

Graduate Handbook

Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology

Auburn University

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Introduction

Auburn is a Land Grant university about 110 miles southwest of Atlanta and 55 miles northeast of Montgomery. The City of Auburn has a population of over 75,000 and a metropolitan area of about 160,000. Main campus includes almost 2,000 acres and over 80 academic and administrative buildings. Academic programs at Auburn University are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Auburn University is an “R I” institution, which is the highest designation from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and which indicates “Doctoral Universities – Very High Research Activity.” Auburn is committed to research and instruction of over 32,000 students in addition to Extension. Faculty and curricula at the main campus are organized into a Graduate School and Colleges/Schools. There are 160 graduate programs of which 70 are doctorates. Research activity is supported through federal and state contracts and grants as well as private organizations, business, and industry.

The Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology offers graduate programs leading to a PhD in Applied Economics, Master of Science in Agricultural Business and Economics, Master of Science in Rural Sociology, and Master of Agriculture in Agricultural Economics. The PhD in Applied Economics and the MS in Rural Sociology are interdepartmental.

The broad range of experience, training, research, and extension interests among faculty provide a flexible graduate program. Concentration areas of the faculty include land economics, market analysis, consumer economics, food consumption choice and buying behavior, food assistance decisions and policy, production, innovation, finance, development, agrifood studies, agrifood system governance, environmental justice, environmental economics, conservation, and many other areas related with food, farming, environmental, and rural issues.

Excellent computer and internet facilities are available. Students are encouraged to bring laptops with wireless internet capability, but each student will have a desktop computer to use during their studies. The Ralph Brown Draughon Library on campus was elected in 1992 as a member of the Association of Research Libraries.

Application

Application is online through the Graduate School. This Handbook covers only some of the Graduate School requirements, and applicants are responsible for meeting all Graduate School requirements. Admission to the Graduate School requires a Baccalaureate Degree from an accredited college or university with a minimum GPA of 3.0 for the last two years (60 semester hours). *Minimum* Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores less than 5 years old are in Table 1. Note that GRE scores for accepted applicants are substantially higher than the minimum scores given in Table 1. In particular, to be competitive for the PhD an applicant will generally need to have a score of at least 155 for the quantitative part of the GRE.

Table 1. TOEFL and GRE Requirements

Graduate Programs	Minimum Scores			
	TOEFL ¹	GRE(V)	GRE(Q)	GRE(T)
MS in Agricultural Economics	79/213	146	140	286
M Ag in Agricultural Economics	79/213	146	140	286
MS in Rural Sociology	79/213	150 ²	140	290
PhD in Applied Economics	79/213	150	148	298

¹ For students whose first language is not English. Score 79 is for the internet version (iBT) TOEFL and score 213 is for the computer version (cBT) of TOEFL. ² The Rural Sociology program also requires a minimum 3.5 writing score.

Applicants should have completed a minimum of disciplinary coursework as determined by the Graduate Committee. Students without sufficient undergraduate background may not be admitted or may be required to complete undergraduate courses. International applicants from non-English speaking countries must submit a minimum score of 79 on the internet version (iBT) of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), 213 on the Computer TOEFL. Agricultural/Applied Economics applicants with verbal GRE scores below 146 and Rural Sociology applicants with verbal GRE scores below 150 will be required to complete specified English courses. Auburn will also accept a 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam.

Agricultural/Applied Economics applicants are required to submit three letters of recommendation. Letters should address ability to undertake rigorous quantitative research and intellectual commitment to the discipline. Applicants to the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology should refer to specific admission requirement stated in the Rural Sociology section. Admission, regardless of program, involves (1) application to the Graduate School, (2) review by the Graduate Program Committee, and (3) decision by the Graduate School.

Financial Assistance

In addition to admission, applicants will be considered for Graduate Research (GRA) and Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA). Stipends vary based on academic status, competitiveness of applicant relative to other applicants, and department funding availability. Students on 25% stipend receive 50% tuition support; students on 33% or higher stipend receive full tuition support. Receipt of an assistantship is a privilege granted on competitive basis and students holding appointments are expected to work productively for their assistantship supervisor while also making sufficient progress toward their degree.

Students falling below 3.0 GPA have one semester of probation with the Graduate School to return their GPA to 3.0. Students failing to reach 3.0 the following semester are suspended by the Graduate School. The Department does not support Plans of Remediation for suspended students, implying termination from the program. If the GPA falls below 2.5, funding is cut the following semester regardless of its source. If the student then achieves a GPA of 3.00 funding may be re-established. Students on assistantships must be enrolled every semester (including summer) to receive pay. The enrollment requirement can be met by registering for one hour of Thesis and Research (AGEC 7990 or 8990/ RSOC 7990).

