

SOCIOLOGY GRADUATE PROGRAM

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

**Master of Science in Sociology
and
Graduate Certificate in Applied Social Research**

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook has been prepared by the faculty of Sociology Department to assist students in understanding and completing the curriculum of the Master of Science in Sociology (M.S.) and the Certificate in Applied Social Research (CASR). Although the Handbook attempts to explain the curriculum and administrative procedures in as much detail as is necessary for typical circumstances, you should also develop a relationship with your designated Graduate Program Advisor, as shown below:

On-campus students: Dr. Meredith Katz (makatz@vcu.edu)

Online students: Dr. Tara Stamm (tmstamm@vcu.edu)

Administrative procedures and forms described here are accurate at the time of writing. However, this document is revised only periodically, so procedures and forms may be different than those indicated here. Always check the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for current requirements, the [VCU Academic Calendar](#) for current deadlines, the [Graduate School](#) website for current forms, and the Graduate Hub page for current news. Also, pay close attention to emails sent by the Graduate Advisors and other faculty members.

Mission of the Sociology Graduate Program

The Master of Science in Sociology Program is designed to prepare students for employment in professions related to sociological practice or continued study at the Ph.D. level. Students receive comprehensive training in sociological theory and methodology and have the opportunity to pursue specialized interests or interdisciplinary study. Our goal is to produce well-trained, highly skilled sociologists who are prepared to study the social world and effect positive social change within the highest ethical standards.

Program Address

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Graduate Culture and Program Expectations

Graduate school is not simply an extension of undergraduate education; it's a completely different world and academic experience. The majority of undergraduate students do not go to graduate school; it requires a much higher level of commitment, motivation, dedication, perseverance, and effort than undergraduate education. If you are willing to make the commitment, the payoff is well worth it. The general goal of graduate study to develop independent scholars. Graduate students go through a process of learning to rely less on faculty members for perspectives and information and more on themselves. With the assistance of the faculty, you will be developing your own intellectual approaches to the study of social life. That's the general framework, now to the practical details.

Coursework

The amount of coursework required in graduate classes is much greater than that required in undergraduate education. A full course load at the graduate level is 9 credit hours (typically 3 courses). You should expect to read an average of 100 pages per week for each course. You should expect to write a 20-25-page final paper, or its equivalent in project form, in addition to several smaller assignments for each course. Some courses also include midterm and final examinations. For on-campus courses, you should prepare diligently for each class by reading all assigned materials and preparing notes in order to participate actively in class discussion. You should expect to prepare and give oral presentations or lead discussions regularly in each class. Graduate classes tend to be smaller than undergraduate classes, so each student is visible and expected to contribute. Though online classes in the program will typically have a different structure for participation, the expectations of preparation and full participation in course activities are identical.

Attendance in on-campus courses

Attendance requirements vary by instructor, but in general, attendance is expected at all class meetings in graduate courses; it is not a time to "blow off" class. If an emergency arises that prevents you from attending class, you must notify the instructor as soon as possible and take full responsibility for making up any missed work.

Faculty/student interaction

You should expect to become better acquainted with the professors in graduate school. Class sizes are smaller, and there tends to be more mentoring and advising at this level than at the undergraduate level. Sociology faculty members are very supportive of students and generous with their time; we enjoy helping students navigate their graduate studies and professional pursuits. Students should remember, however, that faculty members are not peers. They are still in a position of authority and should be addressed as “Dr.” or “Professor,” unless they tell you otherwise. They also have a number of demands on their time including administrative duties, research obligations, other teaching responsibilities, and publishing pressure. You should respect the many demands on faculty members’ time by:

- Always making an appointment ahead of time if you need to meet; unless specifically instructed otherwise by the faculty member.
- Always preparing for meetings with faculty; know what you want to get out of the meeting; bring a list of questions and any materials/documents pertinent to the conversation; let the professor know why you want to meet.
- Meetings are a part of the curriculum. You should approach them as such. For example, be prepared to take notes on feedback.
- Expecting to meet for no more than 15-30 minutes unless otherwise agreed upon beforehand.

In sum, treat your faculty members (and student peers) with respect, and be proactive. If you are unsure of how to proceed at any point, talk with a faculty member. Students who put the most effort into their graduate education will reap the most benefits.

Asking questions

Getting started on the right foot is certainly important to any graduate student. If you have questions and are uncertain about how to proceed with any of the requirements of your courses and programs, consult your Graduate Program Advisor. This will make you a more productive and successful graduate student. The Graduate Program Advisor for on-campus students is Dr. Meredith Katz (makatz@vcu.edu) and for online students is Dr. Tara Stamm (tmstamm@vcu.edu). Also, you should get to know the Sociology Department Advisor, Rachel Bobbitt (bobbitts@vcu.edu). She handles the details of many administrative procedures for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Academic Policies – M.S. and CASR

Introduction

Students must be familiar with and follow the academic regulations prescribed for the University and the College in the [VCU Graduate Bulletin](#). The materials in this handbook do not attempt to repeat or summarize these general regulations, but represent specific departmental policies that students must additionally follow. Of particular importance are the [general academic regulations](#). In addition, you should visit the [Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#). Here, you will find the Student Code of Conduct and the VCU Honor System policies. You should familiarize yourself with these materials before beginning graduate study in the department.

Time to Completion of the Degree

A graduate student is considered full-time when taking a minimum of nine and a maximum of 15 credits per semester. Since the M.S. program requires 36 hours of credits, a student enrolling in nine credits in both fall and spring semesters can finish the program in two years. The amount of time to completion can be quite variable for part-time students. Due to the small size of our graduate program, the Sociology Department does not regularly offer graduate courses in the summer sessions. SOCY 508 is sometimes offered during the summer by a professor in the Statistics Department.

As specified in the VCU Graduate Bulletin, the time limit for completion of a graduate certificate or Master's degree is six years. Students should keep this time limit in mind when planning their programs.¹

The Grading System

Every student is assigned a letter grade for each course that is completed in the M.S. or CASR Program. This grade is recorded on the student's permanent transcript with the University. The grade on the student's university transcript is the official grade for the course. Course grades are assigned numerical equivalents, totaled, and divided by the number of credit hours completed to arrive at the student's Grade Point Average (GPA). The GPA is important to the student in remaining in good standing in the M.S. Program and in qualifying for the M.S. degree. It also plays an important role in recommendations by the faculty, in qualifying for Alpha Kappa Delta (the sociology honor society), and in being considered for various College of Humanities and Sciences and university awards that recognize scholarship.

With exceptions for Pass/Fail courses (see below), course academic achievements are graded on a 4.0 scale. Letter grades are assigned that carry numerical weight. The following equivalency table demonstrates this relationship.

¹ A limited number of extensions may be granted if approved by the Sociology Graduate Program Director and the dean of the Graduate School.

GRADE	NUMERICAL WEIGHT
A	4.0
B	3.0
C	2.0
D	1.0
F	0.0

The grade of "A" indicates high competency in understanding and applying the coursework. A "B" indicates competence in understanding and applying course elements. For graduate student grading purposes, the grade of "C" indicates that the student did not achieve minimum competency in understanding and/or applying the course elements. A "C" grade is a failing grade in graduate studies, as are the grades of "D" or "F".

After the completion of each course, the course instructor assigns a grade to each student. The instructor's system of grading should be explained in the course syllabus and discussed at the beginning of each course. Students who have any questions about the grading system should request an explanation of the system from the instructor.

The Grades of "P" and "F"

The grades of "P" (Pass) and "F" (Fail) are utilized in SOCY 693 Internship, SOCY 694 Practicum in Sociology, and SOCY 698 M.S. Thesis. The grade of "P" is assigned the weight of 3.00 quality points for purposes of evaluating student progress in the program. "Fail" receives a 0 quality point rating. However, the grade received in a P/F course is not included in the student's overall grade point average. Any student receiving the grade of "F" on a P/F course must repeat the course until it is passed.

Faculty Role in the Assignment and Change of Grades

The instructor is the principal determiner of course grades. Instructors have the responsibility for determining an initial grade for a course, for authorizing an incomplete ("I") grade, and changing a grade after it has been given. There are only two instances in which anyone other than the course instructor can issue or change a grade.

The first is a formal grade appeal by the student. In this situation a final grade determination is made by a Grade Review Committee. Students who wish to pursue a grade appeal should consult the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for instructions.

The second occasion for a grade assignment by faculty other than the instructor is when the instructor is unavailable for reviewing the course materials and assigning a grade. This can occur when a student receives an incomplete (I) grade in a course and the instructor leaves the University temporarily or permanently. When a faculty member departs, they are asked to continue their responsibility for grade assignments for their students. Most will accept this responsibility and will leave instructions about how they can be contacted. The student must

contact the faculty member, arrange to transmit the appropriate materials, and notify the department that this has been done.

Some faculty, by personal decision or inability to continue academic assignments, will leave the grading decision to the current program faculty. When this occurs, the Graduate Program Director will assign the responsibility for determining a grade to the faculty member most qualified to make that decision. Usually, students will confer with that faculty member about the course requirements and grade expectations.

