Streamlined Graduate Student Learning Outcomes Report
Department of Sociology (Ann Meier, DGS)

Process: The DGS drafted the document using existing program goal statements as a guide. We then solicited the input of faculty, graduate students, and staff via email and in two meetings with the Graduate Admissions & Affairs committee consisting of nine faculty, two graduate students, and one staff member, in an open meeting with graduate students and the Director of Graduate Studies, and in one faculty meeting. The document was revised considerably based on feedback from graduate students, faculty and staff. The current version reflects this feedback and revision process.

Goals for Graduate Learning in the Department of Sociology
The purpose of the Sociology graduate program at the University of Minnesota is to train students who plan to undertake careers as professional sociologists—at academic institutions, in the government, or at private research organizations. We attempt to prepare students by teaching the fundamentals of sociological theory and methods, emphasizing mastery of central and emerging literatures and debates, the conduct of research, teaching, and service. Specifically, we expect that our students will:

1. Develop scholarly knowledge and critical analytical skills. Our graduate program is designed to give students opportunities to develop a sociological knowledge base and practice their critical analytical skills. In doing so, we seek to acknowledge the multiple subjectivities that our students may bring to their doctoral studies. Core scholarly knowledge includes the theoretical foundations and continual development of the discipline and the range of methods and ways of knowing used to answer sociological research questions. Students are expected to develop additional depth of knowledge in several substantive areas. Further, we aim to facilitate the development of critical analytical skills so students learn how to interrogate theoretical approaches and research findings. Students learn in the context of required courses, elective seminars, through apprenticeships or collaborations with faculty and/or their graduate student colleagues, and through a number of regular lecture series (e.g. the Sociology Department workshops, the Inequality & Methods talks, the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change brown bags, the Life Course Center workshops, and others).

2. Acquire and refine research-related skills. We aim to provide students with a strong foundation in research skills. We achieve this through required and elective courses in sociological research methods and advanced, topical courses in specific methodologies. Further, our students learn about and practice grant proposal writing skills in funding workshops, with faculty mentorship, and via a department repository of successful grant proposals for a handful of common funding sources. Our students fine-tune their research skills in faculty-mentored student research and collaborative projects with faculty (e.g. via the Graduate Research Partnership Program) and other graduate students—in both cases students gain hands-on experience in applying research skills.
3. **Learn and practice teaching.** Our students have multiple opportunities to learn and develop teaching skills. Nearly all of our students are funded through teaching assistantships for at least part of their program tenure. Students attend a day-long teaching assistant training in each of their first two years in the program and topical sessions in the Center for Teaching and Learning series. Advisors meet with graduate student TAs and instructors to discuss their teaching evaluations and mentor them in ways to improve. We hold several workshops each semester that address themes in teaching (e.g. in-house experts on teaching writing to undergraduates, outside experts on the unique features of teaching at liberal arts and community colleges). All students are encouraged to take a semester-long graduate seminar in the Sociology of Higher Education, and they must pass this course if they wish to instruct their own course in our department. In this seminar students discuss current debates and strategies in post-secondary pedagogy including engaging a diverse student population. Students in the seminar also observe other teachers and develop their own syllabi. By the time they earn their Ph.D., most of our students instruct their own class at the University of Minnesota.

4. **Gain experience in and appreciation for service.** Students have opportunities to be involved in service from their very start in our program. All of our department committees have graduate student representatives selected by the graduate student body. Our department is the editorial home for two professional journals and the leading web portal for bringing social science research to a broader public. Each of these projects has a graduate student editorial board where students gain valuable experience in evaluating research evidence, adjudicating contradictory evaluations of submissions, and advising scholars across the discipline on how to improve their work. Our students also take an active role in regional and national associations for our discipline, for example by serving as graduate student representatives. Finally, many of our faculty and graduate students are involved in range of community organizations that tackle pressing social issues that are the objects of our scholarship.

5. **Make a commitment to professionalism.** Our first year required graduate student professional development seminar and research methods courses cover and discuss professionalism, including the ethical conduct of research. Our fall teaching assistant training and the semester-long seminar on Sociology of Higher Education also covers professionalism and ethics in teaching. Our students present their work and gain feedback though our weekly department workshop series, an annual department conference and a handful of other interdisciplinary seminar series. Further, we provide funding for our students to gain professional experience by attending and presenting at regional, national, and international conferences where they gain professional skills. Nearly all of our students do this.
Means of Assessing Learning

1. **Scholarly knowledge and critical analytical skills.** Students’ progress is tracked through academic transcripts in core courses. The full faculty reviews all graduate student academic progress annually at a fall faculty meeting, with more in-depth discussion of students in their third year, by which time they have completed our core course sequence. The materials for this review include the students’ grades in the core courses, their timely progress through the program, their CVs, and comments by their advisor and other faculty who have worked with the student. In addition, a committee of three sociology faculty and one external member evaluate student knowledge and critical analysis skills in their written preliminary examination and an oral defense of it.

2. **Research-related skills.** We assess research skills via student performance in research methods and advanced methods courses as well as their dissertation prospectus, or plan for their dissertation research. The written prospectus must be passed by a committee of three sociology and one external faculty members and successfully defended in an oral hearing. Finally, we evaluate students’ independent research skills in the development of the dissertation and as a final product of their work in the evaluation of the written dissertation and its oral defense.

3. **Teaching skills.** Graduate student teaching knowledge is evaluated through student performance in the Sociology of Higher Education (taken by nearly all students), and via formal student evaluations of teaching assistants and graduate student instructors. Faculty advisors receive teaching assistant and instructor evaluations for their advisees and counsel them where improvement is needed.

4. **Education for service.** Students record their service activities on the CVs, which constitute part of their packet for the third year review of students by the faculty. Further, advisors are expected to evaluate their advisee’s service commitments and counsel them on appropriate service activities (within the department, the discipline and the community) dependent on their future career plans.

5. **Professionalism.** Student professionalism is assessed via their active participation and contribution to a year-long required professional development seminar, the successful completion of their coursework and program milestones in a timely manner, any student teaching evaluation reviews in their file, and in the annual faculty review of graduate students. Additionally, we observe our students presenting their work in our department workshop series and our annual department research conference. For the later event, graduate students collaborate with faculty to plan paper presentation sessions, chair the sessions and serve as session discussants, allowing them to experience and showcase their professional skills in a number of roles.