PhD Student Funding

Students admitted on a PhD assistantship from department funding and who continue to make adequate progress will be guaranteed funding for four years. The first 6 semesters plus 2 summers (August of year 1 to May of year 3) will be funded by the department; the last year (May of year 3 to May of year 4) will be funded by the student's major professor. Thus, a requirement for adequate progress is that a student earn support from their major professor. Students ought to finish their programs within four years. Additional funding for studies past four years are not guaranteed and require the student to arrange their own funding through advisors or by seeking teaching assistantships. Some students might even find work at local colleges (Southern Union Community College, Columbus State University, and Chattahoochee Valley Community College) who hire instructors with the equivalent of a Master's degree. However, off-campus arrangements would not result in tuition remission. Graduates seeking jobs in academia typically want to have teaching experience.

Students admitted on a Ph.D. assistantship funded by a faculty member's grant will have a funding award defined in their offer letter. These students do not receive guaranteed funding apart from any specifications made in this offer letter.

MS Student Funding

Students admitted on an MS assistantship from department funding and who continue to make adequate progress will be guaranteed funding for 4 semesters plus 1 summer (August of year 1 to early May of year 2). Students admitted on an MS assistantship funded by a faculty member's grant will have a funding award defined in their offer letter. All students receiving MS funding must complete a MS thesis.

Course and Workload

Students on assistantships are subject to the course loads and work expectations in Table 2. An MS or PhD student on the regular assistantship can take up to 12 credit hours of course work per semester, though most students enroll for 9 credit hours. Students on assistantship must enroll for at least 1 hour during every semester including Summer. Students on assistantship are not allowed to hold outside employment. Prior to starting classes each semester, students on assistantship must have their course work approved by the professor supervising their assistantship work. The GPO will monitor the plan through DegreeWorks to ensure adequate degree progress.

In cases where graduate assistantships are not available, hourly work arrangements as Graduate Research Assistants may be possible on a case by case basis, but do not include tuition waiver.

Table 2. Course Load Limits and Work Expectations

MS or PhD	Minimum Work Hours	Typical Course Hours (per fall or spring semester)
Level I (0.25 FTE)	10 hours/week	9
Level II (0.33 FTE)	13 hours/week	9
Level III (0.50 FTE)	20 hours/week	9

Programs of Study

The intent of this document is to elaborate on the various program descriptions provided in the Auburn Bulletin (<http://bulletin.auburn.edu/theuniversity/>). The Bulletin takes precedence over this description. Any discrepancies should be reported to the department's Graduate Program Officer. It is the student's responsibility to know and understand all program requirements.

The PhD Program in Applied Economics

The Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology (DAERS) offers the PhD in Applied Economics jointly with the Department of Economics and Forestry Economics. In the first year, students take two semesters of microeconomics and one semester each of econometrics, mathematical economics, microeconometrics (when offered), and electives. PhD students satisfy the preliminary examination only by passing (at PhD level) a qualifying exam for microeconomics managed by the Department of Economics.

In the second year, students complete the two semester advanced micro-econometrics sequence along with other core courses listed in Table 3. The student schedules an Oral Preliminary Examination, which lays the groundwork for the dissertation.

The third year is devoted to completing required core courses and the dissertation. The dissertation typically consists of three essays. The dissertation is defended at the Final Oral Examination, which constitutes the final requirement for the completion of the degree.

Ph.D. Course Requirements

The Graduate School requirements for a PhD include a minimum of 60 semester hours of graduate credit beyond the baccalaureate. At least 30 of these hours must be graded. Ungraded hours include AGE 8990 Research and Dissertation, of which a minimum of 10 credit hours are required. Complete course requirements for students enrolled in DAERS are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Courses for PhD Degree in Applied Economics, DAERS

Description		Credits
<i>Required courses offered by Economics Department</i>		
ECON 7110 and 7120	Microeconomic Theory	6
ECON 7210 or 7220	Macroeconomic Theory	3
ECON 7310 or 7320	Econometrics	3
ECON 7130	Mathematical Economics	3
ECON Subtotal		<u>15</u>
<i>Required courses offered by DAERS</i>		
AGEC 7690	Micro-econometrics I	3
AGEC 7700	Research Methods	3
AGEC 8690	Micro-econometrics II	3
AGEC 8990	Research and Dissertation	10
AGEC Subtotal		<u>19</u>
Total required courses		34
Select at least 15 credit hours from the following courses:		
AGEC 7080	Production Economics I	3
AGEC 7090	Resource Economics II	3
AGEC 7110	Agricultural Economic Development	3
AGEC 8060	Theory of Markets	3
AGEC 8080	Production Economics II	3
AGEC 8090	Food and Agricultural Policy	3
Select additional credit hours from 6000-8999 level courses to meet the minimum 60 credit-hour requirement.		11
Minimum total credit hours:		60

International students must be enrolled at least 9 hours per semester to maintain their visa status. The credits for AGEC 8990 may be adjusted as necessary to meet this requirement. If the 10 credit-hour minimum for AGEC 8990 has been reached, the student may request an exemption from the 9-credit hour enrollment minimum by filing a Reduced Course Load (RCL) form available from the Office of International Programs.