The Grade of "Incomplete" (I)

Incompletes in courses are discouraged as general practice by a student or faculty member. However, there are circumstances in which an incomplete grade will be assigned. This occurs when the student is unable to complete some of the coursework because of circumstances beyond his/her control, usually a term paper or research project, by the end-of-semester deadline. Each instructor should inform students about her/his "incomplete grade" policy at the beginning of each semester. Faculty members are not obligated to allow incompletes in their courses. The student is responsible for sending a request for an incomplete grade to the faculty member and making specific arrangements for completing these requirements. The student requesting an incomplete must do so before the faculty member assigns final grades.

For the purposes of grading, the student and the faculty member must come to an agreement about the completion of course requirements. If the student has not completed all course work and does not contact the instructor to negotiate an incomplete, the instructor will enter a final grade based on the work completed. Final grades are due soon after the end of the final exam period. Students cannot wait until after the grades have been submitted to negotiate an incomplete grade.

When the course work is completed, the instructor will need to file a Change of Grade Form. Incomplete grades do not remain forever on a student's transcript if they are not completed. University policy is that the grade of "I" is automatically changed to the grade of "F" after one regular (fall/spring) semester if another grade is not reported by the instructor. The date for completion of the remaining assignments in a course cannot extend beyond the last day of classes of the next regular semester. A student receiving an incomplete grade at the end of the fall term must complete the course work by the last day of classes in the next spring semester. A student receiving an incomplete grade at the end of the spring or summer term must complete the course work by the last day of classes in the next fall semester. University grade records for the previous semester are swept at the end of the next semester. All "I" grades are automatically changed to the grade of "F". These failing grades are automatically added to student transcripts.

If students are unable to complete the course work by the deadline, they should initiate a negotiation to request an extension with the instructor of record or with the Graduate Program Director if the faculty member of record is unavailable. This request must be initiated before the last day of classes for the semester in which the work is due. Neither the faculty member nor the Graduate Program Director is obligated to grant the extension request.

The Grade Point Average (GPA)

The grade point average is important to maintaining good academic standing in the M.S. or CASR program. All students must maintain a GPA of 3.0 on all coursework to remain in good academic standing. The 3.0 GPA is the minimum required for graduation from these programs.

Repeated Courses

Students who receive a grade below a "B" may be allowed to repeat a course. This includes a course with an incomplete grade that has been converted to an "F." Students should consult first with their Graduate Program Advisor (Dr. Katz or Dr. Stamm). The advisor will then send a recommendation to the Graduate Program Director (Dr. Honnold). If a student is allowed to repeat a course, both the original grade and the repeat grade will enter into the calculation of the overall GPA.

Termination for Academic Insufficiency

The faculty can decide to terminate a student for academic insufficiency under several conditions. These are as follows:

1. The student's grade point average falls below 3.00.
2. The student receives the grade of "C" in more than two courses; the earning of a third "C" automatically terminates the student from the program, regardless of the presence on the record of offsetting grades of "A".
3. The student receives a grade of "D" or "F" in one or more courses.
4. A student admitted provisionally to the M.S. program fails to maintain a 3.00 grade point average for the first three courses taken in the program.

The faculty will also terminate (or advise voluntary termination for) a student for academic insufficiency when the student seems unable to raise a GPA above the 3.0 level necessary for graduation. The academic records of all students in the M.S. and CASR program will be reviewed by the Graduate Program Committee after the end of every semester and students notified if any of the conditions of academic insufficiency apply.

A student terminated from the graduate program may appeal the termination to the Graduate School. See the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for details. A student terminated from the program for cause may not be reconsidered for admission to the program for two full years from the date of termination. The student would then follow the normal application process prescribed by the program and the School of Graduate Studies.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

All students are expected to make satisfactory academic progress toward their degrees. After grades are entered at the end of a semester, the Graduate Program Director will review the records of all students in the program. If conditions of academic insufficiency or unprofessional conduct exist, the student will be considered for termination from the program by the Graduate Program Committee. A graduate student who receives multiple grades of "C" or a single grade of

“D” or “F” will be reviewed for possible termination from the program. See the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for details.

Continuous Enrollment

Once admitted to a degree program, graduate students are expected to comply with minimum enrollment of one course per 12-month period from the beginning of their programs. Graduate students who have completed course requirements for a degree must register for at least one credit at VCU each fall and spring semester until the degree is awarded. Students must be enrolled during their graduation semesters. If a student does not meet continuous enrollment minimums, she/he must reapply to the program through the Graduate School.

Class Attendance Policy

Faculty members determine class attendance policy for their classes. Class attendance policy should be stated in each course syllabus. If it is not, students should ask instructors about their policy regarding class attendance. Some faculty members require attendance at each class. If this is the policy and the absence is an emergency, students should be absolutely certain that they contact instructors either before missing the class or soon thereafter.

Leaves of Absence from the M.S. and Certificate Programs

If a student who has been formally admitted is unable to attend classes for one full academic term or more, a formal leave of absence from the M.S. Program must be requested in writing (email will do). This is accomplished by submitting a petition or a letter to the Graduate Program Director requesting a leave of absence. The request must include the reason for the leave and the amount of time that the leave of absence will require. This request will automatically be granted by the program and will be forwarded to the Dean of Graduate Studies. The student's request for a leave of absence will be entered into the record. The student will be allowed to return and register at a later time, without any penalty or the need to reapply to the University and the program. Leaves of absence do not extend the time limit for completion of the degree. Leaves of absence temporarily suspend continuous enrollment requirements. See the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for additional information.

Withdrawals

Withdrawal from Classes

Withdrawing from classes without prejudice is permitted. The deadline for withdrawal is noted on the [VCU Academic Calendar](#) for every semester. Students who wish to withdraw from a class need not submit a reason for the action. Withdrawals may be completed through eServices.

If a student has fallen so far behind in attendance and/or submission of assignments that the successful completion of a course is impossible, the student should withdraw from the course by the withdrawal date. If the student does not withdraw and has completed too few assignments to justify a request for an incomplete grade, the instructor will grade the student on the same basis

as other students in the course.

Health-related Withdrawals

For a protracted illness, a student may choose to ask for an approved leave of absence (see "Leaves of Absence" above). Some students may experience medical conditions that make them unable to complete their studies once a semester is in progress. If an illness occurs after add/drop but before the last day to withdraw, as specified on the academic calendar, students should withdraw from their classes through the normal eServices withdrawal process.

After the last day to withdraw for the semester and before a final class grade has been assigned and/or posted to the academic history, students with medical problems must petition their academic deans (or dean designees) for a medical withdrawal from all courses. This is accomplished by submitting a petition or a letter to the Graduate Program Director requesting the medical withdrawal. Students must present documentation of their medical condition that establishes a significant degree of impairment in continuing their studies. See the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for additional information.

Graduation Application

Application for graduation takes place at the beginning of each regular University semester, including the summer sessions. The date of the last day of application for graduation is listed in University publications and on the [Academic Calendar](#).

At the beginning of the semester, students eligible to graduate will be notified by email of the graduation process and provided a link to the graduation application. Only students eligible to graduate during the current semester will receive this email. The email notification will be sent to the official VCU student email address and will include submission deadlines and guidelines. A separate graduation application must be filed for each degree/certificate the student plans to complete (e.g., M.S. and CASR). A student must be enrolled at the time of application (i.e., during the semester in which the student graduates).

Students applying to graduate in the current semester should consult the [Enrollment Services Graduation Forms and Instructions](#) page. Currently, parts of the graduation application procedures are in the process of being changed from paper to electronic form, so be sure to follow instructions in the email you receive at the beginning of the semester.

Conferring the Degree

After a student has completed all of the degree requirements and had a graduation application approved, the degree requirements will have been met. An individual is considered as graduated at the end of the semester in which the degree requirements were met.

There is a difference between having fulfilled graduation requirements and having a degree conferred by the University. Virginia Commonwealth University confers degrees twice each year at the end of the fall (December) and spring (May) semesters in a graduation ceremony. The

official commencement program will list the names of all persons who have completed degree requirements and have been recommended by the faculty for graduation. Graduation applicants who have completed their degree requirements during the summer will have their degrees conferred at the following December ceremony.

