

Applying to Graduate & Professional Schools

(adapted from a presentation by Dr. Katja Guenter)

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- 1. What to consider before applying to graduate school**
- 2. How to negotiate the admissions process**
- 3. MA vs. PhD Sociology programs**



Part 1

What to consider before applying to graduate school



Graduate Education in the 21st Century

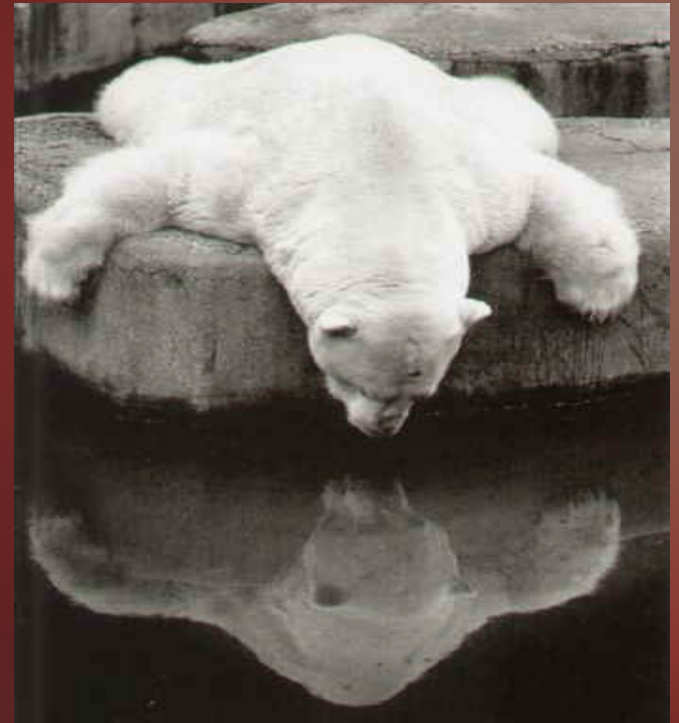
- A Survey of over 282,000 freshmen at 450 colleges and universities found that more than 75% of college first years expect to earn a degree beyond the bachelor's degree (UCLA, 2002)
- The Master's degree is becoming the “expected” degree for most professions.
- In many professions, the Master's degree is already identified as the *entry-level*.

What To Consider?

- **What do you want to do?**
- **What are you good at?**
- **Where do you want to work?**
- **Who do you want to work with?**
- **How much time do you have?**
- **How much money do you have?**

Is Graduate or Professional School for You?

- **Spend some time reflecting on who you are and what you want in life?**
 - **Happiness?**
 - **Sunny weather?**
 - **Prestige?**
 - **Money?**
 - **Work-family balance?**
 - **To help people?**



Part 2

NEGOTIATING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Where To Apply: Do Your Homework

- **When looking at programs to which you might apply, consider the following:**
 - **Do faculty in this program work in the subfields in which I want to work? Can I identify 1-3 possible mentors in the program?**
 - **Are there opportunities for research or professional experience in this program?**
 - **How is the curriculum organized? Does it fit my expectations and needs?**
 - **What are funding opportunities like in this program?**
 - **What kinds of jobs are recent graduates of this program getting?**
 - **Does the department & university environment meet my needs?**

Where To Apply

- **Apply to programs with**
 - **At least TWO (and ideally more) faculty working in your broad area of interest**
 - **National reputation if you plan to pursue an academic career (i.e., professor)**
- **Apply to programs with varying status**
 - **Safety, reasonable chance, reach**

Contact Programs Before I Apply!

- **Who?**
 - Contact graduate or admissions director and professor(s) of interest
- **Why?**
- **How?**
 - Indicate you are interested in studying similar topics (graduate school faculty) or in their professional specializations (professional school)
 - **DO NOT** ask about funding, mentoring style, or any questions available on website!

What Matters in an Application?

- **Transcript**
 - Appropriate courses (need not be major)
 - Good grades (stable or improving over time)
- **Standardized Test Scores (GRE for most PhD programs; varies for professional schools)**
- **Personal Statement**
- **Writing Sample**
 - Choose your **BEST** sociological work, ungraded (clean) version
- **Recommendation Letters (usually 3)**
- **Other Activities**
 - Research experience (senior thesis, independent or collaborative projects, internships, conference presentations)
 - Community/college service
 - Organizations (honors or professional societies, etc.)
 - Academic honors
- **Fit between student & department**

Personal Statements and Essays

- ***Why*** are you pursuing a master's/doctoral/professional degree?
- ***How*** have your academic, professional and/or personal experiences culminated in this decision/goal/path?
- ***What*** do you want to gain/learn/pursue while you are in graduate or professional school?
- **What** do you want to do with that knowledge once you have your degree?
- **How** will this particular program help you to further your progress towards these goals?

Tips & Techniques for Your Personal Statement

- **Draft, revise, draft, revise!**
- **Proofread!**
- **Have others read it**
 - especially professors!
- **Be clear, organized, succinct**
- **Follow guidelines provided by program/university**
- **Be confident, not arrogant**
- **Don't overshare**

What about Recommendation Letters?

- **Build relationships with ladder-ranked faculty (Assistant, Associate, or Full Professors) so you have people to ask**
 - Take 2 or more classes with them
 - Inquire about research assistantships, internships, or other opportunities with them
- **Ask primarily *faculty* who know you and can *add* to what your transcript already says.**
- **Some professional school applications might also want letters from past internship supervisors or employers**

How Do I ask for Letters?

