

Overview of Sociology 407 and 408

Sociology 407 and 408 (Honors Essay I and II) are the required capstone courses for the BA Honors degree in Sociology. The Honors Essay is a piece of original research, typically 50 pages in length, written by an Honors student under the guidance of a faculty member over the final two terms of their program. As an independent research project, the Honors Essay requires a level of sophistication and rigor that goes beyond what is normally required in undergraduate courses and is designed to bring students' educational experiences together in a way that other courses do not.

Recognizing the value of a developmental model, the Department encourages careful planning to ensure that students are provided with the opportunity to develop and demonstrate key research skills and competencies. Specifically, in keeping with the Department's program learning outcomes, the Honors Essay is intended as an opportunity for students to build upon the sociological knowledge gained through prior coursework and engage in various forms of critical interpretation. This involves rigorously reading, critically analyzing, and synthesizing the relevant literature, as well as, developing reasoned, well-supported, and coherent arguments about the topic in question. Completion of the Honors Essay also allows students to develop essential transferable skills such as effective communication, the ability to work independently and collaboratively, as well as, to give and receive constructive feedback.

While students are responsible for finding a supervisor, the Associate Chair (Undergraduate) is available to help students identify potential supervisors. Supervisors, in consultation with students, are then required to choose a faculty member to serve as a second reader for the assessment of the final essay submitted for Sociology 408. Normally, the second reader will be a full-time faculty member in the Department of Sociology. However, when appropriate, faculty from other departments may be asked to serve in this capacity. The second reader should be confirmed no later than the middle of the second term (i.e., the term in which SOC 408 is taken).

Registration in Sociology 407 and 408 requires that students complete the Honors Essay Form with their supervisors and submit the form for approval by the Associate Chair (Undergraduate). Separate forms must be completed for each term (one for SOC 407 and one for SOC 408) and submitted to the Undergraduate Advisor at least one week prior to the add/drop deadline for the term. Once approved, the Department will register the student in the relevant course for that term. The Honors Essay Form requires that, in addition to specifying the course requirements and their weight, students and supervisors review and discuss the student-supervisor agreement clarifying responsibilities and expectations. Both students and supervisors should retain copies of the Honors Essay Forms submitted for each course.

Sociology 407 (Honors Essay I)

Sociology 407 is intended as an opportunity for students to develop general research skills and lay the groundwork for their projects. Given the diversity of projects undertaken by students, it is not possible to standardize course requirements. However, the Department encourages that certain requirements be adopted for all students. These include regular meetings and discussion and the preparation of an essay proposal which may take the form of a detailed outline. The following are examples of the requirements (and their associated weight) that have been used in recent years.

Sample Requirements	Weight
Regular meetings and discussion	20%
Literature review	40%
Outline of final essay	40%

Sample Requirements	Weight
Regular meetings and discussion	25%
Critical Reading Responses	50%
Essay proposal	25%

At the end of the term, supervisors must submit a complete grade breakdown as well as a final letter grade by the required deadline (typically by the last day of the final exam period). Grades must be assigned based on the grading scale outlined below.

Sociology 408 (Honors Essay II)

Sociology 408 culminates in the submission of the final Honors Essay for independent assessment by the supervisor and the second reader. However, it is important that students' grades not be based entirely on the Honors Essay. Rather, additional evaluative components should be included as outlined in the examples below. In each case, and consistent with the Department's emphasis on a developmental model, a draft essay should be required. Regular meetings and discussion should also be included as part of the assessment criteria.

Sample Requirements	Weight
Regular meetings and discussion	10%
Draft essay	20%
Final essay	60%
Defense	10%

Sample Requirements	Weight
Regular meetings and discussion	20%
Draft Essay	30%
Final essay	50%

The second reader is responsible only for assessing the final Honors Essay. All other components will be assessed by the supervisor and the supervisor retains the authority for assigning a final course grade for Sociology 408. The procedure for assessing the Honors Essay is as follows:

- The final essay must be submitted to the supervisor two weeks prior to the last day of classes. The supervisor will then forward the essay to the second reader.
- The second reader will prepare written comments and provide them to the supervisor within one week of receiving the final essay.
- The supervisor, taking the second reader's assessment into account, will assign a grade to the Honors Essay.
- The supervisor will prepare a one page summary evaluation for the student that incorporates the written comments provided by the second reader. The supervisor will meet with the student to discuss the summary evaluation and will provide the student with the original written comments prepared by the second reader.
- The supervisor will also provide a copy of the summary evaluation to the Undergraduate Office.

At the end of the term, supervisors must submit a complete grade breakdown as well as a final letter grade by the required deadline (typically by the last day of the final exam period). Grades must be assigned based on the grading scale outlined below.

Additional Requirements

As the official instructor for Sociology 407 and 408, supervisors should retain a copy of a major piece of work completed by the student for each course (e.g., essay proposal for SOC 407 and final essay for SOC 408). Such work must be kept by the supervisor for at least one year.

Once the Honors Essay has been completed, the student must submit an ungraded electronic copy to the Undergraduate Advisor. Only very minor corrections are permitted. Please note that final Honors Essay titles can be no longer than 50 characters, including spaces.

The following grading scale is required for both Sociology 407 and 408.

Letter Grade	Percentage Value	Grade Point Value	Definition
A+	95-100	4.0	Exceptional
A	90-94	4.0	Excellent
A-	85-89	3.7	Very Good
B+	80-84	3.3	Good
B	75-79	3.0	Satisfactory
B-	70-74	2.7	Minimally Satisfactory
C+	66-69	2.3	Fail*
C	62-65	2.0	
C-	58-61	1.7	
D+	54-57	1.3	
D	50-53	1.0	
F	0-49	0	

*Students must achieve final course grades of no less than B- in both SOC 407 and 408 in order to be awarded the BA Honors degree.

For further questions or for any concerns that may arise, please contact the Department Undergraduate Advisor or Associate Chair (Undergraduate).