Transfer Credits

Students who enter the PhD program with a master's degree from Auburn can count those credits hours toward the PhD course requirements upon approval of the Graduate Program Officer, major advisor, and Graduate School. Students who enter with a master's degree from another institution may petition to have previous coursework counted toward course requirements by filing a written

request with the Graduate Program Officer giving a detailed description of the specified courses, date when the course was completed, and grade received. The Graduate Program Officer will work with the student's advisor to determine which courses might be substituted, and will forward the request to the Graduate School for final approval.

Electives

There is not a lot of room in the program for electives, so students must choose wisely if they wish to graduate on time. A suggested list from which to choose is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Suggested Electives

Course Number	Name	Credits
AGEC 7100	Operations Research Methods	3
ECON 7220	Macroeconomics II	3
ECON 7340	Macro-econometrics	3
ECON 8710	International Trade	3
ECON 8810	Labor Market Analysis	3
FORY 7440	Forest Finance and Investment	3
RSOC 7630	Political Economy of Development	3
RSOC 6410	Extension Methods	3
RSOC 6610	Rural Sociology	3
STAT 7600	Stat Theory and Methods I	3
STAT 7610	Stat Theory and Methods II	3
STAT 7780	Survival Analysis	3
STAT 7800	Linear Models	3
STAT 7860	Applied Time Series Analysis	3

Remediation

DAERS does not do remediation plans. Consistent with Graduate School policy (for details, see <http://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/academicprogress/>), a student whose GPA falls below 3.0 for two successive semesters (excluding the summer term) is dropped from the program. If a student's GPA falls below 2.5, funding is cut the following semester regardless of its source (hard dollars or contracts and grants). If the student then achieves 3.0, funding may be restored upon recommendation of the student's major professor, and approval of the department head.

Typical PhD Program

An outline of the sequencing of courses in a typical PhD program is shown in Table 5. During the third year, PhD students take core courses or electives that are only offered in alternate years. But the primary concentration in the third year is on dissertation research. Students who are supported by graduate research or teaching assistantships must register for 9 hours of coursework and/or research and dissertation hours (AGEC 8990) during each fall and spring semester.

Table 5. Typical PhD Program (starting in fall of an odd year)

Fall	Spring
Year 1	
ECON 7110 Micro I ECON 7130 Math Econ ECON 7310 Econometrics I	ECON 7120 Micro II AGEC 7690 Micro-econometrics I Elective
	PhD qualifying exam (Micro)
Year 2	
AGEC 8690 Micro-econometrics II AGEC 7700 Research Methods or AGEC 8090 Elective or ECON 7210 Macro I	Electives AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation
	Complete Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) form
Year 3	
Electives ECON 7210 Macro I if not taken in year 2	AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation
	Schedule General Oral Examination
Year 4	
AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation	AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation
Apply for graduation by filling out Graduation Application (1 term before planned graduation)	Final Oral Examination

Table 5. Typical PhD Program (starting in fall of an even year)

Fall	Spring
Year 1	
ECON 7110 Micro I ECON 7130 Math Econ ECON 7310 Econometrics I	ECON 7120 Micro II Electives
	PhD qualifying exam (Micro)
Year 2	
AGEC 7700 Research Methods Elective ECON 7210 Macro I	AGEC 7690 Micro-econometrics I Elective AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation
	Complete Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) form
Year 3	
Electives AGEC 8690 Micro-econometrics II	AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation
	Schedule General Oral Examination
Year 4	
AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation	AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation
Apply for graduation by filling out Graduation Application (1 term before planned graduation)	Final Oral Examination

PhD Qualifying Exam Requirement

Qualifying exams are widely used in departments of agricultural economics in the United States and the faculty in our department believe it is an efficient tool to motivate students' learning. We only require a qualifying exam in microeconomics. The microeconomics qualifying exam will be managed by the Department of Economics. If a student obtains a PhD pass then the student is eligible for continuation in the PhD program. If a student does not obtain a PhD pass on the first try, then the student will retake the exam during the make-up period (approximately one month after the first exam). If a PhD student cannot obtain a PhD pass after a second attempt, then the student's PhD study in the department will be terminated. The student can be transferred to the MS program in the department.