Commencement

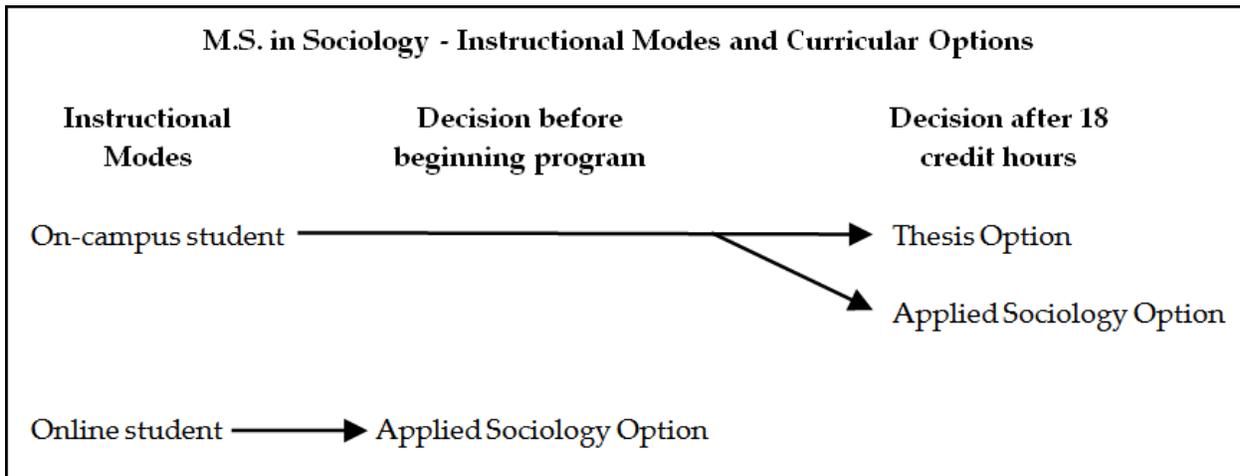
Information about a particular semester's graduation activities may be found on the [VCU Commencement Website](#). The University-wide ceremony is held on a Saturday morning at the Richmond Coliseum during the May graduation and at the Siegel Center during the December graduation. Candidates are officially awarded their degrees, but except for PhD recipients, do not walk. The Sociology Department holds its own graduation ceremonies at a different time of day on the Monroe Park Campus. Check the Commencement website under "Departmental Ceremonies" for day/time/place information. This is a much more informal ceremony at which all candidates get to walk and are congratulated individually by the faculty members. If you will be attending the Sociology graduation, contact the departmental office to register your attendance, obtain tickets for guests, and ask any questions.

The Master of Science in Sociology (M.S.)

Curriculum Options and Instructional Modes

The curriculum of the M.S. Sociology Program includes two academic options: thesis and applied sociology. Students who are interested in pursuing a Ph.D. or an applied research career should consider the thesis option. Students who are interested in pursuing an applied professional position should consider the applied sociology option. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss their options with sociology faculty members.

In addition to the two options, the program offers two different instructional modes: on campus and online. The applied option is available both to on-campus and online students. The thesis option must be taken as an on-campus student. The online applied option features a focus in Digital Sociology. Both academic options are intended to provide students with a strong background in sociological theory, methods, and a variety of substantive topical areas.



The mode-option choices are also summarized below.

Instructional Mode	Academic Option	Acronym	Student Decision Date
On campus	Applied Sociology	CAO (Campus Applied Option)	After 18 credit hours; for full-time students at the end of second semester of coursework
On campus	Thesis	TO (Thesis Option)	After 18 credit hours; for full-time students at the end of second semester of coursework
Online	Applied Sociology	ODS (Online Applied Program - Digital Sociology Focus)	When accepted into the M.S. degree program; before beginning first classes

The curriculum requirements and academic regulations for the Applied Sociology Option are identical, whether completed in the online or on-campus instructional mode. Students who desire to take their courses online must enroll as online applied sociology students at the beginning of their program and continue in that program until graduation. Other features of the ODS program are discussed later in this handbook.

On-campus students must decide whether to apply to progress to the thesis or not by the time they have completed 18 credit hours, usually at the end of their second semester in the program. See the "Thesis Option Curriculum" section below for details.

Curriculum Advising

The principal student advisors in the M.S. program are the Assistant Graduate Program Directors, Dr. Meredith Katz (on-campus students) and Dr. Tara Stamm (online students). Students should contact their advisor for assistance with submission of several program progress forms.

- After the successful completion of 18 credit hours, or their first year of graduate study, all graduate students are required to submit a [Second Year Proposal form](#) declaring their path through the second year of the program. On-campus students must declare their intent to pursue either a thesis or applied option. Online students must declare their internship preferences and/or practicum projects.
- Students are required to complete a [Student Evaluation form](#) at the end of each semester, assessing their progress in the program thus far, as well as their goals for the upcoming semester.
- Students who have GTA or LTA appointments are required to submit a [Teaching Assistant Evaluation Form](#) at the end of every semester.

In addition, the signature of the Graduate Program Director is required for a variety of actions, including independent study approval and graduation application. If a student is unsure of how to proceed with any action in the Program, the Graduate Program Director should be consulted.

ePortfolios

A key feature of all Sociology graduate programs is the 'ePortfolio' ([example](#)), a digital professional presence continuously developed over time in the program. Upon entering the program, students will create their own open-source WordPress or other blog site that allows them to:

- collect and curate content related to their coursework,
- write reflectively about their experiences in the program,
- share their work with other students and the broader public (with accommodations for privacy where desired),

- see and comment on other student's work,
- archive and organize their accumulated work,
- develop their work into a professional web presence that can be tailored to suit their particular needs and further their career goals long after they leave the program.

By developing their online sites over time, students experience the program in a more integrated fashion, rather than as simply an assemblage of individual courses. In turn, each course in the program has a basic WordPress site on which students' posts related to course material are automatically aggregated, so that all course participants can read and respond. Professors are able to view student posts in other courses and see what work they are doing there, which provides a larger context within which to understand student development. Work that students produce is shared not only with the professor but with other students and even the world at large (with privacy exceptions, as desired). We will provide detailed information and tips on creating and maintaining a WordPress site. Most students will want to use VCU's free WordPress hosting services through [RamPages](#).

Students have numerous opportunities to reflect upon their own process of learning and share those reflections with others. Students are expected to use their online space to respond to each other's reflections, creating dialogue about the learning experience, and thereby encouraging the development of community among the student cohort. Further, the option seeks to empower students to use their online space to communicate sociological insights and analyses as part of their professional work and online identity, regardless of their particular field.

Courses Taken Outside the Department

Students in the M.S. program are allowed to take up to six credits of courses outside the department in areas related to their interests. Courses taken outside the department require the prior approval of the student's Graduate Program Advisor.

Independent Study

If formal course offerings are not available in an area of interest for a student, and the student is academically prepared to undertake work in this area, enrollment in an independent study course is an option. The course designation used by the department is SOCY 692 Independent Study (1-6 credit hours). To use this course mechanism to pursue independent studies, the student must have the sponsorship of a Sociology Department faculty member.

The student must propose a project or subject for investigation to the faculty supervisor and negotiate the appropriate number of credit hours. The Independent Study Contract must be approved by the student's Graduate Program Advisor before registration for SOCY 692 (form in Appendix A). Note that this form must include a short description of the research or subject of inquiry, the name and signature of the supervising faculty member, and the number of credit hours to be earned. In general, approximately 150 hours of work on the course are expected for each 3 hours of credit. Students are expected to submit weekly progress reports to their faculty supervisors. Students should request a preliminary evaluation of their progress from their supervisor by mid-semester. Each 3-credit independent study should propose the equivalent of

a 20-25 page formally written paper with an extensive reference list of academic sources. The faculty supervisor should outline expectations and grading standards in the written documentation of the project.

SOCY 694 Practicum in Sociology as Elective Credit

Applied option students entering in fall, 2016, or later must accumulate 6 credits of internship (SOCY 693), 6 credits of practicum (SOCY 694), or 3 credits of each in the second year of their programs.² Applied option students may take additional practicum credits as elective courses. Students in the thesis option may take practicum credits as elective courses. When taken for elective credit, the student must propose a project or subject for investigation to a faculty supervisor and negotiate the appropriate number of credit hours. The Practicum Study Contract for Elective Credit must be approved by the student's Graduate Program Advisor before registration for SOCY 694 (see form in Appendix B). Note that this form must include a short description of the research or subject of inquiry, the name and signature of the supervising faculty member, and the number of credit hours to be earned. In general, approximately 150 hours of work on the course are expected for each 3 hours of credit.

Sociology Graduate Student Organization (SGSO)

The department has set up a Blackboard site to communicate program information to graduate students.³ The Graduate Program Director enrolls students in the organization when they are accepted into the program and receive an eID. They can then access the site through the VCU portal or the Blackboard home page. Students who are not enrolled or who have trouble accessing the site should contact the Graduate Program Director.

Graduate Program Hub Page

A Graduate Program Hub Page is currently under development. This will be an online portal that aggregates department information, including ePortfolios, course Ram Pages, and department information. When it's ready, students should visit the Hub Page frequently for information and department communication.

² Applied option students entering prior to fall, 2016, were required to accumulate 6 credits of internship credit (SOCY 693). Optionally, these students may decide to use the new requirements for their programs, but must notify the Graduate Program Director of their intention.

³ Blackboard is VCU's online learning management system. To access Blackboard use the myVCU Portal or go to blackboard.vcu.edu. Use your eID and password to log in.

On Campus: Thesis Option

Curriculum and Plan of Study

Thirty-six hours of graduate coursework must be completed as follows:

- SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory
- SOCY/STAT 608 Social Statistics (Prerequisite: SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 601 Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 602 Applications of Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisites: SOCY 508 or equivalent, SOCY 601)
- Electives - 24 hours, typically including 6 credit hours of SOCY 698 Thesis.

