

**UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMITTEE
FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

PRESENTED BY: Kevin Flynn, Chair, Academic Programs Committee

DATE OF MEETING: February 16, 2017

SUBJECT: **Credit Reduction for the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Sociology, Project-Based Program**

COUNCIL ACTION: For information only

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:

The Academic Programs Committee (APC) approved the reduction in required credit units for the M.A. in Sociology project-based program at its January 25, 2017 meeting.

As per the Academic and Curricular Change Authority Chart approved by Council at its June 23, 2016 meeting, APC has the authority to approve changes to the total number of credit units required for an approved degree program when this change affects tuition or overall program length for students.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

Recommendations from the graduate program review in Sociology made it clear that a reduction in credits units (from 30 to 18) in the project-based M.A. in Sociology would be in order. The current course load makes this program an outlier in relation to comparator institutions. The change approved by APC will allow the program to be competitive in recruiting students.

The significant reduction in credit units should improve student completion times by at least one term. This reduction in time in program will have a slight impact in the tuition generated by the program, but it is expected that in making the program more competitive there may be an increase in admissions to offset that budgetary impact. It is anticipated that the reduction of course work will facilitate a renewed focus on research.

The credit reduction of the M.A. in Sociology project-based option was approved at the January 12, 2017 meetings of the Executive Committee of the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

APC also received a report indicating a reduction in credit units in the M.A. in Sociology thesis-based program, from 18 credit units to 15. This change is within the purview of the University Course Challenge, as per the Academic and Curricular Changes Chart. This change was approved through University Course Challenge in January 2017. This change was approved by the Executive Committee of College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at its January 12, 2017 meeting.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1. Changes to MA in Sociology Academic Requirements Proposal**



Memorandum

To: Kevin Flynn, Chair, Academic Programs Committee of University Council

From: Office of the Associate Dean, College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS)

Date: January 18, 2017

Re: Credit unit reductions to the Master of Arts in Sociology

The College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is recommending approval of a reduction in credit units to the Master of Arts in Sociology project-based program option. This recommendation comes following a recommendation by the Graduate Programs Committee made on January 6, 2017, and a subsequent recommendation made by the CGPS Executive Committee on January 12, 2017.

The attached proposal contains recommendations for a 12 credit unit reduction to the project-based program, resulting in an 18 credit unit program requirement. The proposal also contains a recommendation for a 3 credit unit reduction to the thesis-based program, resulting in a 15 credit unit program requirement. As the thesis-based program modification is relatively minor, it has been posted to University Course Challenge. The CGPS is seeking approval from APC for the project-based program modification.

The Sociology graduate programs recently went through the Graduate Program Review process which identified significant inconsistencies with our requirements in relation to comparator institutions. The proposed changes are necessary to allow master's level programming in Sociology to be competitive in recruitment.

As a 12 credit unit reduction is rather significant, it would be expected that student completion times should improve by a minimum of one term. No changes are being proposed to the current tuition rate; however, the program assesses the standard grad term tuition so total revenue may be reduced. Conversely, aligning the program requirements with comparator institutions may result in increased admissions providing an increase in revenue.

Please note that consultation with the registrar has occurred, and the proposed changes do not require any unusual technological set up.

Consistent with the Academic and Curricular Changes Authority Chart, the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is recommending the approval of the credit unit reduction to the Master of Arts in Sociology project option. We are now seeking to have the proposal supported by APC.

Attached please find:

- A copy of the memo from the Executive Committee of CGSR recommending the proposal
- A copy of the memo from the Graduate Programs Committee of CGSR recommending the proposal
- The full proposal including supporting documents

If you have any questions, please contact Kelly.clement@usask.ca (306-966-2229).

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Memorandum

To: Amanda Storey, Committee Coordinator, Academic Programs Committee of Council

From: Adam Baxter-Jones, Dean, College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Date: January 18, 2017

Re: Master of Arts in Sociology – reductions to credit unit requirements in project and thesis options

Members of the Executive Committee of the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies met on January 12, 2017, and considered the recommendation from the Graduate Programs Committee to approve credit unit reductions to the Master of Arts in Sociology project and thesis program options.

The proposal is requesting a 3 credit unit reduction to the thesis-based Master of Arts program, to require 15 credit units rather than 18 credit units. The project-based program would see a reduction of 12 credit units to require 18 credit units rather than 30 credit units. The proposals were submitted to CGPS in response to the Graduate Program Review, which identified the program requirements as excessive in relation to comparator programs. It was anticipated that the programs may see some growth in student numbers after they are brought in line with comparator institutions making them more competitive.

Members of the Executive Committee discussed the potential impact on program quality and were confident that the proposed changes would better focus student's research to enhance overall program quality.

The Executive Committee unanimously supported the credit unit reductions to the Master of Arts in Sociology thesis and project options.

Kelly Clement will be available to attend the Academic Programs Committee meeting to respond to questions regarding the proposal.