Selecting Committee and Filing a Plan of Study

After completing 30 hours of coursework, and before scheduling the General Oral Examination, students must select their committee, complete and submit the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) Form, which can be found off of <https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/committee-selection/>.

PhD Examinations

In addition to coursework and a qualifying exam, PhD students are required to pass two examinations: a general oral examination, and a final oral defense.

General Oral Examination

The general oral examination sets the stage for the student's dissertation and shall occur at least one semester prior to the final oral defense and ideally during the spring semester of the third year. The student is required to have at least one meeting with his/her advisor and the committee regarding the dissertation research proposal prior to the submission of a written proposal to the committee. The **written proposal** must be submitted that includes the equivalent of one finished paper, one paper drafted with all but results, and one paper outline that is a feasible project. The student must submit a draft of the written dissertation research proposal at least two weeks prior to the proposed date of the preliminary oral examination to his or her advisor and committee members. The student submits their request for the general oral exam with the Graduate School. This must be done at least two weeks before the date of the exam.

The student will work with departmental administrative support staff to announce the general oral defense to faculty and graduate students at least two weeks prior to the defense date. All announcements about oral defenses should include a) names of the student, advisor(s), and committee members; b) the title and abstract of the dissertation or thesis; and c) date, time, and location of defense. Calendar invites must be sent out to faculty and graduate students when the announcements are made.

If a student fails the first attempt of the general oral examination, the Graduate Program Officer, in consultation with the student's advisor, may grant a second attempt. If a second attempt is granted, the general oral examination process must be repeated between four and six months after the first attempt. A maximum of two attempts to pass the general oral examination is allowed. There will be no opportunity to repeat the general oral examination process after two attempts.

Final Oral Examination

The final oral examination is a defense of the student's dissertation. The Graduate School requires that the final oral exam not be scheduled less than one semester after the student has successfully passed the preliminary oral examination. Before scheduling the final oral examination, the student's committee must concur that the dissertation is suitable for the final defense.

After the first draft of the dissertation has been approved by the student's committee, it is submitted to the Graduate School along with a "Dissertation First Submission Approval Form" signed by committee members. The student, in collaboration with the major advisor, must select a University Reader outside of the department to review the dissertation. The first submission approval form must be filed with the Graduate School at least two weeks in advance of the examination date, but no later than the deadline stated by the Graduate School for graduation in any specific semester. The dissertation must also be submitted for a format check to the Graduate School. The final oral exam must be scheduled before the deadline specified on the Graduate School's website.

Once the final oral exam has been scheduled, the student must submit a complete draft of their dissertation to their graduate study committee and the reader at least two weeks prior to the defense date. The student will also work with departmental administrative support staff to announce the final oral defense to faculty and graduate students at least two weeks prior to the defense date. All announcements about oral defenses should include a) names of the student, advisor(s), and committee members; b) the title and abstract of the dissertation or thesis; and c) date, time, and location of defense. Calendar invites must be sent out to faculty and graduate students when the announcements are made.

The final oral exam is administered by the student's committee. Students should NOT prepare any food or beverages for the participants. While the gesture is appreciated, this policy aims to save students' time, energy, and money. The outside reader also attends and participates. The examination, although focused on the dissertation, may include general questions to probe mastery of theory and methods appropriate to the student's chosen fields. Successful completion of the oral exam requires unanimous support of all members of the committee. Anyone may attend the public presentation portion of the exam.

Following the final oral examination, the advisory committee may determine that additional work is required. In that case, it will be necessary for the student to submit the final electronic copy of the dissertation to the Graduate School when all work is completed to the satisfaction of the major professor and the committee. Additional details about the submission and approval process for the dissertation are provided at the web site <https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/electronic-thesis-dissertation-guide/>.

If a student fails the final oral, a re-examination may be given on recommendation of the advisory committee and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. Further examination requires exceptional circumstances and approval of the Graduate Council.

Master of Science Programs

The MS degrees are in Agricultural Economics or Rural Sociology. The Agricultural Economics program has existed since 1938, while the Rural Sociology program, administered jointly with the Department of Sociology in the College of Liberal Arts, has existed since 1972. Consideration for admission to these programs requires that an applicant satisfy the minimum admission requirements of the Graduate School, generally have a minimum GPA of 3.0 on the last 60 semester hours completed as an undergraduate, and meet the Departmental minimum test score requirements in Table 1. Note that students who are competitive for assistantship funding generally have higher scores than the minimums listed in Table 1. Students interested in Rural Sociology should refer to the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology Admission Requirements that are listed below.

