

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
AND SOCIAL STUDIES

HONOURS PAPER GUIDELINES

SOCIOLOGY 499

JANUARY 1996

Modified SEPTEMBER 2003

Sociology 499 involves the preparation of an Honours paper and its defense.

The paper completes the honours program in sociology, and the student should use this paper as an opportunity to demonstrate his or her knowledge of and abilities in sociology. For the paper, the student is to select a specific topic within the field of sociology and conduct a sociological analysis of this topic.

The paper is also an exercise in selecting a suitable topic, working with an advisor and committee and receiving suggestions from the advisor and committee. Students writing the honours paper should look on this as an opportunity to obtain the input and suggestions of faculty advisors and using and incorporating these in the paper.

There are many possible approaches to researching and writing an honours paper. As a general guideline, the paper might do one or more of the following:

- ◆ Compare and contrast various approaches to a sociological issue.
- ◆ Examine some issue or problem within the context of one or more theoretical approaches.
- ◆ Examine and discuss a topic that is socially relevant to the needs of society.
- ◆ Review a portion of the sociological literature and make comments on and evaluations of this literature.
- ◆ Examine qualitative or quantitative data that have already been produced and analyze these in an sociological manner.
- ◆ Provide a critique of various approaches to a sociological issue.

The student is not expected to conduct original research for the paper, although such research is not discouraged if the student can find the time or resources to conduct such research.

A. Structure of the Paper.

The paper will be judged on the basis of the following four criteria. (Each criterion will be weighted equally in determining the grade. See notes on grading in B5 below).

1. Theme. Once the student has selected the topic, the student must construct a theme or problem which is relevant for this topic. This theme should (a) be clearly stated near the beginning of the paper, (b) be used to organize the presentation of materials in the paper and (c) lead to a conclusion near the end of the paper. As part of the theme or problem, a student may wish to state whether he or she is attempting to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis or research question.

The purpose of this requirement is to focus the intellectual energies of the student and to guide the student's research and writing. By constructing a theme, the purpose and justification for the research task should become apparent. This requirement should also help the student avoid the pitfalls of having an open-ended or rambling exposition of the topic. For example, the student should not attempt to explain all the works of a particular theorist, deal with all aspects of a social issue, present nothing more than a collection of empirical information or present a series of personal conjectures or opinions.

2. Relevance of the theme. The student must show how the theme relates to the discipline of sociology and how the discussion in the paper is relevant to the discipline. This means that there will be (a) some reference to the writings of sociologists concerning the topic selected, (b) some discussion of theoretical approaches to the topic by sociologists and (c) some discussion of methodological approaches to the topic by sociologists.

There need not be an explicit discussion of theory and methodological approaches in the paper. It may be that the theory and the methodological approaches can best be illustrated through a well constructed argument about the topic and a clear and thoughtful presentation of the topic. But the paper must show that the student is familiar with the sociological literature on the topic and with alternative theoretical and methodological approaches to the topic. Each approach discussed must be documented and the student is to present a fair and balanced discussion of alternative views, rather than just presenting his or her own opinion.

3. The Argument. In the paper, the student must discuss and elucidate the theme, and construct an argument about the topic. This argument should be well constructed and thorough, with evidence presented to support the argument. This evidence should be integrated with the points in 2 above (writings of other sociologists and theoretical and methodological approaches). The argument should be sociological in nature but where appropriate, can incorporate approaches from other disciplines. The student should attempt to be creative and original in the paper, and should do more than merely summarize the theme or evidence. The student must construct an argument that is methodologically sound, be familiar with various methodological approaches, be able to justify the methodological approach used in the paper and be aware of how a different methodological approach might have led to a different analysis.

4. Style. The student is expected to communicate the argument as clearly as possible in the paper. The structure of the paper is important in that the argument should be logically arranged and should flow smoothly.

The paper is to be grammatically correct and free from spelling and formatting errors. Proper documentation for references and arguments is to be provided and a properly referenced bibliography is to be included. We recommend that the student adopt one of the standard styles. Some suggestions for possible styles are given in Appendix A.

The student should aim to write a paper of approximately thirty (30) typewritten, double spaced pages. If it is appropriate, the paper can be shorter than this. In no case is the paper to exceed forty (40) pages of text without prior permission being obtained from the Honours/Graduate Committee.

B. Structure of the Program

1. Choosing a Topic. The student should choose the topic for the paper and attempt to define the theme before, or soon after, enrolling in Sociology 499. When the student obtains permission from the Department Head to enroll in Sociology 499, the student and the Department Head will discuss the topic and the selection of an advisor.

2. Selecting an Advisor and Committee. For the paper, the student must select an advisor and two other committee members (or co-advisor and one other committee member). After the oral presentation (see point 4 below), this three person committee will assign a grade for Sociology 499. Students are free to select any faculty member in the Department as advisor, subject to that faculty member agreeing to serve as advisor. Once the advisor is selected, this should be reported to the Department Head by both the student and the advisor. If a faculty member outside Sociology and Social Studies is to be selected as the advisor, then a Sociology and Social Studies faculty member should also be selected as a co-advisor. In this case, the student must clear this selection process with the Honours/Graduate Committee.

