

Graduate Handbook

Department of Agricultural Economics & 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 50,000 and together with Opelika well over 100,000. The 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 is committed to research, extension, and instruction of over 24,000 students. 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 and 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 natural resources, market analysis, international economics, production, biotechnology, finance, development, social organization, international development, agrifood studies, agrifood system governance, environmental justice, environmental economics, nonmarket valuation, welfare, and aquacultural economics. Other areas such as applied statistics, forestry economics, computer science, agricultural production science, or social sciences can be emphasized with courses in other departments.

Excellent computer and internet facilities are available. Students are encouraged to bring laptops with wireless internet capability. The Draughon Library across the street 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.

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	
PhD in Applied Economics	79/213	150	148	298

¹ International students, iBT /Computer TOEFL. ² The Rural Sociology program also requires a minimum 3.5 writing score.

Applicants should have completed a minimum of disciplinary coursework in as determined by the Graduate Committee. Students without sufficient undergraduate background may be required to complete undergraduate courses. International applicants from non-English speaking countries must submit a minimum score of 70 on iBT TOEFL, 213 on the Computer TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). 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.

Agricultural/Applied Economics applicants are required to submit three letters of recommendation should be mailed to the Graduate Program Officer. Letters should address ability to undertake rigorous quantitative research and intellectual commitment to the discipline. Students applying for financial aid must submit the Graduate Assistantship Application Form in the Appendix. 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

There are several competitive Graduate Research (GRA), and Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA). Stipends vary based on hours and academic status. 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 be productive and make 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 (AGEC7990 or 8990/ RSOC 7990).

PhD Student Funding

The maximum length of financial assistance is 5 semesters plus 2 summers. Extension for one semester may be granted based on written request by the major professor and approval of the Graduate Program Coordinating Committee subject to funding availability. PhD students may be able to teach as GTAs at Auburn or AUM. Local colleges (Southern Union Community College, Columbus State University, and Chattahoochee Valley Community College) also hire instructors with the equivalent of a Masters degree. Graduates seeking jobs in academics typically want to have teaching experience.

MS Student Funding

The maximum term for financial assistance is 3 semesters plus 1 summer. Extension for one semester may be granted based on a written request by the major professor and approval of the Graduate Program Coordinating Committee subject to funding availability.

Course and Work Load

Students on assistantships are subject to the course loads and work expectations in Table 2. An MS (PhD) student on the regular assistantship can take up to 12 credit hours of course work per semester. Most students enroll for 9 to 12 credit hours of credit. Students on assistantship must enroll for at least 1 hour during every semester including Summer.

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

Table 2. Course Load Limits and Work Expectations

	Minimum Work Hours	Typical Course Hours
MS		
Level I	10	12
Level II (standard)	13	12
Level III	16	6
PhD		
Level I	10	9
Level II	13	9
Level III (standard)	16	9
Level IV	17	6
Level V	20	3

Based on a 40-hour work week.

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 Ph.D. Program in Applied Economics

The Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology (DAERS) offers the Ph.D. in Applied Economics jointly with the Department of Economics and Forestry Economics. In the first year, students take two semesters of microeconomics and econometrics, one semester of macroeconomics, mathematical economics, and research methods. Students also take a special topics course on writing for scholarly journals that serves as the basis for the PhD Research Paper that is due at the beginning of the second year of coursework.

In the second year, students take two semesters of advanced micro-econometrics along with other core courses listed in Table 3, and complete their PhD Research Paper. Upon completion of the PhD Research Paper, 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 the PhD Research Paper and two 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 Ph.D. 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 AGEC 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. Required Courses for Ph.D. Degree in Applied Economics, DAERS

	Description	Credits
<i>Courses offered by Economics Department</i>		
ECON 7110 and 7120	Microeconomic Theory	6
ECON 7210	Macroeconomic Theory	3
ECON 7310 and 7330	Econometrics	6
ECON 7130	Mathematical Economics	3
ECON Subtotal		<u>18</u>
<i>Courses offered by DAERS</i>		
AGEC 7080	Production Economics I	3
AGEC 7090	Resource Economics II	3
AGEC 7110	Agricultural Economic Development	3
AGEC 7690	Micro-econometrics I	3
AGEC 7700	Research Methods	3
AGEC 7970	PhD Research Paper	3
AGEC 8060	Theory of Markets	3
AGEC 8080	Production Economics II	3
AGEC 8090	Food and Agricultural Policy	3
AGEC 8690	Micro-econometrics II	3
AGEC 8990	Research and Dissertation	10
AGEC Subtotal		<u>40</u>
Total required		58

The student should file a Plan of Study with the Graduate School by the beginning of his/her second year. The Plan of Study must be approved by the student's major professor, and should include the courses listed in Table 3, including 10 hours of AGEC 8990 Research and Dissertation. The student also needs to list three committee members besides his/her major professor. The Plan of Study is filed online <http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/degreeworks-plan-of-study/>.

