

Things to do this year

1. Make sure you are getting administrative email to sociology grads. Not all will apply to you, but many important announcements come through email, so be sure to check it. (And delete messages you don't need or you will rapidly be overwhelmed.)
2. If you hope to get a master's thesis waiver, turn your thesis or papers in to the ASC (via Sandy Ramer) within the next few weeks. If you do get a waiver, remember that you have missed out on some in-house mentoring; look for ways to get this experience other ways. (You should talk to me and other faculty for advice on this.)
3. Take courses that will acquaint you with a range of ideas and professors, as well as meet requirements and give you skills. If you aren't sure what a course is about or whether you'd fit in, talk to the instructor. Generally best to focus on sociology courses the first year, to integrate yourself.
4. Attend training seminars or brownbags whether or not you are registered for them. Read the weekly calendar (comes on email) to find out what is being presented where. Get used to hearing about other people's research, and hearing people criticize and discuss research in public.
5. Start reading the journals. Read over ASR, AJS to get a sense of the range of sociology and what a top research article looks like. As you identify a specialty, find out what journals to read in that area.
6. Begin to get to know the faculty. You'll meet some in training seminars and brownbags. Ask for appointments with people you might share interests with. If you are not in class with them, you can just ask to meet them to talk over their interests and yours. Ask what grad courses they teach and when they will be offered; ask what kinds of research their advisees are doing.
7. Get to know your fellow students. Form study groups. Hang out around the building or in other places where they hang out. Even if you are shy, make yourself spend time with other grad students. This is harder if you have children or an off-campus job, but is still important. These are your colleagues and your future professional networks.
8. Find ways to cope with stress and competitiveness. Your fellow students are your colleagues, not your opponents. Learn how to set priorities and keep your morale up. Don't try to operate on no sleep – if you have too much to do, ask for help in figuring out how to cut back.
9. Remind yourself often that professional life is not the same as being in school. Don't give up prematurely, but do think about whether you want the job and life that this program is preparing you for.
10. Avoid incompletes! Don't get trapped in the spiral of perfectionism. If you have academic trouble (B's or worse, incompletes, personal problems getting in the way) ask for help as soon as possible.
11. Second semester, MA students: Begin thinking about possible master's thesis. [We will have a session second semester to talk about this. It is too soon to worry about it now.]
12. Second semester: Ask someone to be your advisor. This is usually tied up with choosing a master's thesis topic. The first step is "begin to get to know the faculty." You are welcome to talk to me individually about this, as well, and other students can also give you advice.
13. Second semester: Look for a job for next year.

Things to do in your second and third years (and think about now if you are ready)

1. Leave room in your schedule for a significant amount of time in the second year working on your master's thesis. Don't take too many courses; talk to your advisor about the possibility of taking some thesis credits to allow time. This is not a term paper you are going to knock out in a long weekend. Consider forming/joining a master's thesis support group. Most people should target completion for the summer after your second year.
2. With your advisor, go through the course requirements for the PhD and plan a schedule for completing them within the next 2-3 years.
3. You'll need to take prelims in two areas. In discussions with your advisor, select those areas and plan a program of course work and independent study that will prepare you for them. (You should finish these within four years from now, three if you came with a master's. There is usually plenty of time; you don't have to do this all at once.)
4. Decide on how you will do your minor, in consultation with your advisor and the minor advisor. You need to file a formal "minor agreement form" signed by all the right people.
5. Start learning about the different kinds of sociology jobs. Broadly: research university (like this one); teaching emphasis; research jobs ("practice"). Talk to people who actually do those kinds of jobs. Begin to think about which kind you want and what you should do in grad school to move in that direction. (E.g. build a teaching portfolio, plan a research program that will generate publications while you are in grad school, acquire appropriate research skills & experiences.) Don't set this in stone. Many people don't really decide this until 5 years post-PhD. Create the possibility for multiple paths, explore several options.
6. Start writing research papers. Think of your course papers as opportunities to do drafts of research papers. (Or as drafts of proposals for larger projects.) Present your research at meetings. Submit your papers for publication. [There will be workshops and discussions about doing this. You can always ask faculty and fellow students for advice.]
7. If you haven't already, join the ASA as a student member. Join a regional association, either nearby (we are in the Midwest and near the North Central) or the one where you'd really like to end up working. If possible, attend the meetings. (The Midwest and North Central are usually easy to get to.) Get advice about how to get papers accepted for meetings.
8. Join the ASA sections relevant to your research interests and tentative career plans. These are smaller professional groups in which it is easier for graduate students to get involved with graduate students and faculty from other universities. If you believe you are moving towards a small college teaching emphasis, join the Teaching Sociology section. This isn't just "meet famous faculty": fellow grad students you meet will be your future professional networks.
9. If you are unhappy and think this may not be for you, talk to me or your advisor as well as fellow students. You have the ability to do this program, but perhaps you don't want to, or life problems are intervening. It isn't failure if you decide to do something else, and at some point you should stop wasting your time and money trying to make yourself do something that isn't right for you. But remember to focus seriously on what you'd be doing with a PhD, not just on whether you like grad school. Usually, if you are going to leave, it is best for you to leave with a master's degree. Talk seriously and honestly with your advisor and other faculty if you are moving in this direction.
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