Agricultural Business and Economics

The minimum requirements for the master's degree in agricultural business and economics can be satisfied in three academic semesters plus a summer (fall, spring, summer, fall). In practice, many students require four academic semesters. Students not on an assistantship who work off-campus or those with scholastic deficiencies may not meet all requirements in the time indicated. Research is unpredictable and frequently requires more time than anticipated.

Students must earn a minimum of 30 semester hours, of which at least 24 semester hours are coursework including Special Problems or Special Topics classes. At least one-half of all credit hours toward the minimum degree requirement must be earned in 7000- and 8000-level. The remainder may be in 6000-level courses. If a student has not met all undergraduate pre-requisites in any field chosen for major or minor work, these should be scheduled as soon as possible, preferably before graduate work begins.

The student conducts the research and prepares the thesis under the direction of the major professor. The student must register for a minimum of six (6) credit hours of Research and Thesis (AGEC 7990) but may register for as many hours as desired. No more than six hours may be counted toward meeting degree requirements. The student may register for one or more hours of AGEC 7990 at a time. AGEC 7990 credits count against the maximum covered by tuition waivers, which is 33 for the MS. Thus, students on such waivers in general should limit their AGEC 7990 credits to 6.

The *Electronic Thesis - Dissertation Guide* contains information about requirements for the thesis, and is available on the web at <http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/electronic-thesis-dissertation-guide/>.

Required Courses

The requirements for a MS degree in Agricultural Business and Economics includes a minimum of 30 semester hours of graduate credit beyond the baccalaureate. Complete course requirements for students enrolled in the MS thesis is summarized in Table 6. Individual schedules must be constructed in consultation with the major advisor.

Table 6. Courses for MS Thesis Degree in Agricultural Business and Economics, DAERS

Description		Credits
<i>MS Agricultural Business and Economics - Thesis</i>		
ECON 6020	Advanced Microeconomics	3
Or ECON 7110	Microeconomics I	
AGEC 7590	Introduction to Agricultural Econometrics	3
Or ECON 7310	Econometrics I	
AGEC 7100	Operations Research Methods in Agricultural	3
Or ECON 7130	Mathematical Economics	
AGEC 7700	Research Methods in Agricultural Economics	3
AGEC 7990	Research and Thesis	6
Electives	6000-8999 level	<u>12</u>
Note: At most, 15 credits at 6000 level		
Total required courses		30

Typical MS Program

An outline of the sequencing of courses in a typical MS program is shown in Table 7. Students who are supported by graduate research or teaching assistantships must register for 9 hours of coursework and/or research and dissertation hours (AGEC 7990) during each fall and spring semester.

Table 7. Typical MS Thesis Program

Fall	Spring
Year 1	
ECON 6020 Micro I	AGEC 7100 Operations Research
AGEC 7590 Intro to Ag Econometrics	Electives
AGEC 7700 Research Methods	
Year 2	
AGEC 7990 Research and Thesis	AGEC 7990 Research and Thesis
Elective	Elective
Complete Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) form	Final Examination Report
Apply for graduation by filling out Graduation Application (1 term before planned graduation)	

Selecting Committee and Filing a Plan of Study

The MS student must choose a committee and prepare and submit the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) Form to the Graduate School one semester before expected graduation. The CTEC form is available off of <https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/committee-selection/>. The student is required to have at least one meeting with his/her advisor and the committee regarding progress towards a thesis prior to the submission of the CTEC form.

Time Limit

All graduate work toward a master's degree must be completed within a period of six calendar years.

Thesis Requirements

All MS candidates must pass a comprehensive examination covering the major field, as well as the research and thesis. This usually is a two-hour oral examination upon completion of coursework and the Thesis. Members of the Graduate Faculty not on the advisory committee may attend and participate in any oral examination as visitors. The student will schedule the oral examination not later than the deadline indicated in the Graduate School Calendar.

The student must submit a complete draft of their thesis to their committee at least two weeks prior to the defense date. The student must work with departmental administrative support staff to announce the final oral defense to the faculty and graduate students at least two weeks prior to the defense date. All announcements about oral defenses should include a) names of the student, advisor(s), and committee members; b) the title and abstract of the dissertation or thesis; and c) date, time, and location of defense. Calendar invites must be sent out to faculty and graduate students when the announcements are made. Students should NOT prepare any food or beverages for the defense. While the gesture is appreciated, this policy aims to save students' time, energy, and money.

Successful completion requires the unanimous support of all members of the committee. If a student fails the examination, one re-examination may be given on recommendation of the committee and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. Further examinations will be allowed only under exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Graduate Council.

