

Interested in our MA programs?
Here are some answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What will you learn in your MA in Sociology or Criminology?

Both our Master's degrees in Sociology and Criminology provide students with a solid grounding in sociological and/or criminological theory as well as research methods. Students gain hands-on experience conducting quantitative and qualitative research and develop skills in data collection and analysis.

In addition to core research and theory classes for all MA students:

- **Sociology MA** students choose major and minor concentrations in the department's three core areas: social stratification, criminology, and urban sociology.
- **Criminology MA** students have a required Criminal Law class and select substantive classes from the Forensic Science department as well as various Criminology classes (such as Organized Crime, Corrections, or the Sex Industry) offered by Sociology.

How do I apply? What is the application process?

Candidates who wish to apply to our MA degrees must apply online through <https://columbian.gwu.edu/graduate-applying-admission>. Please read through the answers to the FAQs about key elements of the application process, including the kinds of letters of recommendation you should receive, and the sorts of things we are looking for in your statement of purpose, writing sample, and so on.

The exception for applications concerns existing GW BA students majoring in Criminal Justice or Sociology. Top students are eligible for our Dual Combined Degree program. See, for example, <https://sociology.columbian.gwu.edu/combined-degree-bama-programs>. [to be updated].

What letters of recommendation (LOR) should I get?

We require three confidential letters of recommendation for the application. Because we seek to determine your potential as a student in a program of academic sociology or criminology, your letters of recommendation should come from your current or former professors. If you want to submit a fourth letter of recommendation from an employer or other appropriate non-academic source, you are welcome to do so.

Having letters from professors in sociology, criminology, or related fields are especially useful, but letters from professors in all fields are instructive. Most professors are very well-acquainted with the requirements for letters of recommendation for graduate school. LOR typically address training, qualities, and strengths required for graduate study. These include critical thinking, research experience and aptitude, writing ability, organizational skills, interest in the field, eagerness, and the ability to carry tasks through to completion.

While the Department of Sociology will accept a letter from an employer or professional supervisor, recommendations from professors who are familiar with applicant's academic abilities tend to carry more weight. (BA-MA dual degree candidates must have three LOR from GW faculty; see instructions for the dual degree applications.)

What is the statement of purpose? What is the point of the statement of purpose?

Your statement of purpose (or statement of intent) should be a well written document that explains why you want to get an MA in sociology or criminology and how you would profit from as well as contribute to our program. Useful and important types of information to include are your academic objectives, research interests, and career plans. Where relevant, include the relevance of your related qualifications, including collegiate, professional, and community activities, as well as any other substantial accomplishments that are relevant to why you want to complete an MA degree. Avoid key life moment 'stories' unless they help to explain your academic goals.

If you have any teaching or research experience, be sure to include mention of that background.

This statement should reflect your preparation for graduate study in sociology or criminology. We will be looking for the fit among (i) your intellectual interests, (ii) our departmental strengths, and (iii) your career goals upon graduation.

Typical lengths are between 250 and 500 words.

What sort of writing sample should I give?

All applicants must include a writing sample in addition to the statement of purpose. The most important function of the writing sample in your application is the demonstration of your writing ability. The content and form of the sample are not as important as the quality of the writing. Course papers are appropriate, as are other genres. If you would like to demonstrate your expertise in a particular subject area, or a strength in research, the writing sample provides the opportunity for you to do so, but this is not a requirement of the sample.

When should I take the GRE?

Take the GRE months before the application deadline. If you are disappointed with your score, you will still have plenty of time to take it again (and perhaps prepare better the second time). If you take the test near the application deadline and don't do well, it will be too late to take it again. The GRE score is especially important for applicants whose undergraduate degrees are from not-so-well-known institutions, as the admissions committee will not be as familiar with the grading standards at those schools, nor with the faculty from those colleges who write your letters of recommendation.

The GRE exam is waived for applicants who hold a M.D., J.D., or Ph.D. as well as GW BA students eligible for the BA-MA degree.

What is the process of reviewing applications? How is the application assessed?

The graduate committee reviews each application.

- i. **Qualifications.** The first indicator the graduate committee looks for is academic strength as reflected in your grades, GRE (and TOEFL) scores, your writing sample, and what your recommenders write about you.
- ii. **Fit.** The second indicator we seek is what we call 'fit'. Someone might have superb grades or other qualifications but not be accepted because their academic or career goals do not align with our program. Applicants should not just be concerned with being offered admission but with finding the school that's right for them. There needs to be a balance between what the student wants and needs, and what the program offers.
- iii. **Professionalism.** All requested information must be provided in a professional manner. Spelling errors, bad writing, or only having employers write letters of recommendation are likely to lead to candidates being rejected.
- iv. **Motivation.** You should really want to get a graduate degree, and be prepared for the fact that most people – even very good undergraduate students – often find the transition to graduate school tough.

What are the application deadlines? What about funding application deadlines and late applications?