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 "Gold Form" available from the Office of International Programs.

Transfer Credits

Students who enter the Ph.D. program with a master's degree from Auburn can count those credits hours toward the Ph.D. course requirements upon approval of the Graduate Program Officer. 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 within three years. A suggested list from which to choose is provided in Table 4. Students wishing to receive a MS in Economics should take ECON 7220 (Macro II) and ECON 7340 (Macro-econometrics). They should then take the written prelims offered by the Economics department (for details, see <http://www.cla.auburn.edu/economics/students/graduate-programs/ms-economics-degree-requirements/>).

Students wishing to receive a Graduate Minor in Statistics should include 12 hours of graduate-level statistics courses in their Plan of Study (for details, see <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/cosam/departments/math/statistics/programs/grad-minor.htm>).

Table 4. Suggested Electives

Course Number	Name	Credits
AGEC 7100	Operations Research Methods	3
AGEC 7200	Aquaculture Economics I	3
AGEC 7250	Aquaculture Economics II	3
ECON 7220	Macroeconomics II	3
ECON 7340	Macro-econometrics	3
ECON 8710	International Trade	3
ECON 8810	Labor Market Analysis	3
FORV 7440	Forest Finance and Investment	3
RSOC 7630	Political Economy of Development	3
STATS 7600	Stat Theory and Methods I	3
STATS 7610	Stat Theory and Methods II	3
STATS 7780	Survival Analysis	3
STATS 7800	Linear Models	3
STATS 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 chair.

Typical Ph.D. Program

An outline of the sequencing of courses in a typical Ph.D. program is shown in Table 5. The major focus of the second year is completing the PhD Research Paper. Papers that do not meet the standard (see description below) will result in the student's termination from the program. Thus, students should adjust their course load to ensure that sufficient time is available to complete the paper requirement successfully. During the third year, Ph.D. 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 Ph.D. Program

Year 1	
Fall	Spring
ECON 7110 Micro I	ECON 7120 Micro II
ECON 7210 Macro I	ECON 7330 Micro-econometrics
ECON 7130 Math Econ	AGEC 7700 Research Methods
ECON 7310 Econometrics I	AGEC 7970 PhD Research Paper
Initial idea for PhD Research Paper due January 15	
Prospectus for PhD Research Paper due April 30	
File Plan of Study with Graduate School	
Year 2	
Fall	Spring
AGEC 7690 Micro-econometrics I	AGEC 8690 Micro-econometrics II
AGEC core courses from table 1	AGEC core courses from table 1
PhD Research Paper due September 30	
First revision of PhD Research Paper due January 15	
Final revision of PhD Research Paper due April 30	
After completion of research paper, schedule Oral Preliminary Examination	
Year 3	
Fall	Spring
AGEC Core Courses from table 1	AGEC Core Courses from table 1
Electives	Electives
Complete dissertation	
Take Final Oral Examination	

PhD Research Paper Requirement¹

The writing of a publishable paper is required during the first two years of the PhD program (see Table 6).² The paper must be sole-authored and worthy of submission to an economics or related journal with a Google Scholar h-index of 25 or above. Journals meeting this standard can be found from the bibliometric search engine “Harzing’s Publish or Perish” available as a free download at the web site <http://www.harzing.com/pop.htm>. Students are encouraged to begin development of research ideas immediately upon entering the graduate program. Initial ideas for the paper (consisting of a concise research question, a sketch of a framework for investigation, and verification of available data) must be submitted to the Paper Committee by **January 15 of the first year** as part of the Research Paper course (described later).

Based on the paper idea and student nominations, the Paper Committee assigns a Paper Advisor to each student. Thereafter, students report to and interact frequently with their Paper Advisor. Students are also encouraged to seek advice or reactions to drafts from faculty throughout the development of their paper, just as a faculty member might seek advice from a colleague. But the paper must be solely the student’s work, which excludes work done jointly with faculty here or elsewhere (such as a professor in prior undergraduate/graduate work). Plagiarism standards of the journals apply, and violations could result in expulsion from the university (see Student Academic Honesty Code www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/dhc.html and discussion below).

