Learning Goals – Sociology PhD Program

Sociology focuses on core questions of group and societal organization to explore how order is maintained and how social change occurs. Our department seeks to develop what C. Wright Mills referred to as the “sociological imagination” by investigating how broader social forces shape life trajectories, how social categories such as race, class, gender, and sexuality structure social experiences, and how individuals and groups confront, and sometimes alter, institutionalized systems of power. Since its founding, the department has enjoyed a distinct intellectual culture that links the key normative questions of democracy, social justice and the good life to critical social thought and qualitative research methods.

Our program boasts four main areas of study and expertise: gender and feminist studies; medical sociology; politics and social change; and culture and religion. We oblige our students to formulate questions of social and analytical importance in "big picture" terms and submit these questions to the test of rigorous research. With considerable expertise in ethnographic, interview, comparative and historical methods, our center of gravity has remained the qualitative analysis of institutional change.

Students completing the PhD program in Sociology will develop the following competencies:

Knowledge:

Develop familiarity with key theories and debates in Sociology.
Develop expertise in at least three established subfields in Sociology.

Core Skills:

Understand, develop, and extend theoretical frameworks for critically and systematically producing knowledge about social phenomena.
Conceptualize and design research projects, conduct data collection according to established principles, and engage in rigorous analysis.
Ask clear research questions, situate them in appropriate literatures, and articulate their theoretical and empirical significance.
Master oral communication and writing skills that allow for the clear and compelling communication of knowledge to academic peers, students in the classroom, and/or other constituents outside the academy.
Conduct scholarly and professional activities according to ethical standards.

Social Justice:

Gain knowledge and perspectives needed to participate as informed citizens in a global society.
Recognize and understand how structural, cultural, and relational contexts shape systems of power, access, and inequity.
Develop a reflexive and ethical sense of how diversity operates in social settings. Be an informed and critical consumer and producer of sociological knowledge.