

# **Graduate Handbook**

## **Department of Agricultural Economics & Rural Sociology**

**Auburn University**

For additional information contact

Graduate Program Officer  
202 Comer Hall  
Auburn University, AL 36849-5406 USA  
Phone 334-844-4800  
Fax 334-844-5639

Revised  
June 2009

# 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. There are doctorates available in 38 fields. 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 Sociology, Master of Agriculture, and specialized Master of Business Administration. The PhD, MS Rural Sociology, and MBA 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, 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 <sup>1</sup> | GRE(V) | GRE(Q) | GRE(T) |
| MS in Agricultural Economics           | 550                | 450    | 450    | 900    |
| MS in Rural Sociology                  | 550                | 450    | 450    | 900    |
| PhD in Applied Economics               | 550                | 400    | 600    | 1000   |
| M Ag in Agricultural Economics         | 550                | 400    | 400    | 800    |
| M Ag in Rural Sociology                | 550                | 400    | 400    | 800    |
| MBA in Agribusiness <sup>2</sup>       | 550                | --     | --     | --     |
| MBA in Nat Res & Env Mgmt <sup>2</sup> | 550                | --     | --     | --     |

<sup>1</sup> International students, 213 computer.    <sup>2</sup> Apply through the College of Business.

Applicants should have completed a minimum of coursework in economics (or sociology) 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 550 (213 computer) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language TOEFL. Applicants with verbal GRE scores below 400 will be required to complete specified English courses.

Two 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 Personal Information form in the Appendix.

Admission involves (1) application to the Graduate School, (2) review by the Graduate Program Committee, and (3) decision by the Graduate School.

## Financial Assistance

Several levels of Graduate Research (GRA), Graduate Extension (GEA), and Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) are shown in Table 2. Stipends vary based on hours and academic status. Receipt of an assistantship is a privilege and students holding appointments are expected to be productive and make 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 typically support Plans of Remediation for suspended students, implying termination from the PhD 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 8990).

**Table 2. Approximate Graduate Student Stipends**

| Level | \$/yr  | % Base |
|-------|--------|--------|
| I     | 9,800  | 25     |
| II    | 13,000 | 33     |
| III   | 15,000 | 39     |
| IV    | 17,000 | 44     |
| V     | 19,500 | 50     |

Present base salary is \$39,000 for a 100% appointment (40-hour work week).

Advancement is based on recommendation by the major professor to the Graduate Program Committee and Department Chair. Requests must be made at least 45 days prior to the beginning of a semester. Changes are not made during the semester. Advancement is always subject to availability of funds.

### PhD Student Funding

The maximum length of financial assistance is 5 semesters plus 2 summers. Extension for one semester is based on written request by the major professor and approval of the Graduate Program Committee subject to funding availability. Tuition waivers are granted with all assistantships. PhD students may be able to teach as GTAs at Auburn or AUM. Local colleges (Southern Union

Community College, Columbus State University, 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.

Levels of support for PhD assistantships are:

- Level I*        Students who meet admission requirements without MS degrees
- Level II*        Students with MS degrees but lacking requirements for full admission
- Level III*        Typical entry level for PhD students
- Level IV*        Students who have passed comprehensive exams with one or no courses left in their Plan of Study. Students cannot remain at Level IV for more than 2 semesters plus 1 summer
- Level V*        Students who meet Level IV criteria and teach a course

### **MS Student Funding**

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

Levels of support for MS assistantships are:

- Level I*        Entry level for students with qualifying admission requirements
- Level II*        Typical entry level for MS students
- Level III*        Students with an accepted Plan of Study and thesis proposal plus a high GPA and exceptional progress toward degree

## Course and Work Load

Students on assistantships are subject to the course loads and work expectations in Table 3. An MS (PhD) student on the “standard” Level II (III) 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 3. 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                 | 12                   |
| Level II             | 13                 | 12                   |
| Level III (standard) | 16                 | 12                   |
| Level IV             | 17                 | 6                    |
| Level V              | 20                 | 3                    |

Based on percentages in Table 2 and a 40-hour work week.

# PhD in Applied Economics

The PhD in Applied Economics offered by the faculty in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology involves faculty in the Department of Economics and the School of Forestry in course offerings and on Dissertation Committees. The economics faculty in the School of Forestry also offers the PhD in Applied Economics with different requirements.

## Course Requirements

The PhD requires a minimum of 60 semester hours of graded courses beyond a Bachelors degree plus a minimum of 10 hours of AGECE 8990 Research and Dissertation for a total of 70 hours. Students with a Masters from Auburn are considered entering the PhD program with a Bachelors degree and have the same total requirement of 70 hours. Students with a Masters not from Auburn must complete at least 50 semester hours of graded courses plus the minimum of 10 hours of AGECE for a total of 60 hours. Tuition waivers for students on assistantships cover required hours plus an additional 20 hours.

