



UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENT GUIDEBOOK

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Dear Student,

Welcome to the graduate student guidebook for the University of Washington's Department of Sociology. This guidebook was made for students by students to assist you on your path through the program. The information here is meant to supplement information provided to you in the graduate student handbook managed by the graduate program advisor as well as information you receive from department administrators or faculty. You should always defer to the most up-to-date handbook or information communicated to you from the department and ask for clarifications around any portion of this guide that seems incorrect; the guide may be out of date and you may be the one to update it!

This guidebook will introduce you to graduate school as a whole, providing you with tips and insights from current students. It will then go on to discuss the many stages and shapes of pursuing a Ph.D. in Sociology, diving further into the milestones and steps along the way. And lastly, the guide will close by providing you with key insights on how to navigate the unique type of professional setting of graduate school.

We hope through the mixture of policy, tips, and testimonials from current students, you will begin to understand what comes next and keep this guide as a tool to use throughout your time within the program.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Welcome to the exciting world of pursuing a PhD in Sociology! Take a moment to reflect on your incredible accomplishments because just getting to this point is no small feat. Give yourself a pat on the back for making it this far! This chapter is dedicated to helping all students prepare for the transformative experience that lies ahead. So, let's dive into the mindset that will empower you to thrive in your Ph.D. program.

Embrace the Process of Growth

Starting graduate school may feel overwhelming as you embark on a new phase of your educational, professional, and personal life. Remember, it is entirely normal to experience a mix of nerves and excitement. It is important to acknowledge that this journey will be full of ups and downs (there's no sugarcoating this). There will be moments when you doubt yourself. But remember, growth takes time, and it is okay to take a step back and self-reflect on the bigger picture. For many students, particularly those with diverse and intersecting identities, gaining admission to a PhD program holds profound and symbolic significance. You are paving the way for many others, carrying the aspirations and dreams of your community alongside your own. Recognize that this process is not just about earning a degree; it is a profound journey of growth that shapes you into a scholar and a well-rounded individual. Celebrate the small victories along the way and use them as fuel to keep going. Embrace the challenges ahead and mentally prepare yourself to embrace every aspect of this adventure.

Navigating Diverse Transitions in Graduate School

We welcome a diverse group of incoming students, each embarking on their unique journey. We celebrate the richness of these distinct transitions and recognize that all paths hold valuable experiences and advantages. For those coming straight from undergrad or academic backgrounds, the transition may feel like a natural progression. You may be more familiar with the academic system and comfortable with classroom dynamics. On the other hand, some of you may come from non-academic jobs and might find the transition to academics more novel. Rest assured, your experiences beyond academics bring unique perspectives and skills to the table. Regardless of your background, set realistic expectations for your graduate journey. Recognize that there will be challenges and adjustments along the way, but also remember the unique strengths you possess. Seek out mentorship and support, regardless of your transition, as it can be transformative in your academic growth.



Chapter 2: The Many Shapes of the Ph.D.

Pursuing a Ph.D. is a big decision and one people make at different points in their life. You will need to navigate the expectations of the program you enter, those of yourself, and potentially others in your life. Within our sociology department, we use a choose-your-own-adventure model of graduate studies, meaning that you will have many options for research topics, work, and collaborations. As a graduate student, you have a great deal of independence. You will be the main driving force behind your education, and you will be in charge of preparing for, planning, and accomplishing the major milestones. In addition, it is helpful to think through before and during the first few years of the program what getting a PhD in sociology means for you and your future path!

General Expectations of the Sociology Ph.D. at the University of Washington

The University of Washington is a large public research university. The nature of the university as an institution is one of bureaucracy and you will encounter this every day. Graduate school is a unique experience that is very different from attending a university as an undergraduate. Graduate school is a marathon and at times will challenge you in ways you do not expect. It is also important to note that while striving to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, the institution remains highly entrenched in systems of oppression that create inaccessibility and inequality. In response, our department is committed to taking steps of intervention and being proactive in how we support students, staff, and faculty. For more information on the steps being taken, please read our [department diversity statement](#).

NOTE: The following section of the guide dives into the requirements of the program. This guide should be considered as supporting materials for the UW Sociology Graduate Manual. Students are expected to review the requirements first and foremost listed in the Graduate Manual and published by the UW graduate school. If differences appear, default to the Graduate Manual and seek guidance from the Graduate Program Advisor. Again, this guide is meant to recap and offer supportive suggestions on navigating requirements.

Program Overview

The MA/Ph.D. program within the Department of Sociology typically takes 4-8 years to complete. Time varies due to many factors. You may be entering the program with an approved Masters completed at another institution* or be entering with approved coursework to waive department requirements; both of which may speed up time to degree. In other cases, you may have external factors or commitments that make your time to degree different, or perhaps you are conducting research that takes longer to complete than some of your peers. No matter the case, the department is committed to working with you on this journey. Typically students are guaranteed 5 years of funding when entering the program meaning you are also encouraged to



complete the program in as close to 5 years as possible to guarantee financial support as you do so. We will cover funding in more detail later in this guide.

*If you have an MA, the department will work with you to determine if your MA qualifies you to move forward to the PhD portion of the program; this does not happen automatically and even for those entering with a Sociology MA from another institution, the department will need to review your MA materials from the other institution. If you are reading this as a prospective student, please reach out to the Graduate Program Advisor listed on the Sociology Website for more information. Note: All students, regardless of previous degrees, complete the required first-year coursework, unless receiving a waiver for specific courses such as the statistics sequence. For more on this, see the graduate program advisor.

The endpoint of the program is a Doctorate of Philosophy in Sociology. While pursuing the Ph.D. students who have not yet completed an approved MA, will work to complete a Master of Arts (MA) in Sociology from the University of Washington, before advancing to the PhD portion of the program.

[Completing the MA generally requires:](#)

Completion of the required coursework

Appointment of an MA chair (may designate chair before deciding on full committee) and

Appointment of MA thesis committee

Completion and defense of a master's thesis

Graduate with MA (36 graduate credits required)

After completing your MA, your committee will make a recommendation regarding your advancement to the Ph.D. Once you advance to the Ph.D. program, your focus will be on designing, writing, and defending a dissertation.

[The Ph.D. includes:](#)

Appoint the Chair of your Ph.D. committee

Develop and submit a Ph.D. training plan

Pass the comprehensive exam

Register for dissertation hours (SOC 800)

Complete a minimum of 4 SOC electives (if not done yet)

Appoint your full Ph.D. committee

Pass the general exam (dissertation prospectus)

Identify a subset of your Ph.D. committee as a reading committee

Pass the final exam/dissertation defense

Submit your dissertation and required paperwork

Graduate with a Ph.D. (90 Credits of Graduate coursework required)



The Details: Milestones

Program milestones are the checkpoints on your path to completing the program. It can feel overwhelming at first, but each milestone builds on the previous one, supporting students as they develop academic and professional skills as social scientists!

Coursework

During undergraduate, your courses are the priority. Full-time students often will take 3-4 courses; at a graduate level, you will often take 1-3 traditional courses a quarter, supplemented with independent study credits or specialized electives. Students traditionally have the heaviest course load in their first year of the program, when taking the statistics series, first-year seminar, theory, and social inquiry. The first-year required courses provide foundational support to complete your initial research endeavors.

In addition, while undergraduate courses work to give you general knowledge around a subject and prepare you to think critically about the social world, graduate coursework in sociology serves as a deep dive into specialized subjects often relative to your research. The courses may also serve as the best way for you to interact with classmates and potential advisors or mentors. The setting is traditionally small with classes rarely over 10 students (statistics series is the exception). In addition, graduate courses highlight knowledge generation, research skills. Working through course requirements early, especially when your research interests are still developing is a good strategy, but for some spreading courses out, especially your elective courses may be practical. If students want to be able to teach a summer class post-MA, they will need to have taken a teaching prep course (Soc 502), so they should plan ahead for that.

Details on [required courses](#) are available in the graduate manual on the UW sociology website; however, here is a quick snapshot of the requirements for reference:

SOC 504	Social Statistics	3
SOC 505	Social Statistics	3
SOC 506	Quantitative Techniques	3
SOC 508	Logic of Social Inquiry	3
SOC 510	Sociological Theory	3
Proseminar (3 quarters)	SOC 501	3
TA Preparation	GRDSCH 501	1



Independent study: When, how, why?

Independent study is one of the most common forms of coursework completed by graduate students. The three most common forms available to you are independent reading hours (Social 600), MA Thesis Hours (Soc 700), and PhD Dissertation Hours (Soc 800). Independent study requires working with a faculty member, who may oversee your work or work directly with you over the quarter. In order to register for these credits, students must develop a 1-2 page plan for the quarter, covering what will be studied and/or accomplished and how the instructor will evaluate this work. Details and example proposals can be found [here](#) on the Sociology website. For a sample proposal, see [The MA and Dissertation hours](#) are traditionally supervised by your chair or by members of your committee. You are required to complete 9 units of Soc 700, and after you have gained candidate status, 27 units of Soc 800.

The Stats Sequence

The introductory statistic sequence is often considered the most challenging component of the first year. The 3-course series provides a fast-paced review of statistical principles while providing a strong foundation in R. While R and the statistical sequence is the bread and butter of quantitative scholars in our department and provide a direct pathway to specializing in high-level statistical analysis or demography, qualitative scholars also benefit from being fluent in quant methods. Top scholars in many subfields use basic statistical techniques in their work, and strong quantitative skills can be helpful for landing a paid RA position while in graduate school or an industry job after graduation. It is important to note that as a discipline sociology is moving more and more into a hybrid form with many scholars entering the field expected to have literacy in both quantitative and qualitative approaches to studying the social world. On the professional side, both qualitative and quantitative methods are valued; however quantitative methods provided in the program tend to lead more directly into industry positions.