Students desiring to follow the thesis option must apply to progress to the thesis by the time they have completed 18 credit hours (at the end of the second semester in the program for full-time students). The [Second Year Proposal form](#) must be submitted by May 1 for fall and November 1 for spring enrollment in thesis credit. Applications will be reviewed by the Graduate Program Committee. You should hear back from your advisor by May 15 for fall and November 15 for spring semester enrollment in thesis credit - SOCY 698 M.S. Thesis.

During their second year of the program, students in the thesis option develop and publicly defend an M.S. thesis under the guidance of a thesis committee including three faculty members: (1) the thesis chair, who must be a full-time faculty member in the Sociology Department, and (2) two committee members, one of whom must be from a department, program, or area of specialization other than that in which the student is enrolled. Thesis students may present up to six thesis credits in SOCY 698 for graduation.⁴

The recommended progression of courses for full-time thesis option students is shown in the table below. Courses listed with course numbers and titles are designated as either Required (Req) or Recommended (Rec). Part-time students need to be aware that certain required courses are taught only in fall or spring semesters, as follows:

SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory – Fall
*SOCY 508 Introduction to Social Statistics – Fall
SOCY 601 Sociological Research Methods – Fall
*SOCY 608 Statistics for Social Research – Spring (Prerequisite is SOCY 508 or equivalent; Required for thesis option)
SOCY 602 Applications of Sociological Research methods – Spring (Prerequisites of SOCY 508 and SOCY 601)

⁴ In order to maintain continuous enrollment (see "Academic Policies: MS and CASR" section), thesis students may accumulate more than 6 credits of SOCY 698. However, only 6 credits will be counted toward graduation requirements.

*Incoming students who do not have a strong background in undergraduate statistics should take SOCY 508 as soon as possible in their programs. Students who have a strong background in statistics can petition the Graduate Program Committee to waive the requirement for SOCY 508 and take only SOCY 608. SOCY 608 is required for thesis option students.

Thesis Option Students – Course and Task Progression
<p><u>Semester 1 - Fall</u> SOCY 502 Theory (Req) SOCY 508 Introduction to Social Statistics (Rec for students without strong backgrounds) SOCY 601 Sociological Research Methods (Req)</p> <p>Task: Begin considering possibilities for thesis topic and chair Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester</p>
<p><u>Semester 2 - Spring</u> SOCY 602 Applications of Methods - Quantitative (Req) SOCY 608 Statistics for Social Research (Req) SOCY 6XX Elective</p> <p>Tasks: Continue developing ideas for thesis and thesis chair/committee members Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester Submit Second Year Proposal form by May 1</p>
<p><u>Summer</u> Tasks: Conduct preliminary work on thesis proposal, as assigned by thesis chair Review departmental guidelines and VCU Thesis and Dissertation Manual for thesis requirements</p>
<p><u>Semester 3 - Fall</u> SOCY 691 Qualitative Methods (Rec) SOCY 6XX Elective SOCY 698 M.S. Thesis (Req)</p> <p>Tasks: Defend thesis proposal before faculty committee by Nov. 30 If pass, submit Admission to Candidacy form to Sociology Department Advisor by Dec. 1 Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester</p>

Thesis Option Students – Course and Task Progression

Semester 4 - Spring

SOCY 6XX Elective

SOCY 6XX Elective

SOCY 698 M.S. Thesis (Req)

Tasks:

Read email from VCU Records and Registration for details on graduation application process.

Prepare and submit graduation application in January following instructions specified in the email.

Check VCU [graduation website](#) for commencement information.

Defend thesis before faculty committee by April 20. Revise as needed. Submit [ETD Approval Form](#) to the graduate school and the thesis to [VCU Scholars Compass](#) by date shown on [VCU Academic Calendar](#).

Guide to Successful Thesis Completion

The thesis option is recommended for students who are interested in, and are qualified to pursue, a Ph.D. in Sociology or a career as a professional researcher. The thesis experience is challenging and rewarding, and students should be well informed about the process and well prepared to make the commitment before choosing this option.

The thesis process is fundamentally student-driven. Faculty members, especially the thesis chairperson, can assist the student, but cannot write the thesis. It's important for the student to establish a good working relationship with the thesis chair. Remember that the chair has many other obligations and responsibilities. Students should not expect immediate turnaround and feedback on drafts. The student, not the chair, is responsible for identifying and obtaining literature, analyzing data, writing up results, etc., and keeping focused and motivated.

Establish a structured set of dates for completion of each step of the thesis project. Be aware that most faculty members have 9-month appointments and are not under contract during the summer. They may not be available to provide guidance or feedback on thesis projects over the summer.

The M.S. thesis normally should be approximately 40-60 pages in length. However, the length will vary according to the topic and the method of analysis, so the appropriate length will be determined by the student and thesis committee. The thesis is written in formal academic language, such as that in peer-reviewed published articles. The stylistic conventions of the American Psychological Association (APA) should be used, assuming approval of the thesis chair. Many guides to APA format may be found on the internet. The Purdue Online Writing Lab features an [APA Formatting and Style Guide](#) that is recommended by the VCU library. We recommend using bibliographic software for in-text citations and the reference list, though proofreading is still necessary. The VCU Library supports a free online bibliographic application called [RefWorks](#).

Following are the key steps in developing a thesis project and bringing it to successful completion. These steps are generally applicable, but may be altered in some respects by the student's thesis committee.

1. **A student initiates** the process of writing a thesis by identifying a research topic to investigate. The student initiates discussion with faculty members who have an interest and/or particular expertise in the area of interest. It is the student's responsibility to request that a faculty member serve as thesis chair. The faculty member need not agree to chair the committee. Ideally, students pursuing the thesis option will select a thesis chairperson before submitting the [Second Year Proposal form](#) at the completion of 18 credit hours. If the student has not selected a thesis chair, the Graduate Program Committee will appoint one in consultation with the student and faculty member. The member designated as the student's thesis chair must be a full-time faculty member in the Sociology Department. Per Graduate School rules, the thesis committee is made up of three faculty members, two of whom must be in the Sociology Department. One member of the thesis committee must be from a department, program, or area of specialization other than that in which the student is enrolled.

2. **A thesis begins with a proposal.** The student works with the thesis chair to complete a thesis proposal. A proposal is a carefully written, thorough description of the student's project. It is a detailed plan for completion of the research project. Essentially, the proposal consists of what will become the first sections of the thesis itself. In general, a research proposal will have major sections on literature review, theory or conceptual framework, statement of the problem, and methodology. Some committees will require other sections or alternate sequencing. The proposal (and thesis) should be formatted using the requirements specified in the [VCU Thesis and Dissertation Manual](#).
 - In the literature review the student demonstrates a knowledge of the literature in the field that pertains to the selected problem and situates his or her proposed research within that literature. Prior work on the problem or related to the problem, unanswered questions or un-addressed issues, and controversies and debates related to the proposed work are all part of a literature review. In writing a literature review, the student's task is to demonstrate mastery of a body of work in sociology and to show how his or her investigation fits within that work and will make a contribution to existing knowledge within the field.
 - In the theory/conceptual framework section of the thesis, the student describes the theory and/or the analytical concepts relevant to the research question(s). Conceptual definitions are developed. Arguments are presented that justify the choice of a particular theory and/or analytical concepts.
 - If the statement of the problem section is placed after the literature review and theory/conceptual framework sections, it pulls these sections together to propose and justify the choice of research question(s), basic design, and hypotheses (if any). The student should convince the reader that this particular topic has to be addressed with the research project. Some committees will have the student place the problem statement before the literature review, in which case it establishes the importance of studying the topic and the overall objective and scope of the proposed research.

- The methods section comprehensively covers the choices of research methods to be used in the study. Though topics to be discussed in the methods section will vary depending on the research question and choice of secondary or primary data, these may include research design, sampling, data collection instruments, research ethics, and analysis techniques. Some committees will require inclusion of dummy tables or pilot data. In order to finish in two years, we strongly recommend that thesis students undertake some form of secondary data analysis. Good sources of secondary data relevant to sociological topics include government sources and the [ICPSR](#) data repository. Use of the repository is free to enrolled VCU students. Additional information is available on the [ICPSR page](#) of the VCU library system. Collection of primary data typically involves human subjects research, as defined by the [VCU Institutional Review Board](#) (IRB), which requires filing and approval of IRB forms prior to data collection. After IRB approval, the data collection process can be lengthy as well. IRB approval is not required for analysis of publicly available de-identified secondary data.
 - The conclusions section should summarize the key elements of the proposal and discuss strengths and limitations of the proposed research. The student should also present a proposed timeline for completion of the project.
3. **Proposal Defense.** When the committee chair is satisfied that the student’s proposal is complete, and other committee members agree, the student may schedule a proposal defense. The defense should be announced to all Sociology faculty and graduate students at least one week in advance to allow them to make plans to attend. The student makes a short, formal presentation of the basic elements of the proposal first. Defenses are held in one of the conference rooms so that the student can use a screen for the presentation. A question period follows during which committee members and guests can ask questions about the proposal. After the question period, the student and guests leave the room, and the committee deliberates about the conduct of the defense and any changes that will be required for the project to proceed. At the end of the defense, the student returns, and the thesis chair summarizes the project and committee comments. This summary constitutes an approximate “contract” with the student. If the student completes the work as proposed and incorporates the suggestions made in a way that satisfies the thesis chair and members of the committee, the student will complete the thesis project successfully. The student should bring the [Admission to Candidacy form](#) to the defense, so that if the committee members approve the project, the thesis chair can sign the form then. In addition, the form requires the signature of the Graduate Program Director. After obtaining all signatures, the student must submit the form to the Sociology Department Advisor, Rachel Bobbitt. The Admission to Candidacy form must be filed by the end of the semester prior to the semester of expected graduation.
 4. **Conduct the research project and complete the thesis.** After admission to candidacy, the student should consult the [VCU Academic Calendar](#) to determine the deadlines for thesis completion in the semester of expected graduation. The student must be enrolled in at least one credit during every fall and spring semester after being admitted to candidacy, including the semester in which the thesis is completed. As is the case for the proposal, the student works closely with the thesis chair to accomplish the tasks necessary to write the findings and conclusions sections of the thesis. On portions previously written for the proposal, be

