



## Sociology PhD Handbook

May 2024

### Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to provide graduate students in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies with the information they require to navigate the program. This information is mainly available in the Graduate Studies Academic Calendar ([Doctor of Philosophy \(PhD\) in Sociology | Graduate Studies Academic Calendar | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)). The Calendar is the official source of regulation and information. If the information in this handbook disagrees with that in the Calendar or other University Policies or regulations, those sources will be taken as correct.

### Program length

The PhD is normally 12 terms (4 years). Students may undertake this program full- or part-time. Additional terms can be requested from and must be approved by the department's Graduate Officer and the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies.

### Degree requirements

PhD candidates must successfully complete the following.

- 1) Five courses beyond the MA degree. Three of these must be regularly scheduled sociology graduate courses.
- 2) The *Professional Development Seminar* milestone.
- 3) 2 comprehensive exams.
- 4) A thesis proposal, normally about 25 pages in length, which will be orally defended.
- 5) A thesis, normally between 150 to 250 pages in length, which will be orally defended.

Some students may also be required to take additional undergraduate or graduate courses as a condition of admission.

#### 1. Courses

The PhD program requires 5 courses (as above). These 5 courses are normally completed in the first 2 terms of the program. Courses are normally to be chosen from those regularly offered by the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies.

In some circumstances, students can take graduate courses offered by other departments at the University of Waterloo, or by other Ontario universities. This requires permission from the Associate Chair, Graduate Studies, as well as the student's supervisor and the course instructor. Usually only one external course is permitted in the PhD program.

Students are also able to take a maximum of one "directed readings" course (SOC 789) in their program. This requires identifying a course topic in consultation with a faculty member (normally in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies). While reading courses are largely discouraged, to be approved it must generally be the case that a) the topic area is not covered by regular offerings, and either b) the topic area directly contributes to the theoretical/methodological background required for their thesis/MRP/dissertation research, or c) degree progress would be hindered by lack of options (e.g., no other courses offered in a term). A written rationale must also be provided. Course



instructor, supervisor (where applicable), and graduate committee approval must be obtained. Contact the Graduate Coordinator for required forms.

In order to complete a course satisfactorily, students must complete all course requirements as specified by the instructor and receive a minimum passing grade of 75%. Students may receive a grade of “incomplete” (INC) on a graduate course if there is an agreement with the course instructor that outstanding work will be submitted, normally within one term. Evidence of that agreement should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator. Grades of INC will revert to “failure to complete” (FTC) after two terms.

If the student does not receive a passing grade of 75% or higher for a course they must retake the course, or complete another available graduate-level course instead.

## **2. Professional Development Seminar Milestone**

The Professional Development Seminar Milestone (ProSem) is required of all PhD candidates. It is graded on a complete/did not complete basis and is usually completed in the first three terms of study. For this seminar, students will complete and earn credit for at least ten modules hosted by the department and other university bodies, such as the Center for Teaching Excellence. The modules provide key information on topics relevant to PhD students, such as scholarship applications, conference presentations, research methodologies, teaching skills, job applications, and academic publishing. The ProSem also provides an opportunity for students to learn about and discuss other research being conducted in the disciplines of Sociology and Legal Studies, as well as to present their own research to the department, larger university community, and beyond.

## **3. Comprehensive Exams**

PhD students must complete two comprehensive exams, each in one of our thematic areas, demonstrating mastery of relevant theory and methodology. Students may take more than one comprehensive examination in a thematic area; however, they must be distinct and sufficiently comprehensive to merit the title of *comprehensive* examination. To learn more about the department’s thematic areas, go to [Graduate | Sociology and Legal Studies | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](https://graduate.soc.uwaterloo.ca)

### *Committees*

Comprehensive Exam Committees will have three faculty members, all selected by the student. One is selected to serve as the chair of the committee. This chair should be a full-time member of the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies. Ordinarily, the other two members would also be full-time faculty appointments from the department.

There may be times when the specialized expertise required to mount an appropriate examining committee does not exist within the department. In this and other aspects of the comprehensive examination policy, the department will be guided by the principles that we use in supervising PhD dissertations; i.e., faculty members should be free to set and assess an examination and construct a committee that meets appropriate standards of academic excellence.

It is possible for two of the three committee members to be from either (a) other departments in the university or (b) other universities. Where the student and committee propose having one or more members from outside the department, this must be approved by the Graduate Officer.



### *Format*

Students may take comprehensive exams in one of two formats: (1) a six-hour written examination; or (2) a take-home examination with oral defence.