If the sequence seems intimidating, do not worry, there are a lot of ways to help yourself succeed.

1. Leave your expectations at the door
2. Don't compare yourself to other students
3. Form a study group early. Students often form a group with their cohort mates or other students taking the stat sequence from outside the department. The study group allows for students to thrive when learning complex code or learning a new way of thinking.
4. Utilize your TA and Professor.
5. Take an introductory math course; such as the [math camp](#) offered prior to orientation.
6. Take the 1 unit R course or explore the materials online.



7. Ask for help early and stop thinking this should be easy! Often graduate students can feel like they are underperforming or feel a level of imposter syndrome in classes like this. Everyone starts out the same and it will be easy!!

Electives

In Sociology: all Ph.D. students in sociology are expected to take elective courses within the department as they arise and/or are needed for the student's area of study/interest. While no specific electives are required for the MA portion of the degree, students often need them to reach the credits requirement to earn the degree. For the PhD portion, students must take 4 electives and 4 PhD training plan courses (specific courses chosen around your dissertation). NOTE: 2 of the training plan courses can (and most likely will) overlap with the 4 electives, so you will end up completing 6-8 elective courses. These classes are where students build relationships with departmental faculty, which is important for forming committees and finding research opportunities.

Outside Sociology: In most cases, students supplement their sociology coursework with courses from outside departments or programs. Common examples include pursuing methods or research-specific courses externally. For example, a student studying queer populations might take a course in Gender, Women, and Sexuality studies to support their research. These classes are also where students build relationships with faculty outside of the department, which is important because students will need to have a faculty member outside of the department on their PhD committee. Traditionally been possible for outside coursework to count towards the 4 sociology electives; please see the GPA for details.

Law School Courses: In some situations, graduate students may request to take a course at the Law School; the exact courses available for non-law students vary from year to year and the inclusion of non-law students is up to the discretion of the instructor. Some graduate certificates include law courses.

Graduate Certificates

Graduate certificates or specialty programs offered at the University of Washington aid students in developing areas of expertise that will support them personally, professionally, and academically. Graduate certificates traditionally require 15-25 credits and a capstone project. A [full list of programs can be found here](#). Some popular ones that may be relevant to sociology Ph.D. students are CSSS, Disability Studies, Law and Society Studies, Demography Methods, Sexuality and Queer Studies, or American Indian and Indigenous Studies. If students have questions about these, they should reach out to the department of the program or send a note



to socgrad@uw.edu listserv asking the other graduate students for insight. Courses required for certificates are also often used as part of the PhD Training Plan.

Grading

Graduate school grading is generally approached very differently than undergraduate and grading at the University of Washington may be different than what you have experienced before. The University uses a 0.0-4.0 scale for each course, which is then multiplied by the graded unit count and averaged to form your final GPA for the term, allowing people to receive a highly accurate GPA. Students must have a 3.3 GPA to graduate from the MA and/or PhD. The exact grading scale used in a course is under the discretion of the faculty member or department, which means in different courses your numerical or letter grade may translate to a different GPA. For example in one graduate course, a 90 or above may earn you a 4.0, whereas in another, you may need to earn a 98 or higher to receive a 4.0 in the course. In addition, pedagogical differences in grading occur widely in graduate school. Typically, academic jobs are not concerned with the grades you receive in coursework as the vast majority of work completed in a PhD program is in the form of completed research. Coursework is widely considered a practice space meant to support research. You may be thinking, “But I have never gotten below an A!”! Maybe that will continue and maybe it won’t, and in both cases you are going to be completely fine! Graduate school requires so much learning, but also in many cases, it requires some unlearning. Your value as a person, a student in this program, and as a scholar is not tied to your grades; absorb the knowledge to the best of your ability and work hard, the rest will follow. In addition, while incomplete may be needed at times, it is best to get support early and avoid needing to pursue incomplete whenever possible. It is a common myth, based on a certain pedagogy, that all graduate students should receive As in courses if they complete the work. Our department does not practice this officially or unofficially; different instructors approach grading differently and you will learn the style in each individual class you take.

The MA

The MA portion of a Ph.D. program (traditionally 1-3 years) offers students the opportunity to conduct high-level research from start to finish. The MA is widely considered a chance to practice research methods or explore topics that may further develop into one’s dissertation. In many cases students change MA topics repeatedly over the initial year of the program and modify the topic during the research process; changes are normal and often required to end with a successful MA. The MA as a piece of research should be manageable and realistic to complete with limited research funds and time. Your advisor should work with you to help you figure this out, and courses like Logic of Social Inquiry are designed to prepare you for this step.



Identifying a Research Project

Deciding on what to research for the MA thesis is often a more complicated process than students think. In contrast to term papers in courses, an MA thesis requires students to learn how to transform a topic of interest into a research question that speaks to a subfield of sociology. While some students may know immediately *what* they want to study, most take time to develop their approach. Required courses during the first year are meant to give students the support they need to develop an approach to sociological research. In addition, students will develop the approach with their chosen MA committee!

Helpful questions to think through a potential topic:

- What is a social problem/situation/phenomenon in the world you are interested in?
- Why are you interested in it?
- Who is impacted by it?
- What are the main questions or debates about it?
- Is it a local, national, or internationally relevant topic?
- What methods would reveal something about it?
- What have others learned about it?
- What would you try to add or improve upon?

Pro tip: Books like *Problem Solving Sociology* (Prasad 2021) and *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences* (Luker 2008) are great resources for this process

The MA committee

The MA committee typically has two to four members; one of which is your MA chair. Your chair is the primary advisor for the research project and subsequent thesis. The chair and committee will work with you on the design and implementation of the MA. The nature of your relationship with your committee will dictate much of the experience; in some cases, students work largely independently until time comes for review of key materials. In other cases, students work very closely with faculty on developing each piece of the research or even utilize data from faculty to complete the MA. In all cases, setting clear expectations on both sides, student and faculty members is the key to success.

Forming the committee

The first step in forming a committee is identifying a chair. Once a potential chair is identified, request a meeting with them to discuss the possibility of them serving as your chair. If the faculty member agrees to a meeting, come prepared with the ideas formulated enough to talk through, but open enough for initial feedback/potential development. Following the meeting, you can both decide if the fit is right. If either decides it is not, no worries, on to the next! For some students, forming a committee can be timely and difficult, but in the end, finding the right



fit is essential. In some cases, the faculty member may opt to be on the committee but not be chair due to their other commitments. The faculty members may also opt to not be on the committee at all, but offer support in other ways. You can repeat this process as you add members to the committee. Students should ideally select committee members who bring knowledge of the subject matter or methods being used by the student; however, in some cases, the student may bring on a committee member to offer more general support in completing the MA process or conducting research. The chair must be a sociology faculty member, and the second minimum committee member must at least be an adjunct in sociology. The 3rd and 4th members may be from outside the department and even if needed outside the University of Washington. If you find it difficult to build the committee, do not worry, your peers and the department are here to help!

Sometimes the hardest step is reaching out... Here is an example of how that could go...

Student:

Dear Dr. _____,

I am a 2nd year Ph.D. student in the sociology department and I would really love to set up a meeting to talk about my MA thesis work on... I am currently attempting to build a committee and would love to share my research goals with you and see if you are interested in joining the committee. Please let me know if you are able to meet.

Potential responses from faculty:

Dear Student,

Sure thing. I am free on Friday afternoons. Your work sounds promising and I am looking forward to learning more about it.

Best,

Faculty

Dear Student,

Unfortunately, I am unable to take on another student right now. I wish you the best in this step and look forward to seeing how the project develops.

Best,

Faculty



Dear Student,

I am not sure I am the right person to advise on this. My work focuses on.... I suggest you reach out to

Best,

Faculty

Set some ground rules

It can be very important to be clear with your MA chair about your expectations and their expectations around the MA process as a whole, especially when navigating IRB and data use. You may also need to address expectations with other members of the committee as needed (data, method, drafts, ect).

Here is a sample email to set expectations with your MA chair

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for agreeing to be my chair. I really appreciate your time and the ability to learn from you while I complete my research. The meeting today was very helpful to layout expectations for this process.

Per our discussion, I will plan to meet with you bi-weekly, providing updates on the project. When I have materials ready for review, I will expect comments 1-2 weeks after giving you the materials. Additionally, I appreciate being able to use your data on the topic for my Masters Thesis. My research focus will use xyz parts of your data for my MA and then when transitioning the MA into an article for publication, I will list you as second author.

I am looking forward to our next meeting and thank you again!

Best,

Student

Pro Tips:

Keep a record of everything for effective communication.

Plan in advance when you need something and communicate clearly how and why.

Be strategic on how and when you need to communicate with faculty, one email addressing a few topics is usually less burdensome than multiple emails across a short period of time.



MA Thesis expectations

It may seem strange at first to ask your committee exactly what your MA should look like, but the more detailed you are in questions, the easier it will be. In some cases, the committee will provide very general expectations for your MA, in other cases, the committee may express specific expectations about what you include or highlight.

MA papers for reference

- [Online UW Libraries](#) (Note: There is a delay in availability)
- The Physical copies of completed Master Theses live in Savery 245! Hop in when the room is not in use and take a peek!
- Ask your peers to see theirs! Older students are a great resource and can often give you some key tips that just reading or looking over a completed MA will not.

