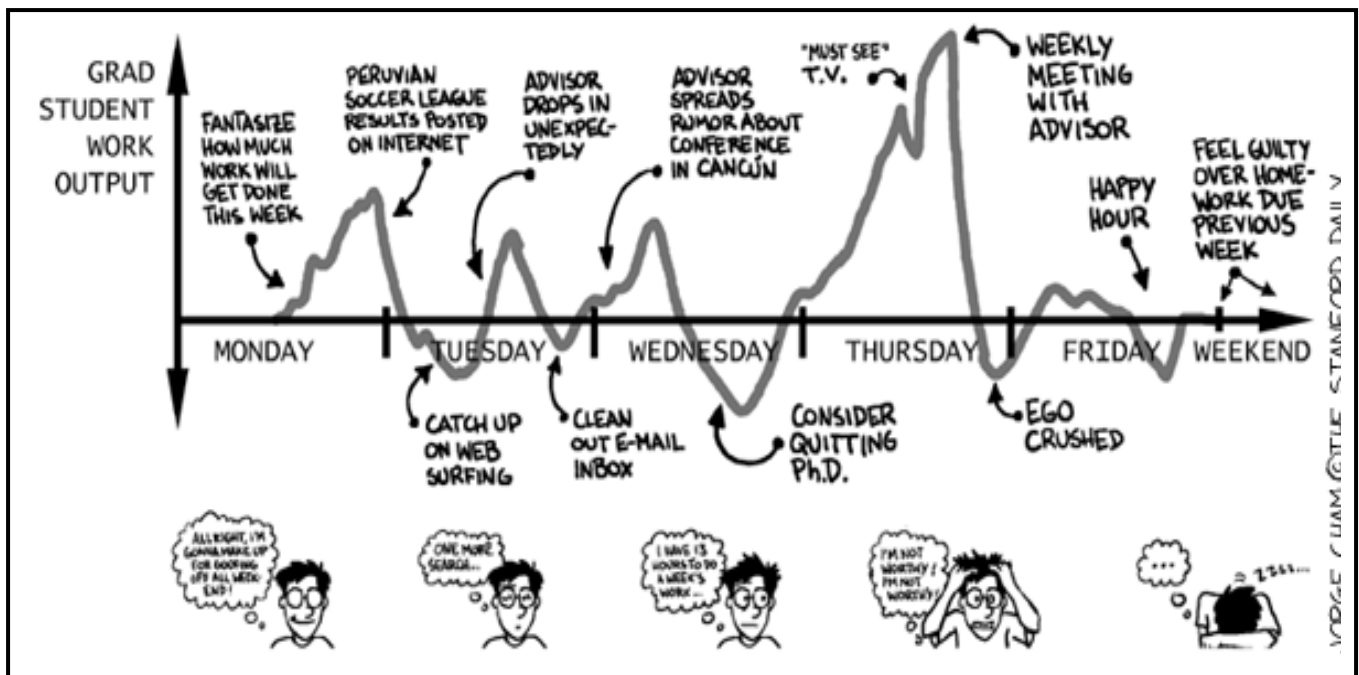


# The Smart Guide to Getting Done: Some Tips for Getting through Your BC Sociology Graduate Degree



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Department of Sociology  
Boston College  
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## MESSAGE FROM THE GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Welcome to the Boston College Sociology Department! Like all graduate programs, our department has rules and regulations, outlined in the *Guide to Graduate Study*, otherwise known as the Blue Book (*see* <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/meta-elements/pdf/bluebook.pdf>). But in addition to rules and regulations, we on the Grad Studies Committee increasingly saw that there was a need for information and friendly advice on getting through the program. We pooled our collective wisdom, and produced this *Smart Guide* in response to this perceived need. Whether you are an MA or a Ph.D. student, we hope you find it useful.

Please note that this *Smart Guide* is intended to be a living document, to be updated periodically by both its designers and its users. If you identify something that you think should be added to, deleted from, or changed in this document, please send an e-mail with your proposed change to the Director of Graduate Studies.

## THE FIRST YEAR

When you first arrive in September, you'll probably feel overwhelmed with the many details of getting established as a grad student (and if you're from out of town, getting established in Boston). The following are some tips for getting through the initial confusion.

### Selecting Courses

Unlike BC undergraduates, who take 5 courses per semester, BC graduate students take 3 to be considered "full time." Unless they have been waived out of taking the full 18 courses for the Ph.D., funded Ph.D. students *must* take 3 courses per semester for their first years, while they have their credits being paid for by GSAS. On the other hand, some MA students who do not have funding may want to consider taking only two courses per semester and completing their degree within a three-year time-frame so as to be able to maintain a paying job while taking courses. If as an MA student you register for fewer than 3 courses in any given term (or 6 over the course of a year), Sallie Mae will flag you as having dropped below full-time status, and suspend your student loan deferral (this is not true of Ph.D. students who are serving as TAs or TFs). The simplest solution to this problem is to register for a cost-free, credit-free course called Interim Study, or SC88801, for every term that you are registered for fewer than 3 courses.

The two main things to remember when selecting courses in your first year are: (1) get a running start on your required courses; and (2) take some elective courses that you like.

### Required Courses

If you plan on being registered full-time (i.e., for three courses per semester), you will want to complete at least three of your required courses during your first year; you will likely be too busy during your second year to play catch up. For Ph.D. students and Academic MA track students, required courses include two semesters of sociological theory (SC715, SC716), one semester of Social Inquiry Research Seminar (SC710), and two semesters of statistics (SC702, SC703). Applied MA track students (see below) also have to take two semesters of statistics (SC702, SC703), but have different requirements for the remaining courses, as explained below.

There are two additional things to think about when considering which required courses to take your first year. First, whether you take it your first year or your second year, you should take the Statistics sequence (SC702 and SC703) over the course of a single year, so that you don't forget the stats you learned in the first course by the time you take the second. Second, if you are an Academic MA track or Ph.D. student (see below), you need to take the Social Inquiry Research Seminar (SC710) the Spring semester immediately preceding your MA paper or thesis—which for most students will be Spring of your first year. This course is intended to prepare you to carry out your MA paper/thesis topic, and if you don't take it in your first year, you'll feel a little stranded later.

### Elective Courses

It is also very important to take some elective courses you like in your first year. Taking electives helps you to explore your interests, and will help you maintain your original enthusiasm about sociology as you work through the required courses. Choose your elective courses with potential MA topics in mind. It may also be helpful to get some information from other students about the professor teaching each course, along with looking at the syllabus. Choose wisely!

Which among the array of courses offered in the BC sociology department are appropriate for graduate students? Courses numbered 700 and above are considered to be graduate-level courses. However, because the BC graduate program is relatively small, with a correspondingly small number of 700-level courses, you will probably also be taking some 500-level courses, which are considered to be mixed graduate and undergraduate. In reality, the composition of that mix (and the actual level of the course) varies considerably from course to course; you should ask the professor before registering whether the class is more targeted toward graduate or undergraduate students. If it is the latter, it may be possible to get the professor to agree to beef up the assignments you complete so that they are more grad student-appropriate. You will probably also want to explore the possibility of taking elective courses in other departments or schools within BC (e.g., the BC Law School or the School of Education), or at area universities that belong to the Graduate Consortium. (For more information on cross-registration within the Consortium, go directly to <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/grad/consortium.html>.) Remember that only three non-sociology courses can be applied to your MA degree, except with permission of the Director of Graduate Studies.

