

# Graduate Student Handbook

Department of Sociology  
Acadia University



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## **Important Dates for Sociology Graduate Students**

*Note: exact dates vary from year to year*

### **Fall Term**

#### **Course Work/Registration:**

SOCI 5960 Thesis (students need to maintain continuous enrolment in SOCI 5960 while in the programme)

SOCI 5003 XI Graduate Seminar

SOCI 5123 Sociological Methodology

SOCI 5000 level elective (this course may be completed in the fall or winter term. Consult with Graduate Programme Coordinator and/or your supervisor for guidance)

**Early September:** RGS (Research and Graduate Studies) Orientation

**End of September:** Identify a supervisor

**October-November:** Develop a Research Proposal

### **Winter Term**

#### **Course Work/Registration:**

SOCI 5960 Thesis

SOCI 5113 Sociological Theory

1 or 2 additional Graduate (5000 level) courses (depending on whether you have taken a 3<sup>rd</sup> graduate course in the fall term)

**3<sup>rd</sup> week of January:** Submission of research ethics proposal

*The University REB meets the 4<sup>th</sup> of every month. For research involving human subjects, students should have their research ethics proposal to the REB (Research Ethics Board) by late January. Ethics must be approved by a supervisor before it goes to the REB.*

**Late January/Early February:** Presentation of research proposal to the sociology department<sup>1</sup>

**April:** Discuss external reader with supervisor

**May 1:** Complete the research component of your thesis

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<sup>1</sup> *At this point the student should aim to have completed a first draft of the following chapters: literature review, theory, and methodology (chapter types may vary depending on the project. Consult your supervisor).*

- Mid-late June:** Complete first draft of the thesis submitted to supervisor (to ensure graduation for fall convocation)
- End of July:** Revised thesis submitted to supervisor; with their approval it will be sent out for external review (4 weeks required before the defense date)
- Late August:** Apply to graduate (the exact date is set annually. Consult Research and Graduate Studies.)
- September:** Defence is scheduled; final thesis must be received by RGS in time for list of fall graduates to be finalized (consult RGS for exact date)

## **Program Requirements**

### ***Courses***

Students will meet with the Graduate Program Coordinator during the orientation period to register for their courses and discuss potential supervisors. Each student is required to take the following courses:

- One research methods course (SOC 5123 X1 Sociological Methodology)
- One theory course (SOC 5113 X2 SOC Sociological Theory)
- One professional development seminar (SOC 5003 X1 Graduate Seminar)
- Two three-hour elective courses (one per term); may include one independent reading course as well as courses offered by other graduate programs (e.g. *CODE 5033 Community Development Seminar*)
- Every student will be enrolled in the thesis course (SOC 5960 Thesis) as part of their ongoing, independent thesis research throughout their degree

\*Individual research activities should not conflict with course attendance. Students who miss more than two classes run the risk of failing the course.

\*Students are expected to meet with the Graduate Program Coordinator once per semester to discuss their progress.

### ***Research Proposal Presentations***

Students will present their thesis proposals to the department at the end of January. Students must circulate their proposals to all members of the department one week before the presentation date. For the presentation, students should prepare a 10 minute talk about their research plans, after which point they will respond to questions and feedback. This is a mandatory requirement of the Graduate Seminar.

This proposal should provide the following (Max. 3000 words):

1. A clearly worded description of the **topic** under investigation.
2. The **purpose** of the proposed research.
3. The relation of the proposed research to traditions of scholarship. How does this research contribute to or diverge from these traditions? (**Literature review**)
4. The **theoretical** framework and **methodological** approach of the proposed research.

5. **Research ethics**, language, travel and any special requirements.
6. The **contribution to knowledge** that the proposed research makes.
7. A brief chapter-by-chapter **outline** of the thesis.
8. A **time frame** for completing the thesis.