Writing the MA

For most, the MA is the first large research paper you will complete in graduate school and likely it will result in one of your first research articles. When sitting down to write the MA, remember to set realistic goals and keep in mind the MA is meant to train you in this skill. It may feel hard and boring and other times exciting; this is all a part of the process! Work with your committee on setting writing and revision goals; think through what your main argument is early and shape the framing around this goal. At the University of Washington, we encourage students to write the MA as close to a journal format as possible to help facilitate a publication directly from the paper. At the end of the day the MA should reflect what you have learned about the topic and demonstrate the ability to methodologically investigate a social phenomenon and contribute to a larger scholarly debate.

MA Defense

Once your MA is written and your committee has given the greenlight, you are ready to do an MA defense. And while the name implies otherwise, you won't be defending so much as you will be sharing with your academic community what you have learned and found through the research process. We advise you to have explicit conversations with your committee before scheduling the defense to make sure the project is ready for review. When doing the defense, think about what you want to share with the committee; you will need to highlight key things from the actual paper. Remember the committee has read your thesis, so the oral defense is about presenting the key aspects. Feedback will come at the end and may be extensive; do not worry, this is a part of the process and will make you and your work progress! The steps to the defense are as follows:

1. [Schedule the date of defense & room in advance](#)



It is the responsibility of you, the student, to schedule with your committee the date and time of defense, [notifying the Graduate Program Advisor](#) and working with department staff to secure a room. usually schedule defenses with 3 weeks' notice. Please note that the last month of the year will be a busy season for all of your professors, so, if you want to plan a defense in May or early June, lock in a date by early April.

Typically, your committee chair will give you extensive feedback on earlier drafts. This means they will need extra time to review your work, and you need time to make revisions. Generally, give at least a week for them read a draft and plan for a month or so for revisions. Also recognize that schedule conflicts may change this on both student and faculty side. That means if you want to be 100% sure that you can defend your MA or PhD at the end of a given quarter, your committee should see a complete draft before the third week of that quarter.

2. Send your final draft MA to your committee

You are expected to provide to your full committee your MA final draft before your defense. The exact time needed before must be determined by your committee, but in general, the earlier the better. Typically, your committee chair will give you extensive feedback on earlier drafts. This means they will need extra time to review your work, and you need time to make revisions. Generally, give atleast a week for them read a draft and plan for a month or so for revisions. Also recognize that schedule conflicts may change this on both student and faculty side. That means if you want to be 100% sure that you can defend your MA or PhD at the end of a given quarter, your committee should see a complete draft before the third week of that quarter.

3. Prepare for 10-30 minute (or shorter) presentation & hour discussion

Talk with your MA Chair about the length of your presentation. Some professors encourage very short presentations to allow for extra discussion time. Others use this as an opportunity for you to practice a more formal presentation of your research. Make sure you prepare a presentation that highlights and emphasizes your work; think about how to translate the paper into an engaging presentation that will facilitate discussion about how the work can grow and become a strong publication. The majority of the time will be a discussion of your work, where the multiple committee members will share their thoughts and insights; remember to take really good notes or ask to record the session!

4. Final Decisions

At the end of the defense session, the committee will tell you if you passed, conditionally passed (major revisions needed), or did not pass. In the rare occurrence you do not pass, your committee will talk to you about what comes next and the best way the department can support you in reaching your goals moving forward. For those that pass or conditionally pass,



you will complete any revisions required by the committee and then file paperwork with the department and graduate school. The final copy of the MA thesis will be sent to the graduate school where you will designate when the graduate school will publish the MA for public view. [Details here.](#)

Moving Past the MA

In our department, your MA committee will discuss moving on to the Ph.D. portion of the program and make a recommendation to the department. In many cases, this is a conversation about your plans and how you feel about moving forward. In some cases, the committee may want to have a more in-depth discussion around this topic if concerns have arisen; in the end, the committee and department want to support you the best way they can, which may mean taking a break or ending at the MA. Some students have opted to end after the MA to pursue other career goals, realizing that the Ph.D. was not necessary for their path forward, research was not for them, or for personal reasons. If the committee does not recommend continuing, you may appeal the decision, [see details here.](#)

Student to Candidate Transition

After completing your MA and progressing into the Ph.D. portion of the program (*traditionally 1-2 years*), additional coursework and milestones await before you begin to conduct the research and writing for the dissertation! In particular, students at this stage develop a Ph.D. training plan, complete comprehensive exams, and defend a prospectus (proposal for dissertation research).

Comprehensive Exam

The comprehensive exam in our department is meant for students to demonstrate a level of mastery over key sociological subjects. Typically these are directly applicable to your research or areas you wish to teach. The exam requires a committee that should be formed (3-4 members usually). [Details are here.](#) The written exam is typically in the form of 3-5 questions about these subjects (typically 3 areas); students have 48 hours to complete the exam. DSR accommodations can increase to 72 hours, if this applies to you, speak with your committee about this early. Answers are typically 10-15 double spaced pages for each question, but the exact expectations should be discussed with your exam committee beforehand. Students should schedule to take the exam during a time of the year they can dedicate time to writing without distraction and should find a physical space free from distractions. The exam can be taxing and students should always remember to eat and sleep during the time period.

Step 1: Develop a reading list around the topics you have chosen.

Step 2: Form a committee related to the topics and your work broadly.

Step 3: Develop a timeline to read the material and take notes.



Step 4: Get approval of the reading list and timeline.

Step 5: Read and take detailed notes of readings; thinking how they connect to each other and how they apply to your topics.

Step 6: Submit paperwork and take the exam.

An additional guide to this process provided by Professor Sarah Quinn can be found [here](#).

PhD Training Plan and Prospectus

The PhD training plan is a form you complete in consultation with your advisor that identifies 4 courses you have taken that prepared you for your dissertation. Two of the four courses may overlap with the required sociology electives. The courses may be topically or methodologically relevant. The training plan requires a narrative explanation of how the courses work together and facilitated your training to complete a dissertation on your selected topic. A prospectus is a proposal for your dissertation you will defend to your committee before conducting research and writing the dissertation. A prospectus can vary greatly by the chair of your dissertation committee, but in general, the proposal should clearly define researchable, sociological questions. The lengths vary, but most students strive to have around 40 pages double spaced. It should have a well shaped review of literature and a plan for analysis. Additionally for those that have preliminary results, it is a good place to present those as examples of what is to come. The defense of the prospectus, like other defenses, usually consists of a short presentation followed by a critical and targeted discussion about your proposed work. The dissertation is the final step of the program and the research typically takes place over long periods of time; your committee knows this and will use the prospectus defense as a space to troubleshoot aspects of your proposal to support you prior to launching the project. It is an intense but constructive space that will serve you well.

PhD Candidate: All But Dissertation

A student transitions to being a candidate / 'All But Dissertation' (ABD) after defending their prospectus. At this stage the research for the dissertation and writing remain (traditionally 1-2 years). At this phase students are traditionally able to begin applying to post-doctoral positions and if nearing the end of this stage, even professorships!

What is a PhD Dissertation?

A dissertation is a large piece of independent research and writing meant to deeply examine a specific sociological topic. The dissertation should be the culmination of your time in graduate school, reflecting methodological, theoretical, and topical training you received at the University of Washington; additionally it serves to initially position you as a scholar, impacting what jobs you will apply for. Conducting the research and writing the dissertation will not be easy and it will take time. Navigating this step of the program requires working closely with your Dissertation



committee. It may be an extension of your MA thesis or a completely different project; in either case, working closely with your committee to fulfill the plan you laid out in your prospectus is key.

FAQs around the Dissertation

1. How long is long enough?

The length of dissertations vary greatly and are often dependent on the type of research you conducted or structure of the work. In general a good rule of thumb is 120 -160 pages, but this should be discussed with your committee.

2. What is the best way to structure it?

There are two main ways of organizing dissertations: 1) as three articles on a related topic, or 2) as a monograph or book. Students can look at other dissertations for examples., although one again, the structure is largely dependent on the research topic and should be closely discussed with your committee. It also may change multiple times.

3. How is it different from the MA and other scholarly work I do?

The dissertation should be broader and deeper than your thesis. Multiple empirical or theoretical questions may be included and typically require more complex tools of analysis. The dissertation often will lead to multiple articles or a book, so thinking through what it will become while writing it is also important.

4. When is it finished?

Only you and your chair can answer that. Talk about this early and set clear goals! As they say, a “good dissertation is a done dissertation”...

What strategies or resources did you find helpful for breaking through writer's block or overcoming research-related obstacles?

Student Testimonial: *“For me, the most helpful way to break out of writer’s block has been to talk it through with people. In my experience, feeling “stuck” is often the result of trying to work through problems alone, which can be unproductive. Though it may feel intimidating, know that it is OK to bring unfinished ideas to your advisors and peers. Through conversation, you will likely be given suggestions and new ideas for how to approach the problem that you would not have thought about otherwise. It can also be really helpful to join or start a working or reading group with other graduate students who share your substantive interests or theoretical/methodological orientations.”*

Ph.D. Defense

You are expected to prepare a 10-15 minute presentation to be followed by an hour to hour and a half discussion about the work and the future of the work. The defense is a time for the committee to ask critical and generative questions about your MA work. Some committees will use the



defense as an opportunity for the candidate to practice defending the work to external audiences; for others this is a time of reflection celebration. Before the defense, talk with your committee members about how they view the defense, and how they think you should prepare. At the end of the defense session, the committee will tell you if you passed, conditionally passed (major revisions needed), or did not pass. In the rare occurrence you do not pass, your committee will talk to you about what comes next and the best way the department can support you in reaching your goals moving forward. For those that pass or conditionally pass, you will complete any revisions required by the committee and then file paperwork with the department and graduate school.