### **Non-Classroom Courses**

In addition to regular classroom courses, most students take non-classroom course—particularly if you are beyond your first year and have a relatively clearly-developed set of interests and future plans. Non-classroom courses include Readings and Research courses, the Research Practicum, Internships, and the Second-Year Writing seminar (discussed in the section on The Second Year below). Please note that 7 out of the 10 courses required for the MA degree must be regular classroom courses.

**Readings & Research Courses.** Many students find readings and research (R&R) courses (otherwise known as independent studies) to be an excellent option for one or more courses, particularly in their 2nd and 3rd years. To put together an R&R, you must first determine a specified area of study and find faculty member to work with in that area. Generally, the student and faculty member meet the semester prior to the R&R to agree upon the expectations for the semester, including the final product to be graded. Once you are settled on the R&R, an email exchange between the faculty member, yourself and the Department Administrator must occur for you to be enrolled in the course.

Please note that the final product of an R&R could be a research paper, but could also be an MA paper, an area exam or a dissertation proposal. Some students have even used R&Rs to participate in an internship with a local organization (see below), in which case their final product may be a journal on their experiences or a document of use to the organization for which they worked.

Another option is to create a collaborative R&R with your peers in the graduate program. This is a really innovative way to explore your interests but continue to learn in a collective manner. It is also a way to take on a group research project. If you are interested in this option, you should speak to other graduate students in the program to see where interests overlap. Once you have a specified area of interest defined for an upcoming semester, you may want to collectively e-mail [adminsoc.grad@bc.edu](mailto:adminsoc.grad@bc.edu) to see if other students might be interested in joining.

**Internships.** If you would like to get course credit for sociology-related work with organizations outside Boston College, you may consider registering for the Internship in Sociology (SC540). Such internships are likely to be of interest to students who are seriously considering non-

academic careers, particularly in the not-for-profit sector (or who wish to develop or continue their links to activist or not-for-profit organizations). Internships can also be used to get experience in various for-profit applied research and consulting organizations dealing with policy related work on such issues as health, education, crime, etc. Working with an organization through an internship may also give a student valuable knowledge and connections that can help launch them into research projects in particular areas. For example, an internship with a Boston-area immigrant rights organization might pave the way for future research on the experience of immigrants in Boston. The Internship class can be taken more than once, and the projects do not need to be related.

Prior to registering for SC540, you will need to identify the group/organization you would like to work with, and propose an internship to the faculty member officially in charge of administering the internship program (John Williamson, at the time of this *Smart Guide's* completion). If you are new to Boston or are unfamiliar with local organizations, there are several good places to look for ideas. Some professors have connections to organizations they work with. Fellow graduate students can also be an excellent resource depending on the field of interest. The department holds a seminar called MRAP (Media Research Action Project) which hosts new people from activist and not-for-profit organizations each week. The Murray Graduate Student Center staff may post advertisements soliciting interns, and Murray Center staff may also have some ideas. The website [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) also has information about internships.

Together, you and the faculty member in charge of administering the internship program develop a schedule of meetings and agree upon a final product from your work during the semester. Final products vary widely, from academic papers to documents that can be used by the organization with which you conduct the internship (e.g., a pamphlet or report).

Rather than register for SC540, some students may prefer to participate in an internship by registering for an R&R class with a particular professor (see above). This option can be useful if you know a professor has contacts with an organization with which you would like to connect.

### **Choosing between the Applied or the Academic MA Tracks**

If you are in the MA program, sometime during your first year you will want to decide between the Applied and the Academic MA tracks (or that you want to fulfill the requirements for both). Both Applied and Academic tracks require that you complete 10 courses for the MA, but the composition of the courses vary, as do the non-course degree requirements. The Academic MA is designed to prepare you for a career in university teaching and research, and includes two semesters of theory, two semesters of statistics, the Social Inquiry Research Seminar, and an MA paper or thesis. The Applied MA is a “build-your-own” track designed to give you the flexibility to prepare for a career in applied sociology (e.g., in human resources, policy research, or academic administration). Applied MA students take two semesters of statistics, a single semester of sociological theory, and three additional required courses of the student’s choosing, including research methods courses and an Internship in Sociology. There is no MA thesis or paper required for the Applied MA, but Applied MA students are required to develop a Plan of Study—a brief description of the career the student plans to pursue and the courses he or she will take to pursue this goal. The requirements for the two tracks are described in greater detail in the Guide to Graduate Study. At some time during your first year, you should talk to the Director of Graduate Studies about choosing between the two tracks.

## Getting through Statistics

Before beginning any graduate-level statistics classes, students usually have polar expectations about these courses. Some students believe that Statistics will be a breeze and are looking forward to stats courses. If you are one of those students, and especially if you have had strong statistics preparation before coming to BC, you may wish to talk to the Director of Graduate Studies about skipping SC702 and consider taking Advanced Statistics courses (SC704, SC705, and SC706) instead. Most students, however, expect that statistics will make them feel like they're stuck in a rainstorm with no umbrella (i.e., miserable and helpless). This is often the case for those students who are especially interested in qualitative research and feel like statistics has too much math-jargon and will be useless to them and their work. But whether your research interests are qualitative or quantitative, statistics is a great opportunity to learn a tool that will put you in touch with a lot of what is going on in the discipline. You may never use statistics in your own research, but you'll almost certainly have to read and understand it so you will be glad you learned it.

There are a few things that you can do to make sure your statistics experience is smooth and stress-free. Stay on top of the readings. Completing the assigned reading before each class prevents you from getting lost when the professor mentions main concepts and points. Keep up with the class assignments. As a graduate student it is quite easy to begin focusing more on other courses, personal research, or non-school obligations. By providing yourself with ample time to complete the assignments, you will make sure that you have enough time to ask your professor or teacher assistant (TA) about certain areas where you might need further clarification. It is important to keep the lines of communication open with your professor and TA because they can offer you some extra help outside of class.

For both Introduction to Statistics (SC702) and Multivariate Statistics (SC703), the statistical program SPSS is used. It may sometimes be difficult to remember all of the necessary SPSS steps to complete a particular statistical test, especially if a long amount of time has passed since the class period it was discussed. Don't hesitate to ask for help: your classmates or your TA can quickly remind you what you've forgotten and save you a lot of time. Something that many students have found to be very helpful is the Results Coach in SPSS. If you right click on any table in the output and choose "Results Coach," descriptions of all the columns and symbols of that table will appear. Finally, if statistics is not your area of strength, and you feel you need someone to commit more one-on-one time than a professor or TA can offer, you should not hesitate to inquire within the department about hiring a tutor.