#### *Six-hour written examination*

- A reading list is negotiated between the student and the committee. It may in no case contain more than 50 items: an item is normally a scientific article or a book chapter.
- The examination is divided into two three-hour sessions – one in the morning and one in the afternoon – with a one-hour break between sessions. Separate sets of questions will be handed out for the morning and the afternoon sessions, with the answer booklets or electronic files collected after each session.
- Normally, students are required to answer two out of four or five questions in each of the two sessions.
- Students may hand write the exam or use a computer provided by the department.
- A member of the examining committee must preside over the administration of the written exam. S/he ensures that suitable space and all examination materials are provided. The committee member must remain in the department for the duration of the examination in case any questions or problems should arise. A staff member may not supervise the exam.

#### *Take-home examination with oral defence*

- A reading list is negotiated between the student and the committee. It may in no case contain more than 50 items: an item is normally a scientific article or a book chapter.
- The comprehensive examination takes the form of a set of questions. The number of questions is agreed upon by the student and the committee.
- Normally, students are required to answer two out of three or four questions. The entire examination (not including references) cannot exceed 40 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins).
- The oral defence does not involve a presentation by the student and normally does not last more than two hours.

### **Timing**

The first comprehensive exam will be written in the second year of the PhD program, by October 31<sup>st</sup>. The second comprehensive exam must normally be written by April 30<sup>th</sup>. Writing the exam on a different timeline would require permission from the Graduate Affairs Committee.

The 18-week timeline for the six-hour written examination is as follows:

- The committee has two weeks to approve the reading list.
- The student has 12 weeks to read the materials (starting between July 24 and August 7 for the October 31 exam or January 23 and February 6 for the April 30 exam).
- The exam will be administered within two weeks of the end of the 12-week period, on October 31 or April 30 (or the following Monday).



- The committee marks the examination and individually submits their assessment within two weeks.

The 18-week timeline for the take-home examination with oral defence is as follows:

- The committee has two weeks to approve the reading list.
- The student has 12 weeks to read the materials (starting between July 24 and August 7 for the October 31 exam or January 23 and February 6 for the April 30 exam).
- The student is given the examination within two weeks of the end of the 12-week period, on October 31 or April 30 (or the following Monday) and has one week (7 days) to submit the written exam. Failure to submit within this time frame constitutes a failure of the examination.
- The committee schedules the oral defence to take place within two weeks of receiving the written exam.
- The committee marks the examination and notifies the Graduate Officer within two weeks.

### *Reporting of results*

All comprehensive exams are assessed on a pass/fail basis.

### *Six-hour written examination*

Each of the three examiners will independently assign a grade of (pass or fail) and provide written feedback on each answer, as well as the examination overall. These assessments (grades and comments) will be signed, i.e. are not anonymous. In the case of passing answers, the feedback may be quite brief.

These comments and results will be transmitted in writing to the Graduate Officer (or his/her designate, normally the Chair) within two weeks of the date the examination was taken. Overall passing grades from two out of the three examiners constitute a passing grade on the examination.

In the event that two of three examiners submit overall failing grades for a student, the Graduate Officer (or his/her designate) will convene a meeting of the examining committee to review the decision. Members of the examining committee may change their decision at this meeting.

The Graduate Officer will inform the student in writing of the result of the examination as soon as possible, normally within a week of grade submissions by committee members. The student will be provided with a copy of the examiners' written comments.

### *Take-home examination with oral defence*

The examining committee decides after the oral defence whether or not the written submission and the oral defence constitute a pass or fail. The decision is made within two weeks of the oral defence. There are no rewrites or revisions. If the examining committee cannot come to a consensus on whether the exam is a pass or fail, then they must vote. Two votes in favour constitute a pass. The Chair of the examining committee will notify the Graduate Officer in writing of the committee's decision. After receiving the results from the Graduate Officer, a student may request to meet with his/her examiners individually or as a group.

### *Appeals and retakes*

Internal appeals: Students may appeal their grades on procedural grounds to the Graduate Officer and the department's Graduate Affairs Committee.



External appeals: The University of Waterloo's Student Grievance Policy (Policy 70) describes additional appeal procedures administered outside the department:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>.

Retakes: A student has one chance to retake a failed comprehensive examination. They must take the examination in the same field and the same area, but they can choose any format and may strike a different examining committee. Students who fail the retake will be forced to withdraw from the program. Any retake of a failed comprehensive examination must be completed within 12 months of the notification that the student failed the first attempt. If registration is interrupted (e.g., if student changes to inactive status), the one-year time period will be based on the total number of months of regular registration from the original notification that the student failed the first attempt.

#### **4. Thesis supervision and proposal**

During the initial application process, PhD candidates choose and contact a potential supervisor from the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies. The supervisor is then normally confirmed by both the student and the faculty member in question by the end of the student's 1<sup>st</sup> term in the program.

Supervisors are normally regular faculty members with ADDS status in the department. The student can be co-supervised by one regular faculty member of the department with ADDS status and a faculty member from the department without ADDS status, including those from another University of Waterloo or affiliated college department.