What's Next After I Defend?

CELEBRATE YOURSELF!!!! All your hard work has led to this moment and now only a few administrative steps before you are ready to graduate from the program!

1. Revisions (pre-submission)

Based on recommendations from your committee, students may want to make revisions to the dissertation before it is published with the graduate school. The exact strategy should be discussed with your committee and/or chair.

2. Submission to Graduate School

In order to submit your dissertation, you will work with the Graduate Program Advisor. The dissertation (as was the case with the MA if done at UW) has specific formatting requirements and procedural submission steps. Details provided by the college can be found [here](#).

3. Publishing the Dissertation

The steps for publishing the dissertation vary depending first and foremost on the medium you wish to publish. Most often, students decide whether to work towards converting the dissertation into a book or into multiple articles. The process can vary widely and should be discussed with your committee and mentors. If pursuing an academic job, your committee will help strategize the best path forward given your specific subfield and intended job. For non-academics, the decision to publish the dissertation and how is largely up to your preference. No matter the path, in order to avoid copyright issues, the dissertation will require some modification to be published externally.

Think About The End at the Beginning

In your first year, you should start thinking about how long you want to spend in graduate school, and what you hope to get out of this experience. If you are interested in jobs outside of the academy, keep looking at what types of resumes people have in those jobs. Have these people published papers as graduate students, and if so, in what types of journals? What kind of training, quantitative and



qualitative, do they have? Alternatively, if you want an academic job, look at the CVs of the youngest assistant professors at the departments where you would like to work; this will tell you what kinds of publications you will need to be competitive for those jobs. If you want to go the academic route, it is especially important to go to job talks and familiarize yourself with the hiring processes.

As part of this, you should also think carefully about how long you want to spend in graduate school. Graduate school can be one of the most intellectually and socially fulfilling times in your life. It is also a time of tremendous stress and a ton of work for not nearly enough pay. There are real downsides to taking a long time to complete your degree. After five years most students are out of the guaranteed funding window, and the farther outside of that you get, the harder it may be to get funding. Taking a long time to get a degree may raise concerns for your letter writers or for members of hiring committees who will review your applications. The low pay and long hours of graduate school can also cause stress in your family relationships. Some faculty advise my students to stay in graduate school just long enough to develop strong skills and a marketable CV, but get out as soon as possible. Of course, some kinds of work takes longer to develop, not everyone goes at the same pace, and there will be unexpected twists and turns in your journey. As you consider your own goals for finishing graduate school, talk with your advisors about what they think is appropriate for the kind of research you are doing, and lean on your friends, family and loved ones as you think through your own goals for graduating.



Chapter 3: Other Parts of ‘Doing’ Graduate School

The Curriculum Vitae (CV)

It is best to start a CV as soon as you begin graduate school if you have not before. The CV is a place to keep record of all your academic and professional achievements/developments. As graduate students it highlights your education and research activities. As you transition into faculty or professional workers, the CV becomes more specialized. Since CVs evolve over time, the best way to learn how to make a CV is to look at samples of CVs of senior graduate students and early stage faculty.

The Graduate Student Annual Review

The graduate student annual review happens every year in Spring quarter. It is a tool for you, the department, and your advisors to reflect on the previous year. In the report, you will be asked to explain how far you have progressed with department milestones, what research or professional projects related to your studies have you completed, and provide insight into where you plan to go within the program the following year. The reports are reviewed by your advisors and the faculty in the graduate program committee. Using this information, the department will identify students needing additional support or facing certain circumstances within the department that may warrant additional review. The annual report is in no way intended to cause anxiety. In some years your report may include many different achievements you wish to share with the department; in other years, it may include very little and both are normal. Progress through the PhD program and in the field of academia comes in waves and looks different for each and every student. In order to make the annual report smooth and easy, we suggest you keep a notepad or document with a list of any and all accomplishments you have during the year as they happen. Examples include completing or making progress on milestones, conducting research, going to a conference, getting a job, consulting on a project, writing a paper for publication, writing a form of public scholarship, and more.

For more advanced students, the annual review can have implications for funding. Students in their guaranteed funding window are assured funding as long as they are meeting basic requirements. For students outside of their funding window, funding through TAs is no longer guaranteed, but in most years the department has enough demand for TAs to be able to fund everyone. However, if there is a year when there are TA shortages, the graduate committee would use these to determine funding.

Publishing Articles

Research articles are the primary way academics share research with peers and the public. If you have chosen an academic pathway, journal articles or related academic publications (books, chapters, ect) will be the primary way you advance your career.

Pro-tips:

Choose the right journal! In general it is best to find a few journals that your work would fit in topically or methodologically and then begin submitting with the highest ranked journal, moving down the list if/as needed. Consider asking What are they [the journals] like? What kinds of data



and method do they publish? How are the articles structured? Consider these things as you think through whether your work is a good fit. Early in your career, we recommend this decision should be made with your advisor(s) and/or always with your collaborator(s).

Submit it when it is good enough for review! A good rule of thumb is to submit an article for publication when it is 80% of the way done. Remember that the review process of a peer-reviewed journal is one of feedback and improvement.

Rejection is a part of the process and should be expected! Publishing a journal article often takes multiple submissions to different journals. Finding the right fit is a process and over the years you will learn more and more how to navigate this process. It is not a reflection of you as a scholar and with each rejection, your work will improve and develop. Keep the hard work up!

Collaborative Research

Research is often a collaborative process and over the course of your time in graduate school you will have many opportunities to collaborate with other students, faculty, and community members. When doing collaborative work, we recommend setting clear expectations early about the timing of the project, the expected outcomes, your contributions, and how authorship or deliverables will be handled. As the situations vary so much, we also recommend talking to your advisors or peers on how to navigate the process!

Can you share an experience of collaboration or networking that positively impacted your academic journey?

Student Testimonial: *“As I began to establish my research, I knew I was interested in employing less traditional qualitative methods. I sought support outside of the department with other faculty who shared similar research methodologies. Through the qualitative methods concentration program offered through the Jackson school, I was able to find a number of courses offering the training I needed to expand my knowledge and understanding of qualitative methods. Through this program, I was also able to meet a number of great faculty and community leaders who have provided me with support and guidance throughout my academic journey.”*

Student Testimonial: *“In my experience, collaborating with faculty and peers has been one of the most important and enriching parts of graduate school. Collaborations provide an opportunity to put methods skills into practice, learn new research areas, and develop closer relationships with your advisors and other grad students. In addition, for early graduate students, collaborations can offer important practical insights into the publication process (i.e., how to assemble a manuscript, select a journal, respond to reviewers, etc.). Though opportunities for collaboration may not always be paid, I would encourage early grad students to join collaborative projects if they can, even if they do not align 100% with their research interests.”*



Being a Teaching Assistant

TAing is one of the most common ways you will receive funding within the department. It is a part-time employment of 20 hours a week (the other 20 hours are intended for your own coursework and research). As a teaching assistant, you will be assigned to a course under the direction of an instructor (most commonly a course and professor in Sociology). You will work with the professor to support students learning within the class. In most cases, the primary responsibility of a TA is teaching 50-minute discussion sections students attend in addition to the lecture. For example, students are often expected to attend lectures two times a week listening to the professor/instructor and typically one time a week will attend a 50-minute section taught by you. Discussion section material may review topics covered in the main lecture or offer additional course material to supplement the main lecture; it varies with each course. You may be responsible for creating teaching materials to use in the course. In addition to teaching students once a week, teaching assistants are responsible for grading. If grading levels require you to go outside your 20 hours, you should speak to your supervising instructor to share the grading load or they may request assistance from the department on your behalf. You should never work over the 20 hours you are paid for. For more information, please refer to the [incredible department teaching guide](#) and the [UW Center for Teaching and Learning](#).

Classroom dynamics: For many students, becoming a teaching assistant will be the first time you are in the role of a teacher, leading a classroom space. Teaching college level courses is a steep learning curve. Students from all walks of life share a space and look to you for guidance on a topic that you may or may not know much about. In that role you will have power and authority over much of the students' experience in the class. Various pedagogies around the classroom exist and it is through experience that you will develop your own special approach. Developing policies for your section, establishing norms around communicating with your students, and strategies for grading fairly and inclusively are some of the main considerations you will face. Our department offers formal and informal resources to support you, such as the *brownbag teaching series*. We suggest talking with the professor supervising you about tips and tricks on how to run an effective classroom space. You may also want to ask other graduate students how they navigate classroom dynamics. Additionally, graduate student instructors from different positionalities face different types of interactions in the classroom. Gender and sexuality, race, class, and other identities you hold may impact how you are read and treated in a classroom space. If you ever feel you are being treated poorly, please let your supervisor know immediately. As a community of educators, we support each other and we will support you in navigating any issues that may arise.

DEI and Accessibility as a Student Instructor: The classroom can be a very difficult space for undergraduate and graduate students to navigate. As you take on the role of a teacher, you have added power to create a space that centers the experiences of students, meeting them where they are to create an accessible and diverse learning space. At the University of Washington, we are committed to creating spaces that are accessible and take DEI into account with all decisions. As you teach different situations will arise that may challenge your expectations and you may need to be creative with your approaches. In particular, it can be easy to want to re-create your own learning experience in a classroom, which in some cases will work amazingly; however in other cases, it may not and that is okay!