Beyond the professor and the TA, remember that you can use your classmates also enrolled in the class for support as well. Many students who have successfully completed the two courses of statistics talk about the advantages of forming partnerships or small groups to problem solve with when questions arise and work alongside while completing assignments. Statistics can even be social!

## Job Opportunities for MA Students

Being a graduate student in Boston is expensive. The following are some pointers to help ensure that your financial situation does not keep you from making the most of your experience as an MA student.

The MA program is designed to be a two-year program, but can be completed over three years. Although every student's schedule is unique, it is important that you recognize and take into consideration the time that you need to dedicate to your courses and personal research, before accepting

just *any* job. Being an MA student is job in itself. Along with finding a job that is compatible with your duties as a student, it may also be helpful to find a job that you are truly interested in, whether it's working for a non-profit organization, a research institute, or as a university administrator.

Because it is extremely helpful to have an employer who understands your responsibilities as a graduate student, Boston College may be the best place to work. Most full-time BC employees are allowed to take two courses per semester for free, which can also help cut down on your bills. Inquire within the sociology department; at the very least, other Sociology graduate students may know of job openings on campus or at their place of work. The Murray Graduate Center is dedicated to supporting and enriching graduate life at Boston College. Among the services it provides is information about on-campus employment opportunities. The jobs posted on their website include positions in Campus Ministry, International Programs, and Student Development, to name a few areas of employment (see <http://www.bc.edu/offices/gsc/mgc.html>). Most positions are posted at the beginning of the Spring semester for the following school year.

### **External Funding for M.A. and Ph.D. Students**

Another great way to fund your studies, whether you are an MA or a Ph.D. student, is to obtain a predoctoral fellowship. Such fellowships can provide you with funding for one year or for multiple years. It takes some effort to prepare an application, but it is well worth it if you actually get a fellowship. If you are an M.A. student, a predoctoral fellowship will allow you to focus on your graduate studies without having to spend time on an outside job. If you are a Ph.D. student, a fellowship will let focus on your research without having to serve as a teaching assistant. Such fellowships look great on CVs and résumés and they can help you obtain funding in the future.

One good list of predoctoral funding opportunities is maintained by Tufts University: <http://gradstudy.tufts.edu/researchteaching/opportunitiesOutsideTufts/predocutorial.htm>. To ensure success in obtaining external funding, it is best to apply for multiple fellowships, as it typically takes more time to prepare the first application than the subsequent ones. See also the BC sociology department website on funding opportunities at <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/grad/funding.html>.

### **Being a Teaching Assistant**

As part of their funding package, most Ph.D. students in the BC sociology department serve as Teaching Assistants (TAs) for their first three years, followed by two years of service as Teaching Fellows (TFs). Whereas TAs are assigned to a professor's course to help with grading and other tasks, TFs are responsible for preparing and teaching their own courses (two per academic year). The Graduate Director is responsible for making TA assignments; the Chair for assigning TFs

In making TA assignments, the Graduate Director has to balance the preferences of faculty and graduate students, as well as the needs of the department. Because priority for TA slots goes to high-enrollment courses (and to certain labor-intensive courses, such as graduate and undergraduate statistics), you may often find yourself TAing for a course that is not in your major area of interest. This is not necessarily a bad thing—part of your training in sociology involves learning about more than one or two narrow areas within the discipline. However, you should also try to ensure that some of your TA assignments fit with your long-term research and teaching interests. The best way to do this is to find out what courses will be eligible for TA assignments, and to ask professors with whom you are interested in working if they are teaching a TA-eligible course. If a student and faculty member have

reached a prior agreement about TAing, the Graduate Director takes that very seriously in making TA assignments.

The workload for TAs in the sociology department is supposed to average out to approximately 15 hours per week (if you are routinely asked to do a lot more than this, you should notify the Graduate Director). Typically, the professor will want you to keep up with class readings, attend class, and do some grading. In some cases, you may also be asked to teach one or two weekly discussion sections. TA assignments with discussion sections typically involve more work, but also provide students with more valuable teaching experience.

For tips on being a Teaching Fellow, see the section below on Preparing for Teaching.

## **Getting Advice**

Both MA and Ph.D. students should have an academic advisor at all times. Typically, your academic advisor is the Chair of your committee for your MA and/or Doctoral Dissertation. Because most graduate students do not arrive at BC with a clear MA project in mind (much less having selected a Committee Chair), all first-year Ph.D. and MA students are automatically assigned to the Director of Graduate Studies as their temporary, default advisor. You should feel free to make an appointment with the Graduate Director at any time if you have questions about registering for courses, choosing a substantive advisor, planning your upcoming year, or any other matters pertaining to your graduate education.

When choosing your advisor, take into account not only the research interests but also the personality and mentoring styles of different faculty members – getting along with your advisor is crucial to an optimal graduate program experience. Please note, however, that choosing an academic advisor is not irreversible—you can always switch advisors! Ph.D. students, in particular, may find themselves working with different advisors as their research and teaching interests evolve. When selecting or switching advisors, just make sure to notify your previous advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies so that the department has a record of who your current advisor is.

Beyond your formal graduate advisor, it is highly recommended that you talk with your peers, those further along in the graduate program for advice and other faculty members. You will likely find that those right around you may have excellent suggestions on courses to take, particular methodologies and softwares to use, funding opportunities, TAing and grading, working with local organizations, and even journals to consider for publication. Different faculty and students may have different perspectives so ask several people. Our department strives to cultivate an atmosphere that is friendly and welcoming, where folks help each other out in cooperative efforts. Please feel free to ask around if you are making a decision!

## **On Being Holistic**

A final thought about your first year—try to set aside some time for activities and interests outside the department. This is particularly true if you are a Ph.D. student. Getting a Ph.D. in sociology is like running a marathon; it takes a long time, and you need to conserve your energy for the long haul. This means keeping yourself sane and balanced so you can keep up your strength. For example, many of you may have been inspired to study sociology by your interest in activism and social justice. Particularly if you are from out of town, your first year is a good time to explore local activist groups

and other activities. The best source of information on these activities is other graduate students in the program, many of whom are involved with a range of off-campus organizations.

## THE SECOND YEAR

During your second year, you will continue to take your required Core classes. If you are a Ph.D. student or in the Academic MA track, you will also probably be completing your MA Thesis or Paper. Under department rules, Ph.D. students are expected to finish and defend their MA Paper/Thesis by **June 1** of their second year (see the *Guide to Graduate Study* for further details).

**A Special Note for Second-Year MA Students:** If you are a second-year MA student with deferred student loans, you may face a logistical problem in your second year. Most of you will only need 4 classes this year to complete your MA degrees. However, if you register for fewer than 3 courses in any given term (or 6 over the course of a year), Sallie Mae will flag you as having dropped below full-time status, and suspend your student loan deferral. The simplest solution to this problem, according to GSAS, is for you to register for a cost-free, credit-free course called Interim Study, or SC88801, for every term that you are registered for fewer than 3 courses. This will enable you to keep your full-time status.

