Degree Offered: BA, PhD

Sociology is a branch of the social sciences that evolved in response to the revolutionary social changes of the 19th century, such as industrialization and urbanization, that ushered in the modern era. Sociology’s founding fathers include Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer, and George Herbert Mead. They explored how social relationships and interactions affect individuals and large-scale social institutions, including religion, government, and education. Today, sociologists use qualitative techniques, including ethnography; participant observation; and case studies of a variety of social phenomena, processes, and problems as methods for exploring the meaning of social life and culture to those who live it, and in building inductive theory. Quantitative techniques engage in hypothesis testing of established theories and concepts, using techniques that include experimental designs, survey questionnaires, and network analysis. Sociology as a discipline includes “ways of knowing” that link it closely to methods of the natural sciences, and more interpretive and critical perspectives that are closer to scholarship in the humanities.

The Sociology department does not have a terminal MA program, and students seeking only a master’s degree will not be admitted. However, the master of arts degree is earned as a student progresses toward the PhD.

Degree Requirements for BA in Sociology

For general university requirements, see Graduation Requirements (Undergraduate For general university requirements, see Graduation Requirements. Students majoring in sociology must complete at least 33 semester hours (11 courses) in sociology. Requirements for the major include the following:
Honors Program

The Honors Program is designed to provide sociology majors with the opportunity to sharpen their research skills and deepen their understanding of the discipline through a two- to three-semester program of directed independent research and writing. The program also offers the opportunity for formal recognition, through Departmental Honors, of those undergraduates who have demonstrated unusual competence in sociology by successfully completing a sustained independent research project.

Eligibility—To be eligible for the program, students must have taken at least four sociology courses beyond SOCI 101 *Introduction to Sociology*, including SOCI 381 *Research Methods*. If their project requires statistical analysis, students also should complete SOCI 382 Social Statistics before beginning their research. An A- average in all sociology courses taken also is required.

Application Process—During the fall and early spring semester of their junior year, students are invited to consult with members of the faculty about a potential thesis topic. All students must have at least one faculty member in the sociology department approve their topic and agree to serve as their thesis committee chair.

Once a thesis supervisor has been identified, the student must submit a written description of their proposed research project to the departmental undergraduate advisor, Dr. Rachel Kimbro. The proposal should be two to three pages in length (double-spaced) and is due by April 1st of their junior year.

The sociology faculty will vote on the merits of the proposed thesis project at their monthly faculty meeting in mid-April. If approved, the student may begin work on the thesis immediately, or at a start time agreed on with their thesis supervisor (including summer semester, if desired).

Program—Students in the Honors Program register for two successive semesters in *Directed Honors Research* (SOCl 492 and 493). An honors thesis typically involves much discussion over both semesters between the student and their primary advisor. Students should meet early in the process to agree on ground rules for the project, to choose the other members of the thesis committee (made up of two additional faculty members, sometimes from other departments, who serve as readers and ad-hoc advisors), and to set up a schedule for discussions and submission of written work. It is the department’s experience that students who work alone without much consultation with faculty are less likely to succeed in their project than students who maintain close contact with their advisor and the department. Students also are encouraged to include other members of the committee in discussion of the thesis, especially as the project nears completion, so that their feedback can be incorporated before the final draft of the project is submitted.

Students normally begin by conducting a thorough review of the relevant literature, formulating hypotheses that grow out of the literature review, and proposing a research design that clearly describes how the data for the project are to be collected and analyzed. The research itself is usually carried out in the fall semester of the senior year (and sometimes in the summer following the junior year), and is analyzed,
written up, and defended as a completed Honor's Thesis during the spring semester of the senior year. (Students are encouraged to examine several previously written theses, which are available from the sociology department administrator.)

In addition to being read by the student's primary advisor, the thesis also is read and evaluated by the other faculty members, sometimes from other departments, who make up the student's thesis committee.