### ***Thesis Preparation Guidelines***

Students must prepare their thesis according to the guidelines established by Research and Graduate Studies. They will not accept the final version of your thesis if it is not prepared accordingly. We recommend that students follow the template from the onset. For detailed information on the guidelines, please see:

<http://gradstudies.acadiau.ca/PresentationPrepareThesis.html>

- Students are required to follow the ASA style guide. An abbreviated version can be found on the American Sociological Association website at: [http://www.asanet.org/documents/teaching/pdfs/Quick\\_Tips\\_for\\_ASA\\_Style.pdf](http://www.asanet.org/documents/teaching/pdfs/Quick_Tips_for_ASA_Style.pdf)
- The sociology department also has bound copies of the ASA style guide.
- Students are encouraged to use Zotero, a software tool that helps you organize your citations and references.

### ***Defence Guidelines***

Students must submit one hard copy and one electronic copy of their thesis to Research and Graduate Studies a **minimum of four weeks** prior to the anticipated oral defence date. Your supervisor will indicate when the work is ready to be sent out to the internal and external reviewer. You must include with this a signed copy of the Request for Oral Examination form. Please see the following link for all forms and information regarding the thesis defence:

<https://gradstudies.acadiau.ca/Forms.html>

## **Teaching and Research Assistants in Sociology**

### **Responsibilities of a Teaching Assistant (TA)**

RGS offers a limited amount of money to the department to fund graduate student teaching assistantships. Normally, the amount of the TA salary is stipulated in the offer of admission. These positions are for eight hours a week (unless otherwise specified) for 13 weeks during the semester.

#### **Duties might include:**

- teaching preparation support (research; photocopying)
- marking support
- teaching a class once a term
- holding office hours
- holding tutorials

## **Responsibilities of a Research Assistant (RA)**

Students may be hired by individual faculty members to provide research support. Exact hours and duties will depend on the research program of the faculty member, but responsibilities might include:

- conducting a literature review
- creating a research bibliography
- transcription
- analyzing data

## **RGS Policies on Graduate Thesis Supervision**

The section below has been written by Research and Graduate Studies. Please read these carefully.

### **Responsibilities**

#### **Joint Responsibilities of supervisors and students:**

**Respect.** Every student and faculty supervisor has a right to be treated respectfully. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- o Maintaining appointments, except in cases of extenuating circumstances. If cancellation is necessary, provide as much advanced notice as possible.
- o Coming to meetings having read or prepared whatever was agreed upon prior to the appointment.
- o Allowing for disagreements, but recognizing that it is the supervisor's responsibility to guide the direction of, and approach to, the study; no research project will proceed to a public defense without the agreement and written consent of the supervisor, the student, and the head/director of the department/school. If disagreements or disputes arise in the relationship, faculty and students are expected to treat each other in ways that are not hurtful or otherwise disrespectful.
- o Maintaining confidentiality. While not all aspects of a supervisory relationship are confidential, areas that have been identified by one or the other as being such must be respected.
- o Constructing a joint relationship that is free of stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudicial behaviour.

### **Responsibilities of Supervisors**

- **Topic Development.** Supervisors are expected to provide guidance for students in the development of thesis/project topics. This includes offering ideas and generally assisting students in identifying areas within a disciplinary realm that are suitable for investigation. In instances where a student enters the relationship with a well-developed idea for a research study, the faculty supervisor can assist in refining the research focus and delimiting the study.
- **Proposal Development.** Every thesis-based research project at Acadia begins with the development of a formal research proposal by the student. While the length and substance will vary among departments and schools, a proposal serves as a basis for the development of a research project that will meet academic standards. Once the proposal is at the stage where the supervisor feels the study is ready to be launched, he or she will sign a proposal acceptance form and file it, along with a copy of the proposal, in the departmental or school office. A copy will be provided for the student. Departments and schools may require a proposal meeting in order to provide feedback from the examining/proposal committee.

Signing a formal research proposal does not preclude the possibility that research studies can change due to unforeseen circumstances, creating a situation where the purpose of the study as originally stated is not achievable. Where this happens, changes must be jointly agreed upon by the supervisor and the student, and must adhere to departmental or school policy. Substantial changes in focus may require the preparation and submission of a new proposal.

- **Reasonable Access.** Faculty members who have agreed to supervise graduate students are expected to be reasonably accessible for thesis consultation, occasionally on short notice. To whatever extent possible, supervisors should plan with students around likely completion dates in order to avoid interruptions and delays. In cases of leaves of absence or sabbaticals, the supervisor, in consultation with the graduate coordinator, may arrange for a replacement supervisor.
- **Length of Study (timelines).** It is the responsibility of the faculty supervisor to assist a graduate student in designing a study that is achievable in a reasonable period of time.
- **Constructive and Timely Feedback.** A central component of the research process for graduate students is constructive and timely feedback from supervisors. This is crucial in allowing a student to maintain consistent progress. What constitutes timely feedback is to be negotiated in each supervisory relationship, and perhaps by standards established within departments and schools. Under normal circumstances, students should not expect feedback to be “immediate,” but neither should they expect it to be in excess of two (2) weeks.

Constructive and timely feedback is equally crucial in instances where students are not meeting academic expectations. While these conversations can be difficult, it serves no one's interest to prolong a study if success is unlikely.

- **Professional Growth.** Supervisors are expected to support students' professional development by encouraging participation in discipline-specific professional gatherings (e.g., conferences, symposia). Where appropriate, supervisors should encourage the publication (jointly or otherwise) of a student's work.
- **Thesis quality.** It is the responsibility of the supervisor to advise the student as to the quality of the thesis (i.e., that it meets or exceeds the standards of graduate level work at Acadia) and to judge whether it is ready for submission.

### **Responsibilities of Students**

- **Commitment to Research.** Graduate research takes time and commitment on behalf of students. In discussion with faculty supervisors, students need to plan for sufficient time to complete a thesis or project of substantial scholarly merit. This includes: (i) time needed to gain sufficient background and skills in the research area before initiating the study, (ii) time required to undertake the fieldwork/analysis in a comprehensive and rigorous manner, and (iii) time to produce a thesis manuscript that is thorough, well organized, and lucidly written.
- **Research Proposal.** Each thesis student is required to write and submit a research proposal in consultation with their supervisor that meets the standards established by their department or school.
- **Communication.** Students are expected to maintain regular contact with supervisors to inform them of progress and make them aware of factors that may cause problems or interruptions. It may be helpful if students and supervisors agree upon a schedule of meetings and event horizons, although this may not always be possible. It is important for students to recognize that faculty members have other responsibilities which can delay access on short notice.
- **Ethical Behaviour.** All students are expected to adhere to high ethical standards in undertaking research that involves humans or other animals. This includes close familiarity with the protocols established by the Research Ethics Board or the Animal Care Committee, in addition to appropriate discipline-specific codes of ethics. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that all written work in the thesis is either his or her own work, or, where appropriate, has been attributed to the actual authors.

### **Dispute Resolution**

At times conflict arises in a supervisory relationship. As uncomfortable as this may be, it is imperative that troubling issues be addressed at an early stage before



they lead to a deterioration of the working relationship. Resolution at an early stage should be between the student and the supervisor, without the necessity of involving others. However, given the power imbalance in a supervisor relationship, if students are uncomfortable approaching their supervisors on issues of conflict, or if the supervisory relationship has deteriorated to the point where the likelihood of resolution at this informal stage is remote, the following procedures are to be employed:

- **Graduate Coordinator.** All departments and schools offering graduate programs select a faculty member to serve as their graduate program coordinator. This individual is normally responsible for providing academic counselling for graduate students. However, in cases of conflict in the supervisory relationship, the coordinator serves as the first external point of contact for the student and/or supervisor in seeking resolution. In instances where the graduate coordinator is the supervisor, recourse will be directly to the head or director.
- **Head or Director.** In instances where the graduate coordinator is unable to construct an acceptable solution to the conflict, the head of the department or director of the school will be engaged through the graduate coordinator. In some cases, it may be in the best interest of the student to have a new supervisor appointed. This is done by the head/director and coordinator, in consultation with the student. Appointing a new supervisor will be done without penalty or disadvantage to the graduate student.

In instances where the head or director is the supervisor, recourse will be directly to the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies.

A dispute involving a student in Social and Political Thought will skip this step and proceed directly to the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies.

- **Dean of Research and Graduate Studies.** If the dispute is unable to be resolved within the unit, the graduate coordinator or head/director will bring the matter to the attention of the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies. Where appropriate, the Dean will meet with the student or faculty member to seek a resolution. As Acadia does not have a faculty of graduate studies, in instances that directly involve faculty, the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies may request the involvement of the relevant program dean. When necessary, the Dean of RGS will bring the matter to the attention of the Vice President Academic.

Situations that cannot be resolved through these procedures can proceed to the stage of formal appeal as outlined in the University Calendar.

## Supervising Faculty

**BONNER**, Claudine, BSc., M.Ed., PhD. (Western) (on Leave 2023-24)

African Diaspora studies, ethnic & race relations, sociology of education, equity and social justice, African Canadian history, migration.

**BRITTAIN**, James, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. (University of New Brunswick)

Class (Consciousness), Disposable Populations, Escape, Political Economy, Social Theory

**CARLSON**, Jesse, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. (York) (on Sabbatical 2023-24)

Sociological theory, cultural sociology, morality, friendship, climate change activism

**CASEY**, Rebecca, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. (McMaster)

Aging, Disability, Work and Employment, Sociology of Health and Illness, Research Methods, Social Inequality, Public Policy.

**FRANK**, Lesley, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. (UNB)

Sociology of food, family poverty, sociology of health, research methods, public policy.

**MOHAMMADI**, Foroogh, B.A, M.A., Ph.D. (Pending)

Sociology of Culture, Race and Ethnicity, Space, Place, and Time, International Migration, Qualitative Methods, Identity and Belonging, Environmental Sociology

**RUDRUM**, Sarah, B.A, M.A., Ph.D. (UBC)

Health & healthcare. Health inequalities. Maternity health care. Sexual and reproductive health. Global health. Uganda. Qualitative methods including institutional ethnography.

**SWISS**, Liam, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. (McGill)

Sociology of Development, Gender, Globalization, Political Sociology, Canadian Foreign Policy, Research Methods, Social and political thought.

There are also a number of adjunct faculty members who may be available to supervise students. Please discuss with the Graduate Coordinator for more information.

## **Resources for Graduate Students**

### **Acadia Graduate Students' Association (AGSA)**

Each year the AGSA elects a graduate student from the department to represent our MA programme and its students. This a good opportunity to meet students from other Acadia graduate programmes, to learn more about how the university functions, and to contribute to supporting graduate studies in the broader university community. For more information, see the AGSA Facebook and Instagram pages. Email the AGSA at [ags@acadiau.ca](mailto:ags@acadiau.ca).

### **The Acadia Writing Centre**

The Coordinator of the Writing Centre, Dr Stephen Ahern, is available to meet with graduate students for one-on-one consultations about their theses. He offers personalized attention in a comfortable setting. Students who wish to make an appointment should email [writingcentre@acadiau.ca](mailto:writingcentre@acadiau.ca) and identify themselves as graduate students who would like to meet with the Coordinator.

Division of Research and Graduate Studies

**The Division of Research and Graduate Studies** is responsible for the official administration of all graduate programmes at Acadia. Theresa Starratt, Graduate Studies Officer, can answer questions about such matters as scholarship deadlines and proper preparation of theses for final submission. [theresa.starratt@acadiau.ca](mailto:theresa.starratt@acadiau.ca)

### **Student Health Services**

Located in Dennis House, this office provides health services and health education to Acadia students. To make an appointment to see a physician, call 585-1238. The health care team is available on a walk-in basis for urgent health needs. (Note: It is not necessary to disclose personal health matters when making an appointment.)

### **Vaughan Library**

The Academic Librarian for Sociology is Mike Beazley. He can be reached via email at [mike.beazley@acadiau.ca](mailto:mike.beazley@acadiau.ca)