- **Meet with your letter writers in person**
- **Give your writers at least 4-6 weeks notice before the deadline**
- **Give your writers important information about you:**
 - **Curriculum Vitae**
 - **Transcript**
 - **GRE scores**
 - **Personal statements/essays**
 - **Logic of where you are applying**
 - **Other relevant information (career plans, internship experience, research experience, employment history)**
- **Highlight sources of strength or vulnerability in your materials.**
- **Provide stamped, addressed envelopes for mailing letters to the intended programs or returning them to you.**

Standardized Testing

- **It's a measure of your ability to take this particular test... and it can be taught!**
- **Invest in a class if at all possible**
- **Use practice tests & study guides**
- **Take it when you are ready**

How Do I Get the “Extras”?

- **Research Experience**
 - Talk to faculty
 - UCR Mentoring Summer Internship Program (MSRIP) <http://graduate.ucr.edu/msrip.html>
- **Community/Professional Experience**
 - Volunteering in organizations related to your research or professional interests
 - Travel to places where you may want to conduct fieldwork
- **Professional Experience**
 - Attend (even better, present at) conferences
 - Introduce yourself, make contact with people
 - Work in a related field

Important Miscellany

- **Be aware of—and meet—deadlines**
 - May be different for fellowships than for admission—submit by *earliest* deadline
- **Demonstrate interest, not peskiness**
 - Faculty will have limited time for you until you are admitted
- **Use graduate & professional students as a resource**
- **Use the web as a resource**

How To Decide

- **Fit and funding**
 - **Fit is both academic and social/environmental**



- **Professional Associations**
 - American Sociological Association
www.asanet.org
- **Campus library & guide books to graduate & professional schools**
- **Campus career services office**
- **Faculty members & other mentors in the field**
- **Websites for standardized tests**
 - GRE: www.ets.org/gre

Questions & Discussion

- **MA vs. PhD Degrees in Sociology**
- **Some of this comparison also applies to other academic fields**

What Can I Do with an MA in Sociology?

- **Become a faculty member at a community college or teaching-oriented college**
- **Applied sociology**
 - **Government/civil service and “think tanks”**
 - **For-profit private sector researchers**
 - **Market research**
 - **Non-profit sector**
 - **Labor organizing**
 - **Social services**
 - **Policy organizing**



What Can I Do with a PhD in Sociology?

- **Become a faculty member**
 - **Teaching-oriented institutions**
 - **Community colleges**
 - **Many liberal arts colleges**
 - **Research-oriented institutions**
 - **Universities**
 - **Hybrid institutions**
- **Applied sociology (with higher pay than with MA)**
 - **Government and “think tanks”**
 - **For-profit private sector researchers**
 - **Market research**
 - **Non-profit sector**



Table 1: Jobs Advertised for PhD Sociologists, 2006

Type of Position	N	% of Advertisements
Assistant Professors	610	56.2
Associate Professors	65	6.0
Full Professors	49	4.5
Instructors/Lecturers	64	5.9
Fellowships, Post-Docs	71	6.5
Academic/Other	138	12.7
Sociological Practice	89	8.2
Total	1086	100

How Much Time and Money Do You Have?

TIME

- PhD
 - ~5-7 years+
- MA
 - ~2 years



MONEY

- PhD
 - Most likely to be funded
- MA
 - Unlikely to be funded
- Remember lost earnings while in school



Doctoral vs. Master's Degree

– Time

- Doctorate takes more than 2x longer
 - Time to degree for MA: 2 years
 - Time to degree for PhD: 5-7 years

– Prestige

- Doctorate is more prestigious

– Employment Opportunities

- PhD trains primarily for faculty positions at research and some teaching institutions
- MA trains for non-academic positions and community college teaching

– Money

- Doctorates are paid more (but perhaps not much)
- Doctorates MAY be initially less expensive to obtain

– Access

- Doctorates are generally harder to get in to

– Intellectual stimulation

- A PhD program is typically more challenging

What Does a PhD Program in Sociology Look Like?

Sociology PhD at UCR

- **Year 1: Required courses in contemporary and classical theory, quantitative and qualitative methods, professional development**
- **Year 2: Courses in student's areas of interest, plus working on MA thesis**
- **Year 3: Complete coursework in 2 areas of specialization (Criminology and Socio-Legal Studies, Gender, Organizations and Institutions, Political Economy and Global Social Change, Race and Class, Social Psychology, Theory)**
- **Years 3 and 4: Complete qualifying exams and prospectus**
- **Year 4+: Research and write dissertation**
- **ONGOING: Work as a Teaching Assistant, apply for/receive fellowships, collaborate with faculty on research, present at conferences, submit papers to journals**

Current and Recent Dissertation Projects

- **Social control and class politics in the logistics industry (warehouses)**
- **State and media responses to teacher sexual misconduct**
- **Use of visual narratives in the environmental movement**
- **How gay Republicans and gay Catholics negotiate their identities**

Where Do PhDs End Up?

- **Recent PhDs at UCR have gone on to**
 - **Postdoctoral fellowships**
 - 1-4 year appointments as researchers in academic settings
 - **Tenure-track positions at community colleges, liberal arts colleges, state colleges like the CSUs, and research universities**
 - **Private sector**
 - Nielson Ratings
 - **University administration**
 - **Lecturer positions (non-tenure track)**