sure to change verbs from future to past tense, since the thesis reports on the completed project. For example, change “data will be analyzed” to “data were analyzed.”

5. **Thesis Defense.** When the project is completed, the student consults with the chair and committee members. When they feel that the project can go to defense, the student will organize a thesis defense. Typically, the defense should be scheduled to occur before April 30 (spring), August 1 (summer), or November 30 (fall) in order to give the student sufficient time to make any changes to the document required by the committee and submit the [ETD Approval Form](#) to the Dean’s office and the thesis to the [VCU Scholars Compass](#) by the deadlines shown in the [VCU Academic Calendar](#). The thesis defense is conducted in the same manner as the proposal defense. The arrangements are publicly announced at least one week in advance, and guests may attend the presentation and question period. The student should bring the [ETD Approval Form](#) to the oral defense, so that if the committee members approve the project and defense, they can sign the form then. At this time, a hard copy form is still in use, and members must sign in black ink. The committee can direct the student to make changes to the document prior to final submission to the VCU Scholars Compass.
6. **Submit thesis to the Graduate School.** Once any changes required by the committee have been made, the student must follow the proper procedures for submitting the thesis to the Graduate School. When the student uploads the thesis file to the VCU Scholars Compass, submits the signed [ETD Approval Form](#) to the Sociology Department Advisor (who submits it to the Graduate School), and receives email confirmation that the submission has been accepted, the thesis process is complete.
7. **Graduate.** When that the student has successfully submitted the thesis and fulfilled all other requirements, it’s time for celebration! See the [VCU Commencement](#) website for graduation information.

On Campus: Applied Sociology Option

Curriculum and Plan of Study

On-campus students in the Applied Sociology option must complete thirty-six hours of graduate course work, as follows:

- SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory
- SOCY/STAT 508 Introduction to Social Statistics or SOCY/STAT 608 Social Statistics (Prerequisite: SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 601 Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 602 Applications of Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY 508 or equivalent, SOCY 601)
- SOCY 693 Internship and/or SOCY 694 Practicum (6 credit hours when combined)*
- Electives - 18 credit hours

*Students may take their 6 credits of SOCY 693 and/or SOCY 694 either separately or in combination. For example, a student could take all 6 hours of internship, all 6 hours of practicum, or 3 hours of each.

The recommended progression of courses for on-campus, full-time applied sociology option students is shown in the table below. Courses listed with course numbers and titles are designated as either Required (Req) or Recommended (Rec). Part-time students need to be aware that certain required courses are taught only in fall or spring semesters, as follows:

SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory – Fall
 SOCY 508 Introduction to Social Statistics – Fall
 SOCY 601 Sociological Research Methods – Fall
 SOCY 602 Applications of Sociological Research methods – Spring (Prerequisites of SOCY 508 and SOCY 601)

Applied Option Students – Course and Task Progression
<p><u>Semester 1 - Fall</u> SOCY 502 Theory (Req) SOCY 508 Introduction to Social Statistics (Rec for students without strong backgrounds) SOCY 601 Sociological Research Methods (Req)</p> <p>Task: Begin considering possibilities for internship/practicum experiences/projects and faculty committee members Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester</p>

Applied Option Students – Course and Task Progression

Semester 2 - Spring

SOCY 602 Applications of Methods – Quantitative (Req)

SOCY 6XX Elective

SOCY 6XX Elective

Tasks:

Continue developing ideas for internship/practicum experiences/projects and faculty committee members

Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester

Submit [Second Year Proposal form](#) by May 1

Summer

Tasks:

Conduct preliminary work on fall semester internship/practicum project, as assigned by committee

Review departmental guidelines for internship/practicum project requirements

Semester 3 - Fall

SOCY 691 Qualitative Methods (Rec)

SOCY 6XX Elective

SOCY 693 and/or SOCY 694 Internship/Practicum (Req)

Tasks:

Defend internship/practicum fall semester project before faculty committee by Nov. 30.

If pass, submit committee approval form to your program advisor by Dec. 1. **(This form is under development.)**

Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester

Semester 4 - Spring

SOCY 6XX Elective

SOCY 6XX Elective

SOCY 693 and/or SOCY 694 Internship/Practicum (Req)

Tasks:

Read email from VCU Records and Registration for details on graduation application process.

Prepare and submit graduation application in January following instructions specified in email.

Check VCU [graduation website](#) for commencement information.

Defend internship/practicum spring semester project before faculty committee by April 30.

Revise as needed. Submit approval form to your program advisor by April 30. **(This form is under development.)**

Internship/Practicum Requirement

Applied option students entering in fall, 2016, or later must accumulate 6 credits of internship (SOCY 693), 6 credits of practicum (SOCY 694), or 3 credits of each.⁵ Applied option students should begin considering internship and/or practicum possibilities as early as the first semester of graduate work. The [Second Year Proposal form](#) is due near the end of the semester in which the student will accumulate a total of 18 credits. This gives the student the opportunity to request working on a specific sequence of internship and/or practicum experiences in the second year with particular faculty members. At least two Sociology faculty members must be on the student's committee, one of whom acts as chair. The student also has the option of requesting that an additional committee member be appointed, such as a faculty member from another department or a community organization representative. From that point onward, the student works with committee members to gain approval for a set of experiences that will fulfill the requirement.

A product must result from each semester of internship or practicum which is defended in a meeting of the student's committee. Typically, the defense should be scheduled to occur before April 30 (spring), August 1 (summer), or November 25 (fall) in order to give the student sufficient time to make any changes to the document required by the committee prior to the end of the semester. The defense should be announced to all Sociology faculty and graduate students at least one week in advance to allow them to make plans to attend. The student makes a short, formal presentation of the basic elements of the proposal first. Defenses are held in one of the conference rooms so that the student can use a screen for the presentation. A question period follows during which committee members and guests can ask questions about the proposal. After the question period, the student and guests leave the room, and the committee deliberates about the conduct of the defense and any changes that will be required for the project to pass the practicum requirement. At the end of the defense, the student returns, and the committee chair summarizes the comments and required changes.

Internship

The internship is a key feature of both the Applied Sociology option and the Certificate of Applied Social Research. Students in the Applied Option who wish to do an internship may opt to complete the internship/practicum requirement with 6 credits of internship (2 3-credit courses) or 3 credits of internship (1 3-credit course) and 3 credits of practicum. Students in the Certificate of Applied Social Research program must complete 1 3-credit internship course. Each 3-credit internship course requires 150 hours of work in the internship position, in addition to time spent writing an internship paper relating sociological concepts to the experience.

In the internship, students undertake a practical, applied work experience, typically in a governmental or nonprofit agency. The internship addresses the experiential needs of the student by providing: (1) a setting for students to integrate classroom knowledge with specific job situations and apply this knowledge to organizational problems, (2) an environment in which the student can learn how to deal effectively with others in mutual

⁵ Applied option students entering prior to fall, 2016, were required to accumulate 6 credits of internship credit (SOCY 693). Optionally, these students may decide to use the new requirements for their programs, but must notify the Graduate Program Director of their intention.

goal-directed activities, and (3) a means for students to understand the work processes and complexities common in such organizations. Because of the individual focus of the internship, each student's experience will be unique. A student currently employed in an organization may propose to intern in that position, provided that appropriate opportunities are available for integrating sociological theories and/or methodologies with ongoing professional activities.

Students who think they might be interested in an internship should contact the Internship Coordinator, Dr. Meredith Katz, as soon as possible in their programs. Students who have completed 18 credit hours and are interested in an internship experience must file a [Second Year Proposal form](#) outlining their plans. Typically, internship students take 3 credit hours of SOCY 693 during each of two semesters during their second year in the program. Students will be required to locate a paid or volunteer internship that enables them to apply the sociological principles and/or methodologies they have studied. When appropriate, students may be allowed to complete the internship in their current work position. Students must identify an internship supervisor in the work setting. The supervisor will make the final decision about whether a student is qualified to complete an internship with the organization. If so, the student consults with the supervisor to determine work responsibilities. Any problems that develop in the course of the internship should be reported by the supervisor or the student to the Internship Coordinator. At the end of the semester, the supervisor will be asked to complete an evaluation of the student's performance in the position.