Non-Thesis Option

There is a non-thesis MS option that requires 30 hours of coursework. Twelve of these hours must be in the core courses. The remaining 18 hours can be filled with any graduate-level courses approved by the major professor and graduate committee. At least one-half of all credit hours toward the minimal degree requirement must be earned in courses at the 7000 level or above. The non-thesis option requires a "Plan B" paper that serves as the basis for the student's final oral exam. Complete course requirements for students enrolled in the MS thesis is summarized in Table 8 and the course sequence is summarized in Table 9.

Table 8. Courses for MS Non-Thesis Degree in Agricultural Business and Economics, DAERS

Description		Credits
<i>MS Agricultural Business and Economics – Non-Thesis</i>		
ECON 6020	Advanced Microeconomics	3
Or ECON 7110	Microeconomics I	
AGEC 7590	Introduction to Agricultural Econometrics	3
Or ECON 7310	Econometrics I	
AGEC 7100	Operations Research Methods in Agricultural	3
Or ECON 7130	Mathematical Economics	
AGEC 7700	Research Methods in Agricultural Economics	3
Electives	6000-8999 level	<u>18</u>
Note: At most, 15 credits at 6000 level		
Total required courses		30

Table 9. Typical MS Non-Thesis Program

Fall	Spring
Year 1	
ECON 6020 Micro I	AGEC 7100 Operations Research
AGEC 7590 Intro to Ag Econometrics	Electives
AGEC 7700 Research Methods	
Year 2	
Electives	Electives
Complete Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) form	Plan B Paper Presentation - Final Examination Report
Apply for graduation by filling out Graduation Application (1 term before planned graduation)	

Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology

The MS degree in Rural Sociology is offered as a cooperative Interdepartmental Program between the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Social Work (College of Liberal Arts) and the Department of Agricultural Economics & Rural Sociology (College of Agriculture).

Both thesis and non-thesis options are available. These two degree options are designed to serve the needs of differing types of students. The thesis option requires successful completion of an

independent research project resulting in a formal thesis. This option is recommended for students who might, for instance, be interested in pursuing advanced graduate work and/or might be interested in gaining research experience that is applicable, or required, for a wide range of career opportunities. The non-thesis option is designed for individuals who are in mid-career, who wish to learn new skills in order to be more productive professionally, and have no intent on pursuing a more advanced graduate degree or a career that requires a science-based credential. In place of a thesis, students who pursue the non-thesis option will be required to successfully complete a capstone paper. For additional considerations see “Deciding on a Thesis or Non-Thesis Option,” below.

Admissions Requirements

The Graduate School at Auburn University and our Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology welcome applications from serious students. Auburn University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer/equal opportunity educational institution.

Admission to our Program involves two steps: (1) application to the AU Graduate School via their online application system, and (2) review of the application by the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee. A complete application requires GRE scores (see Table 1 for minimum scores), official transcripts from each college and/or university previously attended, three letters of reference attesting to the student’s academic capabilities, an updated curriculum vitae, and statement of interest. All documents must be submitted to the AU Graduate School’s online application portal. In addition to the above requirements, students applying to the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology must declare whether they intend to follow a thesis or non-thesis option (refer to the section below “Deciding on a Thesis or Non-thesis option” for additional information.)

Once a completed application has been received by the Graduate School, the application is reviewed by faculty representing each participating department. The final decision on admission to the Graduate School is made by the Dean of the AU Graduate School. In some cases, students applying to the Interdepartmental Program have had limited undergraduate course work in Sociology. When this is so, students may be required to take certain undergraduate courses as further indicated below.

Degree Requirements – Thesis Option

1. Graduate students are required to earn a minimum of 30 graduate-level semester hours, 6 of which are required, by the Graduate School, to be thesis credits (i.e., RSOC 7990).
2. There are three required core courses for all graduate students in the Interdepartmental Program: SOCY 7000 (Advanced Sociological Theory), SOCY 7100 (Statistical Analysis of Survey, Aggregate, and Large Data Sources), and RSOC 7700 (Methods of Social Research). A grade of B or better must be earned in each of these core courses.
3. If a prospective student has not had one or more of the core courses as an undergraduate (or appropriate equivalents as determined by the co-chairs of the Interdepartmental Program) they will be required to pass corresponding undergraduate coursework with a grade of at least a B before being allowed to take graduate courses in any core area.
4. The remaining coursework is selected by the individual student in consultation with the student’s Graduate Advisory Committee. However, at least 3 of these courses, earning at least 9 semester credit hours, must be within the program area (defined as ANTH, RSOC, and SOCY).
5. Undergraduate, foundational, courses in the three core areas do not count for graduate

course credit.