### The Second-Year MA Thesis or Paper

What is a Second-Year MA Paper? First, you should be aware of what it isn't. The Second-Year MA paper **is not a term paper**. Term papers are produced at the end of a course, typically after several weeks of preparation. In contrast, the second-year MA paper is something in which you invest many months of time—it is a much more substantial and serious piece of scholarship.

That being said, an MA Paper **is not a book** (or a dissertation) either. Dissertations are multi-chapter behemoths lasting hundreds of pages. A Second-Year MA paper should typically be 30-50 pages long, double-spaced.

Finally, an MA Paper **is not a publishable article**—or at least it doesn't have to be. Many Ph.D. students will later want to use their MA Papers as the basis for one of their Area Exams, which means they will submit it to a peer-reviewed journal (and defend it in an area). But a typical MA paper will need further revisions to become publishable. Under department rules, an MA paper is ready to be defended when it is ready to be submitted for presentation at a professional meeting—a less stringent standard than publishability.

There are three approved formats for the MA thesis or paper. They are, (1) An empirical study involving the analysis of quantitative or qualitative data; (2) An original analytic contribution to theoretical literature in sociology; and (3) A policy analysis pertaining a particular social issue or problem. Since most MA papers fit into the first category, this means that you are probably going to be doing some empirical research—whether it be interviewing, ethnographic fieldwork, historical analysis, or statistical analysis of quantitative data.

Doing sociological research and writing it up is both a demanding and rewarding experience, and is a central part of your professional training at BC. Because such research takes a lot of thought and planning, it is extremely important for you to take the Research Methods class the second semester of your first year, and start thinking about and working on your project the summer between your first and second years (see above). If you are doing interviews or fieldwork, it is also extremely important for you to submit your proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) well before the beginning of the

fall semester. IRB approval process can be lengthy and unpredictable, and you do not want it to delay your data collection.

The MA Thesis/Paper generally takes a lot of time, thought, and effort. That means that this is a year you will want to clear the decks. In other words, you will want to postpone taking on an extra job, volunteer work, etc., and set aside time to work on your Thesis or Paper. It's also **a good idea to refrain from registering for 3 regular courses each semester during your second year**, since you will find it tough to work on 6 regular courses, serve as a TA, *and* work on your MA. Whether you are an Academic MA or a Ph.D. student, you should consider taking the Second Year Writing seminar, which is designed to guide you through the process of researching and writing your MA paper (see below). Especially if you are a funded Ph.D. student, you should also consider signing up for at least one additional Readings and Research course in the fall semester for the specific purpose of working on your MA Paper. These strategies will help you finish up your MA while remaining registered full-time (and remaining sane).

As you start this first major project, consider managing your references in RefWorks (the citation software supported by BC—see <http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/howdoi/howto/refworks.html>). You are likely going to be working with dozens of citations. RefWorks allows you to electronically import references for books, journal articles, videos, etc. from online databases, organize your references into folders according to your topics of interest or for particular assignments or projects, insert references in a variety of formats (e.g., AJS, ASA, or APA) into the body of your research paper, and generate formatted references pages (i.e., bibliographies). All of your references will be stored on the RefWorks server, so you can access your references from any location with an Internet connection. RefWorks can save you a lot of time in the long run.

If you are planning to search for literature while being off campus, it can be helpful to set up BC VPN (Virtual Private Network) on your computer: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/help/getstarted/network/vpn.html>. A VPN connection will allow you to easily open full-text articles even if you find them using non-library resources, e.g., a search engine or Google Scholar.

### **Choosing between an MA Paper or an MA Thesis**

Under departmental rules, there is no substantive difference in the structure or content of an MA Paper versus an MA Thesis. In other words, a Thesis isn't any longer, any more difficult, or of any higher quality than a Paper. The main difference between the two is that a Thesis (but not a Paper) is bound and placed in O'Neill Library. A Thesis must therefore meet special formatting guidelines and be submitted to GSAS well ahead of the student's graduation date (see the Blue Book for details, or go directly to <http://www.bc.edu/schools/gsas/academics/thesis-guide.html> and <http://www.bc.edu/schools/gsas/currentstudents/studentforms.html>). The advantage of completing a Thesis is that it has a more official status as a public document; M.A. students intending to apply to Ph.D. programs may elect to complete a Thesis for this reason. A Thesis is also eligible for competition for external awards for M.A. Theses. The advantages of a Paper are that it involves considerably fewer bureaucratic procedures, does not need to be submitted to GSAS, and does not need to be completed as far ahead of the graduation date.

## **The Second Year Writing Seminar**

The writing seminar is intended for MA and Ph.D. students working on their MA theses/papers (but is also suitable for other students working on research projects intended to be presented at professional conferences). It is entirely dedicated to supporting students through the process of research and writing. It meets approximately every two weeks over the course of two semesters. Students only register one semester for the writing seminar, typically in the Spring: it is a 3-credit course, not a 6-credit course. In addition to support and guidance through the process of research and writing, the Writing Seminar provides a good way for funded Ph.D. students to maintain full-time registration status while setting aside time to work on their MAs. Unfunded students who are paying for their own credits may want to consider auditing the Writing Seminar rather than registering, so as not to incur any extra costs.

## **Presenting Your Research**

Once you have done your research and are writing your paper, consider presenting it at a professional conference. It is not an actual requirement, but it is an important step in your professional development. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences provides partial reimbursement to grad students to travel to conferences (*see* <http://www.bc.edu/schools/gsas/currentstudents/conference.html>).

The biggest conference in the discipline is the annual meetings of American Sociological Association held every August; submissions to this conference must be complete papers (20 pages or so) and they are typically due in mid-January. If your paper is not ready yet, but you anticipate that it will be by August, consider submitting to the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) that usually holds its conferences at the same time and place with the ASA meetings--SSSP does not require complete papers and accepts extended abstracts. SSSP also has travel grants for grad students that will pay for a portion of your travel expenses.

Another great venue for graduate student presentations is Eastern Sociological Society; these conferences are smaller and typically provide a friendly audience for your first presentation experience. ESS also accepts extended paper abstracts rather than entire papers. Finally, you should also look into student-organized conferences and field-specific conferences—such conferences can provide a wonderful experience and help you form closer ties with others in the discipline. And, compared to larger conferences, field-specific conferences can also provide you with more detailed feedback on your work.

Many conferences distinguish between regular paper sessions and either roundtables or poster sessions, so even if your paper didn't make it into a regular session, it will nevertheless be included in the program. Beware that while regular paper sessions will have AV equipment, roundtables typically will not. But with either presentation format, you will have to be brief – practice your presentation ahead of time to make sure it fits the allotted time (typically 15-20 minutes). Note that poster sessions require that you present your research in the form of a poster. In preparation for the conference, it might be a good idea to order business cards—for example, having them makes it easier to ask someone to send you their paper.

## APPLYING TO PH.D. PROGRAMS

Many of our M.A. students are interested in moving into Ph.D. programs after they get their B.C. degrees. There are a number of strategies that will increase your likelihood of being accepted into a program with funding. Here are some of them.