Throughout the time of the internship, students are responsible for logging their completed hours, as well as ensuring their field supervisor completes a mid-term and final evaluation of their performance. In addition, all internship students must conduct a project for each 3-credit course applying sociological principles, theories, and/or methodologies to their internship experiences. The student must receive approval for the project from the Second Year Proposal faculty committee and the Internship Coordinator.

The process and time line involved in the internship are as follows:

The internship position: Prior to registration for SOCY 693, the student locates a potential internship position and meets personally with someone at the agency or organization to discuss duties and expectations of the position. After submission of their [Second Year Proposal form](#), students will be assigned a departmental faculty committee composed of two members for their internship project. Students will submit an internship proposal to their committees and have a public defense of their internship paper at the end of each 3-credit course.

1. Registration for SOCY 693: After the Graduate Program Committee and the Internship Coordinator approve the [Second Year Proposal form](#), the student should enroll in SOCY 693 Internship for either 3 or 6 credit hours, depending on the nature of the position. Under ordinary circumstances, students will complete three credits in fall and three in spring semester during their second year in the program. Students in CASR are required to complete only one internship course for 3 credit hours.
2. Conduct of the internship: Throughout the course of the internship, students are

responsible for logging their completed hours and ensuring that their field supervisor sends a mid-term and final evaluation of their performance to the Internship Coordinator.

3. Internship Paper: Prior to or shortly after beginning their internship, students should consult with their faculty committee about their ideas for a sociologically relevant internship paper. Typically, the requirement might be to submit a 20-25-page paper at the end of 3 credits integrating sociological theory, principles, and/or methods with the internship experience and a culminating paper at the end of 6 credits of 40-45 pages. All projects require prior approval of the student's faculty committee.
4. Final Submissions: At the end of each 3-credit internship, the student should submit completed time logs for work in the organization to the Internship Coordinator and the internship paper to the faculty committee. The student then defends the project publicly. The student should also request that the field supervisor send a final evaluation to the Coordinator.

Projects may be continued through two semesters in the Applied Sociology option, provided that the student produces a final product for grading at the end of each semester. At the end of the semester, the student's faculty committee will assign a grade on the A-F scale to the final internship project. In order to pass SOCY 693, students must meet all requirements and guidelines described herein and earn an "A" or "B" on the final project ("Pass"); a grade of "C" or below on the project will result in a grade of "Fail" for the internship, and the student will be required to redo the entire internship. The supervisor's evaluation will also be considered in the determination of whether to award the student a "Pass" or "Fail" for SOCY 693.

Students conducting internships as part of their sociology graduate coursework should keep in mind that they are representing VCU, the College of Humanities and Sciences, and the Sociology Department. The faculty expects students to maintain professional standards in behavior and appearance and be respectful of the organization's staff, mission, and clients. Students are expected to fulfill all commitments, report to the organization when scheduled, work all hours as agreed-upon, be punctual, and perform the duties assigned to the best of their ability. Creating positive relationships with organizations is also important in order to provide future students with excellent internship opportunities. If at any time students experience problems in their internship experiences, they should contact the Internship Coordinator immediately.

Practicum

The practicum course, SOCY 694, provides a flexible format (1-6 credits) allowing graduate students to develop skills in areas of interest under faculty supervision. Practicum experiences may include but are not limited to such options as conducting a secondary data analysis, producing data visualization materials, developing a literature review and professional presentation, or writing a grant proposal for a community organization. Practicum content will vary widely among students, and, as discussed above, must result in a product each semester that is defended before a faculty committee.

Online: Applied Option – Digital Focus

The VCU M.S. in sociology with a focus on Digital Sociology is the first such program in the U.S. Digital Sociology is the study of the social processes that shape technologies like the Internet and how those technologies shape social processes. Students study what all this change means for how we work, go to school, form families, understand ourselves, and enact social change. The degree program prepares graduates to shape emerging local, national and global conversations about big data, privacy, algorithms, inequality, and social movements. Students create meaningful projects from the start, building a digital portfolio of analytical skills, critical analysis skills, and theoretical acumen. The course sequence brings together a cohort from day one that moves through an eight course sequence in methods, theory, substantive courses, and internship/practicum.

Students in the Online Applied Program with a focus in Digital Sociology (ODS) complete the same curricular requirements as the on-campus applied sociology option students. All courses are fully online; that is, there is no requirement for students to come to the VCU campus at any time during their studies. ODS enrolls students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Many are employed in professional positions that are related to applications of sociology or related fields. As previously noted, students who wish to participate in ODS must enroll in the program at the beginning of their graduate work and remain in the program until completion of the degree.

Students who are admitted to ODS will be given a detailed orientation to the technologies and processes used in the program. Emphasis will be on use of open (free) technologies and minimal equipment. An online student orientation session will be held prior to the beginning of the semester of enrollment to acquaint students about requirements.

As with the on-campus applied sociology option, the goal of ODS is to provide students with:

1. a sophisticated understanding of sociological concepts and theories,
2. facility in the use of sociological research methods, and
3. the ability to apply sociological methods and theory to their current or desired areas of professional interest.

Curriculum and Plan of Study

Online students in the Applied Sociology option must complete thirty-six hours of graduate course work, as follows:

- SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory
- SOCY/STAT 508 Introduction to Social Statistics or SOCY/STAT 608 Social Statistics (Prerequisite: SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent)*
- SOCY 601 Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 602 Applications of Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY 508 or equivalent, SOCY 601)
- SOCY 693 Internship and/or SOCY 694 Practicum (6 credit hours when combined)**
- Electives - 18 credit hours

*At this time, SOCY 608 Social Statistics is not offered as an online course. Students who would like to fulfill this requirement with a more advanced course than SOCY 508 should identify an appropriate advanced statistics course either at VCU or elsewhere. If interested, consult with your program advisor about the possibility of substituting that course for SOCY 608.

**Students may take their 6 credits of SOCY 693 and/or SOCY 694 either separately or in combination. For example, a student could take all 6 hours of internship, all 6 hours of practicum, or 3 hours of each.

The recommended progression of courses for online full-time digital sociology students is shown in the table below. Courses listed with course numbers and titles are designated as either Required (Req) or Recommended (Rec). Full-time students should take their courses in this sequence. Part-time students need to be aware that certain required courses are taught only in fall or spring semesters, as follows:

SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory – Fall
 SOCY 508 Introduction to Social Statistics – Fall
 SOCY 601 Sociological Research Methods – Spring
 SOCY 602 Applications of Sociological Research methods – Fall (Prerequisites of SOCY 508 and SOCY 601)

Online Digital Sociology Focus – Course and Task Progression
<p><u>Semester 1 - Fall</u> SOCY 502 Theory (Req) SOCY 508 Introduction to Social Statistics (Req) SOCY 691 Digital Social Problems (Rec)</p> <p>Task: Begin considering possibilities for practicum projects and faculty committee members Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester</p>
<p><u>Semester 2 - Spring</u> SOCY 601 Sociological Research Methods (Req) SOCY 673 Public Sociology (Rec) SOCY 691 Big Data/Content Scraping (Rec)</p> <p>Tasks: Continue developing ideas for practicum projects and faculty committee members Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester Submit Second Year Proposal form by May 1</p>
<p><u>Summer</u></p> <p>Tasks: Conduct preliminary work on fall semester practicum project, as assigned by committee Review departmental guidelines for practicum project requirements</p>

Online Digital Sociology Focus – Course and Task Progression

Semester 3 - Fall

SOCY 602 Applications of Methods – Quantitative (Req)

SOCY 691 Digital Sociology (Rec)

SOCY 694 Practicum (Req)

Tasks:

Defend practicum fall semester project before faculty committee by Nov. 30

If pass, submit committee approval form to your program advisor by Dec. 1. **(This form is under development.)**

Consult with program advisor and submit Student Evaluation Form at end of semester

Semester 4 - Spring

SOCY 691 Data Visualization (Rec)

SOCY 656 Social Network Analysis (Rec)

SOCY 694 Practicum (Req)

Read email from VCU Records and Registration for details on graduation application process.

Prepare and submit graduation application in January following instructions specified in email.

Check VCU [graduation website](#) for commencement information.

Defend internship/practicum spring semester project before faculty committee by April 30.

Revise as needed. Submit approval form to your program advisor by April 30. **(This form is under development.)**

See a detailed discussion of the Internship/Practicum requirement in the “On Campus: Applied Sociology Option” section above.

The Accelerated BS/M.S. Degree in Sociology

The accelerated B.S. and M.S. program allows qualified students, with a major in sociology, to earn both degrees in a minimum of five years by completing approved graduate courses during the senior year of their undergraduate program. The program will provide students with the opportunity to expand and deepen their knowledge of sociology, enhance their credentials for the job market and/or to prepare for further professional education. Students in the program may count up to 12 hours of graduate courses toward both the B.S. and M.S. degrees. Thus, the two degrees may be earned with a minimum of 144 hours instead of the 156 required if the degrees are pursued separately.