For Fall admission, apply by February 1 if you want to be considered for funding. The final deadline for all other applications is April 1. For Spring, applications must be received by October 1. (There is seldom funding available for Spring admissions.) Late applications may be considered on a rolling basis. Late applications also make funding less likely. International students often need to apply earlier to facilitate visa processing if they are accepted.

What funding do you offer?

We offer competitive funding for qualified applicants based on academic merit. Some but not all of our students receive funding, and funding levels vary. There are three different sources of regular funding, one or more of which may be combined: tuition funding, stipend or fellowship, and graduate assistantships (often also called teaching assistantships). (Note that, unlike many universities, getting a Graduate Assistantship does not mean one necessarily receives other funding such as tuition.) Your applications should let us know that you want to be eligible for funding.

May I apply if I am an international student?

We welcome international applicants. For additional information for students outside the US, see <https://graduate.admissions.gwu.edu/international-applicants>. International students are eligible for most funding from CCAS and GWU. There are some funds

exclusively available for categories of international students, and there are some funds for which international students may not apply. Please see these links for more information on the scholarship opportunities available for graduate international students: https://www2.gwu.edu/~fellows/fellowships/global_leaders.html, <https://www2.gwu.edu/~fellows/ccas.html>, <https://financialaid.gwu.edu/policy-international-student-aid>, <https://columbian.gwu.edu/scholarship-aid-international-graduate-students>.

May I apply if I don't have an undergraduate degree in Sociology or Criminal Justice/Criminology?

We attract students who majored in sociology, criminology, criminal justice as well as students. We respect interdisciplinarity and are open to students with diverse undergraduate training. While it is important for *all* applicants to explain to us why they want to obtain a Sociology of Criminology MA, it is especially important for candidates with other majors to explain why you now wish to complete a Sociology or Criminology graduate degree.

All candidates, but especially those who have a background in fields that are less typical, need to explain their interest in our programs. Our committee considers the *fit* of candidates to what we teach and research in our department. We therefore want to know the basis for your interest in Sociology or Criminology if you have little or no formal academic training in this area.

Second, we do sometimes recommend or require that good candidates who don't have sufficient background to do some relevant undergraduate coursework to prepare themselves for our Master's degrees, usually specifically to address a key missing element in your training. Background can also make a big difference for funding options. Someone who has strong academic credentials but little or no background in Sociology or Criminology/Criminal Justice may be competitive for admission but less likely to be considered for funding. If you are lacking in important background and want to be competitive for funding, it would be especially important to show us that you have the background to be able to assist professors in their teaching as a Graduate Assistant.

Third, it's important to emphasize the skills and knowledge you do have. For example, even if you haven't taken sociology classes but have done well in other related social science (or even some humanities) classes, tell us. For example, your ability to do well in political theory or anthropological theory bodes well for doing well in sociology theory. Or your strong showing in quantitative classes would bode well for how you would likely do in research methods in our program.

How many credits are needed to complete the degree? Do students write a thesis?

All MA degrees require 36 hours of credit. All Sociology and most Criminology Master's students write theses for six of the 36 credit hours; a small number of Criminology MA students elect Comprehensive Exams in lieu of a thesis.

Do you have any options for Ph.D. students?

Sociology faculty work with Ph.D. students in two ways. First, they work with students in GW's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration who select the race, ethnicity and public policy field of concentration. Second, our faculty engage as chairs, members, or readers of dissertations for students in other GW departments as well as at other universities.

What do your graduates go on to do?

We offer academic sociology, criminology, and social science training geared towards people who either want to go on to Ph.D. programs or who want a rigorous academic and research-based training for work in research, advocacy and policy change, community organizing, law enforcement, business, media, and similar pursuits. Our students go on to jobs in the business, government, nonprofit, and academic sectors, as well as into doctoral programs.

While there are a few forensic and investigative classes available through our partnership with the Forensics Science department, our Criminology program is not a forensics program.

What time are the classes?

Most of our classes are from 4.10-6pm or from 6.10-8pm. Occasionally, there are classes at other times. You can see an example of the schedule of classes at <https://my.gwu.edu/mod/pws/courses.cfm?campId=1&termId=201603&subjId=SOC>. Our graduate handbook is available online and includes suggested and required course sequencing, etc.

For more information regarding our classes for our graduate programs, please see our graduate program handbook.

<https://sociology.columbian.gwu.edu/sites/sociology.columbian.gwu.edu/files/downloads/MA%20Handbook%202016-17%20v%208.25.16.pdf>

The graduate program handbook provides comprehensive and detailed information about graduate courses, the thesis, as well as membership in professional associations for sociology and criminology.

Where else can I get useful information?

There are many, many useful websites. A very select few include:

<https://columbian.gwu.edu/graduate-faqs>

<http://www.princetonreview.com/grad-school-advice/statement-of-purpose>

<http://www.acjs.org>

<http://www.asanet.org>

<http://www.dcsociologicalsociety.org>