

# Department of Sociomedical Sciences

Doctoral Student Handbook  
2023-2024

**Department of Sociomedical Sciences  
Doctoral Student Handbook**

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**Disclaimer**

The information contained in this handbook is correct for the academic year 2023–24. The most up-to-date version can be found at [www.mailman.columbia.edu/people/current-students/academics/student-handbooks](http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/people/current-students/academics/student-handbooks)

Although the degree and academic requirements in place normally will not change within any given academic year, Mailman School and departmental policies are reviewed and updated regularly. The Department of Sociomedical Sciences reserves the right to make changes at any time with appropriate notice to the community (e.g., email notification).

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## Overview

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In 1968, the Columbia University School of Public Health, now called the Mailman School of Public Health (MSPH), became the first institution in the country to offer a graduate degree in Sociomedical Sciences (SMS). What began as a collaborative research project on rural health care in 1956, spearheaded by a physician, an epidemiologist, and a sociologist, evolved over a decade's time into a formal doctoral program. Professor Jack Elinson, the first head of SMS, coined the term "sociomedical sciences" to incorporate the social sciences of sociology, anthropology, history, political science, and social psychology into a multidisciplinary study of health and medicine.

SMS faculty are broadly involved in both research and teaching, with the goal of applying social science theory and methodology to health and medical issues. Research projects are focused on such contemporary health topics as sociocultural aspects of drug behavior and alcoholism, tobacco control, sexuality and health, adolescent health, the role of social supports and social networks, aging and health, social aspects of disability, the organization of health care and health care program evaluation, the health professions, stress and coping, the behavioral and ethical impact of AIDS, behavioral and structural approaches to prevention, implementation science, the social roots of public health policy, and gender and health.

**Professor Kathleen Sikkema** is the Chair of the Department. The Department has designated a Deputy Chair, **Professor Jennifer Hirsch**, responsible for directing the doctoral programs. The Deputy Chair consults with the Department Chair regarding procedures that require Departmental approval, and also works with other faculty on admissions, review of student academic performance, and curriculum. The Director of Academic Programs and is responsible for all academic affairs related to the master's and doctoral programs.

To assist the Deputy Chair, SMS faculty members have been designated as liaisons with each of the downtown Departments. Among their roles are to monitor program requirements for their respective concentrations and to advise students on course requirements. For 2023–2024, the faculty liaisons are:

- Anthropology: Jennifer Hirsch (jsh2124)
- History: Merlin Chowkwanyun (mc2028)
- Sociology: Diana Hernandez (dh2494)

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## General Information and Resources

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The information and resources provided in this handbook focuses primarily on SMS program requirements. Students should refer to the [Mailman Student Handbook](#) for school policies and procedures.

This section of the handbook includes general information and resources for PhD students, and for the few DrPH students who entered prior to 2022.

### ***Resources for Parents***

The following benefits are available to SMS DrPH and PhD students who have been enrolled in 14 or less semesters (i.e., no more than seven years):

#### ***Parental Leave***

Students who give birth, adopt, or become legal guardians or foster parents, as well as students whose spouse or partner gives birth, can have responsibilities associated with their doctoral program suspended for twelve calendar weeks without loss of funding. In addition, students may elect to take a semester of unpaid accommodation after their paid leave concludes.

#### ***Childcare Subsidy***

Students may receive a \$5,000 subsidy per year for each child who is: 1) under the age of five, and 2) not attending kindergarten. If both parents are doctoral students eligible for funding at Columbia, each of them may apply individually for the child-care subsidy.

#### ***Adoption Assistance Program***

This benefit is available to a doctoral student who: 1) is in years one through seven in their doctoral program, 2) is fully funded, 3) has adopted a child who is under the age of 18, and 4) has finalized the adoption process within the past six months. This benefit provides a one-time reimbursement of up to \$5,000 for expenses incurred on or after the parent's first day of enrollment in their SMS doctoral program. There is a limit of one \$5,000 reimbursement per adopted child, even if both parents are Mailman students.

### ***Funding & Stipends***

In the 2023-2024 academic year, SMS doctoral students in years 1-5 will receive an annual (12 month) stipend of \$46,680, coverage of tuition & fees, and health insurance, which is the Columbia University [benefit package](#) provided to all PhD students.

The stipend is our standard level for all funded doctoral students at the Mailman School of Public Health. The stipend is inclusive of all required departmental expectations for satisfactory completion of doctoral training in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences, including teaching and research rotations across faculty mentors. Stipends to training grant fellows are disbursed

three times a year, and stipends to non-training grant students are paid twice a month. In both cases the annual amount is the same: \$46,680.

***Professional Development Units/Rotations***

Professional development units generally fall into one of the following categories: teaching fellowships/rotations, research rotations, mentored research activity, external grant-writing.

Student rotations should include working with at least three different faculty members and serving as a teaching assistant at least twice. Rotations are expected to comprise a 20-hour commitment per week, excluding winter break and spring break, over the full calendar year. Work with a faculty member can, if mutually agreed upon, last for a full academic or calendar year. The priority for these assignments will be building academic connections between SMS faculty and doctoral students. It may also be possible for students to have research and teaching assignments outside of SMS, with Departmental approval.

As part of their annual report, students should propose a rotation plan for the coming year. Information about faculty research opportunities will be circulated before annual reports are due. Students may find it useful to meet with faculty in developing their rotation proposals and to think long-term about the rotations they would like to complete over their five funded years.

The courses to which students may be assigned in their teaching rotations include, but are not limited to:

Course	Fall	Spring
Mailman MPH Core	X	
P8736 Theories & Perspectives in Sexuality and Health	X	
P8745 Social and Economic Determinants of Health	X	X
P8792 Dissemination & Implementation		X
P8774 Introduction to SMS Research Methods		X
P8911 Applied Quantitative Research Methods	X	
P8912 Applied Qualitative Research Methods	X	

If a trainee engages in a teaching rotation for a class in a Department outside of SMS, that Department will apply the support to the SMS subsidy for the doctoral trainee. The only exception is a summer teaching rotation, for which the student may receive up to \$3000 in additional compensation.

Should students wish to undertake a teaching and research rotation in the same term, total effort in both rotations cannot exceed 20 hours per week (e.g. 10 hours of research rotation, 10 hours of teaching rotation).

## ***External Funding***

All students are strongly encouraged to apply for fellowships and grants from government agencies and private foundations. Students interested in exploring these funding possibilities should consult with the Deputy Chair for Doctoral Studies or with the liaisons or program director for the program in which they are enrolled. Students may also wish to consult the list of funding opportunities for graduate students found at [www.mailman.columbia.edu/information-for/research-resources-r2/graduate-students](http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/information-for/research-resources-r2/graduate-students)

If a student in years 1-5 secures external funding, the externally-supporting stipend funding is applied towards the annual stipend, not awarded in addition to it. In no instance would a student who secures external funding receive a lower stipend; SMS will top off external funds so that students receive the same annual stipend of \$46,680.

When preparing such grants, students should consult with the SMS Grants and Contracts Officer, who will assist with preparing the appropriate grant documentation. **The SMS Business Office requests that all materials be submitted to them at least 10 business days before the grant is due.**

## ***Ad Comp and Outside Work Policies [Columbia & Mailman Policy]***

GSAS and all Departments at the Mailman School of Public Health consider PhD training to be full-time effort for 12 months per year. The University's commitment to [fully funding](#) our trainees pursuing a PhD is to allow them to focus entirely on all aspects of their training: coursework, research, teaching, dissertation-related activities, professional development, other training activities (e.g. seminars, colloquia, journal clubs, workshops), and service to the institution. PhD trainees, therefore, are discouraged from taking on additional employment.

Trainee appointments are set at 20 hours per week, irrespective of funding source (T32, F31, NSF, GRA, or other support administered through the university). The educational components comprise the balance of full-time effort. PhD trainees are not permitted to hold paid positions of employment at Columbia during the Fall and Spring terms in addition to their PhD trainee appointments (e.g. T32, F31, GRA, or other apprenticeships).

NIH prohibits T32 and F31 appointees from working more than 10 hours per week on any activity outside of the training program, regardless of whether it is conducted within or outside the university.

However, the School and University permits PhD trainees to take on additional work in the Summer term and the intersession between Fall and Spring, given the reduced engagement with courses and other educational activities characteristic of the Fall and Spring terms. This additional work cannot exceed 10 hours per week. Moreover, any additional work cannot interfere with a trainee's progress toward degree completion and is subject to a range of federal grant restrictions. Summer work paid through Columbia must be pre-approved by the Department, the

Dean's Office, and the Sponsored Projects Administration via submission to the Salary Review Committee.

To summarize, the only situation in which a student can receive additional compensation for additional effort from Columbia University is in the Summer, in between Fall and Spring terms, and short-term (1-2 day) activities and only with pre-approval. Work outside Columbia is not governed by the University, School, or Program, but must still conform with NIH rules, should not exceed 10 hours per week, and should not hinder progress toward degree completion to degree (as evaluated by each Department).

Scholarships, foundation grants, and other awards (e.g. conference travel award) that do not require a student to be engaged in a traditional employee/employer relationship or a quid pro quo work effort are permissible but must be declared to the Department.

Students who wish to participate in externships with compensation in excess of the GRA minimum may waive their summer payments to accept the external payment. The School will continue to fund student health insurance and tuition, and fees. Externships must be approved by the Department, the Dean's Office, and Sponsored Projects Administration via submission to the Salary Review Committee.

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## Academic Affairs

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### ***Faculty Advisors***

Doctoral student advisement and mentoring occurs at multiple levels and evolves during the course of doctoral study. Upon matriculation to SMS, each student is assigned a faculty advisor. The advisor is responsible for guiding the student through the initial years of the program. The faculty advisor is often, but not always, the PhD disciplinary liaison. The faculty advisor assists students in planning coursework and the progression of academic requirements. During the coursework phase of their doctoral studies, students should meet with their advisors at least once a semester.

Most students change advisors as their specific research focus develops. Once the student has begun to work with a faculty member on developing the theme essay, that faculty member is referred to as the student's 'sponsor', which also encompasses the responsibilities of the advisor (such as signing off on the annual report).

The Director of Academic Programs is knowledgeable about the rules and policies of the University and serves as a resource person to both students and faculty. Students should meet with the Director at registration times and should consult with her about questions regarding the fulfillment of requirements or any other administrative or program-related matter.

## ***Annual Academic Progress Review***

Doctoral students' academic progress is assessed annually via the annual progress report completed each spring. For students who are beyond the seven-year limit for doctoral study established by the school, the reports provide a basis for the Director of the Doctoral Program to make a recommendation to the Department Chair and the Dean of Students as to whether progress has been sufficient to merit a one-year extension (for more information on this, see "Program Time Limits").

Students must complete the annual report form, consult with their academic advisors/dissertation sponsor for review and signature, respond to their advisor or sponsor's comments, and submit the completed form to the Courseworks/Canvas site by the deadline. In addition to considering whether students are on-track regarding coursework and milestones, the review assesses two other criteria: 1) progress in developing as a scholar, as measured by peer-reviewed publications, participation in professional meetings and conferences, submission of applications for external funding, and 2) development of independent research interests, as measured by the above but also as indicated by whether students in the first few years give other indications of settling on a dissertation topic and gravitating towards a faculty sponsor.

## ***First Year Student Review***

First year students' academic performance is reviewed by SMS faculty in January and June. The goals of these additional reviews are to assess whether students are adjusting well to doctoral-level training, to identify areas of potential concern so that appropriate means of remediation can be taken. After the January review, students receive a written evaluation that takes into consideration grades in courses and on assignments as well as GRA-related work.

At the end of students' first academic year, the Doctoral Committee review will be based on the overall portfolio of the student's performance, which includes the student's first year course grades, rotation-related work, the student's annual report, and other faculty input regarding the student's overall performance and transition to doctoral-level work.

The Doctoral Committee will recommend whether the student 1) has finished the year in good academic standing; 2) requires additional or remedial work in the second year, or 3) should not be permitted to advance in the program. If a recommendation is made for additional or remedial work, the student shall meet with an ad hoc committee to develop a plan of action. The ad hoc committee may include advisor, DGS, PI or supervisor. The student will meet quarterly with her or his advisor in year 2 to assess progress on that plan of action.

## ***Waiver of Course Requirements***

Students may request a waiver or exemption from a specific course requirement if they have evidence of having satisfactorily completed a graduate-level course that is comparable in rigor and scope to that of the required SMS course. Students initiate this process by submitting a

written request to the Director of Academic Programs that identifies the course to be waived along with a copy of the course syllabus

Except for students applying for transfer credit, there is no reduction in course credits towards graduation. The waiver allows the student to substitute an elective course for the course out of which they have been waived.

PhD students seeking transfer credit based on coursework from prior master's degree, please consult with the Director of Academic Programs regarding advanced standing and [GSAS Transfer Credit](#).

### ***Tutorials***

A tutorial is an individualized course of study in which a student works with a faculty member in a less structured setting than a classroom course. One-to-one student/faculty tutorials may include, for example, participation in major research or other projects, small individual projects, pilot projects, literature review, and field experience. A tutorial may be taken for one, two, or three credits depending on the amount of work it entails.

No more than 20 percent of coursework may be taken in tutorials and no more than 6 credits of tutorials may be taken with any one faculty member.

### ***Graduation***

Degrees are awarded three times a year—in October, February, and May. The Mailman School of Public Health hosts one commencement ceremony annually, known as Class Day, in May. Similarly, the University only hosts one University-wide Commencement ceremony. Please review the [Mailman Student Handbook](#) for policy on participating in commencement activities.

PhD students completing the Masters of Arts degree (see pg 11) must [apply for the MA degree](#) with the CU Registrar. [Application for the MPhil degree](#) may be submitted after completion of all coursework and milestones, less the proposal. The conferral of the PhD degree follows the dissertation defense and final deposit. The GSAS Dissertation Office dates & deadlines are available at <https://www.gsas.columbia.edu/content/dissertation-dates-and-deadlines>.

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## **PhD Program**

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### ***Learning Objectives of PhD Programs***

The PhD is designed for individuals who wish to combine training in history or in a social or behavioral science discipline with research on questions significant to public health and medicine. Students combine 30 credits of coursework in the disciplinary program to which they are admitted with similar length of training in public health. Faculty mentors are drawn from SMS, as

well as other MSPH faculty with social science training, and faculty from social science departments from GSAS. The successful PhD graduate will be a scholar with a portfolio of independent research, prepared to teach students in either a social science department, an interdisciplinary program (such as global health or gender studies) or a school of public health.

Upon satisfactory completion of the PhD degree in SMS, graduates will be able to:

- Summarize, analyze, and critique key concepts from three of four disciplines (anthropology, history, psychology and sociology) as they apply to research in public health, with a deeper focus on the student's discipline of concentration.
- Demonstrate mastery of methods and research design, including proficiency in core principles and methods in biostatistics and epidemiology, and in the selection of a methodological approach to answering a research question in a specific population, time, and setting.
- Demonstrate the capacity to conduct original independent research that advances social or behavioral science theory and public health knowledge, as shown by i) proposing a detailed plan for collecting and analyzing data to address two specific research questions, one of which should include the major methodological traditions of the student's disciplinary concentration, and ii) designing and conducting theory-based original empirical research on health, illness, health behaviors among individuals and groups or the organization of public health and health care.
- Identify and demonstrate mastery of principles and requirements for the ethical conduct of public health research, including human subjects protection and responsible conduct in research, including writing and securing approval for a research protocol that follows guidelines of the Institutional Review Board, and that protects the confidentiality of study subjects, minimizes their exposure to physical, social and psychological harm and, as appropriate, and compensates subjects for their participation in a research study.
- Communicate in written and oral form the results of research findings to other scholars in both the selected social science discipline and public health.

### ***Degree Requirements***

All students in the PhD program must complete a minimum of 30 points in public health courses and 30 points in their social science disciplinary focus. Each social science discipline concentration has its own specific course and language requirements (see page 12).

Each student is responsible for ensuring that their course selection is consistent with timely completion of all course requirements as stated in this handbook. Students may satisfy course requirements through successful completion of equivalent graduate level courses. Students seeking a waiver of any requirements should consult the procedures outlined on page 7. Please allow reasonable time for review of any waiver request. Students may not take required courses pass/fail (unless this is the only grade option available for the course as set by the instructor).

**Introduction to Public Health:** PhD students with no prior public health coursework must

complete a self-paced, online module, P6025 Intro to Public Health. This zero-credit module is pass/fail and must be completed by September 30, 2023.

**Registration - Residence Unit (RU)** In addition to registering for individual courses, PhD students are required to register for the RU which provides the basis for tuition charges and provides full-time status. PhD students are required to complete a total of six Residence Units. Students entering with a master's degree may be granted transfer credits and two Residence Units toward the required total of six (see [GSAS Transfer Credit](#) for more information). RUs may only be earned during fall and spring semesters, not during the summer.

**Registration - Matriculation & Facilities (M&F)** PhD students who have completed all six Residence Units then register M&F to maintain continuous registration through the term in which they distribute the dissertation (see Continuous Registration page 11).

**SMS Doctoral Seminar:** During their first year, all doctoral students are required to take a social theory course sequence in fall and spring semesters: *P8788 Theoretical Foundations* and *P8789 Contemporary Debates*.

**Epidemiology & Biostatistics:** SMS PhD students are also required to demonstrate competence in epidemiology and basic statistics. This requirement may be satisfied by taking the Mailman School core courses in Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

**Methods Courses:** a course in quantitative methods and one in qualitative methods are mandatory. Public Health course descriptions are listed in the Mailman School of Public Course Directory.

**Social Science Courses:** SMS doctoral students must further demonstrate competence in approaching public health and medical research from the perspective of social science disciplines other than the one in which they are concentrating. The requirement is fulfilled by completing:

- **P8745 Social & Economic Determinants of Health** –taken in semester two or first year.
- **A second graduate level course** that covers a broad survey of a social science discipline's approach to public health and medicine. The course may be within SMS or from other departments of Columbia University or Teacher's College. Subjects and courses may include sociology, anthropology, history, political science, ethics, law, and psychology.

#### ***Expected Timeline for Completion of Coursework and Milestones***

- **Students entering with a master's degree** are expected to complete coursework within two years, and to have defended the dissertation proposal by their sixth semester in the program
- **Students entering without a master's degree** are expected to complete coursework within three years; are expected to submit the master's essay and apply for the MA degree before the end of semester four (see Master of Arts Degree section on following

page); and to have defended the proposal by their eighth semester in the program.

- **All students** are expected to take no more than 18 months to move through the sequence of post-coursework exams & milestones (methods and theme essays, oral examinations, and the dissertation proposal defense).

### ***Continuous Registration***

Continuous registration is required of PhD students until all requirements (including dissertation defense) have been completed. Continuous registration means the student must register each and every semester for one of the following: a Residence Unit (RU), Matriculation and Facilities (M & F), Extended Residence (ER); or, they must be on an official leave of absence. If continuous registration is not maintained a student runs the risk of poor academic standing which may result in, among other consequences: a hold on their account, suspended financial aid, loss of health service and insurance.

- Residence Unit (RU) - for six semesters during the coursework period, less if the student has received transfer credit mentioned above.
- Matriculation and Facilities (M & F) - after the six Rus (including transfer credits) have been satisfied.
- The Extended Residence (ER) - used for any term beyond the required six RUs in which students are taking courses.

### ***Program Time Limits***

As previously noted, PhD students are expected to complete coursework within two to three years, to have defended the dissertation proposal within eighteen months of the completion of coursework, and to have completed the program no more than seven years after matriculation. After those seven years, a student may apply for two one-year extensions. These time limits are part of a set of policies established by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, <https://www.gsas.columbia.edu/content/satisfactory-academic-progress>.

### ***Master of Arts Degree***

PhD students entering without a prior master's degree are expected to apply for the MA degree before the end of semester four\*. To obtain the MA in Sociomedical Sciences, a student must satisfactorily complete: (a) 2 RUs and minimum of 24 credit points in a combination of courses offered by the Mailman School of Public Health or the student's chosen social science discipline at GSAS, and (b) a Master's Essay in Sociomedical Sciences.

The master's essay may develop from a term paper for a course, from a research project, or as a separate project. The form and content of the project are not rigidly specified as long as the subject is appropriate, and the quality is high. The Master's essay should be submitted to the student's social science liaison (who may not necessarily be the student's advisor) for approval, with a copy submitted to the Director of Academic Programs.

The student initiates the awarding of the MA degree by filing an application with the GSAS registrar. Those students who have been granted transfer credit as a result of prior academic or professional degrees are considered to have completed the MA requirements and are not awarded a Columbia MA. Students who have only received 1 RU of transfer credit may earn a Columbia MA by fulfilling the two requirements listed above (24 points and a Master's Essay).

*\*Students who are granted two RUs of transfer credit are not eligible to receive the MA degree from Columbia; however, a student awarded one RU may earn a Columbia MA degree.*

### ***Master of Philosophy Degree***

The Master of Philosophy (MPhil) is awarded to students who have fulfilled all the requirements for the PhD except the proposal defense and the dissertation defense. After successful completion of coursework, completion of a master's degree with submission of a master's essay (or transfer credit), the language and/or statistics requirements, the theme and methods essays, and the fulfillment of the necessary Residence Units, the Chair of the Subcommittee recommends to the Dean of the GSAS for award of the MPhil.

### ***Concentration Requirements for the PhD in Sociomedical Sciences***

Requirements for each of the social science concentrations available within the Sociomedical Sciences program are determined by the collaborating GSAS Departments. All concentrations carry a 30-credit minimum course requirement. The course requirements for each discipline outlined below are developed by SMS faculty in consultation with the directors of graduate study and subcommittee members from the respective departments. Students should bring to their advisor's attention courses not being offered or SMS requirements that are no longer in accord with current requirements for doctoral students in the department of specialization. The disciplinary liaison will work with each student to find suitable course substitutions.

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#### ***Anthropology***

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Language: Competency in the language of fieldwork, as measured by a grade of B or higher in an intermediate level course or by an equivalent examination. Language training should be considered central to a student's program of graduate training. Students must pass their language requirement exam prior to their proposal defense.

Students planning substantial training in a foreign language may want to explore the Foreign Language Area Studies program, which provides some support for students doing language study: <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/financing-your-education/flas-fellowship-academic-year>

Coursework: 18 points for E credit, 12 points for R credit. First year students without a strong background in anthropology are urged to take Principles/Applications of Social and Cultural Anthropology in the Anthropology Department. In consultation with advisors,

then, students are urged to take 2 courses with a pronounced theoretical focus. Two additional requirements: an advanced course in medical or public health anthropology and one in ethnographic methods. The remaining 18 elective credits should be spread across courses covering specific substantive, methodological and/or geographic topics, with particular attention to the development of those tools of inquiry needed to pursue a dissertation subject.

*As noted in the Methods & Theme Essays section, PhD students in the Anthropology concentration fulfill the requirement by writing their theme essay under the supervision of a faculty member who is an anthropologist.*

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## **History**

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Language: No language requirement.

Coursework: Students take a minimum of 12 points in the Morningside History Department. During the first year, entering students are required to take an introductory colloquium in historiography, (GR8910 / 4 points), which is designed to introduce them to the history and current state of historical scholarship. In addition, students take a course that deals primarily with 19th century history (4 points) and a course that deals primarily with 20th century history (4 points) in the History Department.

Students must take a minimum of 9 points in courses offered through SMS's Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health. These courses include: P8703 Health Advocacy; P8747 Ethics of Public Health; P8757 Global Politics of Aging; P6785 Poisoned Worlds: Corporate Behavior & Public Health.

The remaining points consist of electives in history, policy, law, and ethics, and may be taken throughout the university. It is strongly recommended that at least some of these courses be taken in the History Department to augment the minimum 12 points noted above; however, students should choose these courses in consultation with their advisor in areas appropriate to their research interests.

Oral Examination: Students in the history concentration will prepare four readings lists, one each in consultation with four faculty members who will serve as examiners. At least one of the examiners must hold an appointment in the Morningside History Department. One of the four lists must deal with the history of public health and medicine. The other three lists must deal with recognized subfields of history and/or ethics. Examples of acceptable subfields for examination include:

- Public health ethics or bioethics
- A defined historical period (e.g., 19th century, colonial, Progressive Era)
- Urban history
- Women's history
- African American history
- History of U.S. colonialism
- History of bioethics

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## ***Sociology***

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Language: No language requirement

Coursework: 24 points of credit: These should include at least 18 points of courses taken for a letter grade or Pass/Fail, and up to 6 points of R credit all taken within the Department of Sociology. Courses may be taken outside the department but only with prior authorization from the Sociology Liaison and the Director of Graduate Study (DGS).

*Required courses*: Satisfactory completion of, or exemption from, required courses. Generally, these courses are taken in the first year or 3 semesters, and generally offered for Pass/Fail only. The required courses are:

- SOCI GR6051 Sociological Theory
- SOCI GR6000- GR6001 Intro Social Data Analysis I & II. This is a two-semester sequence. Students with sufficient prior statistical training should petition the DGS for exemption from these courses. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- SOCI GU6097 Designs of Social Research
- Advanced Courses: 2 one semester courses: 1 theory course and 1 advanced methods or statistics course.

Literature Review/Field Statement - The sociology comprehensive examination is satisfied by preparation of a literature review of the theoretical and empirical research in a subfield of sociology. This is often referred to as the 'field statement'.

The Sociology literature review milestone is distinguished from the SMS theme essay milestone by its in-depth attention to the sociological literature. The goal of the theme essay is to demonstrate the capacity to review and synthesize a body of literature, and to point to key gaps to fill, with a focus on public health. The goal of the sociology field statement is not that different and may overlap, however it should be specific to and more in-depth sociological focus and literature.

It is also distinct from the master's essay (required only of students who come in without a master's degree), which demonstrates the student's mastery of empirical research, the subject matter need not be tied to sociological literature.

- Students must submit a brief statement of intent as well as a proposed reading list to two faculty readers, one of whom must have an appointment in sociology.
- One of the readers chairs the student's literature review committee.
- Signed approval of the statement of intent and reading list is required.
- Upon completion of the literature review, the student must submit a copy with the SMS Director of Academic Programs along with a statement signed by the first reader signifying successful completion of this requirement.