6. No more than 6 credit hours of directed readings, including SOCY 7930 (Directed Studies) and RSOC 7800 (Special Problems in Rural Sociology), or comparable courses in other departments, will be accepted to meet the required minimum of course hours earned.
7. Graduate students are required to develop a research proposal for their thesis research and to present this to their advisory Committee for review and approval. Research proposals typically include a statement of the problem, a set of clear research objectives, a preliminary review of the relevant literature, and a discussion of the proposed research methodology. Only when the proposal has been approved by the advisory Committee will the graduate student be considered ready to begin thesis research.
8. Graduate students are encouraged to present their proposals as part of periodically scheduled program colloquia where several students discuss their proposed research projects.
9. Once the thesis is complete and Committee members have had an opportunity to review and comment on its contents, a thesis defense is scheduled which is open to any interested person. Students should make sure to complete and submit the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) which can be found off of <https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/committee-selection/>. Master's students must submit the CTEC form no later than the term prior to expected graduation. The student must submit a complete draft of their thesis to their graduate study committee at least two weeks prior to the defense date. The student should work with departmental administrative support staff to announce the final oral defense to faculty and graduate students at least two weeks prior to the defense date. All announcements about oral defenses should include a) names of the student, advisor(s), and committee members; b) the title and abstract of the dissertation or thesis; and c) date, time, and location of defense. Calendar invites must be sent out to faculty and graduate students when the announcements are made. Students should NOT prepare any food or beverages for the defense. While the gesture is appreciated, this policy aims to save students' time, energy, and money.
10. After passing the thesis defense, final changes required by the Committee are made and the thesis is turned into the Graduate School. It is the responsibility of graduate students to meet format and other requirements of the Graduate School with regard to the final version of the thesis. It is the responsibility of the graduate student to meet format and other requirements of the Graduate School including the Graduate School's deadlines.
11. Graduate students are guided through their program by an advisory Committee consisting of at least three faculty members. Selection of this Committee, including the Committee Chair, is the student's responsibility. Students are strongly encouraged to form Committees which have faculty representation from both participating departments.
12. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to form their Advisory Committee and identify a plan of study for coursework by the end of their first semester. Revisions to the plan of study and/or to the composition of the Advisory Committee are possible should the need arise. This plan of study must be submitted to the Graduate School via DegreeWorks.

Degree Requirements – Non-Thesis Option

1. Non-thesis students are required to earn a total of 36 hours of graduate credit. Any exceptions to this must be approved by the co-Directors of the Interdepartmental Program.
2. Non-thesis students are required to take the same three core courses in theory, methods, and

statistics as students pursuing the thesis option. In addition to the 3 core required graduate courses, students must take at least 3 additional courses earning at least 9 semester credit hours within the program area (defined as ANTH, RSOC, and SOCY).

3. No more than 6 hours of course work can be in the form of directed studies (SOCY 7930) or special problems (RSOC 7960).
4. Non-thesis students will be guided in their program by an Advisory Committee made up of at least three graduate faculty. Students are strongly encouraged to form Committees which have faculty representation from both participating departments. The Advisory Committee is to be chosen by the student, with one member designated as the Chair. This Advisory Committee will be responsible for overseeing development of a plan of study and monitor the academic progress of the student.
5. The choice of courses taken will be made in consultation with the Advisory Committee, who will indicate their approval by signing a Plan of Study filed with the Graduate School, in DegreeWorks, by the end of the first semester in residence or before completion of 12 graduate-level semester hours.
6. In lieu of a thesis, non-thesis students will prepare a major capstone paper. The content of this paper is to be approved by the student's Committee. The capstone paper will be presented and defended at a meeting of the Advisory Committee. Completion of this requirement is contingent on the Committee's approval of the paper. This capstone paper could take a number of forms including a policy review, a program evaluation, or a paper suitable for presentation at an academic conference. The intent is for the student to provide the Advisory Committee with a piece of work that reflects the students' interests and abilities to integrate elements of what they have learned in the graduate program.

Deciding on a Thesis or Non-thesis option

The Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology offers students in Rural Sociology a choice between a MS thesis or non-thesis degree. Both degrees carry an MS designation (choice of student), but a non-thesis degree will be indicated on the student's transcript.

The non-thesis option is designed primarily for students who are employed full-time and need a master's degree certification to either retain their positions or make them eligible or competitive for promotions. This degree option will normally be used by students who know that they will not be going on for a higher degree or changing to a career in which they would need a thesis research credential.