The program is restricted to students who have demonstrated a clear interest in sociology. Minimum qualifications for admittance to the program include completion of 90 undergraduate credit hours with an overall GPA of 3.0, and a minimum of nine credit hours in sociology with a GPA of 3.3. Prior to being formally considered for admittance and before enrolling in graduate courses, the student must complete the graduate school application, submit GRE general aptitude scores, and supply supporting information required for admission. All students admitted to the program must meet the graduate student standards of performance, e.g., maintain a 3.0 GPA, and satisfactorily complete all requirements for the degree.

The Graduate Program Director provides guidance for students in this program. Students who are interested in this program should consult with the graduate program director and the departmental advisor before they have completed 90 credits.

Requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Sociology include the completion of a minimum of 120 credits. Students in the accelerated program may take up to six graduate sociology credits in each of the final two semesters of their undergraduate course work. These courses are shared credits with the graduate program, meaning that they will be applied to both undergraduate and graduate degree requirements. A maximum of 12 graduate credits may be taken prior to completion of the bachelor's degree.

The Bachelor of Science degree will be awarded when the student has completed all requirements for the undergraduate degree, which may include the 12 graduate sociology credits. The graduate sociology courses that may be taken, once a student is admitted to the program, are:

- SOCY 502 Contemporary Sociological Theory (a required course in the graduate program and will fulfill the SOCY 402 requirement in the undergraduate major)
- SOCY/STAT 508 Introduction to Social Statistics (a required course for the applied option in the graduate program and may fulfill elective requirement in the undergraduate major)
- SOCY/STAT 608 Statistics for Social Research (a required course for the thesis option and an elective course for the applied option in the graduate program and may fulfill elective requirement in the undergraduate major)
- SOCY 601 Methods of Sociological Research – Prerequisite SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent (a required course in the graduate program and will fulfill SOCY 320 requirement in the undergraduate major)

- Other SOCY graduate courses, with the approval of the graduate program director, may serve as an elective requirement for the M.S. degree and an elective for the undergraduate major.

All accelerated program students must have their schedules approved by the Graduate Program Director prior to registration.

Certificate in Applied Social Research

Program Description

The 18-credit Graduate Certificate in Applied Social Research (CASR) may be earned separately or simultaneously with the M.S. To earn the certificate separately, students must apply directly to the VCU Graduate School by completing the generic application forms, and submitting them along with the application fee. Standardized scores are not required for the CASR. Students who have been accepted into the M.S. program and are interested in earning the CASR simultaneously with the M.S. must submit the generic graduate school application only. No fee or supporting materials are required. Using this option, CASR credits will count simultaneously for the M.S. degree.

To earn the CASR, students must complete 18 credit hours, including 4 required methods/statistics courses in Sociology, 1 internship and 1 3-credit elective.

The following courses are listed as required for the certificate program in the VCU graduate bulletin:

- SOCY/STAT 608 Social Statistics (Prerequisite: SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 601 Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY/STAT 508 or equivalent)
- SOCY 602 Applications of Methods of Sociological Research (Prerequisite: SOCY 601)
- *SOCY 656 Social Network Analysis OR SOCY 603 Seminar in Population Dynamics
- SOCY 693 Internship (3 credit hours; must focus on applied social research)
- Elective (3 credits) - One of courses below or another graduate course in methods or statistics; permission of Graduate Program Director required if not listed below:
 - SOCY 603 Seminar in Population Studies
 - SOCY 656 Social Network Analysis
 - **PADM/GVPA 625 Public Policy Analysis
 - **PSYC 631 Evaluation Research: Psychological Perspectives
 - **URSP 621 Introduction to Geographic Information Systems
 - **URSP 622 Community Socioeconomic Analysis Using GIS

*At present, the Sociology Department is not able to offer either of these courses on a regular basis. Students in the program should locate another social scientific research methods or statistics course appropriate to their interests. The course choice must be approved by the Graduate Program Director.

**Courses in other programs may have prerequisites or require permission of the instructor. Check the VCU course list for current information.

See the Applied Sociology option for a full description of the internship procedure, but note above that the CASR internship must focus on applied social research activities. Students may

not be able to enroll full time or complete the certificate in one year given the limits on course scheduling.

Transfer to the M.S. Program before Completion of the CASR Program

Students enrolled in the CASR Program may apply to the Sociology M.S. program. A new application to the VCU Graduate School is required; however, certain documents from the CASR application, such as undergraduate transcripts, may be used. Credits received in the CASR may be transferred to the M.S. Program. Note that students must take the GRE as part of the M.S. application. Successful performance in the CASR does not guarantee admission to the M.S. Program.

The Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory (SERL)

Founded by Sociology Department faculty members in 1982, SERL is a VCU-affiliated applied research unit. Currently, SERL is a part of the Center for Public Policy in the Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. The Lab conducts a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative social scientific and behavioral research projects, often for nonprofit or governmental agencies, and serves as an interdisciplinary university center for teaching, research, training and community service.

Students in the CASR program have often fulfilled their internships at SERL, gaining direct experience in sampling procedures, questionnaire development, interviewing, computer applications, and/or statistical analysis of the data. Contact the Graduate Program Director if you have interest in an internship experience here.

Student Financial Aid

Many graduate students are eligible for some amount of financial aid which is available in various forms, including loans, grants, scholarships, and work-study funding. More information may be found under [Graduate School Student Resources](#) and the [VCU Financial Aid Office](#) for information.

In addition, the Sociology Department awards several graduate assistantships on a competitive basis to full-time, on-campus students. Graduate assistantships support the teaching mission of the College of Humanities and Sciences. Online students in the Applied Sociology option are not eligible for departmental assistantships at this time. The exact amount and conditions of the assistantships may vary from semester to semester. Students who are fully funded by graduate assistantships must register for nine credit hours a semester. Contact the Graduate Program Director for current information.

Library and Computer Resources

Library Resources

The [VCU Library](#) has a wide variety of resources available to students. A good place to start to familiarize yourself with library resources is the link on the library site to the [Research Guides](#) home page. Here you will see a wide variety of guides indexed by subject. The [Sociology Research Guide](#) home page shows links to the most popular resources for literature searching as well as general information (e.g., "Writing a Literature Review") and contact information for the sociology reference librarian. At the time of this writing, that's Dr. Nita Bryant, who has a Ph.D. in Sociology and is a former member of the department.

On the Sociology Research Guide home page, you'll see a link to the Sociological Abstracts database. This is the primary source for sociological works; however, notice that other databases are also listed. Depending on your interests, you may find other resources useful. All library databases may be accessed from the "Databases" link on the library home page.

Also on the Sociology Research Guide page, you'll see an important link to [ICPSR](#) data sets. ICPSR, the "Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research," is a repository of thousands of data sets on numerous topics that are freely available to graduate students for analysis. Following this link will take you to a detailed explanation of how to set up an account in order to download data from ICPSR. For additional suggestions about freely available data, see the [Data Sources](#) link on the Sociology Research Guide page. As discussed in the thesis section, secondary data analysis is an excellent choice for thesis work.

Another very useful Research Guide on the library site is the one for [RefWorks](#). We strongly advise using a bibliographic program like RefWorks to organize your sources. RefWorks enables you to locate all of your sources in one digital space and output bibliographies in many styles, including APA style.⁶ RefWorks also features a small plug-in ("[Write-N-Cite](#)") for Microsoft Word that formats in-text citations and creates a bibliography in the style you prefer. As you do literature searching using library databases, you can add sources automatically into your RefWorks bibliographic database.

Yet another useful Research Guide is for [Interlibrary Loan](#) (ILLiad). Many resources that are not available from the VCU Library are freely available through Interlibrary Loan. Articles are usually available as pdf files, and books can be picked up at the library or delivered. Delivery also includes students not residing in the metro-Richmond area, but will take some time.

Many other library resources are available. You should consider this discussion only a partial overview. We encourage you to explore the VCU Library website and contact Dr. Bryant for more information.

A few more links:

⁶ However, we also strongly advise that you double check the formatting of your bibliographies and in-text citations carefully. No software is perfect.

Research Guides for:

- [Graduate Students](#)
- [Distance Education Students, Faculty, and Staff](#).
- [Find Books, Articles, and More](#) (includes videos on searching).

Video tutorials on the library's [YouTube channel](#), for example:

- [Using Interlibrary Loan](#)
- [Developing a Search Strategy](#).

Helpful information for locating e-books, including:

- [Locate e-Books in VCU Libraries Search](#)
- [eBook Collection from EBSCOhost](#) (formerly NetLibrary)
- [ebrary: Academic Complete Collection](#) (recent e-books)

Computer Resources

All students will have VCU computer accounts set up for them as part of the admissions process. [VCU Technology Services](#) provides a [Quick Start page](#) that contains information for new students. Additional information can be found in the [VCU Campus Technology Guide](#).