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Memorandum

To: Dr. Adam Baxter-Jones, Chair, CGPS Executive Committee

Copies: Dr. Hongming Cheng, Department of Sociology

From: Graduate Programs Committee, CGPS

Date: January 9, 2017

Re: Proposal for credit unit reductions in the project-based and thesis-based MA programs in Sociology

The Graduate Programs Committee (GPC) met on January 6, 2017, and reviewed the proposal to modify the program requirements for the Master of Arts program options in Sociology.

Members found that the rationale and supporting documentation was sufficient to support both programs changes.

While the change to the project-option is significant with a 12 credit unit reduction, the existing requirements are disproportionately high in comparison to other institutions or other project-based Master of Arts programs on campus.

The thesis-based option is requesting a minor reduction from 18 credit units to 15 credit units.

The Graduate Programs Committee unanimously recommends supporting the approval of the modifications to the Master of Arts in Sociology project-based program requirements and thesis-based program requirements.

If you have any questions, please contact Kelly Clement at Kelly.clement@usask.ca or 306-966-2229.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Kelly Clement, Graduate Academic Affairs and Programs Officer

From: Hongming Cheng, Chair of Graduate Studies, Department of Sociology

Date: December 12, 2016

Re: Proposal for Program Change – M.A. Program

Based on the suggestions by a recent external review of the Sociology Graduate Programs in September, 2016, the Graduate Studies Committee of the Department of Sociology has reviewed the M.A. program and recommended the attached proposal for program change.

Should you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Hongming Cheng, LL.M., Ph.D.

Chair of Graduate Studies

Department of Sociology

University of Saskatchewan

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Changes to MA in Sociology Academic Requirements Proposal

Program: MA in Sociology (Project-based) and (Thesis-based)

Effective Session of Proposed Changes: Fall 2017

1. The Context

The Sociology graduate program underwent a recent external review in September, 2016. Both during the review meetings and in their report, the reviewers strongly recommended that we revamp and promote the project-based MA, stating that this program:

...is currently too onerous and the requirements discourage students from enrolling. Improving the attractiveness of the MA project will require a major revamping, e.g., the reduction in the number of courses. The impact of encouraging more students into this program will include, but [not] necessarily be limited to, reducing the funding pressure and improving completion times. The Department will have to clarify misinformation about entrance into PhD. Currently students believe this requires an MA thesis. Making these changes will bring this Department into line with the direction that the U15 has been taking for some time. It will not represent a decline in the quality of the Master's degree and will increase the number of students moving through the program.

The department has considered the reviewers' recommendations very seriously and is carrying out necessary initiatives and discussions to incorporate such recommendations to further improve our graduate program. We strongly agree with the reviewers that for students in the non-thesis MA (Project-based) degree option, the current requirement of 30 credit units is too onerous and is diminishing the effectiveness of this program.

2. Proposed Changes

For students in the MA (Project-based) degree program, a minimum of 30 credit-unit coursework is currently required. The composition is SOC 840.6, SOC 841.6, and 18 elective credit units in the area of the student's research (in addition to SOC 990, GSR 960/961, and SOC 992 research project). For students in the MA (Thesis-based) degree program, a minimum 18 credit units of coursework is currently required. The composition is SOC 840.6, SOC 841.6, and 6 elective credit units in the arena of the student's research (in addition to SOC 990, GSR 960/961, and SOC 994 thesis).

We propose that MA (Project-based) students in Sociology be required to complete a minimum 18 credit units of coursework. The composition will be SOC 840.6, SOC

841.6, and 6 elective credit units in the arena of the student's research (in addition to SOC 990, GSR 960/961, and SOC 992 research project).

MA (Thesis-based) students in Sociology will be required to complete a minimum of 15 credit units. The composition will be SOC 840.6, SOC 841.6, and 3 elective credit units in the area of the student's research (in addition to SOC 990, GSR 960/961, and SOC 994 thesis).

All graduate students are still required to register, attend, and participate in SOC 990 Seminar. Students meet the requirements for SOC 990 by participating in the seminars and by presenting the results of their own research. All graduate students are also required to complete an ethics course GSR 960. An additional ethics course, GSR 961, is required for those working with human participants in their thesis research.

Table 1: MA (Project-based)

CURRENT ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS	PROPOSED ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS
<p>All students in this program are required to complete a minimum of 30 graduate credit units. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOC 840.6 Advanced Theory • SOC 841.6 Advanced Methodology • 18 elective credits in the area of research. • SOC 990 Seminar - All students are required to register and attend all SOC 990 seminars. Students are also required, as part of their program of studies, to present a 990 seminar based on their research. • GSR 960 and possibly GSR 961 - All MA students are required to pass GSR 960 (Introduction to Ethics & Integrity). If they are conducting research with human subjects they must also pass GSR 961 (Ethics & Integrity in Human Research). • SOC 992 Research Project - MA students must register in this class continuously while in the program. 	<p>All students in this program are required to complete a minimum of 18 graduate credit units. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOC 840.6 Advanced Theory • SOC 841.6 Advanced Methodology • 6 elective credits in the area of research. • SOC 990 Seminar - All students are required to register and attend all SOC 990 seminars. Students are also required, as part of their program of studies, to present a 990 seminar based on their research. • GSR 960 and possibly GSR 961 - All MA students are required to pass GSR 960 (Introduction to Ethics & Integrity). If they are conducting research with human subjects they must also pass GSR 961 (Ethics & Integrity in Human Research). • SOC 992 Research Project - MA students must register in this class continuously while in the program.