The student’s progress is evaluated by the Paper Committee together with the Paper Advisor. To assist the student in meeting the paper requirement, the Paper Committee will teach a 3-hour course on the basics of writing for journals. In this course, which is offered Spring Semester, students make an oral presentation on the development of their paper ideas, and submit a formal Paper Prospectus on or about **April 30** (end of Spring semester). Class attendance is required.

The student’s paper must be submitted to the Paper Committee by **September 30** following the first year of course work. After soliciting a thorough review of the paper by the Paper Advisor and two independent reviewers selected from the faculty, the Paper Committee classifies the paper into one of three categories: (i) the paper meets the standard as is, (ii) the paper could meet the standard with minor revision, or (iii) the paper needs substantial work. Students with papers in the first category are finished with the paper requirement. Students with papers in the second and third categories are given careful advice on how to bring their papers up to journal quality, and continue to work with their Paper Advisors (which subsequently includes the independent faculty reviewers).

The revised paper must be submitted by **January 15** of the second year, when a similar evaluation process occurs. If the revised paper fails to meet the standard, a second revision will be due **April 30**. If the paper at that point does not meet the standard, or could not do so with straightforward revisions, the student will not be allowed to continue in the PhD program. These students have the

¹ Appreciation is expressed to the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Maryland, for permission to use their web material in developing this description, some of which is verbatim.

² Students are assumed to have earned a MS degree or equivalent at the start of the program. For students entering with a BS degree, the paper requirement will be deferred until the equivalent of a MS degree is earned, which typically occurs after two years of classes.

option of changing to a terminal MS program, or leaving the PhD program. The chair of the Paper Committee conveys the committee's final evaluation for each student in writing to the Graduate Program Officer, who, in turn, provides written notification of the final decision to the student and the Department Chair.

Appeals of decisions made by the Paper Committee must be tendered to the Department Chair within one month of the decision. The appeal must be in writing, and state clearly the reasons for the appeal. The Department Chair will appoint an *ad hoc* committee consisting of three faculty members who hold Level 2 Graduate Faculty status to consider the appeal. At least one of these members must be from outside the department (e.g., Economics or Forestry Economics). The *ad hoc* committee will inform the Graduate Program Officer of its decision, who will then notify the student. In filing the appeal, the student is entitled to the due process procedures described in *The Tiger Cub*, which is available online at <http://www.auburn.edu/tigercub/>.

Year of PhD Study	Initial paper idea submitted to Paper Committee	Prospectus submitted to Paper Committee	Paper due	Decision letter to student
1	January 15	~April 30	September 30	October 31
	Revision submitted to Paper Committee	Decision letter to student	Final revision submitted to Paper Committee	Decision letter to Student
2	January 15	February 15	April 30	May 15

Tips on Producing a Successful Paper

- 1) Select a topic that contributes to the Department’s research program. Most faculty have research projects funded by the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, or outside contracts and grants. Familiarize yourself with these research projects, with the aim of developing a researchable idea that contributes to the research objectives. This will align your interest with faculty expertise, and thus result in higher quality feedback as the writing process unfolds.
- 2) Do a thorough review of the literature with the aim of identifying gaps, problems, or puzzles that your work could address. Focus on work published in the better journals (i.e., those with a GS h-index higher than 25). Avoid unpublished work, and work published in “popular” outlets (i.e., those intended for a non-scientific audience). And, be sure that the review is up to date (i.e., includes the most recent work on the topic). A good place to find relevant articles is *EconLit*, the electronic data base maintained by the American Economics Association. Harzing’s Publish or Perish is also a good source, as it allows you to re-arrange articles on any given topic by date of publication, journal, and citation rate.

- 3) Assemble a database early in the research process, ideally by the end of the first semester of classes. This will give you an opportunity to explore alternative hypotheses, apply econometric techniques learned in class, and develop a realistic understanding of what can be accomplished given data limitations and time constraints.

Policy on Late Papers

Consistent with university policies laid out in *The Tiger Cub*, paper deadlines will be strictly enforced. A student who misses a deadline without the prior approval of the Paper Committee will be terminated from the program. Requests for deadline extension must be received at least one month before due date.