For information regarding the department's thematic areas, faculty members and their research specialties, visit the department's website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/sociology-and-legal-studies/>

For more detailed information regarding the PhD supervision process, see: <https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies/faculty-and-staff>

##### *PhD Dissertation Committee*

A Dissertation Committee consists of three members: the supervisor and two members of the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies. Committee members are chosen by the student in consultation with the supervisor. The Graduate Coordinator must be notified by e-mail when the committee selection has been made. It is possible to have a faculty member from another department or university serve as a member of the Dissertation Committee, subject to the approval of the supervisor, the Associate Chair, Graduate Affairs, and the Associate Provost, Graduate Studies.

##### *Thesis proposal*

The purpose of the thesis proposal is to present a justification and plan for the thesis research, and to give the thesis committee members, the student and the supervisor an opportunity to discuss, modify and agree to the proposed plan.

The proposal should be written in consultation with the thesis supervisor. The proposal itself is usually about 25 pages in length. It normally includes some introduction to the research problems, a literature review and justification for the proposed research, research questions or hypotheses (as appropriate), a plan for data collection and analyses, and some discussion of the limitations of the research plan. Proposals often include proposed timelines, as well as discussions of ethical issues related to the research. Note that the thesis proposal is normally defended before submission to the Office of Research Ethics.



The thesis proposal is normally submitted by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> term (December 31<sup>st</sup> of year 3).

### *Thesis proposal defense*

The student must orally defend their thesis proposal to their supervisor and the two committee members. The oral defense of the proposal is normally completed one month after the submission of the proposal.

After the supervisor agrees that the proposal can go to a defense, the student should notify the Graduate Coordinator and prepare a Thesis Proposal Form, to be signed by the Associate Chair, Graduate Studies. The Graduate Coordinator can help coordinate the date and time of the defense with the supervisor and other committee members, and to book a room for the defense.

The oral defense usually consists of a short (approximately 20 minutes) presentation by the student, followed by questions from the committee members and supervisor. The supervisor normally chairs the defense. Thesis proposal defenses are normally open to other members of the Department and the University community, and to the public.

At the end of the oral defense, the supervisor and committee members decide *in camera* whether the proposal and oral defense have 1) passed, 2) passed with revisions, or 3) has not passed. In cases in which the proposal has not passed, it must be re-written and re-defended within a timeframe specified by the supervisor and agreed upon by the student and Graduate Officer.

Once the proposal has passed and any required revisions have been made and approved by the supervisor, a PhD department proposal approval form must be completed. This form is obtained from the Graduate Coordinator.

## **5. PhD Thesis**

The student's thesis should be completed and defended by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> term (August 31<sup>st</sup> of year 4). The thesis is usually between 150 and 250 pages. It can be in either 3-article or (traditional) book format. The contents of the thesis should be developed in consultation with the thesis supervisor. Other committee members might be involved in various ways as the thesis is being written. This should be discussed with the supervisor.

For university regulations pertaining to the format of the thesis, see:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/current-students/thesis>

### *Thesis submission and oral defense*

Once the supervisor has decided that the thesis is ready to be defended, s/he should notify the Dissertation Committee and the Graduate Coordinator, who will assist with the required forms, arranging a time and booking of a room. The student, in consultation with the supervisor, must also select a faculty member from outside the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies but within the University who will serve as the internal/external examiner, and an external examiner from outside the University of Waterloo (in addition to the members of the Dissertation Committee). Contact the Graduate Chair and Graduate Coordinator to start this process. The Graduate Coordinator should receive an electronic copy of the thesis at least 7 weeks before the date of the defense. The Graduate Coordinator will then send copies to the committee members, and also make a copy available to members of the university community who wish to examine it.

The thesis defense is similar to the proposal defense. It is open to the Department, the



University community and the public, and is normally chaired by a faculty member outside the Faculty assigned by the GSO. The student gives a short presentation (approximately 20 minutes), followed by rounds of questions from the committee members, the supervisor, the internal/external examiner and an external examiner. After the defense, the committee members and supervisor decide *in camera* whether the thesis and oral defense have passed without revisions, passed with revisions required, or has not passed. If revisions or further work to pass are required, the committee will specify the nature of these revisions/work. In the case of revisions, committee members will be responsible for overseeing them, and for the timeframe required. In cases in which the thesis has not passed, it must be re-worked and re-defended within a timeframe specified by the supervisor and agreed upon by the student and Graduate Officer.

## **Graduation**

Once you have successfully completed your thesis, you must do the following:

- 1) Upload your thesis to UW Space (see <https://uwaterloo.ca/library/uwspace/thesissubmission-guide>).
- 2) Contact the Graduate Coordinator to request that a Program Completion Form be completed. This certifies that you have met all of the Department's requirements and are able to graduate.
- 3) Complete the intention to graduate form on Quest (see [Graduation and Convocation | Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)).