1. **Timing.** Generally speaking, it is inadvisable to apply to a Ph.D. program in your first year as an M.A. student. You have not accumulated enough of a track record, will not have your thesis research to send, and will not have enough experience with faculty to get well-informed letters. In short, waiting until the second year to apply will give you a much stronger application.
2. **Advising.** Get a good advisor to help you navigate the process. Find someone you trust who has experience.
3. **Writing sample.** The choice of writing sample is an important decision. Go over with your advisor. You should submit a piece of writing of 15-30 pages—ideally one that contains empirical research. Don't submit an excessively long writing sample (e.g., 60 pages), as this will just annoy the admissions committees.
4. **GREs.** Are very important. If your old scores are outdated, or lower than you would like them to be, do whatever you can to get the highest scores possible. This means taking practice tests, studying math you may have forgotten, etc. GREs are a shorthand way that programs sift through competitive pools. Do not shortchange yourself in this area. It may be unpleasant, but do focus strongly on this aspect of your application, as it will yield high returns.
5. **Letters of recommendation.** Try to get 3 letters from faculty members who know you well. For example, faculty members who have had you in small classes are better letter-writers than those who have had you in large classes. Faculty members who have had you in class recently are better letter-writers than those who had you a long time ago. People outside the discipline are less useful for application to a sociology program and non-academic employers are even less so. Do not use undergraduate faculty unless their connection with you is recent.
6. **Research record.** If you can get involved in doing research for or with a faculty member before applying, that will help a lot. The decision to admit you to a Ph.D. program is in many ways a decision about your competence in doing research.

## THE THIRD YEAR

After completing their MA papers/theses, Ph.D. students need to think about facing the next hurdle—the Area Exams. When you hit the job market, you will find that it is a big advantage to be able to make the claim that you have deep knowledge in more than one subfield of sociology. Reading and research for your Area Exams helps you make a more informed choice with respect to a dissertation topic. It also helps you prepare for teaching courses, and may lead to a published journal article that will help you on the academic job market.

Below are some tips about how to get through your Area Exams as quickly and productively as possible. The place to begin is with a careful reading of the section of *The Guide to Graduate Study* that deals with Comprehensive Examinations, particularly the subsection on Specialty Area Examinations.

### **The Research Practicum**

In the third year, in order to make progress on area exams, students are encouraged to take R&Rs and Research Practicums with their comprehensive examination committee members. RPs are like R&Rs (see above), but carry six rather than three credits. You could consider signing up for an RP with the chair of each exam committee. RPs also include two meetings per semester with other faculty and students who are also doing an RP; at these meetings, you will present your work. At least one of these meetings takes place at the end of the semester and functions as a deadline to show progress from the beginning of the semester. You can consider taking one or two RPs during the third year.

If you are preparing for a comprehensive exam in Quantitative Methods, you may want to take fewer independent research credits and opt for regular classes instead, in order to master more methods. Like all students, you should discuss your course choices with your advisor.

### **Finishing Your Area Exams While Simultaneously Finishing Your Coursework**

During the third year, you should finish up the required 54 credits (18 courses and independent research credits) that you need to complete as a requirement for the Ph.D. degree. Ideally, you should also finish both Area Exams, because in your fourth year, you will be teaching your own courses as a TF—a rewarding but time-consuming job, particularly for first-time teachers. It is to your advantage to finish up your Area Exams while your workload is relatively light, so that you have enough funded time left in the program to work on your doctoral dissertation.

If you have been able to take courses in your areas of interest during the second year, you should probably sign up for a good number of R&R or RP credits in the third year in order to put time into your schedule to make progress on your research. If the courses you need are available in the third year, take them then. See above on R&Rs and RPs. To do this, approach a member of your Area Exam committee (typically the Chair) and ask whether s/he would be willing to supervise an R&R or RP. You should specifically ask that the Area Exam (whether it is the journal article or take-home exam) be submitted in lieu of a final paper.

You can also begin working on your area exams during the summer before the third year.

## **Choosing between Journal Articles and Take-Home Exams**

In fulfilling the Area exam requirements you have some choices to make. One big choice is whether to do one exam in the form of a journal article and one take-home exam, two exams in the form of journal articles, or two take-home exams. How do you decide? If you check around with different faculty in our department you will find some faculty that will support each of these options. The following are some guidelines, but you should keep in mind that not all of the faculty in our department will agree or will give the same weight to the various arguments that can be made in favor of each of these options. In general, it is important to consider two criteria: (1) the time it takes to complete Area Exams and (2) your career aspirations.

### **Time**

In general, the reading list for the take-home option will be equivalent to between one and two graduate course on that topic. Thus, if you pick an area such as medical sociology, the reading that you do will take at least as much time as one graduate seminar on that topic and it should not take you more time than two seminars on that topic. If there are seminars offered on the topic you select, you can take them in preparation for your take-home exam. As mentioned above, you can also take Readings & Research courses specifically geared toward preparing the reading list and doing the readings. Please note that if you select Quantitative Methods as a take-home exam area, there is a different process that entails writing mini-papers on selected advanced quantitative topics; thus, this option might take somewhat more time than regular take-home exam.

If you elect to write an article that is suitable for submission to a refereed journal and that stands a reasonable chance of eventually being accepted (most likely after making some changes in response to comments from reviewers), it is likely going to take more time than it takes to do the reading for two graduate seminars. The actual time it will take will most likely be the equivalent of at least three courses for your first article and it might well take more time if you count the time you will spend revising that article before it is actually accepted for publication.

When making this decision, you should take into consideration where you stand with your second-year Master's paper. If your MA paper is a solid piece of research already, it will take less time to prepare it for publication. However, there will be instances in which it becomes clear that the paper is, for any of a variety of reasons, unlikely to be publishable. It could be that it would take too long to get the paper to a publishable level or that the strength of the findings is not at the level required to gain acceptance for publication in a peer reviewed journal. If you think that might be the case, consult with your Area Exam chair and consider shifting to the take-home Area Exam option.

In summary, it will likely take more time to finish your Area Exams if you emphasize the journal article options. Based on considerations of time, this could make a case for doing two take-home exams, or for selecting a mixed-model (one take-home and one exam in the form of an article).

### **Your Career Plans**

In addition to getting through your exams in a timely manner, you should make sure that these exams become a useful experience for your future career. If your eventual goal is a job at a college that puts a very heavy focus on teaching (which in some cases will involve teaching four courses per semester), a strong case can be made for doing one or even two take-home exams. Such schools will often be particularly interested in evidence that you have a lot of teaching experience, that you enjoy

teaching, that you want to emphasize teaching, and that you are an excellent teacher. Relative to other schools with more of a research agenda, they will be less interested in evidence that you can publish in refereed journals. Refereed journal publication is also less important if you are interested in a non-academic career in a research institute or non-governmental organization (NGO).

In contrast, if your goal is to get a job at a research university like Boston College (i.e., an academic department that has a Ph.D. program), your publication record, and particularly publications in refereed journals, is going to be given quite a bit of attention. With this career goal, you should aim to publish at least one article, better yet two or more. If this is your goal, then the best choice may be to do both Area Exams as journal articles even though this option will take you longer.