Each group of students is different and adaptive teaching is the name of the game. [The Center for Teaching and Learning \(CTL\) has additional resources on this topic.](#)

Research Assistantships

Working as a research assistant is the second most common funding option within our department. While students may become research assistantships at any point in the program, many students wait to look for RAships until the end of their second year, after they have completed substantial coursework and begun their own research agendas. It is important to note that this is not a rule and many students have unique paths through the program, resulting in a wide variation of if, how, and when people take part in research assistantships. Research assistantships within our program are largely quantitative, but qualitative opportunities do arise as well. In some cases, research assistantships may arise outside of the department as well. If you ever come across a research assistantship opportunity that you are curious about, reach out to the supervisor of it and ask about it! Often chatting over what the role looks like will reveal much more about it than a job posting.

How did you balance the demands of being a TA and/or RA with your own research and academic obligations, and do you have any time-management tips to share?

Student Testimonial: *“When I first started as a TA I was on top of responding to emails and had a pretty quick response time and would respond to emails even late into the night or in the early hours of the AM. However, this is not a good practice, as this may become an expectation from the students. It is important to protect your time. You are first a student. As I continued to TA I would try to limit the time I would respond to emails. So for the first week I would tell my students my business hours for responding to emails such as 9-7 and no response on the weekends. Also make sure your students respect your time, so if they skip appointments keep that in mind for future meetings and try to keep them within the constraints of your office hours.”*

Student Testimonial: *“From my experiences as a Teaching Assistant (TA) and Research Assistant (RA), I’ve learned that managing my time well is super important between balancing my classes, the classes I TA for, and my research. Second, I’ve realized that talking clearly with my professors and colleagues helps a lot because it makes sure I know what’s expected of me. Third, I’ve learned to be flexible because sometimes things don’t go as planned in research or teaching. Fourth, I remind myself that even though at times it may feel like I’m not knowledgeable enough to teach a subject, I probably know more about the topic than the undergrads. Fifth, taking care of myself and knowing when to say “no” is crucial to avoid getting too stressed and overworked. Sixth, it’s smart to ask for feedback to make sure that I’m meeting what is being asked of me whether as a TA or RA. Lastly, staying curious and wanting to learn more has been really helpful as there’s so much to learn from under faculty you work with. These lessons have not only made me better at being a TA and RA but have also made me better overall in school and work.”*



Funding

Funding for graduate student stipends comes in three primary ways: Teaching Assistantships (over 90% of funding), Research Assistantships, and Fellowships. The administrative process of managing department funds and providing financial support to students is complex and at times can seem very confusing to students. The reality is that our department funding is limited by the university and the state of Washington. Typically students are guaranteed 5 years of funding within the program; after this period, funding is subject to availability. Below you will find an overview of how funding operates within the program as well as a secondary section specifically about summer quarter. Further questions about this should be directed to the graduate program advisor.

Teaching Assistantship Funding: When a student is funded through a teaching assistantship, the funds are supplied by the state of Washington and are tuition/fee exempt, meaning they are waived. The department receives a lump sum of funds for teaching assistantships and student instructor pay. The amount is carefully regulated based on plans around courses and graduate student needs.

Research Assistantship Funding: When a student receives an RAship, the funds for the student stipend as well as tuition/fees come from a grant held by the faculty supervisor or research center. The department is often asked to supplement funds from centers to cover the costs of an RA or Fellowship.

Hourly work during school year (Sept 15-June 15th): Students who perform hourly work during the academic year will be hired as a student assistant, which has a variable pay rate depending on the task performed. The hiring supervisor or center will determine and offer the pay amount to you in a hiring letter.

Fellowships: External fellowships come with many different stipulations and details that should be closely reviewed with the department and funding source. Internal fellowships are often the result of an endowed fund held by the department. These periodic awards are targeted to specific students who meet the criteria for the award and are not always available.

Summer Funding

Summer funding is not typically available from our department and is completely dependent on how the department raised and used funds during the academic year. The department does not know the level of summer funding opportunities it may be able to offer until the end of May, so students are encouraged to plan accordingly. In general, students should expect to rely on savings, loans, or external employment during the summer. In some specific cases, students may have a funding model (outlined in an offer letter) that provides summer funds for a certain time period, or be able to secure funding over the summer. The typical options are outlined below:

- **Hourly Research Positions:** In some cases, you may have the opportunity to continue an RAship you started during the calendar year into the summer months using an hourly appointment. Talk to your supervisor early about the options available over the summer when working on a research project. In other cases, summer-specific research assistantships may arise, requiring



you to apply; these opportunities often arise anywhere from early spring to a week before summer begins, so keep your eye out! You can do these inside or outside the department! Additionally, you may also find opportunities for small-scale hourly work in research during the summer; some examples include coding for a project, conducting interviews, and reviewing documents.

- External part-time job: Many students who do not hold secondary employment during the school year may find a part-time summer job to financially support themselves over the summer.
- Teaching your own class (post-MA only): Summer is a great time for post-MA students who have completed *SOC 502: Teaching Sociology* to teach their own course. Sociology tries to reserve teaching opportunities for graduate students, and this is a very common way for students to make money in the summer. If you are interested in this option, look out for announcements and speak to your advisors or the head of the curriculum committee if you have questions.
- Teaching Assistantships/Grader: In rare cases, a course over the summer may require a teaching assistant or grader; this will often be in the form of hourly support for a larger course. Typically the responsibilities over the summer will be grading and course administration versus the typical discussion section model described above.
- Internships: Paid internships are a great opportunity for individuals seeking to develop skills outside of research or apply research skills to industry.

Pro-tip: Ask faculty early about opportunities and plan ahead; summer can be a difficult time for many of our students, but early planning can make all the difference.

How do you recommend graduate students go about searching for and applying to summer funding opportunities? Are there any resources or support systems available at your institution to assist with this process?

Student Testimonial: *“When it comes to summer funding you must be comfortable or learn to become comfortable cold emailing people to ask if they have summer funding. I recommend talking to your advisor first to see if they have summer funding if they do not then you and your advisor can work together to come up with a list of people to email this can include people inside or outside the department that you have taken classes with, newer professors tend to have funding so they are another group to reach out to, newsletters from different centers on campus also post summer funding listings. For summer it is imperative to be proactive, to show interest, but also some professors won’t know about their funding towards the end of the quarter so it is important to get ahead of the game so once they get their funding you’re one of the first people that come to mind. “*

Sociology Department - Graduate Student Association

The Graduate Student Association within our department (GSA) is a student-led organization representing graduate student needs for faculty and administration at the University of Washington. The association is responsible for the majority of graduate student activity. Each year, in spring, the current GSA leadership will facilitate elections for the following year. Look out for communication on this and feel free to reach out to current leadership as anytime.



**Chair of the Graduate Student Association for 2023-2024: Ryan DeCarsky

Graduate Committees

Executive Council

Representative to the Admissions Committee

Representation to the Graduate Program Coordinator

Faculty Meeting Representative

Representatives to the Chair

Representatives to the Graduate and Professional Student Senate

Committee on the Graduate Student Research Symposium

Social Committee

Diversity Committee [[view new program launched for supported DEI events](#)]

Representative to the Undergraduate Program & Awards Committee

International Student Representative

Representative to the Curriculum Committee

Academic Conferences

Attending academic conferences is an excellent way to network with the broader academic community, share and workshop your research, and if going into academia, explore the job market. Most students begin attending conferences in their 2nd and 3rd years in the program, although it is never too early to go if the conference is a good fit for your personal or professional development. For students who want to know more about this, [Calarco's Field Guide to Grad school](#) has a chapter on this.

Funding to support conferences can come from specific research grants, the department, research centers on campus and the graduate school. Awards vary and the process for applying for these funds vary, but in general, students can expect to receive some financial support to attend at least one conference each academic year. For more information on this, please [see here](#).

Some commonly attended conferences in Sociology are:

American Sociological Association (ASA) Annual Meeting in August

Association of Black Sociologists Annual Meeting in August

Interdisciplinary Association of Population Health Science in October

Population Association of American (PAA) Annual Meeting in April

Pacific Sociological Association (PSA) Annual Meeting in March or April

Social Science History Association in November

Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS) Annual Winter Meeting in January

Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics in July

Southern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in April



Job Market

When you are ready to look for employment, whether academic or industry, the job market can be difficult to navigate. The amount of people qualified for positions outweighs the number of positions available and often the result of your job market experience is more about timing and fit, than it is about your qualifications. For those pursuing an academic job, we recommend reading Chapter 11: “Navigating the Job Market” in [A Field Guide to Grad School : Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum](#) by Dr. Jessica M. McCrory Calarco and [The Professor is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. into a Job](#) by Dr. Karen Kelsky for further guidance. Additionally, the following timeline may be helpful as an idea guide to going on the market.

Job Market Timeline

June:

- Reach out to your advisors to talk with them about going on the market, whether they think you’re ready, and whether they will be willing to write letters of recommendation for you. Also, make sure to ask them how they would like you to request letters. Some professors will have very specific requests and others less so.
- The earlier you start, the better. There is no way to start too early.