As discussed on the VCU Technology Services "[Computer and Network Resources Use Policy](#)" page, all individuals having a University computing account are bound by this VCU policy: "All users of these resources are expected to act in a responsible, ethical, and legal manner. VCU computer and network resources are conducted in a public forum, and users must respect the rights and privacy of other users, share the resources equitably and follow VCU policies and local, state, and federal laws relating to copyrights, privacy, security, and other statutes regarding electronic media."

Important aspects of the policy for VCU computer account users are:

- Actions that harass, threaten, or otherwise cause harm to individuals are prohibited;
- Actions that impede, impair or otherwise interfere with the activities of others are prohibited;
- Actions which download or post to University computers, or transport across University networks, material that is illegal, proprietary or in violation of University contracts are prohibited;
- Use of computer and network resources for commercial purposes, other than University-approved business, is prohibited;
- The University may monitor electronic activities and inspect data files and communications of individuals.

Further details may be found on the [Computer and Network Resources Use Policy](#) website.

VCU has licensed a number of licensed software products that are freely available to students. The [Technology Services Software Center](#) page displays these. Students are eligible for discounts on other popular software products. See the [Software Purchasing](#) page for details.

Two free products are of particular importance to Sociology graduate students:

1. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) - This is the quantitative data analysis package that is used in the statistics and methods courses taught in the department. SPSS is available either as a free download (Windows or Mac) or through remote access to the program on a VCU server. To use the server option, students must be signed in on the VCU Central Authorization site. Instructions for using the App2Go server may be found at [How to Use the App2Go System](#).
2. Nvivo, Atlas.ti, MaxQDAplus - These are qualitative data analysis software programs that are available to students on the App2Go server. Thesis students who are analyzing qualitative data should consider using one of these programs.

Also of particular note is [lyndaCampus](#). Here, students will find many online learning resources that have to do with professional and career development. Students may find these resources helpful in designing practicum experiences.

Associations and Organizations

Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD)

Alpha Kappa Delta is the international Sociology honor society was founded in 1920 by Dr. Emory S. Bogardus, a sociologist at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Its purpose is to promote the scientific study of society and stimulate, facilitate, and recognize excellence in academic scholarship. Since its founding, more than 490 chapters have been chartered in the United States, Canada, China, Finland, the Philippines, Taiwan and Singapore. VCU's chapter of AKD was formed in 1970 with 22 charter members. The name, Alpha Kappa Delta, was chosen because the letters represent the first letters of three classical Greek words that embody the function of society. They are "anthropos" meaning (hu)mankind; "katamanthano" meaning to examine closely or to acquire knowledge, and "diakoneo" meaning to do service. The mission of AKD members is to "investigate humanity for the purpose of service."

Graduate students who maintain good standing in the program are invited to join AKD. We host an induction ceremony with keynote speaker and reception every Spring.

Please contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Victor Chen (vchen@vcu.edu), for more information.

Students for Social Action (SOSA)

Students for Social Action is a student organization sponsored by the department. As explained on its [Facebook](#) page, the group is dedicated to the pursuit of social justice:

"Students for Social Action aims to examine, act, and improve modern social and political institutions in the VCU/Richmond community. Our charge is not merely limited to shining a light on various issues at their intersections, but is also to develop and execute ways to combat these issues within our communities. Our goal is to create a forum for academic and city communities to speak openly about these issues with a positive, results driven approach. We are willing and interested in collaborating with local officials, organizations, and other student groups who are community-minded and equally results-driven. Our desire as an organization is to strengthen and encourage community activism, organizing, and analysis to enact political and social action within the VCU/Richmond community."

Recent events have included:

March, 2015 - Sponsored a panel discussion in their Public Knowledge Series titled *How to be an Ally: Understanding Systematic Racism*

April, 2015 - Hosted a free screening of the movie *Hands That Feed*, a documentary about Haitians working to restore the country's agricultural capacity in a sustainable manner

SOSA has regular meetings in the department, and all interested students are invited to attend. Please contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Jesse Goldstein (jgoldstein@vcu.edu), for more information.

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), VCU, Local 804

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a national student labor organization fighting for worker rights on college campuses with over 150 locals. USAS is housed in the Sociology Department at VCU, but is not exclusive to Sociology undergraduate or graduate students. Students who are interested in learning direct action strategies and working to combat the “race to the bottom” in the garment industry are encouraged to get involved. Check out our [Facebook page](#) and also please contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Meredith Katz (makatz@vcu.edu), for more information.

Phi Kappa Phi

The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi is a national honor society which was founded in 1897. The VCU Chapter was established in 1976. It is the only university-wide society at VCU. The primary objective of Phi Kappa Phi is the recognition and encouragement of superior scholarship in all disciplines. Membership in the Society is by invitation only. Invitations are extended to graduating seniors, advanced degree recipients, and faculty members who have demonstrated academic excellence. Each year the faculty of the Sociology Program nominates its top scholars for this prestigious university award.

Outstanding Graduate Student Award

At each December and May graduation, the Sociology faculty present this award to one graduate student.

Other Academic and Service Awards

Other recognitions for excellence in academic performance and service to the University are made at the annual College of Humanities and Sciences Student Awards Night held during the spring term of each academic year. At that event, students who have achieved academic excellence, received fellowships, and have contributed to the life of the University are recognized by the Dean of the College for their achievements.

Career Advising and Development

The M.S. in Sociology is a versatile credential that prepares students for a wide variety of employment options or serves as the foundation for entry into a Ph.D. program. Many of our Applied Sociology graduates are working in professional careers in non-profit organizations and government agencies or in community colleges as faculty members. Our Applied Sociology students have often found their internship placements lead to the development of professional networks and employment opportunities. Our thesis students are typically very successful in their Ph.D. program applications, and many have joined the higher education professoriate or are employed as advanced level researchers in non-profit organizations or government agencies. In addition, the VCU career center offers individualized career and professional development services. Please visit the [University Career Center](#) for more information.

The American Sociological Association described career opportunities for sociologists with a graduate degree as follows:

“With advanced degrees, the more likely it is that a job will have the title sociologist, but many opportunities exist--the diversity of sociological careers ranges much further than what you might find under "S" in the Sunday newspaper employment ads. Many jobs outside of academia do not necessarily carry the specific title of *sociologist*:

- Sociologists become high school teachers or faculty in colleges and universities, advising students, conducting research, and publishing their work. Over 3000 colleges offer sociology courses.
- Sociologists enter the corporate, non-profit, and government worlds as directors of research, policy analysts, consultants, human resource managers, and program managers.
- Practicing sociologists with advanced degrees may be called research analysts, survey researchers, gerontologists, statisticians, urban planners, community developers, criminologists, or demographers.
- Some MA and PhD sociologists obtain specialized training to become counselors, therapists, or program directors in social service agencies.

Today, sociologists embark upon literally hundreds of career paths. Although teaching and conducting research remains the dominant activity among the thousands of professional sociologists today, other forms of employment are growing both in number and significance. In some sectors, sociologists work closely with economists, political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, social workers, and others, reflecting a growing appreciation of sociology's contributions to interdisciplinary analysis and action.”

Read more about the sociology master's degree in a study conducted by the American Sociological Association, [“What Can I Do With a Master’s Degree?: A Study of Master’s Candidates.”](#) Other resources include: [“What Types of Jobs Are Available with a Master’s in Sociology?”](#), [“Sociologists: Career, Salary and Education Information,”](#) and [“Bureau of Labor Statistics: Sociologists.”](#)

Appendix A: Independent Study Contract

Instructions: Complete and submit this form to your Graduate Program Advisor prior to registration for a SOCY 692 course. Please sign this form and have your faculty sponsor do the same. If you fail to get the Graduate Program Director's signature before enrolling, the course may not be counted toward your degree/certificate.

Student Name:	Date:
Academic Term:	
SOCY 692 Section Number:	Credit Hours:
Faculty Supervisor:	
Summary of the Proposed Independent Study Project (including description of final product)	
Previous SOCY 692 courses (with dates):	
I agree to conduct the above independent study per the terms outlined in the Sociology Graduate Program Handbook.	
Student Signature:	Date:
Faculty Sponsor Signature:	Date:
Approval:	
Graduate Program Director Signature:	Date:

Appendix B: Practicum Contract for Elective Credit

Instructions: Complete and submit this form to your Graduate Program Advisor prior to registration for the SOCY 694 Practicum in Sociology course. Please sign this form and have your faculty sponsor do the same. If you fail to get your Graduate Program Advisor's signature before enrolling, the course may not be counted toward your degree/certificate.

Student Name:	Date:
Academic Term:	
SOCY 692 Section Number:	Credit Hours:
Faculty Supervisor:	
Summary of the Proposed Practicum Project (including description of final product)	
Previous SOCY 694 courses (with dates):	
I agree to conduct the above practicum course per the terms outlined in the Sociology Graduate Program Handbook.	
Student Signature:	Date:
Faculty Sponsor Signature:	Date:
Approval:	
Graduate Program Director Signature:	Date: