



## **MA/MS in Sustainability Studies**

### **HANDBOOK**

**2025-2026**

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***Sustainability Faculty Council (in alphabetical order by last name):***

**Dr. Michelle Edwards (Sociology)**

**Dr. William Fields (Political Science)**

**Dr. Jeff Gessas (Philosophy)**

**Dr. Chang Ji (Chemistry and Biochemistry)**

**Dr. Elissa Marek (Finance and Economics)**

**Dr. Carlos Moro Martinez (Engineering Technology)**

**Dr. Cosette Joyner Martinez (Family and Consumer Science)**

**Dr. Colleen Myles (Geography)**

**Dr. Christopher Serenari (Biology)**

**Students should also refer to resources available on the Sustainability Studies Graduate Student Canvas site and the [Graduate College](#) site.**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The standards set forth in this handbook represent the requirements for the completion of the MA and MS in Sustainability Studies. All graduate students are expected to familiarize themselves with the standards for the degree they have chosen and be prepared to meet each requirement as they progress through the program. This Handbook may be changed during students' degree completion. Students should check for new editions of the handbook as they complete their degree. The Sustainability Studies CANVAS site also contains many useful resources for students.

The degree is flexible in its curriculum to allow students to develop career paths that respond to their interests, career goals, and skills. The degree requires a core of three courses:

- Sustainability 5301 (Sustainability Seminar)
- Philosophy 5323 (Environmental Ethics)
- One course in research methods to be chosen between a portfolio that emphasizes quantitative or qualitative skills. Note that some research methods courses have prerequisites (for example, SOCI 5308, Quantitative Research Methods, requires a statistics class and knowledge of SPSS).

Students may choose between a Master of Arts or a Master of Science degree. Each student, with the guidance of a faculty mentor and/or the graduate director, will design an individualized course of study reflecting individual career goals and life aspirations. The course of study will determine whether the degree plan is appropriately an MA or an MS program.

The MA in Sustainability Studies is designed for students inclined toward the humanities, arts, communication, urban or regional planning, or related fields. The MS in Sustainability Studies is designed for students inclined toward social sciences, natural sciences, economics, policy, ethics or related fields. To reflect the interdisciplinarity of the program, student background, student aspirations, and the variety of professional paths open to sustainability experts, students will choose—in consultation with their mentor and committee—to write a thesis or to complete a professional project as the final product of their course of studies.

## **II. ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM**

Applicants should refer to the [Graduate College](#) for information on application requirements.

## **III. DEGREE OUTLINE/AUDIT**

The Graduate College prepares a degree audit that is available to students. Degree templates are available on the Sustainability Studies Canvas site.

## **IV. THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR**

Each student in the Sustainability Studies program will identify a faculty mentor by the end of their second semester. The student's mentor assists in developing the course-of-study, ensures that students are taking the best classes to enhance the degree's link to the student's career plans, and serves as a

resource throughout the student's time in the Sustainability program. Students and mentors should examine degree templates on the Canvas site and contact the sociology department's graduate advisor with any questions about appropriate coursework. It is the student's responsibility to check in with her or his mentor each semester and ensure that she or he is taking the correct courses. Typically, the mentor is the thesis or professional project supervisor (i.e., the thesis committee chair or project committee chair) and the organizer of the student's oral comprehensive exams. The mentor helps the student to choose the comprehensive exam committee.

## **V. NON-THESIS PROFESSIONAL REPORT AND MA/MS THESIS GUIDELINES AND POLICIES**

### **A. EXPECTATIONS**

Expectations for completed theses and professional project reports are higher than those expectations for a paper or research project in graduate classes. Students will receive suggestions, recommendations, and criticism about their writing and ideas. The chair and committee require a week or more to read and make suggestions on each draft. Drafts submitted to the chair and committee must be proofread carefully. Students cannot defend their thesis or professional project report until it is approved by the committee chair and committee members. Thesis/Projects are expected to consist of original and independent work. The thesis or project report must be the product of an individual effort, written by that individual. Group work is not permitted. However, if the thesis/project is the result of team research (e.g. multiple students working as a team in a lab) then the work that is part of the thesis/report must be the sole contribution of that student to that larger project and the thesis/project report must be entirely written by that student.

Theses and professional projects require students to interact with many groups in order to achieve their goals and objectives. Students are expected to be professional, respectful, civil, and mature in their interactions with faculty, staff, and students, and, when applicable, respondents, site supervisors, agency staff, and clients. Successful completion of the professional project or thesis is the student's responsibility. Students must identify and meet all deadlines and administrative work (e.g., signatures needed) related to the project and the defense. Deadlines are available on the Graduate College website.

Any graduate student receiving supervision for the professional project or a thesis must be registered for the appropriate course during that semester: Students in the **non-thesis** track will take SUST 5398 (Professional Project). Students in the **thesis** track will take a minimum of 6 credit hours of thesis courses. Typically, this means enrolling in SUST 5399A and then SUST 5399B.

Typically, 5399A is used for completing the thesis proposal (including submitting the [thesis proposal form](#)), getting IRB or IACUC approval (if applicable) and beginning data collection and analysis. 5399B is for completing the thesis, the thesis report, and defending the thesis. In some instances, such as when a student needs additional time to complete a thesis, students may enroll in SUST 5199B, SUST 5299B, or SUST 5399B. Students should not take 5399A and 5399B at the same time but there are some exceptions to this guideline (check with the graduate advisor).