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## DrPH Students

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*Applicable only to DrPH students who entered prior to 2022 and are currently working on their Integrated Learning Experience (ILE) / dissertation.*

### ***Learning Objectives of DrPH Program***

The DrPH is designed to train individuals who wish to build academic, policy, or program-oriented careers in public health, drawing on the theory and methods of the social and behavioral sciences. The DrPH in SMS prepares students to assume positions in academic and practice settings where they apply their expertise in evidence-based public health practice. Students follow a course of study that brings the theory and methods of multiple social science disciplines to bear on a public health topic of the student's choosing. Upon satisfactory completion of the DrPH degree in SMS, graduates will be able to:

1. Apply theoretical principles, quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods or policy analysis research and evaluation methods in the social sciences to explore and address a priority public health issue requiring multiple levels of analysis.
2. Identify strategies for engaging a diversity of stakeholders in examining and addressing health inequities at the population level.
3. Develop one's leadership capacity, including understanding the application of fiscal, ethical, human and organizational resources and strategies for advancing a public health agenda.
4. Design an independent research project or system-level intervention that contributes to advancing public health evidence, program or policies on a priority health issue.
5. Apply educational pedagogies and assessments that promote and advance learning in academic, organizational or community contexts.

### ***Integrated Learning Experience (ILE)***

The successful defense of an ILE is the final eligibility criterion for the DrPH degree in SMS. The ILE demonstrates the student's capacity to conduct original research and to present findings in a scholarly manner, along with a demonstrated understanding of public health professional practice leadership. The student uses their acquired social science knowledge and skills to investigate a problem in the health field, along with the application of their learning in public health practice. The student's research may involve the collection of data, or may be an analysis, from a new point of view, of data that has been previously collected. Incorporated within the ILE is the development a detailed plan for change that demonstrates the student's understanding and application of public health practice and leadership.

An SMS DrPH student may choose to write a standard thesis (in the format of an integrated piece of independent scholarship) or a three-paper format. Both approaches include an implementation plan demonstrating the linkage between the learning and public health practice and leadership. See Dissertation section for more information.

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## Methods and Theme Essays

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Before proceeding to the proposal defense, a student must demonstrate readiness to undertake independent research by showing evidence of mastery of i) key substantive and theoretical areas of interest and ii) research methods. Demonstration of mastery in theory and methods has two parts: the theme essay and the methods essays.

- The student should inform the Director of Academic Programs of plans to proceed with these milestones so that a formal review of the student's record can be made to verify that all course work requirements have been met.
- Students are *encouraged* to complete both by the final year in which they are taking courses. They are *required to have completed at least one* (either the methods or the theme essay) by the final semester of coursework and *are required to have completed both by the end of the first semester after completing coursework*.
- Students must have completed all required methods courses by the end of the semester prior to completing the methods essays.

### **Methods Essays**

No later than the semester after completing all required courses, students will write two “methods essays” in response to a **shared question** and an **individual question**. Students must complete all required methods courses the term prior to writing the methods essays, though they may still be taking elective methods courses in the term in which they take the exam.

- **Shared question:** Students will respond to a question developed by the Methods Committee Chair. The question will provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate competence in the range of research methods required of doctoral students trained in the department.

The question, which will be appropriate for students across disciplines, will require students both to articulate key elements of a methodologically diverse research approach and to demonstrate deep familiarity with some of the methodological challenges of research in their major area of expertise. The shared question essay, essay should be approximately 3,500-4,000 words.

- **individual question:** Student will develop and respond to their individual essay question. Students should meet with one of the members of the Methods Committee at least one semester prior to taking the exam. At this meeting, the student should discuss with the faculty member their preliminary ideas for the student-submitted question and the reading list on which the student will draw in preparing to answer the question. The faculty member will offer suggestions for constructing the reading list and preparing the question, as well as suggest appropriate examination members to review the lists and questions. The individual question essay should be approximately 3,000 words.

**Reading Lists** The examination covers the knowledge and concepts contained in three reading lists:

- **The SMS Core Methods List** is prepared by the Department, representing material which all doctoral students are expected to have mastered; in addition, students will be responsible for preparing two supplemental reading lists that reflect their own professional areas of interest and specialization.
- **The Supplemental Lists** (lists 2 & 3) focus on methods and issues that are likely to be utilized in the student’s future professional work. These are the lists on which students will rely in developing and answering the individual question. The lists should cover methodological techniques such as, but not limited to, statistical concepts and analysis, survey research, field methods, mixed methods, historical methods, secondary data analysis, evaluation research, and implementation science.

Students will prepare the supplemental lists in consultation with members of the Methods Committee. A methods committee member may approve both lists, or only one list (in which case, the student would get approvals from two different methods committee members).

Please review the list of members’ specialties in deciding the most appropriate faculty to consult with for your lists. Other Columbia faculty may serve on the Methods Committee in an ad hoc capacity if a student wishes to prepare a reading list on social science methods that falls outside the expertise of existing members. Students should seek the approval of the Chair of the Methods Committee for an outside examiner early in the development of the reading lists.

**Distribution and Evaluation** The methods essay questions will be distributed to students four weeks before the end of the semester and the essays are due before the winter and summer breaks. The methods essays are graded by at least two readers. The evaluation results are: high pass, pass, low pass, or fail. Students will receive written comments on each essay, approximately one month after the exam. Students whose essay receives a low pass or a fail from more than one grader will be expected to revise and resubmit the essay.

**The Methods Committee** is comprised of faculty members for their expertise in areas of social science methods. Additional members may be added for each semester, based on the methodical expertise and students taking the exam.

Daniel Giovenco, Chair	Quantitative, mixed-methods, population survey data analysis; GIS and community mapping techniques
David Rosner	Historiography and archival methods
Karolynn Siegel	Survey research methods, research design, qualitative and mixed methods research.
Rachel Shelton	Research design, implementation science, CBPR, evaluation

2023-2024 Methods Dates		
	Fall 2023	Spring 2024
<b>Methods Overview Meeting</b>	TBD	NO Spring Meeting
<b>Approved lists &amp; question due</b>	Fri 11/10/23	FRI 4/05/24
<b>Exam distributed</b>	FRI 11/17/23	FRI 4/12/24
<b>Exam due</b>	FRI 12/15/23	FRI 5/10/24

### **Theme Essay**

In their final year of coursework (or in the following semester), students will write and submit a “theme essay”, which presents a scholarly overview of the state of knowledge and of the major approaches to research within the student’s chosen research area. A primary function of the essay is to demonstrate the student’s breadth of competence beyond the specific questions and approaches of the dissertation. Students are strongly encouraged to choose a topic that will lay the groundwork for the dissertation, but a student who changes the focus of their dissertation research after completing the theme essay will not be required to do another theme essay.

The focus of the essay is more specific than “public health” or any particular social science discipline but is broader than the dissertation topic.

As an example, a student planning on doing dissertation research exploring obesity and the built environment might write a review essay on public health research on obesity; a student whose dissertation would explore the rise of gluten-free eating might review and critique the history of food fads and movements in 20th century America; or a student planning do to develop and test a novel approach to sexuality education might write about the development, implementation and impact of sexuality education on sexual practices.

**Format, Structure and Process** The Theme Essay is designed to maximize flexibility and student self-determination, and it can be written in a wide variety of formats. Possible formats include (but are not limited to) a review paper or a handbook chapter.

- The student’s Theme Essay Committee will include the student’s intended dissertation sponsor and two additional readers, chosen by the student in consultation with the sponsor.

*PhD students in the Anthropology concentration will write their theme essay under the supervision of a faculty member who is an anthropologist.*

- Students will submit to the Director of Academic Programs, within 30 days of semester in which they plan to write the theme essay: an outline of topic; the timeline for drafts and final distribution; the names their Theme Essay Committee (sponsor plus two additional readers). Sample outline are available in the [SMS Doctoral Canvas Page](#).
- Students must submit at least one draft of the theme essay to the sponsor for comments,

and the sponsor is expected to return the draft within one month in order to provide time for student to revise before submitting to full committee.

- Students will distribute the theme essay to committee with copy to Director of Academic Programs.
- The Director to Academic Programs will provide the committee members with an evaluation form which is to be returned within 3-4 weeks.
- The theme essay is graded by the three-member committee as either high pass, pass, low pass or fail. Students whose theme essay receives a low pass or a fail will be expected to revise and resubmit the essay. In the event that after multiple retakes the student is unable to develop an essay that earns a passing grade, they will be asked to leave the program

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### Dissertation Proposal and Final Dissertation

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The dissertation demonstrates the student's capacity to conduct original research and to present findings in a scholarly manner. The student uses their social science knowledge and skills to investigate a problem in the health field. The student's research may involve the collection of data, or may be an analysis, from a new point of view, of data that has been previously collected. The student should view the dissertation as a demonstration of research competence, and not necessarily expect to provide definitive answers to the theoretical questions posed. Students are urged to discuss possible dissertation topics with several faculty members.

***For DrPH students, the dissertation project constitutes the Integrated Learning Experience (ILE).***

DrPH students may choose to write a standard thesis or a three-paper format. Both approaches include an implementation plan demonstrating the linkage between the learning and public health practice and leadership.

***ILE Option 1: Single Dissertation Format*** Students may elect to present their research and implementation plan within the traditional integrated dissertation format. The concluding chapter will incorporate a detailed “plan for change” that describes the players, resources, and strategies needed to make the changes identified as part of the dissertation research.

***ILE Option 2: Three Paper Format*** Students may elect to present their research and implementation plan within a three-paper format. Two sub-options exist within this possibility:

- Two papers developed from the ILE research; One paper incorporating implementation-related content, aimed at publication as a professional practice article and key aspects of the “plan for change”; concluding chapter would not need to include the plan for change.