It is preferable for the student to select the other two members of the committee soon after the semester starts. These other committee members must be selected and consulted before the final draft of the paper is written. Who the other two members should be is to be discussed by the student and the advisor. The suggested names are then to be submitted to the Honours/Graduate Committee. Ordinarily the Committee will approve the names suggested, subject to the faculty members also agreeing to serve. If the Committee has any disagreement with the names selected, the Committee will meet with the student and advisor. If there is still disagreement at this point, the Department Head in consultation with the Honours/Graduate Committee will be responsible for structuring the committee.

As much as possible, the advisor and other committee members should be faculty members who have some familiarity with the topic selected or the approach adopted. Advisors and students are expected to consider the range of departmental resources and select appropriate committee members accordingly. In this selection process, attention should also be paid to the level of commitment that faculty members have to other students or other projects.

If the student is unable to find an advisor or other committee members, these will be assigned by the Department Head after consultation with the Honours/Graduate Committee.

The Honours/Graduate Committee and the Department Head are expected to act swiftly in making decisions.

3. Writing the Paper. When writing the paper, the student is expected to discuss the paper with the advisor. The advisor may suggest that the student prepare an outline or proposal early in the semester. As the student writes a draft of all or part of the paper, the student should give these to the advisor. The advisor is expected to provide comments and suggestions on the paper in a timely manner.

Once the other members of the committee have been selected they should also be consulted and the student should take their comments and suggestions into account when revising the paper. Before the student writes the final draft of the paper, the student must consult with all the members of the committee. The student should expect to receive comments and suggestions on the paper and should be prepared to revise the paper in the light of these -- not taking these into account might lead to a low grade for the paper. The paper may sometimes have to go through several drafts before it is considered complete.

When the advisor and the other committee members deem that the paper has been completed, the paper can be presented for grading. If any committee member considers that the paper is not ready for presentation, he or she should discuss this with the advisor and student. If the advisor and the student consider the paper completed, even though other committee members disagree, then the disagreement will be taken to the Department Head. In the case where agreement cannot be reached, the case will be adjudicated by the Department Head, in consultation with the Honours-Graduate committee.

4. Presentation of the Paper. The paper is presented to the Department by (a) making the paper available, and (b) making an oral presentation of the paper. The paper is to be made available to all faculty members and students who wish to have a copy. In no case is the student responsible for providing more than ten (10) copies of the paper. At the time the paper is made available to the Department, the student will arrange with the advisor, committee and Department Head for an oral presentation. If any Department member has any serious concerns about the acceptability of the paper, these should be raised with the advisor.

The oral presentation will be five calendar days or more after the completed paper has been made available to the Department. A notice of the paper title, name of the student and the time and place of the oral presentation will be posted in the Department Office. The oral presentation is open to anyone who wishes to attend. The presentation will be chaired by the Department Head or his or her designate.

Students are not normally expected to change topics or advisors once they are enrolled in Sociology 499. Where it does seem necessary to change the advisor, the student is to coordinate this through the Honours/Graduate Committee.

The oral presentation will begin with the student providing a presentation of no more than ten minutes, and preferably shorter. The members of the committee will then ask questions of the student. While any sociological question can be asked of the student, the committee members will normally orient their questions around the paper and issues raised in the paper. Other faculty and students present may also ask questions. All present will abide by the departmental tradition of intellectual tolerance. The oral presentation is normally not to exceed one hour.

After the oral presentation has been completed, everyone will leave the room except the committee and the chair of the presentation, who will decide the grade for the paper. The grade will be communicated to the student as soon as possible, normally within ten to fifteen minutes after the completion of the presentation.

5. Grading. The three committee members will grade the paper on the basis of the four criteria listed in Part A. Each criterion will be given equal weight. The grade assigned for the paper will be the mean of the grades assigned by the three committee members.

The grade will be based on the paper itself. A poor oral presentation will not lead to the lowering of the grade, other than in exceptional circumstances. However, a good oral presentation may lead to the grade being raised.

Grading Standards:

90+

85-89

80-84

75-79

70-74

50-69

Papers that are exceptional

Very good papers

Good papers

Papers above minimum standards but considered "average"

Papers that meet minimum standards

Papers that do not meet honours standards but are considered passable.

Note: For Social Studies 499, substitute "social science" for "sociology" and "Social Studies 499" for "Sociology 499."

Appendix

A. Style Manuals

The paper should be written using one of the standard writing styles, and this style should be used consistently throughout the paper. Students should consult the University of Regina Style Sheet for Written Work, produced by the Department of English. This may provide sufficient guidelines for writing the paper. Where further guidelines are necessary, use either the University of Chicago style or the American Psychological Association Style. Where there are uniquely Canadian references (e.g. Canadian government publications) consult one of the Canadian style manuals.

The following is a list of style manuals that the student could use.

American Psychological Association, Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, fourth edition (Washington, 1994).

Buckley, Joanne, Fit to Print: The Canadian Student's Guide to Essay Writing (Toronto, Harcourt Brace).

Department of the Secretary of State, The Canadian Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing (Toronto, Dundurn).

Hacker, Diane, A Canadian Pocket Style Manual (Toronto, Nelson).

Meyer, Michael, The Little, Brown Guide to Writing Research Papers (New York, Harper Collins).

Tarabian, Kate, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Chicago, University of Chicago).

B. Examples

Students should review the collection of Honours papers available in the office of the Department of Sociology and Social Studies for examples of topics, themes and methodological approaches.