



GRAD SCHOOL

SPRING

TWENTY TWENTY-FOUR

OUTLINE



- Grad vs. Undergrad
- Master's vs. PhD
- Big questions to consider
- Your “intellectual self”
- Things to do before your senior year
 - Courses
 - Grades
 - Letters
- What admissions committees look at
- Deciding where to go?
- The personal statement

*****Every program needs to be researched.*****

Consider postponing the process if this is a rough time, personally and/or socially, for example the unlikely event of a worldwide pandemic, the rise of international fascist movements, the looming threat of global thermonuclear war, or something like that.



Structure and Focus: Beyond core/required courses, the overall course of study will be based on your interests and goals (which one can develop and re-develop in the early years), usually in collaboration with your advisor/mentor.

- Courses will be a lot more specialized and specific, especially electives.
- Most classes are seminars, which involve a combination of lecture and (substantially increased) discussion with/ participation from the class.
- After classwork you will work closely with your advisor/mentor and small committee of faculty for the rest of your time. You will be expected to be increasingly self-directed as you continue.
 - Some master's programs will do this part as a practicum, internship, etc.
- For PhD programs, one usually goes through some form of examination ("Comps," "Prelims," "Quals," etc.) to 'advance' to doctoral candidacy, that is, to start working on your dissertation. This is overseen by your advisor and a small committee of faculty. See program websites for more details, as program use different approaches.

Undergraduate vs. Graduate School



- **Workload:** Expect double or triple your experience here, or more, depending on the program. Assessment is usually from fewer but larger assignments, like term papers.
 - One typically works as a Research Assistant (RA) or Teaching Assistant (TA) in addition to classwork/thesis work.
 - Stats courses will still require computer labs, SPSS, and other software.
 - Other methods courses will likely require labs or active/field research.
 - Generally, one is limited to 3 classes per semester.
- **Class Size:** Most classes will be 30 students or less, probably closer to 15 or 20. There will be lots of opportunities for self-directed work, one-on-one/small group experiences, etc.
- **Community:** Typically, one's cohort (the group of incoming students of a particular year) develop a strong sense of community as they go through orientation together and take similar classes. Reading groups, dissertation support groups, and extra-curriculars (similar to undergrad) are typical of other socializing opportunities through the program.

Master's or PhD



Master's	PhD

Master's or PhD



Master's

PhD

Typically oriented towards a particular career track

Typically oriented towards becoming an academic and/or a researcher

Typically 1-2 years
(1 classwork, 1 thesis/practicum)

Typically 5 years, sometimes longer
(2 classwork, 3+ research/dissertation)

Usually more structured and supervised

Usually more independent

Generally unfunded, but not impossible to afford

Generally funded, but not much

Can be used as a springboard to a doctoral program; not uncommon to get more than one

Terminal degree; extremely uncommon (and pointless) to have multiple PhDs

Can often involve getting credentials for specific jobs

Probs not, unless you pursue a master's while doing a PhD



Big Questions to Consider

- Why are you a sociology major?
- What are your big interest areas in sociology? (NOTE: It is useful to look at the [ASA/American Sociological Association's list of sections](#).)
- What are your specific interests in those research areas, especially interests that might turn into research projects?
- What have you learned so far that makes you qualified to go to the next level? What are your major skills and abilities?
- Do you know what kind of degree you want to get (Master's, PhD, which field), and what that degree will do for your career prospects?
- Do you have a record that will open the door for you? What areas need help? Where do you shine?
- Do you know people who can recommend you? Do they have a good reason to do so?
- And finally: why do you want to go to graduate school?

Present Yourself as a Scholar/Intellectual



- Graduate programs care about **intellectual fit** and **intellectual potential**. (This is probably more significant for doctoral programs than master's programs.)
- **Intellectual Fit:**
 - Do your research areas match the department's?
 - Are there professors in those areas who will work with you, or with whom you want to work?
 - Are there "special" aspects of the department that appeal to you? Ex: research institutes/centers, aspects of diversity, employment opportunities, etc.
- **Intellectual Potential:**
 - Do you have a plan for your research interests?
 - Do you have a plan for your career? That is, why is this degree necessary for your future?
 - Do you have the right academic background?
 - Are you definitely going to complete the program?
- **The Elevator Pitch**



Graduate schools like to see research experience, but opportunities are limited for undergraduates.

- **Make SOC 102 a priority.** All SOC 102 classes allow students to develop research projects which often turn in to writing samples for grad school applications, and prove some kind of research experience.
- **Consider taking SOC 195, a course based around internships.** While not explicitly based on research like SOC 102, SOC 195 offers a chance to get real, practical experience working with organizations connected to sociological interests.
- **Consider doing a SOC 199/independent study with a professor to develop research experience and/or to develop a writing sample for your application package.** This project should focus on a topic/area on which you will be marketing yourself to grad programs.
- **Consider working at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) on campus.** The ISR has many long term and some short term projects with typically flexible terms of employment. Jobs range from data entry to phone surveys to going into the field to perform tasks.