- Three papers developed from the ILE research (per current SMS requirements); the “plan for change” should be incorporated into the concluding chapter

Both options require an introductory chapter(s) including background and the conceptual framework for the ILE, and a concluding chapter that incorporates the key learnings and recommendations; with the “plan for change” included as described above.

All doctoral students defend their dissertation proposal and the completed dissertation in front of a five-member interdisciplinary committee. Both DrPH and PhD have the option of a traditional dissertation format or choosing the publishable papers format. Student will choose a format at the time of their proposal defense and carry that through to the completed dissertation defense. **Students are not permitted to switch to another format after having defended the proposal.**

### ***Selecting a Sponsor***

Towards the end of coursework or, at the latest, while developing the reading lists for the theme essay, the student formally designates a faculty sponsor. By the time a student reaches this point in the program, they should have a well-developed idea for dissertation research and should have identified a faculty member under whose mentorship they plan to conduct independent research.

PhD students will select from the list of [GSAS approved sponsors/advisors](#) and DrPH students will select a sponsor from the list of SMS faculty (see Appendix A). If a student wishes to work with a Columbia University faculty member not on the lists, the student should consult with the Deputy Chair for Doctoral Studies. Adjunct faculty are eligible to serve as sponsors, provided that a full-time Columbia faculty member, who is an approved sponsor, serves as a co-sponsor, and accepts that designation as a genuine responsibility.

**Sponsors and IRB:** There are faculty on the lists of approved sponsors who do not hold full time appointments at Mailman (for example, faculty who are emeritus or whose primary appointment is in another school). This CUMC IRB does not permit faculty without a full-time appointment at Mailman to serve as the PI for student research protocols. In those circumstances, students should consult with their sponsor and identify another committee member who is an SMS faculty member and who can serve as PI of the IRB protocol. The sponsor should be included on the protocol as an investigator and should work with the student in the preparation of the protocol.

### ***Defense Committee***

The full committee (five members) is formed at the time of the proposal defense. **Students** may be consulted on, but **do not select their Dissertation Defense Committees** and should not be put in the position of having to ask faculty members to serve on their Dissertation Defense Committee. The student’s sponsor may undertake an informal exploration of willingness of faculty to serve in this capacity. The responsibility for selecting and recommending Dissertation Defense Committee members rests with the faculty sponsor and Deputy Chair of the Doctoral

Program. It is expected that the same five-member committee will be used for both the proposal and final dissertation defenses.

When the faculty sponsor feels that the proposal is ready for a formal presentation, the sponsor requests that the Department form a Defense Committee and schedule a proposal defense. The faculty sponsor's request is addressed to the Deputy Chair. The request includes a working title for the students' dissertation research and recommendations for possible committee members. **Acting on behalf of the Department and after consultation with the student's faculty sponsor, the Deputy Chair of the Doctoral Program formally invites and confirms the five-member Defense Committee. It is the Department's, not the student's, responsibility to schedule the dates and locations for the dissertation proposals and dissertation defenses.**

*Although GSAS rules state that the Proposal Defense Committee is composed of a minimum of three faculty members, the Department has elected to appoint the full five-member Defense Committee for the proposal defense.*

- A) PhD Dissertation Defense Committee** is composed of exactly five members, all of whom are expected to be present for the dissertation defense. **Three** of the members of the final defense committee must be **inside examiners** (holding a formal appointment or approved as a dissertation sponsor in the doctoral candidate's home department or program). The list of approved GSAS sponsors is available online at: <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/dissertation/doctoral-dissertation-sponsors#sociom>

**Sponsor/Advisor:** a faculty member who has been named as an approved dissertation advisor *in the degree candidate's program* (SMS). The sponsor is the person who guides you through the dissertation.

**Chair/Moderator:** a faculty member in SMS and is an approved PhD sponsor. The Chair is the defense moderator and responsible for making sure the Dissertation Committee follows the formal requirements for dissertation defense. The Chair convenes the defense and moderates the candidate's presentation and committee members' questions and discussions.

**Committee members:** At least one other member in addition to the Sponsor and Chair must be from the list of approved PhD sponsors. The approved list of PhD sponsors in SMS combines all faculty with primary appointments in SMS and/or appointments to the SMS subcommittee. If the sponsor does not hold a full-time appointment at Mailman, another member of the committee who does should be designated as the PI for the student's IRB protocol, with the sponsor included as an investigator.

In addition to the three insider examiners, at least one (but preferably two) of the five must be an outside examiner, defined as:

- i. a faculty member, clinician or practitioner who holds a position at another university or research institution
  - ii. a full-time faculty member at Columbia University outside the student's own department or program
  - iii. a research scientist at Columbia University outside the student's own department or program
  - iv. an adjunct professor at Columbia University outside the student's own department or program
  - v. a full-time faculty member whose appointment is at Barnard College, Jewish Theological Seminary, or Union Theological Seminary
- OR**
- vi. a full-time faculty member in the student's interdisciplinary program whose field is outside of the student's dissertation field

*In cases where the "outside" member satisfies the criterion vi. above, the department/program must include with the defense a brief explanation with the defense application to clarify how the fifth examiner's primary field differs from the focus of the student's dissertation.*

A committee may include members from outside of the University if the faculty sponsor believes such outsider members bring an expertise or knowledge of the research topic not available among existing CU faculty. The faculty sponsor must assure the Department that the outside member will be able to be present for dissertation defense. The Department does not have funds to cover the transportation expenses that might be incurred by outside members. The names of outside examiners from other University Departments shall be submitted by the Subcommittee Chair to the Dean of GSAS. Outside examiners from other universities must submit evidence of their qualification, in the form of curriculum vitae, for approval by the Dean.

**B) DrPH Dissertation Defense Committee** shall be composed of five members, all of whom are expected to be present for the dissertation defense:

**Sponsor/Advisor:** an approved DrPH sponsor, is the person who guides you through the dissertation.

**Chair/Defense Moderator:** a tenured or senior faculty with a primary appointment in SMS. The Chair is the defense moderator and responsible for making sure the Dissertation Committee follows the formal requirements for dissertation defense. The Chair convenes the defense and moderates the candidate's presentation and committee members' questions and discussions.

**Three Committee Members:** must be SMS faculty members and two must be outsiders, either from other Columbia Departments and/or schools or universities. If the sponsor does not hold a full-time appointment at Mailman, another member of the committee

who does should be designated as the PI for the student's IRB protocol, with the sponsor included as an investigator. The 5th member of the committee must be someone who engages in public health practice.

A committee may include members from outside the University, if the faculty sponsor believes such outsider members bring an expertise or knowledge of the research topic not available among CU faculty. The faculty sponsor must assure the Department that the outside member will be able to be present for the dissertation defense. The Department does not have funds to cover the transportation expenses that might be incurred by outside members. The names and contact information of outside examiners from other University Departments shall be submitted by the Director of Academic Programs. Outside examiners from other universities must submit evidence of their qualifications, in the form of curriculum vitae, for approval by the Dean.

### ***The Dissertation Proposal***

The formal approval of a proposal is given upon successful defense and provides assurance that completion of the proposed study will provide the basis for an acceptable dissertation. The dissertation proposal is a description of an idea which is worthy of research, and which has been described in a manner showing the student's ability to plan an independent investigation.

All individuals conducting research are required to submit a protocol for review by the Institutional Review Board. This review can take several months and so it is important to submit it with sufficient lead time. In order to be permitted to draw on this preliminary research in one's dissertation proposal, a student must file a copy of the IRB approval for that research with the Director of Academic Programs.

### ***Proposal Format***

The student, in consultation with the dissertation sponsor, should prepare a proposal on the topic. Development of the proposal requires considerable time and effort; it should include:

- Abstract (1 page)
- A statement of the problem to be investigated
- Research aims of the dissertation
- A synthesis and critique of the literature bearing upon this problem
- A statement of hypotheses or questions
- For DrPH dissertation only: A statement of the implications for public health practice. The statement must describe how findings from the dissertation project can be used to influence public health programs, policies or systems. The DrPH dissertation must include one chapter or section discussing implications for public health practice.
- A description of the methodological approach, including research design and plans for data collection and analysis
- Status of human subjects review

- Timeline

Excluding references and the abstract, **the body of the proposal must not exceed 30 double spaced pages** (using 11 pitch type face or larger). Beyond covering the topics listed above, the Department has no specific expectations regarding the precise format and content of the proposal, which varies among the social science departments and disciplines. The student's sponsor is responsible for assisting the student in developing a suitable format for the proposal.

### ***Proposal Defense***

The Department will first confirm committee participation and then move on with scheduling. If a proposal defense cannot be scheduled in a timely manner with all five members present, the defense may proceed with a minimum of the sponsor, chair, and at least one other member from outside of SMS. Members not present at the proposal defense are requested to prepare comments on the proposal and to submit them in writing before or at the time of the defense to the student and faculty advisor.