If your goal is to teach in a selective liberal arts school (e.g., Middlebury, Vassar, or Amherst) you are going to find that they will want to see evidence that you excel with respect to teaching and demonstrate potential with respect to publication. If this is your goal, it might make the most sense to select one exam as a journal article and one as a take-home exam. However, some would argue that if this is your goal, selecting two journal articles also makes sense with your teaching potential demonstrated through a careful selection of the actual courses that you manage to teach while a graduate student.

### **Some Tips for Doing Take-Home Exams**

As mentioned above, in preparation for your take-home exam, you should prepare a reading list equivalent to approximately 2 graduate courses on the topic. Ask your committee about their reading list expectations early on. The number of items on the list may vary depending on your area, as well as on the number of articles versus books. Sometimes the list may include both the required readings that you will carefully read and recommended readings that you will simply skim. You may want to find students who already took an exam in your area to see what their reading list looked like.

Part of the objective of take-home exams is to teach you how to research and learn about a specific subfield for yourself. You can begin by consulting with your advisor for specific suggestions which might include: (1) To read a textbook or two to get a feel of the general area; (2) To negotiate with committee members a set of key readings to prepare for the examination; (3) To look at key handbooks in the field and examine review essays, such as those in the *Annual Review of Sociology*; (4) To research and scan major journals of the subfield; (5) To learn about organizations in the subfield.

If there are seminars offered on the topic you select, you can take them in preparation for your take-home exam and use their syllabi as the starting point for your own list. You can also take Reading & Research courses to prepare the reading list and do the readings (see above).

When your reading list is ready and you have read most of the items on it, you should discuss the issue of exam questions with your committee (see the *Guide to Graduate Study* for guidelines). Your participation in this process is important, because it gives you a chance to make the most of your exam experience. If your questions are carefully selected, then the writing you will do at this stage will help you better formulate your dissertation topic and can even be useful for the literature review for your dissertation.

## **Some Tips for Choosing Specialty Areas**

You can choose to take a specialty area exam in any of the many subfields defined by the American Sociological Association (ASA), or in any topic of similar breadth (as long as you clear it with the Director of Graduate Studies). If the Graduate Director approves it and if you can get two faculty members to agree to examine you on the topic, you can take an Area Exam in it. If you are committed to a particular area but are having trouble finding two committee members, you are allowed to look outside the department – the second committee member can be someone from another department or even from a different university. You can ask your committee chair to help you find the second member.

This means you have a large number of choices. There are several factors that you will want to bear in mind when choosing an area exam topic. First, you should take personal interests and passions to take into consideration. Second, there are practical reasons for taking an exam in one of the Faculty Cluster areas defined on the department website. Third, you might want to consider the job market you will eventually face if you are teaching/doing research in a particular area.

### **Your Interests and Passions**

Some students come to the program with clearly developed sociological interests that easily translate into two areas of specialization. Many students, however, have a very broad range of interests, so they have a more difficult time choosing their areas; it is also common for interests to change while in the program. Therefore, although it is certainly important to take your passions into account when selecting areas of specialization, it may be helpful to consider some additional factors.

### **Faculty Cluster Areas**

You should consider taking an area exam in one of the Faculty Cluster areas listed on the departmental website. Faculty clusters are groups of sociology faculty members with common areas of expertise who agree to serve on area examinations on a regular basis. For a faculty cluster area to be listed, at least three faculty members have to agree to serve on exams in this area on a regular basis. The biggest advantage to taking an area exam in a Faculty Cluster is that it essentially gives you a guaranteed committee, thus saving you the trouble of hunting down two willing committee members.

### **The Job Market**

When selecting your areas, it is helpful to consider the size of the job market and the number of people competing for positions in a given area. If you expect to have geographical restrictions when you are on the market, it may make sense to select areas for which there will be a lot of positions.

If you are interested in an academic job, you might want to look at the job openings listed with ASA throughout the year. These can be found at <http://jobbank.asanet.org/>. Many of these listings are also posted at the candidate “rumor mill” blogs, e.g., <http://www.socrumormill2007.blogspot.com/>. You might also want to look at the number of graduate programs listed in the ASA’s *Guide to Graduate Departments of Sociology* (at the back of the book). For example, in the 2007 edition you will find the following listings: Military Sociology (1 department), Visual Sociology (1 department), Science and Technology (9 departments), Social Networks (11 departments), Aging/Social Gerontology (37 departments), Environmental Sociology (33 departments), and Medical Sociology (75 departments). If you pick an area with a high number of departments that offer a focus in that area, you will probably

find more job listings for positions in that area, but also more new Ph.D. grads on the market who can claim strength in that area. The various sections at ASA tend to send out job listings for relevant positions, so it may be a good idea to join sections that fit your interests and to monitor their mailing lists.

If you are interested in getting a job in an academic department with a Ph.D. program, you should also consider the availability of post-doc positions in your areas as you may need to spend 1 or 2 years after getting your Ph.D. in a post-doc program. A post-doc typically offers you a wage substantially above what you can earn as a graduate student, but substantially below what you will earn as a tenure track assistant professor. It also offers you a lot of time to publish, to get your post-dissertation research started, and to learn how to get your research funded. It offers you an alternative if you do not get the job you want in a place you want when you go on the job market the year you finish up your Ph.D. If you want to maximize your chances of obtaining a post-doc, you may want to select areas with a substantial number of post-doc opportunities. Some areas (e.g. Medical Sociology, Sociology of the Family) have many such opportunities; many areas have none. How do you find out? Again, check the ASA Job Bank, section mailing lists, and “rumor mills.” Also, check with faculty at BC--faculty members with connections to researchers in departments with post-doc programs may be able to make some introductions for you.

## Some Tips for Preparing Publishable Articles

As mentioned above, it is often advantageous to turn your second-year Master's paper into a publishable paper. When you have finished your Master's paper, make sure to discuss this issue with your Master's paper committee and ask them for specific feedback on how to turn your paper into a publishable paper (and whether they think this a practical option).

You will note that *The Guide to Graduate Study* states that the "Publishable Paper Option" calls for a paper that your committee judges suitable for submission to a refereed journal. This does not mean that the paper will or must actually be accepted for publication. If your goal is a job at a more teaching-intensive college, a research institute, or an NGO, whether or not your paper is actually published is less important than if your aim is a job at a research university. If you are interested in a research university job, you will want to have several such articles accepted for publication. Some committees will keep you working on a paper longer in the hope that the final paper will end up being accepted for publication (typically after revisions made in response to comments from reviewers). If you select a committee that tends to be more flexible with respect to how strong it needs to be to meet this standard, you might be able to finish this requirement faster. But keep in mind that if you submit a paper that in reality has little chance of being accepted for publication, this may make it less likely that you will later be able to be able to pursue a research university or a liberal arts college career. Once again, you should weigh your decision based on your future career aspirations.