Table 2: MA (Thesis-based)

CURRENT ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS	PROPOSED ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS
<p>All students in this program are required to complete a minimum of 18 graduate credit units. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOC 840.6 Advanced Theory • SOC 841.6 Advanced Methodology • 6 elective credits in the area of research. • SOC 990 Seminar - All students are required to register and attend all SOC 990 seminars. Students are also required, as part of their program of studies, to present a 990 seminar based on their research. • GSR 960 and possibly GSR 961 - All MA students are required to pass GSR 960 (Introduction to Ethics & Integrity). If they are conducting research with human subjects they must also pass GSR 961 (Ethics & Integrity in Human Research). • SOC 994 Thesis - MA students must register in this class continuously while in the program. 	<p>All students in this program are required to complete a minimum of 15 graduate credit units. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SOC 840.6 Advanced Theory • SOC 841.6 Advanced Methodology • 3 elective credits in the area of research. • SOC 990 Seminar - All students are required to register and attend all SOC 990 seminars. Students are also required, as part of their program of studies, to present a 990 seminar based on their research. • GSR 960 and possibly GSR 961 - All MA students are required to pass GSR 960 (Introduction to Ethics & Integrity). If they are conducting research with human subjects they must also pass GSR 961 (Ethics & Integrity in Human Research). • SOC 994 Thesis - MA students must register in this class continuously while in the program.

3. Rationale for Proposed Changes

- a. **Graduate Review Recommendation:** As recommended by the reviewers, the department has conducted research on all MA (Project-based) and MA (Thesis-based) programs in sociology in other U15 universities. Our research indicates that our coursework requirement for MA (Project-based) program is the most demanding on a student's time to complete the program. The reviewers were particularly concerned that students are not selecting this option because of the heavy coursework requirements. Demanding 30 credit units for this study option means that students are unable to complete the degree's coursework demand in the first academic year of study. Our coursework requirement for MA (Thesis-based) program is also among the most onerous, which will affect a student's plan to complete the program in time. The requirements also place demands and create stress on our limited number of faculty teaching at the graduate level. For the MA students, they are not able to look beyond meeting their coursework requirement during the first two terms of their study leaving

them with limited time to start planning their project or thesis. We believe that this makes it difficult for the students to graduate within the expected two years of their program. The proposed changes will help students to complete their programs in a more effective, intensive and timely way.

- b. **Improving the Students' Research Skills and Capacity:** These changes are consistent with a growing emphasis on research and professional training within the discipline. Worldwide and nationwide, graduate students in sociology are being required to become more engaged, outside of their coursework, in research and professional development activities through their participation in research and collaborative enterprises. While maintaining the necessary standard for students to learn fundamentally important courses in theories, methods, and their substantive areas of research, the proposed changes provide students with better opportunities to focus on their research and dedicate time to refining their research skills and professional capacities. The refined research skills will enable our MA students to be more competitive in SSHRC and PhD applications and publish their research.
- c. **Reduce Pressure on Resources:** As the review panel emphasized, the most serious difficulty lies in the limited degree of funding and resources available to sustain graduate programming at the institutional level. The proposed changes will reduce funding pressures for the department and for students. The changes may potentially help the department to increase student recruitment, attract domestic students from outside Saskatchewan, and provide students with more meaningful options to pursue their MA degree.
- d. **Maintain Competitiveness:** In comparison, most U15 departments of Sociology require fewer credits units for their graduate degree programs. The majority of project-based programs require 18cus, maximum 21cus. The majority of thesis-based programs require 12-15cus, maximum 21cus. The University of Toronto only offers a project-based MA program and has no thesis-based program. As the reviewers indicated, making these changes will bring our department in line with the direction that the U15 has been taking for some time. It will not represent a decline in the quality of the Master's degree but instead will improve the students' research capacity (See Table 3 for credit unit requirements for MA programs at U15 universities)

Table 3: Credit Unit Requirements for MA in Sociology Programs at U15 Universities

	Thesis-based	Project-based	Project Timeline
Alberta	18	18	1-1.5 yrs.
UBC	24		
Calgary	15		
Dalhousie	18		
Laval	18		
Manitoba	18		
McGill	15	21	1 year
McMaster	12	18	1 year
Montreal	18		
Ottawa	15	21	2 years
Queens	12	18	2 years
Saskatchewan	18	30	2 years
Toronto		18	1 year
Waterloo	12	18	4 terms
Western	15	18	1 year

* non-credit professional development, proposal, or project courses are not included in these credit counts

- e. **Additional Justification:** An additional reason for the differentiated coursework requirements between MA (Project-based) students (a minimum of 18 credit units) and MA (Thesis-based) students (a minimum of 15 credit units) is that MA (Thesis-based) students need additional time to focus on their thesis research. With the 3 credit unit reduction, MA (Thesis-based) students will be guided by their advisory committees to deepen their knowledge of both the discipline and their research field through directed research activities.