July:

- At some point this month, you will want to send your draft materials to your committee for comments. It will serve the dual purpose of giving them a sense of how you’re thinking about your research as you approach the market so they can talk about it in the way you’re presenting it.
- Finalize your writing samples. You want to make sure that they have all been read multiple times by multiple people. It’s fine to send a combination of published and unpublished work.
- Start looking in the ASA job bank and/or Inside Higher Ed and other websites for job postings. They will start being posted in early July. Create a spreadsheet to keep track of applications and postings – you will thank yourself later.
- In an ideal world, start working on your job talk. It sounds like July is way too early for this, but it’s not. And, your future self (in September) will be really grateful when you already have your job talk drafted.

August:

- Attend ASA and other professional meetings.
- By mid-August, you will want to make sure that your advisors have a list of the first set of letters that they need to write. The first set of deadlines was September 1.
- Try to have a complete version of your job talk ready to go by the end of August. Do a first run-through of the talk with sympathetic friends by the end of August. It is useful to invite folks from outside your substantive area to your job talks as this better simulates most actual job talks.



September:

- If applying for research universities or selective teaching-focused institutions: the first application deadlines will likely be September 1, followed by a bunch of September 15 and October 1 deadlines. There were some October 15 deadlines and some later deadlines.
- Try to get your applications in early if at all possible. I think some places really start reading applications before the deadline.
- Practice your job talk CONSTANTLY – aim for at least 3-5 formal practices minimum in front of an audience. Repetition makes it better and it also makes you more confident. It is likely that you will spend all of your time in September practicing your talk, submitting applications, and looking for jobs to apply to. Don't feel bad if you don't get any other work done in this period. Try your best to have pretty much all of the applications done by October 1.

October:

- October can be the most stressful month. Most of your applications are likely in, but invitations for campus visits haven't really started yet. So, you just kind of sit around waiting and wondering if you are going to get a job. Emotional management strategies/distractions here are key.
- Keep practicing your job talk A LOT – alone, in front of people, whatever. It is one of the few things that you actually have control over in the month of October and it's a good place to direct your energy. And no matter what, it will improve your dissertation, helping you hone your framing and analyses.
- Roughly a month after the application deadline is probably the earliest you should expect to hear from a place.



Chapter 4: Navigating Advisor and Department Dynamics

Let's have a candid talk about that critical student-advisor relationship – it's a serious deal. You see, both you and your advisor have vital roles to play in this academic journey, and it's essential to approach it with eyes wide open. So, on paper, an advisor serves as a mentor, advocate, and facilitator throughout your program. You will technically take much more of your advisor's attention and time. In other words, your relationship with your advisor will look completely different than an undergraduate advisor and student relationship. They are there to provide academic guidance, offer their expertise, and help you apply to conferences, grants, fellowships, etc. As we dive into this discussion, let's remember the diverse backgrounds and unique needs each student brings to the table. For more information on the department's mentoring guidelines, view [here](#).

Spectrum of Relationships.

Advisor-student relationships are a spectrum. From hands-on to hands-off, the dynamic shifts based on your research stage, individual learning style, and personal needs. But here's an important key – communication. This is crucial for this partnership. As you start this journey, take the time to understand how your potential advisor operates. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- a. What's their advising style?
- b. How do they support their current students?
- c. Are they more hands-on or hands-off? More likely to meet with you weekly or bi-weekly for 1-1s, or more independent progress tracking?
- d. How many students can they take on?
- e. Are they going on sabbatical or on leave anytime soon?

Remember, this isn't a one-time deal. As time passes, the dynamics might evolve naturally. Initially, you might need more guidance, but as you grow, your independence might shine through. The key is to maintain an open channel of communication. If there's a need for adjustments, talk it out with your advisor. Ultimately you want to explore which advisors can provide the support you need.



Finding the Right Fit.The journey to finding an advisor can take many paths. For those looking to initiate a connection with faculty members, the approach varies. Some might seize the chance during office hours, initiate a conversation after a seminar, or simply have a hallway chat. However, one of the most common methods is reaching out via email. Often, it starts with a cold email if the student and faculty member haven't previously connected. We provide a cold email template for initiating contact:

*“Dear Professor Lewis,
I hope this email finds you well. My name is Amy, and I am a PhD student in the Sociology Department here at UW. I've been following your research closely, particularly your work on a specific Research Area or Topic), and I'm truly inspired by your contributions. I'm reaching out because I am interested in exploring potential research opportunities and seeking mentorship for my graduate journey. Your expertise aligns well with my interests, and I believe your guidance would greatly enhance my academic experience.*

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the possibility of you serving as my advisor. If you have some availability, could we arrange a brief meeting at your convenience? I'd love to chat more about your ongoing projects and how I might fit into your research team.

Thank you for considering my request, and I look forward to the possibility of connecting..

*Best,
Amy”*

Meetings with your advisor will be important as they are opportunities for guidance, clarification, progress tracking, and more. To maximize the productivity of these meetings, we recommend sending an outline of the topics you wish to cover with them prior to the meeting. This helps both of you prepare and ensures that everyone is on the same page. It adds structure to the discussion and allows for deeper dives into specific areas. And remember, there is no such thing as a silly question. Ask away! Your meetings with your advisor should be a space to ask about anything – from clarifying concepts to discussing ideas. We also recommend keeping written records of your meetings with clear note-taking as this will be of tremendous help. When you're in the flow of a conversation, it's easy to forget the details afterward. Combat this by maintaining a written record. Jot down key points discussed, decisions made, and any action items. Include dates to create a timeline of progress. This record becomes invaluable for future reference and can be a lifesaver when you need to recall specifics. We provide an email template to set the agenda:



“Hi Professor Gonzalez,

I hope this email finds you well. I would like to request a 1-1 meeting with you for next week if possible. Here is a brief overview of the topics I would like to discuss:

- 1. Topic 1: Brief Description*
- 2. Topic 2: Brief Description*
- 3. Topic 3: Brief Description*

Let me know if you are available to meet next week and what times work best for you. Thank you for your time and guidance.

*Best,
James”*

Below are two student testimonials on how they set the agendas for their 1-1 meetings with their advisors:

Student Testimonial: *“My advisor and I have a Google document where we add our 1-1 meeting notes. It has the dates and a bullet point structure. When I send an email request for another 1-1 meeting, I outline the topics I wish to discuss with him in advance. Once we confirm the 1-1, I usually send out a calendar invite and update the 1-1 Google document with those questions I had outlined in the email. I’ve noticed how helpful maintaining this system has been for both of us. I can literally see the progression in my own work and personal growth as I navigate through this program.”*

Student Testimonial: *“Early on in my first year, I was introduced to two older graduate students (one from a different department and the other from the soc department) who from day one have both been extremely supportive and genuinely kind to me as I navigate the program. I schedule 1-1s every month or so and use those times to ask them questions about milestones, logistics, personal experiences, and even advice on what to expect when navigating the hidden curriculum of the Ph.D. It’s a good idea to keep those who are willing to help guide you updated on your progress.”*

Not a good fit. Compatibility matters more than you think. Many of the negative stories we hear stem from issues with advisors, not just research topics or external examiners. Sometimes, it's because students didn't take their advisor's advice seriously enough. Other times, it's the



unfortunate case of great-professor-bad fit. The good news is that in this program, you have flexibility. Typically, the department will assign a faculty member as your first-year advisor based on similar research interests, with the expectation that many students will switch to new advisors over the next couple of years. If you find it's not working out or just want to work with someone else, you're not trapped. Your next step should be to find a new advisor. If you feel comfortable with your first-year advisor, ask for their guidance to help you locate a new advisor. The primary responsibilities of the first year advisor include helping your transition into the department, assisting with administrative tasks, formulating your training objectives, and fostering connections with fellow faculty and students within the department. While several students do continue their association with their initial advisor after the first year, it is important to note that there is no obligation to do so. You have the freedom to develop professional relationships with any other faculty members within our department and institution. Diplomacy is key in this transition; it's about finding a better match than creating conflicts. The smoother you handle this transition, the better it will be for you and everyone involved. It's all about finding the right fit for your academic journey. If you are unsure how to inform your current advisor that you are interested in finding a new advising opportunity, we provide an email template below:

"Dear Professor Kay,

I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to express my sincere gratitude for your guidance during my time under your supervision. I've learned a lot from our interactions. As my academic journey evolves, I've been reflecting on my research needs and learning style. After careful consideration, I believe it's in my best interest to explore new advising opportunities that align more closely with my current goals and aspirations.

I want to assure you that this decision is not taken lightly. I deeply appreciate your support and everything I've learned while working with you. I'm eager to ensure a smooth transition and will be working closely with the department to navigate this process.

Thank you once again for your mentorship. I truly value the time we've spent together.

*Best regards,
Ariana"*

Remember, some advising relationships will change as your interests do, and not every advisor-student pairing will be perfect, and that's okay. Everyone is different, and what works for one might not work for another. Now, here's the deal: building a strong student-advisor



bond requires effort from both sides. You need to be proactive, communicate openly, and seek that compatibility. It's a serious commitment, but when you find the right fit, it can lead to a fulfilling and successful academic journey. Below are some testimonies of students navigating similar situations:

Student Testimonial: *“Sometimes your first advisor isn’t the advisor you’re going to work with throughout your grad school career; however, the fit can sometimes be not as great as expected. I found my first year advisor was unfortunately not a good fit for me and felt like I had to figure out grad school myself on top of anxieties of being a first gen student. However, I made connections with people who were interested in seeing me succeed and whose research interests did align with mine. That was when I asked to switch advisors to them because it was in my best interest in the long run. It was a difficult decision but ultimately, this has led me to develop a strong research idea, which can become my dissertation even after I complete my MA.”*

Navigating Positionality in the Department: Student Reflections

As a BIPOC student, did you face any unique challenges or opportunities within the department, and how did you navigate them?