If you have any further questions regarding the graduation process, please contact the Graduate Coordinator.

University of Waterloo hosts two convocations per year (Spring and Fall), in the Physical Activities Complex (PAC) on campus. The student may select their preferred convocation date in the Intent to Graduate form.

## **Funding**

Student funding is described in the offer of admission, provided through Quest. Normally, PhD students receive 4 years of funding, in the form of Teaching Assistantships and scholarships from the University. If a student takes a sessional teaching position in what would normally be a TA term, the sessional stipend will replace the TA+scholarship funding for that term. Funding is conditional on maintaining an average of 80% in graduate program courses. Information on awards and funding is available from the Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs office ([Current students | Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)).

Student Financial Services resources: [Student Financial Services | Finance \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)

The Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs office also offers a Research Travel Assistantship to cover expenses related to conference travel: [Funding graduate school | Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)

There are also external doctoral scholarships that students can, and should if eligible, apply for. Below is a non-exhaustive list of the main funding bodies that offer such scholarships:



SSHRC master's awards (CGS): [Tri-Agency \(CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC\) Canada Graduate Scholarships Master's \(CGS M\) | Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)

OGS master's awards: [Ontario Graduate Scholarship \(OGS\) and the Queen Elizabeth II Graduate Scholarship in Science and Technology \(QEII-GSST\) | Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](#)

### **Teaching as a PhD student**

PhD candidates may choose to apply for a sessional teaching position in the later years of their degree. These are normally given only to students who have successfully defended their proposal to ensure that students are both progressing in their degree (teaching will slow your progress in your program) and because comprehensive exams and the proposal process are considered good training for teaching given the breadth and depth of knowledge required to pass those milestones.

Be aware that for students currently within their funding timeline and who are expected to TA in that term, accepting a sessional teaching position means that you will be forfeiting your TA and scholarship funding for that term and instead will receive the sessional stipend. The implication is that, by teaching sessionally, you will be doing substantially more work for close to the same amount of money that you would receive if you were to TA. Teaching sessionally can also impact the amount of scholarship funding you receive in a subsequent term; in the end, you are not likely to receive more than the yearly funding amount noted in your offer letter.

Teaching in a term that you would not have received a TAship is discouraged. It is preferable that these 'scholarship only terms' are to be used to progress in your research.

### **Co-op**

Graduate students may combine academic studies with paid work experience through the Department's graduate co-op programs. Placements for PhD co-op graduate students will normally occur after comprehensive exams, and in some cases may occur after the dissertation proposal has been approved. Students then return to academic study to complete all remaining requirements for their program. The Graduate Co-op Officer will support student efforts at finding a placement. While the Department will make every effort to assist students in finding suitable co-op placements, we cannot guarantee co-op employment. Only Canadian citizens and holders of Permanent Resident status may enroll in graduate co-op programs.

For more information about co-op opportunities, please contact the Department's Graduate Administrative Coordinator or Graduate Co-op Officer. <https://uwaterloo.ca/co-operative-education/>

### **Student Research Presentation Series**

The Student Research Presentation Series is a forum for graduate students at any level to present their research in a supportive environment. It can be used as practice for conferences, job talks, or thesis/dissertation defences. It usually runs in the fall and spring terms, with 2-3 presentations per session. If interested in taking part, contact the Graduate Coordinator for further details.





### **Inactive terms and changing between full- and part-time**

Students may change between full- and part-time studies with approval of the Associate Chair, Graduate Studies. Part-time students will normally not receive funding. Students may choose to change their status to “inactive” for a maximum of two terms, with permission from the Associate Chair. Inactive students will not receive funding.

### **Departmental activities**

The department aims to create an environment of ongoing constructive discussion and relevant support regarding its members’ research interests and training. To that end, many scientific activities are organized throughout the academic year, including the departmental seminar series, professional development workshops, TA training, etc. You are **STRONGLY** encouraged to participate and engage in as many of these activities as possible.

### **Social, emotional and physical well-being**

The overall well-being of graduate students is a top priority for the department. The department as well as the University of Waterloo offers a wide range of resources, most available free of charge, to ensure the continued well-being of its students. Below is a list of some of these key resources:

Graduate Student Association: [Home - Graduate Student Association - UW \(gsauw.ca\)](http://gsauw.ca)

Mental Health Services: [Home | Campus Wellness | University of Waterloo \(uwaterloo.ca\)](http://uwaterloo.ca)

Campus Safety and Security: <https://uwaterloo.ca/watsafe/campus-safety-security>

### **Department Graduate Coordinator**

Quinn Smith

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