>Within first semester after conditional admission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit <strong>Degree Plan</strong></td>
<td>Prior to completion of 21 semester hours</td>
<td>GPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete required courses</td>
<td>All required courses (except for Program Evaluation) should be completed prior to beginning thesis work. If doing an applied thesis, Program Evaluation should be completed prior to thesis work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of thesis topic</td>
<td>ASAP but at minimum by end of 12th hour of coursework</td>
<td>Graduate Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of Thesis Chair</td>
<td>Before enrolling in thesis hours</td>
<td>Graduate Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refinement of thesis topic and selection of committee</td>
<td>ASAP after selection of thesis chair</td>
<td>Thesis Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit thesis proposal</td>
<td>Before or within first 3 thesis hours</td>
<td>Thesis committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have proposal approved</td>
<td>At completion of 3 thesis hours and required prior to enrollment in further thesis hours</td>
<td>Thesis committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit <strong>Thesis Advisory Committee and Advancement to Candidacy Form</strong></td>
<td><strong>When proposal approved by thesis committee</strong></td>
<td>GPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit <strong>IRB form</strong></td>
<td><strong>When proposal approved by thesis committee</strong></td>
<td>Thesis Chair IRB committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>File <strong>intent to graduate form</strong></td>
<td><strong>Within first two weeks of intended graduation semester</strong></td>
<td>GPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfactorily complete thesis and submit to committee</td>
<td>At least 10 days before oral defense</td>
<td>Thesis committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule thesis defense with committee</td>
<td>At least 10 days after submission of thesis to committee</td>
<td>Thesis committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Successfully complete defense</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thesis committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit committee approved copy of thesis to department chair</td>
<td>At least 10 days before thesis <strong>due to Graduate Studies</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit committee/Department Chair approved electronic copy of thesis, hard copy of approval page and <strong>Thesis/Dissertation Publishing Agreement Form</strong> to Graduate Studies</td>
<td>By <strong>Graduate Studies deadline</strong></td>
<td>Thesis Chair Graduate Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit final copy of thesis to Graduate Studies</td>
<td>Follow deadlines and instructions from Graduate Studies</td>
<td>Thesis Chair Graduate Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>