Student Testimonial: *“As a BIPOC student many of us may also be first-gen and at that intersection we face more difficulties. Some of our parents and/or family do not know what a Phd is and what the process of earning our doctorate entails. This makes it more difficult for them to sympathize with the struggles of earning a Phd. For me it helped finding a therapist with the same or same cultural background who was able to empathize with the struggles and offer the support that our families may not be to offer. However, it is important to emphasize to our family that getting our Phd is not an undergrad part 2 but rather a job.”*

Student Testimonial: *“We often hear that BIPOC and first-gen students have to work as twice as hard compared to non-BIPOC/first-gen students. What does this mean? Because there’s just a few of us BIPOC students in the program, the reality is that for many of our colleagues, we may be their first reference points to working alongside BIPOC PhD students. There is a huge responsibility that comes with this reality. For many of us, we cannot afford to “take it easy”, or simply refuse to do extra work. It doesn’t take long for a colleague to see us “taking it easy” as “oh student A is lazy.” Or if you complain as a BIPOC student, it may just reinforce those negative stereotypes. On the flip side, if you don’t say anything, then they will just assume you know or you will figure it out. In other words, colleagues don’t know how to help you or even if they should help you. So how do we as BIPOC and first-gens achieve excellence without burning out? I do believe there is a path, a middle ground, where you are productive, you create a system of support, you proactively ask around for additional help. And of course, this means we*



have to take of care of ourselves. It's about being very clear on the goal. This is what it means when people say you have to work twice as hard for the same recognition."

Student Testimonial: *"As part of a diverse cohort, I felt supported by my peers and other fellow BIPOC students across the department. Creating support circles helped to establish both academic and emotional support as I transitioned into graduate school. I specifically found benefit in creating study groups with my cohort mates, as we were able to problem solve, discuss ideas, and share useful information with each other. I also found that connecting with BIPOC faculty within and outside the department aided my search for support across my academic community. Finding faculty who could not only relate with my research interest but also shared similar life experiences, was both reassuring and empowering as I sought to find my place within this academic sphere."*

Student Testimonial: *"The feeling of not belonging still wanders in my head from time to time, well constantly, but I find peace with the reminder of why I am getting my degree in the first place and the greater purpose and impact I want to have for and in my community. As a first-generation student and as the youngest student in the department I often felt there wasn't much I could add in a classroom setting and if I had something I wanted to add, I had convinced myself it wouldn't be worthwhile hearing. Being black and female did not ease this feeling either. I wish I'd learned to speak up for my thoughts earlier on in classrooms. As I get further along in the program, I think I realize the importance of my perspective and where I first started."*

Student Testimonial: *"Being a BIPOC student in my department had its unique aspects. I sought out BIPOC faculty members within the department to discuss my ideas and get support. They provided a safe space for these conversations and challenged and pushed me to be a better researcher and student. When I realized not many faculty within the department shared my research interests, I reached out to scholars in other departments who did. This helped me broaden my perspective and further expanded my network of people to rely on for both academic and emotional support. Besides faculty, I also connected with fellow graduate students who were going through similar challenges and aligned with my values. Their experiences and advice were incredibly helpful, complementing the guidance from the faculty. Building a diverse network within and beyond my department played a significant role in my academic journey, providing resources, opening up opportunities, and offering the support I needed to succeed."*

As a Queer/LGBTQIA+ student, did you face any unique challenges or opportunities within the department, and how did you navigate them?



Student Testimonial: *“Being queer in the program has been difficult at times. In some cases I have had to defend a certain way of seeing the social world as a queer person or explain how my identity shapes and influences my approach to research. At first this was something I really struggled with in those conversations, but overtime I began to use it as an opportunity to think through the different ways I might frame who I am and what I research, especially as a future academic committed to positionality and accountability in research. As I write this, I see and am excited by growing forces in the department and field of sociology seeking to better support queer students or those engaged with queer scholarship. My piece of advice for other students who are queer is to join groups on campus or in Seattle to help them feel grounded. The queer community in Seattle is vast and depending on what segment of the queer community you fall in, very welcoming.”*

As a Disabled and/or differently minded student did you face any unique challenges or opportunities within the department, and how did you navigate them?

Student Testimonial: *“I think the department really has struggled to become more accessible. I find that many of the students and instructors just have not been exposed enough to discussions of access, but the Disability studies program on campus and the resource center are great places to find community. I also think UW does try to prioritize accommodations, but the procedures can be tough.”*

As a first generation student did you face any unique challenges or opportunities within the department, and how did you navigate them? What advice would you give to future first-generation students who may be starting their PhD journeys?

Student Testimonial: *“Academia was not built for people like me and yet, a group of people in the admissions committee saw my application, read my statement of purpose, and voted me in. This is all to say that people have been believing in us from the start. You will grow so much every year. So embrace the growth and reflect each step you take and be proud of all the small and big milestones you’ve achieved. You’re here so own it and work towards your goals.”*

Student Testimonial: *“Advocate for yourself and start this early on. Be proactive as well. You cannot afford to stay quiet when you need help or need any sort of clarification on things. Start building relationships with faculty and peers. Let faculty know you are hungry for opportunities and can deliver on time (show them). Find colleagues who are willing to give you advice, esteem support, and opportunities to grow as a young scholar. When given these opportunities, deliver on them. It is through these support systems that you will gain more confidence throughout the program.”*



Student Testimonial: *“As a first-generation student entering a graduate program, I struggled to find my place and feel comfortable expressing my opinions among others who were more knowledgeable than myself. I came to realize that although my ability to express myself might not be identical to that of others, it did not reduce the value of my contributions. For this reason, it is important to remember that your experiences are both meaningful and unique and in this way provide important insights into academic discourse. Further, I encourage you to either find or build support networks as these were essential for my personal and academic growth.”*

Student Testimonial: *“Do not hesitate to ask for help. As a first-generation college student, it is easy to have some “imposter syndrome” feelings in grad school, which can translate into shyness and a reluctance to reach out for help. It was important for me to realize that many of the graduate students in our department are first-generation, and faculty members are here to help us. Reach out to faculty members during your first year(s) to get feedback on your project ideas early. Also, it can be great to meet with later-stage graduate students as well, whether it be for project feedback or general advice on navigating the department!”*

As a student parent did you face any unique challenges or opportunities within the department, and how did you navigate them?

Student Testimonial: *“Having kids in graduate school was a tough (and very rewarding) experience for me. Don’t underestimate how much time and energy it takes to care for a newborn. What helped me was setting expectations with my advisor before the baby was born. I was open and direct about wanting to take some time off and we worked out a plan for when and how I would resume my obligations. Having kids also makes the separation of work and home life very important. For me, I keep strict work hours and try to be very efficient during the work day so that I can keep my nights and (most) weekends for my family life. I think this type of prioritization and discipline is essential for balancing graduate school and your new family.”*

Student Testimonial: *“Having a young child at an early PhD stage was challenging, and I was lucky to have my family here to help out with childcare and homemaking. My RAship and fellowship also greatly helped to release my time. In addition, I found children and family responsibilities helpful in terms of helping me switch contexts and be aware of the usage of my time. I am limited to five or six hours of focusing on my academic work every day. I try to concentrate as much as possible when doing my research work. Having more time to study won't be helpful as the efficiency will be low.”*

For more information on child care assistance programs available at the University of Washington, visit [here](#).



Chapter 5: Discussing Sensitive Topics with Faculty

In the realm of academia, it is crucial to be equipped with the knowledge and tools for handling very serious situations with extreme care and diplomacy. While we cannot predict every possible situation in this chapter, we provide a guide to help navigate them. If you have a problem you can talk to any trusted faculty member. The Graduate Program Chair, Sociology Department Chair, and [University Ombud](#) can also help. Depending on the nature of the situation, [mandatory reporting](#) may be required, but this is a decision best made in consultation with a higher-up.

Begin by gaining a clear understanding of the situation to help you find possible solutions. Seek ways to minimize the situation's effect on you. Locate and speak to a faculty member you can trust who can comprehend the situation and provide advice on how to proceed. You may also want to access both on-campus and off-campus resources to take appropriate action if needed. Lastly, always keep written records of specific dates, specifics of what happened, possible witnesses, and any forms of communication. It is recommended that after you speak to the faculty member in regards to the situation, to request an email from them acknowledging you both met on a specific date and time and addressed such issues. Furthermore, if you require additional support or find yourself facing a situation involving violence, harassment, stalking, sexual assault, or related experiences, do not hesitate to reach out to UW's SafeCampus and their advocacy members. The University of Washington offers free advocacy and support services for students and employees impacted by such incidents. Their confidential advocates can assist you in considering reporting options and provide a clear understanding of what to expect if you decide to submit a formal complaint to the university.

We also understand that initiating a conversation with a faculty member on sensitive topics can be challenging. We've prepared an email template that you can use to schedule a meeting.

Hi Professor Kim,

I hope you're well. I'm writing to request a brief private meeting to seek your advice on a sensitive matter. I truly value your expertise and discretion in this regard.

Would it be possible for us to meet in the next week, either in person or virtually? I appreciate your consideration.

Best regards,

Name



Chapter 6: Nurture Your Journey

In the hustle and bustle of graduate school, it is essential to remember to pause, breathe, and give yourself time to reflect. As you navigate this journey, periodically taking a step back to assess your goals and emotions can be a powerful tool.