The instructions in the *Guide to Graduate Study* also state that "The paper to be submitted is to be single-authored," but that "Under exceptional circumstances...upon the approval of the student's two-member exam committee, a co-authored paper may be submitted for review..." If this your first attempt at preparing an article for a refereed journal, you may need a lot of help, to the point that some faculty would assume that it is only honest to include them as co-authors. However, if you want to submit a co-authored article as your publishable paper, you need to get permission from both members of your committee to do so and you must be very clearly the lead author on the article. You must be the person who has the primary responsibility for carrying out the research and the primary responsibility for the writing. The faculty co-author contribution will generally be limited to giving you a lot of advice, to reading and commenting on several versions of the article, help with what it means to follow the instructions for authors for the specified journal, the selection of an appropriate journal given topic and the relative importance of the contribution of the article, and help with the final editing of the article before it is submitted. The faculty member's goal is to teach you how to write an article and to get you to do as much as possible so you will learn as much as possible from the experience.

In selecting the target journal, it might be helpful to aim high at first. Ask yourself what it would take to make your paper publishable in one of the top sociology journals (ASR, AJS, *Social Forces*), and then try to bring it to that level. When deciding on a journal, it is often helpful to try to find a "model article" – an article in that journal that addresses related issues which can be used as a blueprint for structuring your paper. It is also important to follow the journal's guidelines in terms of paper length and formatting. It is difficult but not impossible to get your paper into one of the top journals while in grad school. But even a rejection from one of those journals can be useful, because you typically get excellent feedback from anonymous peer reviewers. Take that feedback seriously; even if you will resubmit your paper to another journal, it is a good idea to address these critiques, because the same reviewer might get your paper.

In addition to submitting your paper to a journal, consider nominating your paper for some of the numerous graduate student paper awards. Many ASA sections and divisions of SSSP give out such

awards annually; ESS also has a few awards it gives out, and some of the more specialized professional societies might also have awards. The deadlines for such awards are typically in January-March, and the competition is not nearly as steep as you might imagine – oftentimes, award committees are selecting from 5-10 nominated papers, or even fewer, so the chances are pretty high. Typically, you do not have to be the member of that association to nominate your paper, and the paper does not have to be submitted for presentation at the corresponding conference.

“When you select the publishable paper option you are required to participate in a one-hour oral examination on the article itself and the specialty area in which the article is situated.” This wording from the *Guide to Graduate Study* leaves open the question as to how much time will be spent during the exam dealing with the paper itself and how much dealing with the literature on the specialty area in which the article is situated. Some committees will ask you to prepare a list of about 10 very important readings in the specialty area, some may suggest 50 primary readings and another 50 readings to skim and be aware of. Most will be somewhere in between. Committees will also vary in the breadth of the area in which they expect you to defend your paper.

Given that most publishable journal articles in refereed journals are quite focused and given that the preparation of an article that really is publishable takes a lot more time than it takes to prepare for a take-home exam, you may find that some committees will want to focus primarily on the reading that is cited in the actual article and not on reading from an external reading list. You should definitely talk to your exam committee in advance to make sure there is agreement as to how this part of the exam will be handled and how much time you will be expected to invest in broad reading on the specialty area in which this article is situated.

## PREPARING FOR TEACHING

Unless you have a fellowship or other special funding arrangement, if you are a Ph.D. student in your fourth year you will probably be “taking the plunge” into teaching your own courses (one per semester) as a Teaching Fellow (TF). Teaching a course is obviously a lot more work than assisting a professor as a TA, but it also has benefits, such as freedom to teach what you like in the way you like. Most importantly, having some courses under your belt (and on your CV) is a big plus when you are looking for jobs. The following are some tips for making a smooth transition into your role as teacher.

### **In the Long Term**

There are several things you can do in the year or two leading up to your fourth year to prepare for teaching. One is to think about what courses you might want to teach when you are preparing your area exams—doing an area exam on a topic is great preparation for teaching a course. You also might want to take advantage of our department’s Teaching Apprenticeship (SC900), which involves working closely with a professor and co-teaching a class with them for course credit. The Connors Family Learning Center offers frequent seminars on the nuts and bolts of teaching, as well as a certificate in college teaching that students may complete over the course of their graduate education (<http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring/teachingsupport.html>).

### **In the Medium Term**

In the second semester of your third year, and during the summer between your third and fourth years, there are some other things that you can do to ease the transition into teaching. One is to let the Chair know in the Spring semester what courses you are interested in teaching, and to find out what courses the department would be interested in having you teach. It might be strategically useful for you to prepare to teach one course (e.g., a Core course such as Introduction to Sociology) for which there is high demand, since that will enable you to teach the course repeatedly, allowing you to perfect the course and minimize preparation time.

The Sociology Department has pages on the website with information that may be helpful to instructors. The Smart Guide (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/grad/handbook.html>) has a section on Preparing for Teaching; the Syllabus section (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/faculty/syllabi.html>) has syllabi for departmental courses going back to Fall of 2005; and the Faculty Resources page (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/faculty/resources.html>) gives nuts and bolts information about how to view courses, order books, email your class, grant overrides, create course websites, etc.

The Connors Center professional staff and the three Graduate Fellows are also available to talk with instructors individually about teaching issues, to do a confidential mid-semester evaluation, or to lend out books or articles on teaching. (For more information on any of the Connors teaching resources, call 552-0835 or stop in the center at the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of O’Neill.)

To help prepare students for teaching, the sociology department holds an all-day teaching seminar for third-year students at the end of the Spring semester—attending this is mandatory and extremely important.

Make sure to get organized well ahead of when classes start in September! Start working on your syllabus as soon as possible. It can be really overwhelming putting together a syllabus the first

time around, but the investment of time and effort in that initial phase is well worth it. If you are preparing a syllabus for a Core course, bear in mind that BC has specific guidelines for such courses (you should speak to the Director of Undergraduate Studies to get a copy of these guidelines). You might want to model your syllabus after the syllabus of a professor teaching in your area, or whose teaching you admire. The ASA has an online database with teaching resources, including course syllabi (see <http://trails.asanet.org/Pages/default.aspx>). Syllabi from courses recently offered in the BC sociology department are available at <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/sociology/faculty/syllabi.html>. There are also many useful Internet resources providing more general ideas on how to prepare a syllabus. To see one example, go to [http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P2\\_1.php](http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/P2_1.php). Make sure to get your online reserve and BC bookstore orders in well before the end of the summer, or you may find that your class can't access the readings in September.

In addition to preparing your syllabus well ahead of time and getting in your course reserve and bookstore requests, you probably will want to prepare some of your lectures and class assignments, as this will take some of the pressure off during the semester (and let you get some of your own work done in addition to teaching during the school year).

### **In September**

The first day of class is important for setting the tone for the rest of the semester. Since BC undergraduates shop around for courses during the drop-add period, it's also a day to impart crucial information about course content and expectations, so students can make informed decisions about whether they want to drop or add the course. For some useful tips on preparing for the first day of class, see <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources/guides/quick/index.html>. Remember that although some people seem to be born gifted teachers, for most of us, teaching is a learned skill. If things seem a little rocky the first semester you teach, think of it as a learning experience that will make you a better teacher in the long run!

## GETTING THROUGH THE DISSERTATION

For most doctoral students, researching and writing the dissertation is the biggest challenge of their graduate careers. Below are some strategies for helping you to get through to the finish line.