After completion of the Ph.D. research paper, the student should prepare for the General Doctoral Examination (preliminary oral exam). The purpose of the preliminary oral exam is to assess the quality and viability of the student's proposed dissertation research. Details about the process are given in the subsection below entitled "Preliminary Oral Examination." The exam must be scheduled with the Graduate School at least one week (five working days) prior to the exam date. This is done by filing "Form A" available online from the Graduate School. Upon successful completion of the preliminary oral examination, the student becomes a candidate for the degree.

Writing Help

Poorly written papers are apt to be rejected by faculty reviewers. With this in mind, international students whose first language is not English in particular are strongly encouraged to take advantage of writing help offered by the university. Two places where help can be found are the International Student/Scholar English Center (ISEC) and the Miller Writing Center, which is available to both domestic and international students, is located in RBD Library. ISEC offers free tutoring services as well as specialized courses (INTL 1800 and INTL 1830) designed to improve proficiency in oral and written English. The Miller Writing Center has a program called "WriteFest" that is designed specifically to support graduate student writing. Students, domestic and international, who turn in poorly written papers and who have not taken advantage of these services are apt not to get much sympathy in the appeals process. Thus, it is smart to work these services/programs into your schedule early in your Ph.D. studies, preferably in the first year.

Ph.D. Examinations

In addition to coursework and a research paper, Ph.D. students are required to pass two examinations: an oral preliminary examination, and a final oral defense.

Preliminary Oral Examination

1. The oral preliminary examination sets the stage for the student's dissertation. The student must submit a draft of the written dissertation research proposal at least six weeks prior to the proposed date of the oral examination to his or her advisor and the designated readers. The student is required to have at least one meeting with his/her advisor and the designated readers regarding the dissertation research proposal prior to the submission of the proposal to the advisory committee as a whole. If necessary, the

student will have the opportunity to modify his/her proposal to respond to remarks from the advisor and the designated readers.

2. The student must submit the final version of the written dissertation research proposal at least two weeks prior to the defense date to all members of his/her advisory committee. The student schedules the oral examination with the Graduate School by downloading and filing Form A. This must be done at least one week (five working days) before the date of the exam. The student's advisor receives an oral examination form, which he/she returns to the Graduate School upon completion of the exam with the grade (pass or fail) and date of the exam recorded.
3. If a student fails the first attempt of the preliminary examination, the Graduate Program Officer, in consultation with the student's advisor, may grant a second attempt. If a second attempt is granted, the preliminary oral examination process must be repeated between four and six months after the first attempt. A maximum of two attempts to pass the preliminary oral examination is allowed. There will be no opportunity to repeat the preliminary oral examination process after two attempts.

Final Oral Examination

1. 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 advisory committee must concur that the dissertation is suitable for the final defense.
2. After the first draft of the dissertation has been approved by the student's advisory committee, it is submitted to the Graduate School along with a "Dissertation First Submission Approval Form" signed by committee members. The Graduate School appoints an outside reader to review the dissertation. When the Graduate School has approved the dissertation, the student may apply for the final examination using "Form X" obtained from the Graduate School. The application form must be filed with the Graduate School at least one week (five working days) in advance of the examination date. The final oral exam should be scheduled before the deadline specified on the Graduate School's website.
3. The final oral exam is administered by the student's advisory committee. The outside reader appointed by the Graduate School 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. Any member of the Graduate Faculty may attend.
4. 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 http://www.grad.auburn.edu/etd_guide.html.

5. 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.

Statistics Minor

Students may pursue a Graduate Minor in statistics. To qualify students must use statistics in their dissertation; complete 12 hours of course work in statistics, and have a member of the Statistics Department faculty on their graduate committee. Students may also pursue a Masters degree in Statistics. For details, see the Department of Statistics web page.

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.. 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 courses for graduate students only. 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 at a time. AGEC 7990 credits count against the maximum covered by tuition waivers, which is 40 for the MS.

Thus, students on such waivers in general should limit their AGEC 7990 credits to 6, especially if they are planning to continue on for the PhD. A Tuition waiver for the PhD covers 78 credits minus credits used as a MS student. Thus, if a student on waiver takes 30 credits in the MS program, only 48 credits will be covered as a PhD student. Since the PhD requires 10 credits of Research and Dissertation (AGEC 8999), this leaves just 38 hours of graded coursework that can be covered by the waiver.