Reconnect with your goals. Amidst the whirlwind of classes, research, TAing/RAing, and other academic commitments, it is easy to lose sight of why you embarked on this journey in the first place. It's true; all those grad school memes about questioning your existence here are spot on. I've been there. Set aside time to reconnect with your aspirations and purpose. Reflect on the impact you want to make in your field, the questions you're passionate about exploring, and the contributions you seek to offer to academia and your community. And hey, you'd be surprised how some of those things may naturally change over time and that is also perfectly ok! The goal here is to simply remember to give yourself time to self-reflect.

Check in with yourself. It's okay to feel overwhelmed, stressed, or even uncertain at times. Take moments to check in with yourself, acknowledging how you generally feel about your progress and experiences. Recognizing that it is completely normal to face ups and downs, and giving yourself the space to acknowledge these emotions can be very liberating. We would also highly recommend all students find someone to talk to (therapist, support person) and work to establish a support system that will be there for them throughout this transformative journey. In fact, one of the earliest words of advice on preparing for graduate school was to find a therapist and I can agree with that advice [*Find resources to counseling services offered on campus in the resources section*]. These resources will help you better cope with challenges and maintain a healthy balance between work and well-being.

Celebrate Your Progress. Oftentimes graduate school is a marathon, not a sprint. And it's true. Big and small, celebrate all the milestones and victories along the way because trust us when we say the days will oftentimes blend into each other, and you feel you're on autopilot, you may accidentally or even unconsciously disregard many of these victories. I cannot stress enough how important it is to celebrate your progress. We see you.

How did you find support, both academically and emotionally, during your PhD program?

Student Testimonial: *"During my PhD program, I discovered essential support from a combination of sources. While family and friends back home provided emotional backing through regular calls and messages, I also recognized the significance of*



building a network within my university community. Meeting students and faculty outside my department proved to be incredibly valuable, as it offered diverse perspectives and fresh ideas. These interactions not only broadened my academic horizons but also provided emotional support through shared experiences. I also sought out organizations and communities both within Seattle and at the university that aligned with my academic and personal interests. Joining these groups allowed me to connect with like-minded individuals who were passionate about similar topics. This not only bolstered my emotional well-being but also provided academic support through collaborative projects and shared resources.”



Chapter 7: Living in Seattle

If you are just moving to Seattle, a new city can present a big learning curve. The people and culture of the place might be drastically different than what you have experienced in the past and different than you expect. Seattle is a neighborhood driven city, meaning that each neighborhood has a distinct set of characteristics based on activities and residents. It might take some exploring before you find a neighborhood that fits best for you to live, explore and spend time in. Most graduate students live off campus, engaged within their given communities across Seattle proper and the surrounding suburbs. For an overview of the neighborhoods compiled by the Seattle Met [click here](#).

Additionally, the cost of living in Seattle is very high and in general it is not sustainable on a graduate student stipend or pay structure. Most students must have a second job, take out student loans, or rely on support from an outside source. The department will work with you as you navigate this transition and sometimes the best resource is your fellow graduate students who know the tips and tricks to stretching the graduate stipend as far as possible. It is important to note, as discussed in chapter 3, funding is limited and only should be expected during the 9-month academic year, meaning that students will need to think carefully on how to remain financially stable while living in Seattle for the graduate degree.



Additional Resources

Graduate School Guide Books

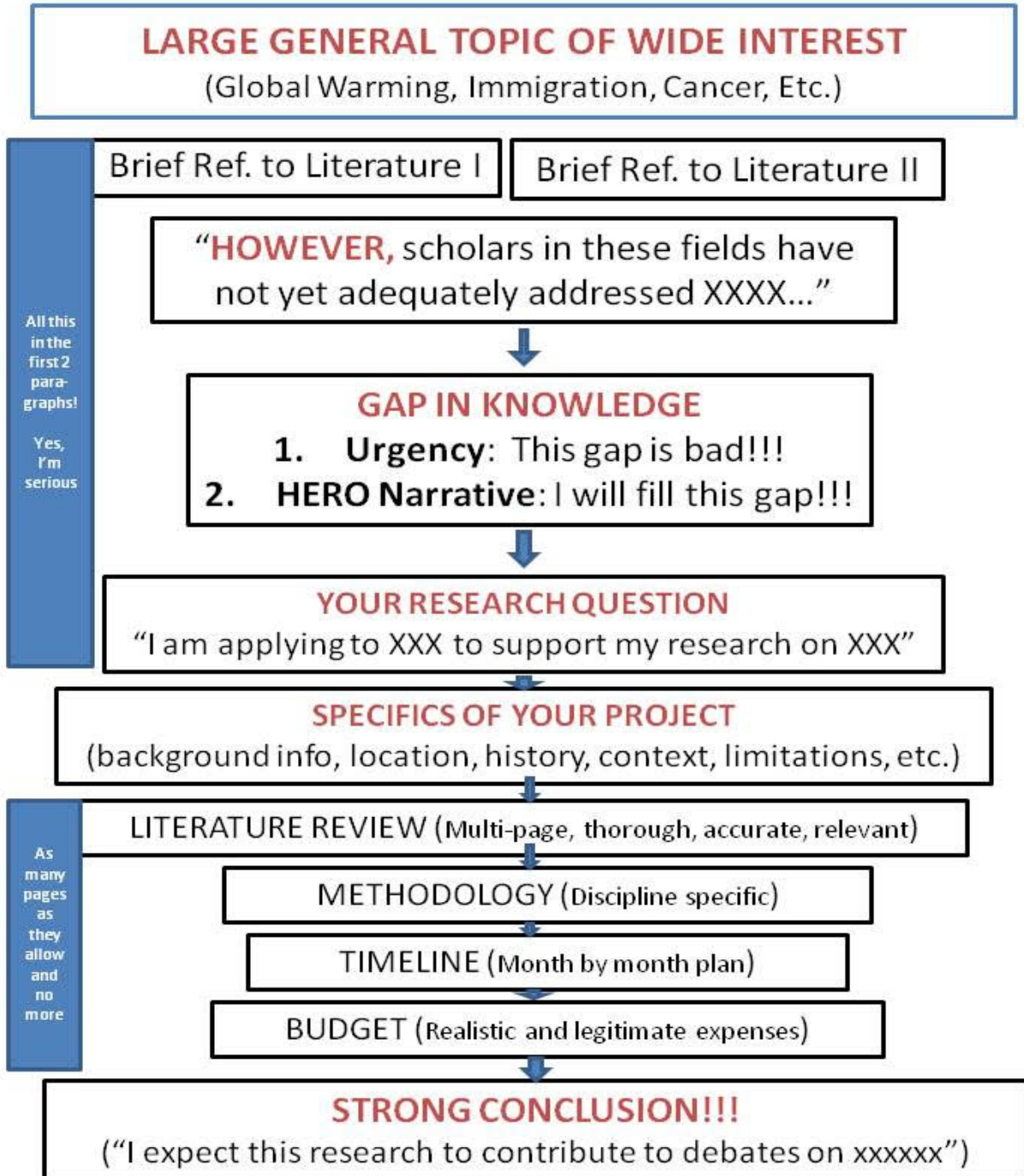
1. [A Field Guide to Grad School : Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum](#) by Dr. Jessica M. McCrory Calarco
2. [The Professor is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. into a Job](#) by Dr. Karen Jelsky
3. [The Latinx Guide to Graduate School](#) by Dr. Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales & Dr. Magdalena L. Barrera
4. [The Latina/o Pathway to the PhD: Abriendo Caminos](#) by Jeanett Castellanos, Alberta M. Gloria, & Mark Kamimura
5. [Hooded: A Black Girl's Guide to the Ph.D.](#) by Dr. Malika Grayson
6. [The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research](#) by Marian Petre Gordon Rugg

Books that help you hone your research topic

1. Luker, Kristin. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
2. Prasad, Monica. *Problem-Solving Sociology: A Guide for Students*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Research Proposal Guide

“The Foolproof Research Proposal Template”



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Resources

[Office of the Ombud](#)

[Hall Health Center](#)

[Student Health and Wellness Center](#)

[UW Resilience Lab](#)

[UW Food Pantry](#)

[Financial Aid FAQs](#)

[Emergency Aid](#)

[International Student Services](#)

[Graduate Student Equity & Excellence \(GSEE\)](#)

[First Generation Graduate Students](#)

[International Students Information](#)

[Center for International Relations and Cultural Leadership Exchange \(CIRCLE\)](#)

[Q-Center \(LGBTQ+/Queer Student Resource Center\)](#)

[Map of Gender Neutral Restrooms](#)

[Intellectual House is a gathering space for American Indian and Alaskan Native students](#) [Community Resource Guide on the Canvas Teaching Resource Page](#)

[Online Academic Success Coaching](#)

[Remember that through the technology fees you pay you can reserve a laptop if you need](#)

[The Disability Studies Program news and events](#)

[Disability Research Guide](#)

[The D Center](#) is UW Seattle's disabled and Deaf student community center located in the HUB.

[Disability Resources for Students](#)

DRS serves 2,100+ students with either temporary or permanent physical, health, learning, sensory or psychological disabilities. Students partner with our office to establish services for their access and inclusion on campus. DRS is in room 011, across the hall from the D Center in the basement of Mary Gates.

[The Access Technology Center \(ATC\)](#)

[Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology \(DO-IT\)](#)