There is a great deal of variation in the extent to which students solicit input from members of the dissertation proposal defense committee in advance of the meeting. In some cases, the proposal a student distributes two weeks before the defense will be the first version a faculty member reads. In other cases, in addition to working closely with the sponsor, a student has shared multiple drafts of a proposal with several members of the committee. Although the primary responsibility for mentoring a student falls to the sponsor, students are encouraged to share their work as it develops, and when the sponsor feels that it is ready, with those members of their committee who are available and willing to provide input at an earlier stage.

It is the candidate's responsibility to distribute copies of the proposal to all committee members at least **two weeks** before they meet. The student is responsible for confirming that all committee members have received proposals in a timely manner.

At the proposal defense, the student should be prepared to make a brief (no more than 10 minutes) formal presentation, outlining the project, discussing its methods and substance, and explaining the rationales underlying decisions that were made as the proposal developed. The proposal defense should be viewed as a working conference, where the committee takes a critical look at the research plan with the aim of protecting the student from attempting to execute an inadequate and unfeasible plan. Any differences among committee members concerning the adequacy of the plan should be resolved among themselves during the meeting. If the committee members agree that there are weaknesses in the plan that are not resolved during the meeting, the student may be asked to revise the proposal and another meeting of the committee may be convened before the proposal is approved.

Target dates for completion of various steps should be set when the proposal is approved to give a standard against which to evaluate satisfactory progress. Unanimous approval must be obtained from the Committee before the student can proceed with the dissertation research.

It is the responsibility of the Proposal Defense Committee to inform the Director of Academic Programs of the approval of the dissertation proposal. A copy of the approved proposal should be given to the Director of Academic Programs to be kept on file. Successfully defended proposals will be considered for the Department's Eugene Litwak Prize, awarded annually for the best proposal to help support students while they are completing their dissertations.

### ***Publishable Papers Proposal Review Process***

The process of evaluating for evaluating the publishable papers option is identical to that followed for the traditional book-style dissertation:

- 1) The student selects a faculty sponsor, who also agrees to the publishable papers option, and the faculty sponsor reaches out to the full committee to ensure that all committee members are in agreement;
- 2) The dissertation proposal follows the same guidelines for SMS doctoral dissertation proposals, with the addition of a Table that lists working titles for each proposed publication along with their "potential submission journal";
- 3) The dissertation committee composition and selection will be identical to those followed for the book-style format, and
- 4) The standards for assessment of dissertation research will be similar to those applied to a book/monographic format, with the additional requirement that to receive a grade of pass with minor revision, appraisal should take into account whether each article would stand alone as a separate publishable article.

### ***IRB Requirements***

All students must submit an application to the Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board (IRB) and obtain approval for any research involving human participants. Even research that will be using data covered by existing IRB protocols, or that does not involve direct contact with human participants must be submitted for IRB review; the determination of whether dissertation research is exempt is the responsibility of the IRB, not the student researcher.

Students should develop the IRB protocol at the same time as they begin to write the proposal. The proposal defense can be scheduled prior to IRB approval (and it is not necessary to include details of submission [actual or planned] in the proposal narrative), but **students must have IRB approval before commencing research.**

Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the IRB's 'office hours' to seek advice on the preparation of their protocols. These preliminary conversations will make it clear whether the protocol presents any particular challenges regarding human subjects protection, how those challenges might be addressed, and what supplementary materials it is necessary to submit.

Seeking this advice in advance of submission can mean the difference between a protocol that is approved in 4 weeks and one that creates major delays in the initiation of research. More information is available at [www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/irb/](http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/irb/). **Students conducting research outside the United States will be required to submit their project for review within that country as well, and so developing a relationship with a host institution is a critical part of any pre-dissertation preparatory work.**

The IRB application must be submitted by the student's sponsor (not the student) through an online system, RASCAL ([rascal.columbia.edu](http://rascal.columbia.edu)). Students should be prepared for the possibility of a lengthy IRB proposal approval process, although this can be avoided by seeking input in advance from IRB staff. Six to eight weeks, or even longer, is not unheard of, and students should take that into consideration when planning. The student's proposal defense includes a brief presentation of the status on the IRB review. It is possible that recommendations made by the committee during the proposal defense may require changes in the research design that may initiate modifications to approved IRB protocols. In addition, if research involves collaboration with other institutions, approval of the modification by their IRB may also be required.

As noted above, faculty without a full-time appointment at Mailman may not serve as the PI for student research protocols, and there are a number of faculty on the list of approved sponsors who fall into that category. In those circumstances, students should consult with their sponsor and identify another committee member who is an SMS faculty member and who can serve as PI of the IRB protocol. The sponsor should be included on the protocol as an investigator and should work with the student in the preparation of the protocol.

Students are responsible for renewing the IRB approval annually throughout the course of dissertation research, which includes the period of data analysis and writing. As part of the completion of the dissertation, students will be expected to present evidence of continuous IRB approval; if the renewal letters are uploaded annually to Canvas Doctoral page when students submit their annual report, this is considered sufficient evidence of continuous approval. Students are also responsible for 'terminating' the IRB protocol when they complete the doctoral program.

### ***The Dissertation in Progress***

Once the proposal has been approved by the dissertation proposal defense committee and the protocol has received IRB approval or been determined to be exempt, the student may begin dissertation research. The student should keep in close contact with their sponsor for suggestions and advice. Each student should work out arrangements with the rest of the committee regarding how the committee wishes to keep abreast of their progress.

GSAS provides formatting guidelines and a very helpful [Word template](#) for your convenience and use while you write your dissertation – or toward the end, when you are preparing it for deposit.

Committee members are expected to provide written or oral responses to drafts within a

reasonable time period. Generally three weeks to a month should be sufficient time to permit a detailed response to a single chapter. Six weeks should be sufficient time to review a group of chapters, two months for a full draft of a dissertation. Some supervision should be provided during summers, and special arrangements for continuous guidance should be worked out when faculty are on leave or during the summer. It is appropriate, and can be very useful, for a student to sit down with the sponsor and work out a schedule for the submission, review, and revision of dissertation chapters.

There is a great deal of variation in the extent to which members of the dissertation committee read drafts of dissertation chapters. In order to take maximum advantage of the mentorship provided by the full committee, and to reduce the likelihood that at the time of the defense faculty will see major unaddressed flaws in the dissertation research, it is **strongly recommended** that students share a full draft of the dissertation with all members of the committee well in advance of the dissertation defense and allow time to incorporate whatever feedback committee members provide. The specifics of how committee members would like to be kept abreast of research in progress and to receive drafts and provide feedback should be discussed at the time of the proposal defense. Students who feel that they would benefit from more mentorship than they are receiving from their sponsor or other members of the dissertation committee should discuss the matter directly with the Deputy Chair.

### ***The Dissertation Defense***

No defense shall be scheduled until both the dissertation sponsor and a second reader have signified that, in their judgment, the dissertation is acceptable and thus ready for a formal defense.

When the student and dissertation sponsor feel that the dissertation has been completed in a satisfactory manner, the sponsor shall inform the Deputy Chair of the Doctoral Program and the Director of Academic Programs and request that a time and date for the defense be scheduled.

Dissertation defenses are held throughout the academic year. The exact days and times are arranged to suit the convenience of the faculty committee and the student. It can be complicated to coordinate the schedules of five faculty members and a student, and so arrangements for the examination can take several months to make; students should plan accordingly.

Students must distribute the dissertation to all member of the Dissertation Defense Committee **at least four weeks prior** to the date on which they plan to defend. The student is responsible to confirm that all committee members received the copies in a timely manner

### **Conduct of the Defense**

The student and all committee members are expected to be present **in person** at the dissertation defense. The DrPH defense is an open defense and guests are permitted to attend. The PhD defense is a closed defense. GSAS has very strict rules and policies on this. Under no circumstance

are guests permitted to attend: *Only the candidate and the approved members of the dissertation defense committee may be present during the defense. Columbia University policy does not allow spectators or other individuals to attend a defense. There are no exceptions to this rule.*

The defense must be conducted in English.

The dissertation defense is two hours in length. At the time of the defense, the Dissertation Defense Committee meets briefly in closed session to outline the themes to be covered during the examination. The candidate and any guest present (for the DrPH defense only) are then invited into the examination room.

The student defends the sources, findings, interpretations, and conclusions of dissertation. The candidate is expected to show familiarity with the research and literature pertinent to the subject topic, and the knowledge relevant to the research questions and methods. The candidate may be asked to begin by summarizing, within ten minutes, the theoretical content of the dissertation and the broader significance of key findings. Following the overview, the committee members ask the candidate to defend the validity of the research and the importance of the findings.

Points made by the examiners will naturally divide into substantive and editorial. Generally, a sheet of notes on editorial matters is handed to the candidate by the reader, thereby leaving examining time for matters of substance. The public audience does not generally ask questions of the candidate, although the Chair of the Committee may allow questions of clarification to be posed by members of the audience.