**Program Timeline**—A first draft of thesis must be turned in to the committee members no later than February 1 of the student's senior year.

After receiving feedback on the project, the student has until the last Monday in March to submit a final draft of the senior thesis to their committee.

A short presentation (10–15 minutes) of the thesis project must be given to the full sociology faculty by mid-April. Faculty will vote on whether to grant Departmental Honors to the student at the conclusion of their presentation.

**Course Requirements for Minor in Sociology**

A minor in sociology requires the successful completion of at least six classes (a minimum of 18 credit hours)

**Required Classes:**

- SOCI 101 *Introduction to Sociology*
- One methods or theory course

**Elective Classes:**

- Four electives (12 credits), including at least one 400-level class.

See SOCI in the Courses of Instruction section.

**Degree Requirements for PhD in Sociology**

The PhD program is a five-year degree program during which students must complete 90 semester hours of graduate study. Students normally obtain a master's degree after two and a half years of study and research, and take an additional three years to complete the requirements for a PhD. The course work is sequenced and is typically completed in two and a half years, at which point students are required to have completed their master's thesis and their MA degree. Students take the comprehensive exams in their sixth semester, and complete their dissertation in the next two years.

Admission—Students are admitted on a competitive basis. Admitted students must have a baccalaureate degree (BA or BS) or equivalent, a minimum 3.0 (B) GPA in undergraduate work, and the intent to complete a PhD in sociology. The admissions committee considers GRE scores, undergraduate GPA, letters of recommendation, writing samples, a personal essay, and professional experience, and strongly encourages applications from women and minority groups.

Students admitted to the program are generally offered financial support in the form of tuition scholarships and/or stipends for living expenses.

**Required Courses:**

Our program offers specialized training in the following areas: Race/Ethnicity, Urban and Community, Population Health, as well as Culture and Religion.
Required courses include:

- SOCI 580: Classical Social Theory
- SOCI 583: Contemporary Social Theory
- SOCI 381/581: Research Methods
- SOCI 584: Qualitative Research Methods
- SOCI 382/582: Social Statistics
- SOCI 613: Advanced Statistical Techniques I
- SOCI 700: Thesis Seminar
- SOCI 611: Teaching Practicum (1 credit)
- SOCI 612: Statistical Computer Programming (1 credit).

The sequence of courses will normally be as follows:

**First Semester:**
- Classical Social Theory or Contemporary Social Theory
- Research Methods or Qualitative Research Methods
- Elective 1

**Second Semester:**
- Social Statistics
- Elective 2
- Elective 3
- Statistical computer programming

**Third Semester:**
- Contemporary Social Theory or Classical Social Theory
- Advanced Statistical Techniques I
- Research Methods or Qualitative Research Methods
- Teaching Practicum (or next semester)

**Fourth Semester:**
- Thesis Seminar
- Electives
- Teaching Practicum (or previous semester)

**Semesters 5-10:**
- Electives, Comprehensive Exams, and Dissertation

All graduate students will be required to attend a Professionalization Workshop that the department will hold throughout the academic school year. With 8-10 meetings per year, these will cover a wide range of topics designed to help students prepare for the range of roles and obligations involved with an academic career. Topics may include writing a CV, preparing for academic job interviews, and applying for grants.

**Comprehensive Exams**

Students will be required to take comprehensive exams which demonstrate their expertise in two of the following four areas: 1) Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration, 2) Urban and Community, 3) Population Health, or 4) Culture and Religion. Demonstration of expertise means that students should be able to a) summarize basic questions, issues, and debates within each specialty area b) compare and contrast basic theoretical orientations and middle-range theories in each area c) understand and apply methodological approaches specific to each substantive area d) develop specific policy implications of theory and research in each area.

**Advance to Candidacy**

Upon completion of both the comprehensive examinations and the dissertation prospectus defense, the faculty will vote on whether to grant PhD candidacy to the student. Rice University requires that PhD candidacy must be achieved prior to the student’s ninth semester.