The *Electronic Thesis - Dissertation Guide* contains information about requirements for the thesis, and is available on the web at http://www.grad.auburn.edu/etd_guide.html. Submission of a thesis is defined as the time at which the first complete draft of such is submitted to the major professor for review. The Graduate School accepts only theses prepared according to the *Guide*. The Graduate School Calendar in *The Bulletin* lists the deadline for acceptance of final copies of theses by the Graduate School each semester. "Final copies" means that the thesis is perfected and ready for binding. A format check may be obtained at the Thesis and Dissertation Office in the Graduate School. If final copies are found to need corrections, the student's graduation may be delayed at least one semester.

Required Courses

Microeconomics (ECON 6020 or ECON 7110), Operations Research (AGEC 7100) or Mathematical Economics (ECON 7130), Econometrics I (ECON 7310), and Research Methods (AGEC 7700) are required of all MS students. This is a total of 12 hours of required courses in a program of 24 course hours of graded coursework. The remaining elective courses can be filled with any 6000, 7000 or 8000 level courses approved by the major professor and thesis committee. At least one-half of all credit hours toward the minimum degree requirement must be earned in 7000 and 8000-level courses and the remainder may be in 6000-level courses. Individual schedules should be constructed in consultation with the major advisor.

Plan of Study

Early in the graduate program, each student should confer with his/her academic adviser or major professor to select courses and discuss research interests. Then a Plan of Study should be prepared and submitted to the Graduate School. The Plan of Study form is available on the web at <http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/degreeworks-plan-of-study/>. For full-time students, the Plan of Study must be submitted no later than the end of the second semester in Graduate School. For part-time students, the Plan of Study must be submitted before registration for the fourth course taken in Graduate School. Notification of all changes must be provided before the beginning of the final semester. The student is responsible for carrying out the planned program and for asking the major professor to make necessary changes. No student will be permitted to graduate who fails to submit a Plan of Study and a graduation check to the Graduate School prior to the semester of expected graduation. Graduation day is the official last day of each semester and, therefore, is the deadline for submitting Plans of Study and graduation checks for graduation the following semester.

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, but the student's advisory committee also may require a written examination. Members of the Graduate Faculty not on the advisory committee may attend and participate in any oral examination as visitors. The major professor will schedule the oral examination not later than the deadline indicated in the Graduate School Calendar. Successful completion requires the unanimous support of all members of the advisory committee. If a student fails the examination, one re-examination may be given on recommendation of the advisory 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 (ECON 6020 or 7110, ECON 7130, ECON 7310, AGEC 7100, and AGEC 7700). 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.

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. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.

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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 will 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 is the major capstone paper that is 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 rejected 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 with at least 20 hours of this in the agricultural sciences. 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 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 outlined on pages 9 and 10. Students pursuing the Master of Agriculture are not eligible for hard-dollar assistantship funding. However, soft-dollar funding (from grants) may be available in some instances at the election of the principal investigator.

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/universypolicies/Policies/AcademicHonestyCode.pdf>). It will not be tolerated in the PhD Research Paper or any coursework or assistantship assignment associated with the Rural Sociology program.

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:³

- 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.

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://wp.auburn.edu/writing/writing-center/>) and at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>).

To help ensure that PhD research papers are free of plagiarism, the student should affix to the title page of each submission (original and revisions) the following statement:

"I certify that this paper is free of plagiarism, and understand that if plagiarism is detected I could be subject to sanctions as defined in Auburn University's Student Academic Honesty Code."

Signed _____

³ These examples are taken either verbatim or in slightly modified form from the academic honesty policies of AU's history and chemical engineering departments (<http://cla.auburn.edu/history/students/undergraduate-students/academic-honesty-policy/> and <http://www.eng.auburn.edu/chen/programs/undergraduate/student-handbook/honesty-ethics/honesty-policy.html>. Accessed 5 August 2014.)

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP APPLICATION FORM
Agricultural Economics
Auburn University

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone No. _____ Email _____ Sex M () F ()

Citizenship: United States () Other _____

Have you ever been discharged or forced to resign from any position? Yes () No ()

If so, explain fully.

Proposed Agricultural Economics Area of Interest for Graduate Study

Scholastic honors, membership in honor societies and participation in other college activities:

RECORD OF EMPLOYMENT

Organization	Title or Position	Dates
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References (List two giving Names, Addresses and Position)

Date _____ Signed _____

Applying for (circle all that apply): GRA/GEA GTA ALL

RETURN TO: Graduate Program Officer, Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, 202 Comer Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849-5406 USA