### **Results of the Defense**

After the two-hour dissertation defense, the student (and anyone else who is not a member of the committee and who has been present at the DrPH defense) leaves the examination room and the Dissertation Defense Committee, in closed session, judges the acceptability of the dissertation. The student is called back into the examination room and informed of the results. The possible outcomes for each program:

<b>PhD</b>	<b>DrPH</b>
<p><u>Approved as submitted</u> - The committee may ask that minor revisions or corrections be made before the dissertation is deposited. A written description of those minor revisions should be provided to the candidate at the defense. These minor revisions should be completed to the satisfaction of the sponsor within one month after the defense.</p>	<p><u>Accept subject to minor revisions</u> - The revisions are supervised by the student’s sponsor. Upon completion of the required revisions, the candidate is recommended for the degree. All revisions should be completed, and the final dissertation deposited no later than three months from the date of the dissertation defense.</p>
<p><u>Approved pending revisions</u> - The committee may ask that revisions be made before the dissertation is deposited. A written description</p>	<p><u>Accept subject to major revisions</u> – A three-member ad hoc subcommittee, including the sponsor, will be named at the conclusion of the</p>

<p>of those revisions should be provided to the candidate at the defense or shortly afterward. These revisions should be completed to the satisfaction of the sponsor within six months after the date of the defense.</p> <p><u>Referred</u> - The committee believes that substantial work must be undertaken on the dissertation by the candidate before it can reach a recommendation to award the degree. A detailed written description of the reservations about the examined dissertation should be provided to the candidate at the defense or shortly afterward. At the time of the defense, a subcommittee composed of at least three unanimously agreed upon members of the original committee (and including the sponsor) will be formed. The specified revisions should be completed to the satisfaction of the subcommittee within one year after the date of the defense. A majority of the subcommittee must approve the revised version for the candidate to be recommended for the degree.</p> <p><u>Fail</u> - The committee believes that the dissertation is not acceptable, and the candidate will not be recommended for the degree. No candidate may have a second defense unless the dean of GSAS concludes, upon evidence provided either by the candidate or by a member of the committee, that procedural irregularities occurred during the defense.</p>	<p>defense and a written description of revisions will be provided to the candidate at the defense or shortly afterward. The revisions should be completed to the satisfaction of the 3-member ad hoc subcommittee within six months after the date of the defense. The sponsor will notify the Director of Academic Programs and the student may then proceed to deposit the dissertation.</p> <p><u>Not accepted</u> - The dissertation is deemed unacceptable and the candidate is not recommended for the degree.</p>
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**Final Deposit of the Dissertation**

Once the student has successfully defended the dissertation, the last remaining academic requirement is to complete the electronic deposit. Once revisions are complete, the student may begin the deposit process.

**PhD Students:** There are specific formatting requirements for the dissertation. Visit the GSAS website to view the [guide to formatting](#).

**GSAS Electronic Deposit Gateway** There are four steps to completing your deposit:

1. Complete the GSAS deposit application and pay the \$85 processing fee.

2. Submit the required Survey of Earned Doctorates online.
3. Upload and submit a PDF copy of your dissertation.
4. Obtain and submit a signed Approval Card that certifies you have made all required revisions and that the dissertation has been approved for deposit by your sponsor and by your doctoral program.

**DrPH Students** may only deposit when all revisions are complete and with approval from their academic department. The Mailman School does not have specific formatting requirements and DrPH students may also use the GSAS guidelines.

There are two steps to completing the deposit - these steps can be done in any order, but the deposit is only considered finalized when both steps are complete:

1. Complete the required [Survey of Earned Doctorates](#)
2. Upload and submit a PDF copy of your dissertation to [ProQuest ETD Administrator](#)

### ***Guidelines for Publishable Papers format Doctoral Dissertation***

In addition to the traditional monograph or book-style format for SMS doctoral dissertations, students may select an alternate format for the dissertation: two analytic chapters written in the format of a publishable papers. Since norms of scholarly publication vary across the social science disciplines, a student must obtain the approval of their sponsor before selecting the publishable papers option, and the sponsor should consult (well in advance of the proposal defense) with the full committee to make sure that they also find this format acceptable. As stated on page 19, students are not permitted to switch to another format after having defended the proposal.

Under this format the two publishable papers are preceded by a comprehensive literature review also in a format suitable for publication. There should be a substantial introductory section that places the papers in the literature more broadly – what is the background of this work, what problems are outstanding, what motives the papers included in the thesis? The two publishable papers are followed by an integrative concluding chapter stating succinctly what was learned in the papers regarding the issues raised in the introduction, and stating what might be the next steps. An appendix may also be added if a more complete description of study methodology is required beyond what would conform to standard practice in the methods section of a journal articles.

Students selecting this option must also include at the end of their dissertation proposal a working title and potential target journal for the review article and the minimum of two “publishable papers”. Each paper would be expected to conform to the submission journal’s format style for, respectively, literature review and original research articles. The committee convened for the proposal defense will approve the list of articles linked to a “potential submission journal” for each paper. Successful defense of the dissertation is not contingent on either acceptance or submission of the publishable papers prior to the defense. The student may

change the “potential submission Journal” contingent on sponsor approval.

The publishable papers option provides students a supervised experience in preparing manuscripts appropriate for submission to a scholarly journal, and is intended facilitate the publication of doctoral dissertation research. This format requires that the review and the empirical papers should be publishable. Though it is difficult to define publishable, the committee will adopt standards similar to those used in reviewing papers for peer reviewed journals similar to those listed in the dissertation proposal. It should be noted that this alternate format may require greater effort from both the student and faculty sponsor than the more traditional thesis because when prepared in this format the dissertation must be comprehensive and thorough, while at the same time being a great deal succinct than is required of the standard monograph format.

### **Format of Publishable Papers Dissertation.**

#### **DrPH Students - Integrated Learning Experience (ILE) Guidelines**

As previously mentioned, two sub-options exist within this Publishable Papers format for DPH Students:

Option 1: Two papers developed from the ILE research; One paper incorporating implementation-related content, aimed at publication as a professional practice article and key aspects of the “plan for change”; and a concluding chapter would not need to include the plan for change.

Option 2: Three papers developed from the ILE research (per current SMS requirements); the “plan for change” should be incorporated into the concluding chapter

#### **PhD Student Guidelines**

1. A comprehensive literature review of the research literature to be addressed by the publishable papers that follow. The literature review should be of length, format and quality comparable to reviews published in the annual review series or other journal that accepts review articles. For a literature review of a field that includes quantitative research, a meta-analysis type of literature review may also be appropriate and must be assessed against current standards of such reviews such as those promulgated by the Cochrane Collaborative. The literature review must provide the theoretical and empirical context for the publishable papers that follow. A well-written review article for a dissertation would end with a succinct statement of the research questions or hypotheses to be addressed in the empirically grounded papers that follow.

2. At least two papers of publishable quality consistent with the standards of a peer-reviewed journal in the field.

3. A final chapter that integrates and discusses the findings of the papers. It should include discussions of the conclusions of the research and should make recommendations for policy or further research.

4. Optional: An appendix outlining in detail the study methods that would not fit within the normal constraints of methods section for most journal articles. Tables too long and detailed for the text may be included in the appendix.

**Dissertation Review Process.**

The process of evaluating for evaluating the publishable papers option is identical to that followed for the traditional book-style dissertation:

- 1) The student selects a faculty sponsor, who also agrees to the publishable papers option, and the faculty sponsor reaches out to the full committee to ensure that they are in agreement;
- 2) The dissertation proposal follows the same guidelines for SMS doctoral dissertation proposals, with the addition of a Table that lists working titles for each proposed publication along with their “potential submission journal”;
- 3) The dissertation committee composition and selection will be identical to those followed for the book-style format, and
- 4) The standards for assessment of dissertation research will be similar to those applied to a book/monographic format, with the additional requirement that to receive a grade of pass with minor revision, appraisal should take into account whether each article would stand alone as a separate publishable article.

## **Appendix A**

### **Faculty Research Interests**

**Adkins-Jackson, Paris “AJ” (pa2629)**, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). Structural racism on healthy aging for historically marginalized populations; life course adverse community-level policing exposure on psychological well-being, cognitive function, and biological aging for Black and Latinx older adults; effectiveness of anti-racist multilevel pre-intervention restorative programs; community health, institutional trustworthiness, multisector community-engaged partnerships.

**Aidala, Angela (aaa1)**, Associate Research Scientist (PhD-Sociology). Research, teaching, and service delivery strategies to work effectively with disadvantaged and ‘harder to reach’ populations in urban settings; social-structural and cultural determinants of health; housing/ lack of housing; individual and community health; collaborative, practice-based evidence to advance health equity.

**Chowkwanyun, Merlin, (mc2028)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). History of public health; health social movements; racial inequality; environmental health and toxic substances policy; immigration; GIS; oral history, interviewing; archival research; text-mining, databases, cloud/parallel computing methods

**Colgrove, James (jc988)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD–Sociomedical Sciences), Vaccination; Government responsibility for public health; the relationship between individual rights and communal responsibilities from the 19th century to the present; the role of the law and other forms of coercion in public health; ethical issues in public health.

**Dupont-Reyes, Melissa (md3027)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and Epidemiology (PhD - Epidemiology). Interdisciplinary public health; mental illness stigma; adolescent mental health; global health communication; intersectionality; latinx and immigrant health; community violence; school mental health; quantitative and mixed-methods research; health equity research.