There are several things for a student to consider when making a decision about whether to pursue the thesis or the non-thesis option:

1. The non-thesis option requires a total of 36 hours of coursework, in addition to a major capstone paper which will be defended in the presence of one's advisory committee. The thesis option requires 30 hours, 6 of which are thesis credits, in addition to writing a major thesis. The thesis normally involves primary research and analysis by the thesis candidate.
2. A non-thesis degree is generally considered a less rigorous degree than the thesis option, despite the fact that there are more course hours involved. This is because the thesis is a much more rigorous research endeavor than the major capstone paper required for the non-thesis option.
3. Because the non-thesis degree is considered less rigorous, most PhD programs throughout the

country will not consider a candidate with a non-thesis master's degree. Typically, such a candidate would either be deemed ineligible for admission or admitted at the master's level. Furthermore, there are research-based positions in governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as the commercial sector, for which an applicant with a non-thesis degree would not be considered. Similarly, there are public and private sector organizations that do not recognize a non-thesis degree for salary and promotion purposes.

4. Normally, non-thesis candidates will not be considered for funding by either department in the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology. There are several reasons for this:
 - a. The non-thesis option is specifically intended for students who are already working full-time; hence, it would be working at cross-purposes to have a policy that provided funding to non-thesis students.
 - b. We reserve our assistantships for what we consider the most competitive students. Given that the thesis option is the more rigorous of the two options, priority in funding will go to thesis candidates.
 - c. We regard the assistantship as part of an academic and professional socialization process that is designed to prepare students to teach and/or do research, and in preparation for advancing to a PhD degree. This is also the purpose of requiring students to write a thesis. Thus, the assistantship is intrinsically linked in purpose with the writing of the thesis.
 - d. In some cases, especially in the Rural Sociology department, the assistantship is designated as a GRA (Graduate *Research* Assistantship), and a research thesis is considered part of the contract for the assistantship.

A student who declares a thesis option may not subsequently change to a non-thesis option unless unusual and extenuating circumstances justify this change, and this change is supported by the student's Advisory Committee and approved by the Coordinating Committee of the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology. In the event of a tie vote, the Dean of the Graduate School at Auburn University, or designee of the Dean, shall cast the deciding vote.

We encourage you to think about these factors very carefully in deciding on which degree option that you want to take. Normally, any student who is not seeking this degree as a necessary certification for conditions of employment is urged to pursue the thesis option. There may be very good reasons for students who do not fit this category to pursue a non-thesis option; however we encourage you to talk with your faculty advisor and/or one of co-Directors of the Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology before making such a decision.

Master of Agriculture

The Master of Agriculture is a non-thesis option that provides broad graduate training in Agriculture and Agricultural Economics. A minimum of 32 hours of course work is required. At least 13 hours of these are major courses at 6000 level or above. Furthermore, at least 16 hours of the 32 are 7000 level courses or above. No comprehensive written exam is required. However, 3 credit hours of AGEC 7960 or RSOC 7960, Special Problems, must be included in the Plan of Study.

The special problem will involve the development of a "Plan B" research paper which must be submitted to the Graduate Committee and will serve as the focus of the final oral examination. Admission requirements for the Master of Agriculture are equivalent to those for the Master of Science

degrees. Students pursuing the Master of Agriculture are not eligible for department assistantship funding.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism -- the use of another's phrases or ideas as if they are one's own -- is a violation of Auburn University's Student Academic Honesty Code. (<https://sites.auburn.edu/admin/universitypolicies/Policies/AcademicHonestyCode.pdf>). Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any coursework, assistantship assignment, thesis, or dissertation work associated with the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology.

University sanctions for plagiarism range from receiving a zero on the paper, with written notification to the Dean, to expulsion from the university. Lack of intent such as accidentally committing plagiarism is not an acceptable defense.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- Quoting another person's actual words, complete sentences, paragraphs, or an entire piece of written work without proper acknowledgement of the source.
- Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theory, *even if it is completely paraphrased in one's own words*, without acknowledgement of the source.
- Borrowing facts, data, statistics, figures, or other illustrative materials that are not common knowledge without acknowledgement of the source.
- Submitting as one's own work a paper or parts of a paper copied *or paraphrased* from other sources.
- Simply rearranging passages and making slight changes or additions in wording.

(These examples are taken either verbatim or in slightly modified form from AU's academic honesty policies and Chemical Engineering Department (<https://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/academic-honesty/>). Accessed 21 October 2021.)

Material provided by anonymous reviewers in the review process is subject to the same rules for plagiarism, as is material obtained from the web. Students who are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism should consult with their Advisors, other faculty, or the web sites of relevant journals.

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to develop skills in quoting, citing, and paraphrasing another's work. Helpful information on these topics is available at the Miller Writing Center (<http://auburn.edu/academic/provost/university-writing/miller-writing-center/>) and Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (https://owl.purdue.edu/writinglab/the_writing_lab_at_purdue.html).