(<http://www.csus.edu/isr/>)



Grades aren't everything, but they are important.

- **3.0 is a magic number. (3.5 if the program is highly ranked.)**
- If your GPA is below a 3.0, admission is certainly possible, but other aspects of the application have to be very compelling.
 - NOTE: Many schools only look at the last two years, not the overall GPA. Schools generally only care about the degree granting school, not all of them.
- **Grades in required/core courses (Stats, Methods, Theory) are weighted more than others.**
 - After the core courses, coursework in areas that you claim as special/specific interests matter more than other electives.
 - Ex: It will look quite suspicious if you claim an interest in the sociology of gender but got a B- in that course.

Before/During Your Senior Year: Letters



You will need two or three letters of recommendation.

- **Give us more reasons to recommend you.** A letter that can point to specifics is far more impressive than a generic one. Specificity comes from distinguishing oneself academically and getting to know one's teachers.
- **Contribute in your classes.** Contributing to class discussions, either by comments, analysis, or by asking good/useful questions, is not only of interest to teachers, but other students as well.
- **Use office hours.** (Students should be using office hours regardless of their interest in grad school. Anyway...) Office hours are a great way to establish a relationship, demonstrate one's interests in and passion for sociology, and expand one's intellectual interests.



- **The Approach**

- All teachers want to help you with this process.*
- Consider an elevator pitch about why you want to go to grad school, or...
- Simply say that you want to find out more about what grad school is about
- Be honest, with them and yourself, about possibly difficult parts of your application.

- **Crucial Information to Provide to Letter Writers:**

- Unofficial copy of CSUS transcripts (and other schools if requested).
 - You should at least know your GPA.
- List of schools being considered, reasons for choosing them, and deadlines.
 - Is it the school's location? Certain faculty? Research opportunities? Career prospects?
 - Are the letters to be mailed? Returned to you? Submitted through a website? These days it is almost always a website.
 - Students typically waive their right to see the letters. You should let recommenders know in advance if you did not waive.
- A draft of your personal statement (or a plan to present one).

What Admissions Committees Look At



Presented in no particular order, but the first four are essential.

- **Formal academics** (GPA, grades in core courses, etc)
- **Research experience and relevant work/volunteer experience**
- **Personal Statement** (research plans and personal narrative)
- **Letters of Recommendation** (usually 3, typically who you know well or from whom you have taken many, or key, courses)
- **Informal academics** (extracurricular activities like Sociology Club, AKD, student government, other clubs etc.)
- **The Diversity Statement** (this started as a California school thing, but now it is somewhat common)
- **Remember, Grad Admissions is Often Random.** There are many paths to grad school, and we cannot cover them all. If some of the things here are no longer options for you, or are not up to supposed standards, don't worry! New options will come along.

Deciding Where to Go



- Matching programs to career options
 - Master's programs will often provide connections to their local areas that can lead to jobs/careers.
 - Especially for PhD programs, clout and status can matter quite a bit.
- Location, location, location
 - Consider moving, but never choose a program in a place where you would not want to live.
- Fit
 - Are you a match for what the program offers? Will the program benefit your goals?
- Finances
 - Can you manage to cost of living?

Writing the Personal Statement



- **NOTE: The personal statement is not meant to be all that personal.** This is a document meant to sell your intellectual/scholarly self. It is not your memoirs. Do not overshare.
- **Typical Parts of the Personal Statement** (Always check program websites/application materials, etc for specifics.)
 - **Research interests**, including why this program will help you realize them;
 - **Background**, to the extent that it has prepared you for this next step, especially with regard to skills and motivation;
 - **Career goals**, and how the program will help you achieve them;
 - **Address any problems.** This is a chance to discuss any unconventional or problematic aspects of your application, like low grade/scores, significant time off, etc.
- **Polish, proofread, perfect.** The personal statement needs to be perfectly written; typos, grammar errors, etc. can lead to immediate rejection.
- **Do not lie** about anything in your personal statement (or anywhere else in your application).
 - **However, do enhance, amplify, highlight, etc.** Like any other job interview situation, a certain amount of spin is expected.
- **Tone is important.** You don't have to sound so serious and clinical, but you do need to sound professional. Humor is generally a bad strategy.
- **Do not list.** Avoid making your statement nothing more than a list of accomplishments.

Finally...



- It is the faculty's job to support you as you weigh graduate school. Do not hesitate to contact us. You are not bothering us.
- This presentation offers some general comments, but there is intense variability in graduate school admissions, etc. There are many ways to get there is it is where you want to go.
- Programs are open to talking with interested students. Some will have a program coordinator or director, other will have a person on staff to manage admissions. Faculty are usually interested in talking to prospective students, and generally will tell you, politely, if they are too busy to do so.
- Thanks! Chris Pappas PhD | pappas@csus.edu