Likewise, some students may not complete the professional project in one semester (SUST 5398). In such cases, the chair of the project committee will assign a grade of "I" and this grade will be changed

once the student has completed and successfully defended the final report. After receiving an “I” grade in SUST 5398, a student does not sign up for the course in subsequent semesters.

## B. SELECTION OF THE THESIS OR PROFESSIONAL PROJECT (EXIT EXAM) COMMITTEE

To begin the thesis or professional project process, each student should consult with his or her mentor, committee chair (who is typically-but not always-the mentor), and committee members. Refer to the professional project or thesis checklists available on the Canvas site. The committee chair must be a regular graduate faculty member. Committee members can be regular or associate graduate faculty members. Refer to the Graduate College website for [graduate faculty](#) designations.

*The thesis committee* consists of three faculty members: The chair (typically, the student’s mentor) should be someone whose area of specialization is related to the thesis topic. Students can find areas of specialization on the faculty webpages, faculty CVs, [faculty profiles](#), and/or ask faculty about their other areas of interest. The Canvas site also provides a list of faculty who teach and/or conduct research on sustainability-related topics. The thesis committee chair can provide possible recommendations for the two other committee members. All thesis committees must include faculty from at least two disciplines (designated by department affiliation). Exceptions will require approval and must be presented, in writing, to the Sustainability Studies Graduate Director from both the student and the chair of the thesis/project. The request will be considered by the Sustainability Studies Steering Committee.

*The professional project/exit exam committee* consists of three faculty members: The committee chair (typically, the student’s mentor) and two other faculty members. The committee chair can provide recommendations for possible committee members. All project committees must include faculty from at least two disciplines (designated by department affiliation). Exceptions will require approval and must be presented, in writing, to the Sustainability Studies Graduate Director from both the student and the chair of the thesis/project. The request will be considered by the Sustainability Studies Steering Committee.

### **The day of the defense, students must:**

- 1) Arrive early. Ask an office staff member to assist with computer set-up if needed. For virtual defenses, the committee chair should set up the Zoom (or other) electronic invitation.
- 2) Confirm that the committee chair will take the student’s [forms](#) with committee signatures to the graduate advisor’s office in the sociology department after the defense or email them electronically. The committee will sign the form if the student has successfully defended. For virtual defenses, Ms. Emrys Williams will create and circulate forms electronically and submit the forms to the Graduate College before the [deadlines](#).

Forms for the professional project that must be completed: (1) Student learning outcome form, completed by the committee; (2) Comprehensive Exam Form, completed by the committee chair. Please send all forms to [cs39@txstate.edu](mailto:cs39@txstate.edu) and [sw1332@txstate.edu](mailto:sw1332@txstate.edu) and we will submit them to the appropriate Graduate College representative. Forms for the thesis that must be completed: (1) Student learning outcome form, completed by the committee; (2) Comprehensive Exam Form, completed by the committee chair; and, (3) Thesis Submission Approval Form, completed by the student and the committee.. Please send all forms to [cs39@txstate.edu](mailto:cs39@txstate.edu) and [sw1332@txstate.edu](mailto:sw1332@txstate.edu) and we will submit

them to the appropriate Graduate College representative.

**After the defense, students must:**

- 1) Complete revisions to the thesis or practicum and send the final document to the committee chair for his or her final approval.
- 2) Confirm the correct format. The **thesis** must precisely follow the correct [Graduate College format](#). Details about confirming format, etc. are the student's responsibility. Attend Graduate College Shop Talks about the thesis process. Be aware of [Graduate College deadlines](#). Read the Thesis and Dissertations Guideline on the Graduate College website. Correspond with the Graduate College about formatting questions. Confirm that your thesis adheres to the Graduate College formatting requirements **BEFORE SUBMITTING IT TO VIREO!**

**The professional project report format** will be determined by the professional project committee chair and depends on the project itself (e.g., whether the student collected and analyzed data, develop a policy proposal, etc.). It should include a title page, abstract, table of contents, and bibliography. Refer to the Canvas site for [examples of previous students' reports](#).

**3) FINAL REPORTS**

[Theses](#) must be submitted electronically to the Graduate College via [Vireo](#) before the deadline.

**Professional project reports** must be submitted electronically to the graduate advisor in sociology within 10 days after the defense. The professional project report ***should not*** be sent to the Graduate College.

- 4) Complete the online exit interview and alumni contact information for the sociology department.
- 5) Celebrate this fine accomplishment.

**F. APPEAL PROCESS**

Should a student take issue with the committee's decision on the comprehensive exam, the following process should be employed to appeal that decision.

1. The student must notify the members of the committee in writing within 7 working days of the decision that the student requests the committee to reconsider its decision. The student should identify specific points or issues to be reconsidered by the committee.
2. The committee has 7 working days after receiving the request to respond to the student in writing.
3. If no satisfactory conclusion can be reached at this level, the student may appeal in writing to the Sustainability Studies Advisory Council.
4. The Council has 7 working days after receiving the request to respond to the student in writing.

Students found guilty of academic dishonesty are subject to the disciplinary action specified in the Texas State Student Handbook (<http://www.dos.txstate.edu/handbook.html>) and in the University's Honor Code (<http://www.txstate.edu/effective/upps/upps-07-10-01.html>). The CANVAS site

contains numerous resources on avoiding plagiarism. Unintentional plagiarism has the same consequences as intentional plagiarism.

## **VI. DEADLINES**

It is the student's responsibility to adhere to all Graduate College deadlines. For [deadlines](#), consult the Graduate College webpage for the semester in which you plan to graduate. **There are no exceptions to these deadlines.**