### Looking Ahead

There are some long-range strategies to help you get a good start on your dissertation long before you start working on it. One is to plan one or both of your area exams in anticipation of your dissertation proposal. If you already have a solid knowledge of the literature in an area, it will make it a lot easier for you to formulate your research questions and research design, and to write up the literature review for your proposal. And if you selected the publishable paper option for one or both of your exams, you can incorporate the research you did for those publishable papers into your dissertation.

Another good long-range strategy is to apply for external fellowships to work on your dissertation research. (Although GSAS has a competitive dissertation fellowship, the sociology department typically nominates students who have completed, or are near completing, their research, and are starting the writing phase.) Why bother applying for an external fellowship if you are already guaranteed a stipend as a TF? There are several good reasons. One is that most external fellowships will provide you with a larger stipend. A second is that if you are planning on doing research away from campus (e.g., in another country), a fellowship will give you the flexibility to be off campus (which is not true if you have to come in to teach). Third, and most importantly, serious sociological research takes a lot of time, and can be extremely difficult to pull off while you are busy teaching and grading! Having a fellowship can give you the flexibility and freedom to do higher-quality research and finish up sooner.

To get an external fellowship you need to think pretty far ahead. Typically, fellowship applications are due in the Fall, a full year before you actually begin receiving the fellowship. That means that you need to have the foresight to put together an application long before you start working on your dissertation (probably while you are still completing your area exams). The BC Graduate Student Association offers research grants (GSA Research Expense Grants) to fund graduate students' research projects: [http://www.bc.edu/offices/gsc/gsa/gsa\\_funding.html](http://www.bc.edu/offices/gsc/gsa/gsa_funding.html). The BC Office for Sponsored Programs maintains websites on fellowship opportunities and dissertation support for graduate students: <http://www.bc.edu/research/osp/funding/external/gradfellowship.html> and <http://www.bc.edu/research/osp/funding/external/dissuport.html>

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) also provides a list of funding opportunities: <http://www.bc.edu/schools/gsas/research/funding.html>. The BC College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) maintains a separate list of graduate fellowships: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/ufel/fellowships/graduates.html>. A more general grants database, called SPIN database, could also be helpful: <http://www.bc.edu/research/osp/funding.html>. Note that you can only access SPIN database on campus or via BC VPN. Cornell University also has an extensive (and searchable) database of external fellowship opportunities: <http://www.gradschool.cornell.edu/?p=132>.

Finally, the Social Science Research Council has a very thorough and helpful guide to writing fellowship proposals: [http://fellowships.ssrc.org/art\\_of\\_writing\\_proposals/](http://fellowships.ssrc.org/art_of_writing_proposals/), and the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) also provides a useful list of resources for grant writing: <http://www.bc.edu/research/osp/granttools.html>.

## Getting Started

To write a dissertation, you need a dissertation committee. The Chair of your committee should be a faculty member in the department with whom you work well (after all, you're going to be working together for a while), and who is responsive (i.e., who gets back to you). You are required to have at least two other faculty members on your committee (*see the Guide to Graduate Study* for further details about committee composition).

When you and your advisor decide you are ready to start working on your dissertation proposal, you should consider signing up for the Dissertation Seminar. The Seminar is run as an ongoing research workshop, and covers all stages of the research process, from conceptualization and theory development through data analysis and writing. It meets bi-weekly, with individual meetings with the professor as necessary. All students who are writing dissertations are strongly recommended to enroll in this workshop, at least for one semester. You can either register formally for the seminar each semester in lieu of registering for a single doctoral continuation credit, or (with the permission of the professor) audit the seminar without registering.

When you are about to begin your work on your proposal, you should look carefully at the sections on Doctoral Dissertation Proposal and Doctoral Dissertation in the *Guide to Graduate Study*. To get a better idea of what your proposal should look like, ask a few other students to have a look at their proposals and analyze them carefully. Although there is no single formula, it will give you a sense of the range of options. You should also ask your committee chair about his or her expectations. It might be especially useful to discuss what your chair expects in terms of the literature review—should it be a brief overview of the literature, a full-blown literature review chapter of your future dissertation, or something in the middle? There is no single way of doing it, so make sure to find out what your committee expects to see. If you are planning to apply for dissertation fellowships, you might want to prepare your proposal according to the guidelines of these fellowships—but make sure that your chair agrees with that strategy.

Remember that a proposal is not supposed to be a hurdle—it should help you clearly lay out the research plan for your dissertation. It also provides you with a formal agreement from your committee—that way you can be sure that if you do what you proposed, your committee will stand behind you. Of course, things might change as you proceed with your research, and dissertations do not always exactly match proposals, so you should be able to adjust things later on if necessary.

According to department regulations, you are required to present your dissertation proposal in a meeting open to all members of the department. In reality, you should expect attendance by your committee members and maybe a friend or two—the idea is for this to be a friendly meeting to help you get started on your dissertation, not a formal defense.

## The Dissertation

For most of us, the dissertation presents a formidable challenge to our time- and anxiety-management skills. While some people are very good at structuring their own time, other people need a lot of external structure, and will need to urge their Committee Chair to set goals and deadlines for them. For everybody, it is important to recognize that Rome wasn't built in a day: you need to approach the dissertation in incremental steps, or risk driving yourself crazy! There are many good Internet sources of advice on researching and writing your dissertation—for some excellent sites, *see* <http://www.studyskills.soton.ac.uk/studyguides/Writing%20Your%20Dissertation.doc>, and

<http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/> and <http://www.abdsurvivalguide.com/>. Other good sources of information and advice on dissertating are other graduate students and (of course) your committee chair and committee members.

As you work on your dissertation research, you should consider looking into fellowships for writing up your dissertation. Each year, the sociology department is typically granted *one* dissertation fellowship by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS). If you apply for external fellowships as well, you maximize your chances of getting a fellowship for writing up your dissertation, and of getting a more generous stipend than GSAS provides. (See the links to fellowship information in the Looking Ahead section above.) As with dissertation research fellowships, dissertation writing fellowships tend to have early deadlines, and hence require some planning ahead.

In preparation for completing the dissertation, it might be a good idea to attend a couple of other students' defenses. You should also start preparing for life after dissertation—without stressing too much about it. For some students, the fear of post-dissertation uncertainty can prevent them from finishing! Focus on practical steps such as maintaining your CV, pursuing publications, and developing your teaching portfolio. Attend the professional development workshop that BC holds each year. Seek career advice from your committee members. And remember that academic job searches are usually conducted in the Fall, and the deadlines for submitting your materials can be as early as August.

## Finishing Up

As you near completion of your final draft and your defense, you should prepare to deal with some final department and GSAS requirements (e.g., booking a room, filling out the correct paperwork at the correct time, etc.). Make sure to read the *Guide to Graduate Study* section on the Doctoral Dissertation *carefully* so that you get through all the hoops and graduate when you plan to graduate. At this point, you should also treat yourself to a nice dinner to congratulate yourself for having made it to the finish line!