**Ford, Jessie (jf3179)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Sociology). Areas of interest-sexual and reproductive health; gender inequality; sociological approaches to health; sexual violence, health, and pleasure; qualitative research and mixed methods.

**Franks, Julie (jf642)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (in ICAP) at Columbia University Medical Center (PhD-History). Areas of interests: HIV/AIDS, sub-Saharan Africa; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health; behavioral health interventions; sex workers; social networks; emergent global COVID-19 pandemic; engagement of under-represented populations in health research; qualitative research and mixed methods.

**Fullilove, Robert (ref5)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (in Social Work) at the Columbia University Medical Center (EdD). Minority health; mass incarceration; HIV/AIDS; addiction.

**Giovenco, Daniel (dg2984)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Health Education & Behavioral Science, MPH). Tobacco control policy and disparities in tobacco use; impact of marijuana legalization; population survey data analysis; GIS and community mapping techniques; neighborhood field data collection.

**Gooden, Lauren (lkg2129)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Epidemiology). Areas of HIV testing and prevention; HCV prevention and treatment; and access to and engagement in care.

**Hernandez, Diana (dh2494)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Sociology). Areas of poverty and social inequality; race, ethnicity and immigration; health, law and public policy and qualitative methods and evaluation.

**Hirsch, Jennifer (jsh2124)** Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Anthropology and Population Dynamics). Gender, sexuality, and reproductive health; U.S.-Mexico migration and transnational communities; HIV/AIDS (heterosexual transmission, cultural and political-economic approaches); the application of anthropological theory and methods in public health.

**Hopper, Kim (kh17)**, Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Sociomedical Sciences/Medical Anthropology). Homelessness; the "de facto" public mental health system; recovery from severe psychiatric disorders; ethnographic methods; ethics and research.

**Lovero, Kate (kl2153)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Neuroscience). Prevention and treatment of adolescent mental health problems in low-resource settings; global mental health; adolescent depression, anxiety, trauma, suicide; dissemination and implementation science; community engagement and participatory research; research-policy partnership; cultural adaptation; capacity-building; mixed methods.

**Oppenheimer, Gerald (go10)**, Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University Medical Center (PhD-History; MPH-Epidemiology). History of HIV/AIDS; history of public health; history of epidemiology, particularly heart disease epidemiology; history of social medicine; history of race and research.

**Prins, Seth (sjp2154)**, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Epidemiology, MPH). Collateral public health consequences of mass incarceration and criminalization; psychiatric epidemiology; relational social processes; economic exploitation and domination; racial capitalism; critical social theory; quantitative methods; critical causal inference.

**Rosen-Metsch, Lisa (lm2892)**, Dean, Columbia School of General Studies, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Sociology). Health promotion research, social policy research, social/structural interventions, health services research in primary care settings, substance abuse policy research, women's health, public health interventions in oral health care settings. Multi-level intervention development, implementation, and evaluation for moving persons at risk and

living with HIV across the HIV treatment cascade/HIV care continuum.

**Rosner, David (dr289)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and History (PhD-History). History of public health; history of urban health; race and mental health; occupational and environmental disease; health in New York City; history of hospitals and medical care.

**Shelton, Rachel (rs3108)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (ScD- Society, Human Development & Health; MPH). Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic-based disparities in cancer screening and preventive health behaviors; adherence and decision-making regarding HPV vaccine, colorectal, breast, prostate, and cervical cancer screening; development, evaluation, and dissemination of cancer prevention/control interventions, particularly for low-income and medically underserved populations; Lay Health Advisor and Patient Navigation programs; role of social, cultural and contextual factors in influencing health behaviors and outcomes.

**Siegel, Karolynn (ks420)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and Social Work (PhD-Sociology). Psychosocial dimensions of genetics and disease; living with chronic or life threatening illness; stress and coping with health related stressors; stigma; HIV/AIDS.

**Sikkema, Kathleen (ks3364)**, Stephen Smith Professor and Chair of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Clinical Psychology). Community based HIV prevention and mental health intervention trial research; global mental health; community-level prevention trials; mental health interventions to improve HIV care engagement; intervention trials to address sexual trauma, coping and gender violence; U.S. and South Africa; university-community research collaboration; syndemic nature of HIV and mental disorders.

**Sivaramakrishnan, Kavita ( ks2890 )** Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-History) Global health history; international health and politics of disease surveillance, history of public health and society in south Asia; population health politics; historical and comparative perspectives on age and aging; health and volunteering across cultures; history of chronic disease in colonial and contemporary settings, WHO and history of social determinants of health; nonwestern medicine and traditions of ethics, healing and professionalization

**Sommer, Marni (ms2778)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (DrPH). Menstruation, puberty, gender and sexuality; global health; adolescent health; qualitative and participatory research methods; intersection of puberty and girls' education; Tanzania, Eritrea, sub-Saharan Africa.

**Wingood, Gina (gw2326)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (ScD-Society & Health; MPH) Research focuses on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of HIV prevention programs for African American women and adolescents in clinical and non-clinical settings (i.e. church settings). Research portfolio in women's health, social justice, dissemination and implementation science and; reduction of stigma associated with HIV and diabetes. Assess efficacy of prevention interventions using self-reported outcomes, biological outcomes and social media.

## **Appendix B Student Prizes**

The following are prizes for doctoral students awarded by SMS. Students may submit articles for the Elinson award. Faculty nominate students for the remaining awards.

### **Elinson Prize**

For a published article by SMS students that best exemplifies sociomedical research. To be eligible, the article must be published or accepted for publication in a peer reviewed journal. The student must be the sole or first author. The article must have been written while in the Department and the student's SMS affiliation is explicitly acknowledged in article. A prize winner is not eligible to complete in the year following the award.

### **Litwak Prize**

For the best dissertation proposal submitted by an SMS Doctoral Student. Candidates for the Litwak Prize are nominated by the student's proposal defense committee. They should be in the upper 20% of all dissertation proposals.

### **Benton Prize**

For the dissertation that best exemplifies application of Sociomedical Science Research to Public Health Practice or Policy. Eligible applications are SMS students who successfully defended their Dissertation in the preceding year. Candidates for the Benton prize are unanimously nominated by their dissertation committee as among the top 10% of all SMS dissertations. A member of the committee must submit a brief nominating statement outlining the merits of the dissertation for this prize.

Student work eligible for these prizes must have been completed and nominations submitted during the year **ending March 31**.

## **Appendix C**

### **GSH Fellowship Requirements**

The Department of Sociomedical Sciences supports pre-doctoral training fellowships in Gender, Sexuality, and Health. The program is funded by the Population Dynamics Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Development. The fellowships are available only to PhD candidates, and eligibility is limited to U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Fellowships will usually be awarded at the time the student enrolls for PhD studies in SMS. Fellows must satisfy course requirements in addition to those required for their disciplinary concentration. These include:

- 1) P9719 Critical Perspectives on Research in Gender, Sexuality, and Health
- 2) One of two courses in conceptual and research approaches to sexuality:
  - P8709 Seminar in Sexuality, Gender, Health, and Human Rights
  - P8736 Theories and Perspectives on Sexuality and Health
- 3) A course in research ethics (usually POPF P9630: Research Ethics & Public Health)
- 4) Attendance at the ongoing faculty-trainee Seminar in Gender, Sexuality, and Health
- 5) A research apprenticeship supervised by program faculty
- 6) Doctoral research focused on a topic in gender, sexuality, and health.

All coursework requirements (1, 2, and 3) must be completed prior to or in the semester the student elects to take the methods examination. Students should consult Professor Jennifer Hirsch about specific courses that satisfy requirements 3 and 6.

**Appendix D**  
**SMS PhD Tracking Sheet**

**Program Requirement Checklist (Coursework 60 credit minimum)**

Course (credits) - Public Health Requirements (30 total)	Semester Planned	Semester Completed
P6025 Introduction to Public Health (online module) (0)	Fall 2023	
P6104 Biostatistics (3)		
P6400 Epidemiology (3)		
<b>SMS Doctoral Seminar: 6 credits</b>		
P8788 Theoretical Foundations in Sociomedical Sciences (3)	Fall 2023	
P8789 Contemporary Debates in Sociomedical Sciences (3)	Spring 2024	
<b>SMS Social Science Course: 6 credits</b>		
P8745 Social & Economic Determinants of Health (3)	Spring 2024	
Additional graduate-level social science course (3)		
<b>Methods: 6 credits</b>		
Qualitative Methods (3)		
Quantitative Methods (3)		
<b>Electives (6)</b>		
Elective 1 (3)		
Elective 2 (3)		
<b>Social Science Requirements - 30 credits coursework</b>		
Masters Essay <u>or</u> transfer credit: ____ RUs / ____ Credits		
Language Proficiency (Anthropology students only)		
Oral Exam (History students only)		
Literature Review/Field Statement (Sociology students only)		
<b>Addition Program Requirements:</b>		
Methods Essay		
Theme Essay		
Proposal Defense		
Food for Thought (FFT) Presentation		
Dissertation Defense		