Each student should complete a Plan of Study with their major professor by the end of the second year. Graduate School forms are available online. A residency form should be filed with the Graduate School during the first semester. The residency requirement is satisfied with 18 semester hours during two consecutive (not counting summer) semesters.

## Course Sequence

Required and elective PhD courses are listed below. Second and third year courses are offered every other year and may vary. Electives others than those listed may be offered according to student demand and faculty interest. Other graduate level courses at Auburn can count as electives with consent of the major professor.

| <b>First Year Required Core</b> |            |                              |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Fall</b>                     | ECON 7110  | Microeconomics I             |
|                                 | AGECE 7590 | Introduction to Econometrics |
|                                 | ECON 7130  | Mathematical Economics       |
| <b>Spring</b>                   | ECON 7120  | Microeconomics II            |
|                                 | AGECE 7690 | Microeconometrics            |
|                                 | AGECE 7700 | Research Methods             |
|                                 | AGECE 7970 | Special Problems             |

A preliminary exam is given during the second week in August before the second year. The

prelim is a four hour exam integrating core courses. Students with a GPA above 3.25 and no grade below B in any core course are exempt from the prelim but must turn in a research paper by July 31 as described below.

### Second & Third Year Required Courses

|                  |               |                                  |                              |
|------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Year A</b>    | <b>Fall</b>   | AGEC 7080                        | Production I                 |
|                  |               | AGEC 7090                        | Resource Economics II        |
|                  | <b>Spring</b> | AGEC 8080                        | Production II                |
|                  |               | AGEC 8090                        | Food and Agricultural Policy |
|                  |               | AGEC 7110                        | Economic Development         |
| <b>Year B</b>    | <b>Fall</b>   | ECON 7210/20                     | Macroeconomics               |
|                  |               | AGEC 8060                        | Applied Market Analysis      |
|                  | <b>Spring</b> | ECON 8310                        | Microeconometrics II         |
|                  |               | AGEC 8690                        | Topics in Econometrics       |
| <b>Electives</b> |               | AGEC 7100                        | Operations Research Methods  |
|                  |               | AGEC 7200/50                     | Aquacultural Economics       |
|                  |               | ECON 7310/20                     | Econometrics                 |
|                  |               | ECON 8710                        | International Trade          |
|                  |               | ECON 8720                        | Open Economy Macroeconomics  |
|                  |               | FORY 7450/60/80                  | Forest Economics             |
|                  |               | FINC 7960                        | Advanced Financial Systems   |
|                  | RSOC 7630     | Political Economy of Development |                              |

### PhD Research Paper Requirement

A publishable research paper is required during the first two years of the PhD program. Students are assumed to have earned a Masters degree at the start of the program. For students entering with only a Bachelors degree, the paper requirement is deferred until the equivalent of a Masters degree is earned, typically after two years of classes. For students who must take the preliminary exam, the paper requirement is deferred until the following year.

The required paper should be a sole authored paper publishable in an economics journal with an impact factor of 25 or above measured by the Google Scholar h-index. Examples of journals meeting this standard are *Applied Economics*, *Marine Resource Economics*, and *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*. Students should seek advice and reactions to drafts from faculty during the development of their paper but it must be solely student work. Plagiarism standards of the journals apply and violations could result in expulsion from the PhD program.

Research papers are evaluated by a Department Paper Committee that will provide the student with two reviews of their paper and overall editorial advice emulating the review process of a professional journal. Depending on paper quality, the committee either determines that the requirement is satisfied or requires a revision that in some cases may require starting a new paper. After evaluating the revision, further revision may be required by the end of May of the following year.

| <b>Research Paper Timetable and Deadlines</b> |                       |                 |                    |                                 |                       |                |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Year of Study                                 | First Draft Submitted | Review Returned | Revision Submitted | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Review Returned | Final Draft Submitted | Final Decision |
| 1   | July 31               | August 31       |                    |                                 |                       |                |
| 2   |                       |                 | January 31         | February 28                     | May 31                | June 30        |

To meet the research paper requirement, by the end of the second year the Committee should determine that the paper is of sufficient quality to be worthy of submission to a journal of the indicated quality or could meet this standard with further straightforward revisions. Otherwise, the student PhD program will be terminated or converted to a Masters program. Students are expected to present their papers in the Departmental seminar series.

To assist the student in meeting the paper requirement a Special Problems course AGEC 7970 on the basics of writing journal papers and oral presentation is offered during the Spring semester. The course will be organized by the Departmental Paper Committee and will include instruction in econometrics software.

### **General Oral Examination and Dissertation Proposal**

After successful completion of the core and paper, the student takes a general Oral Examination with their advisory committee. The Oral Exam is typically taken during the third year, and requires approval by the Graduate School at least one week prior. The Oral Examination covers the Dissertation proposal as well as general economic theory and quantitative methods.

Unanimous support of the advisory committee is required for passing the Oral Examination. If it is failed, a re-examination may be given on recommendation of the committee and approval by the Graduate Dean. Further examinations require exceptional circumstances and approval by the Graduate Council.

Upon successful completion of the Oral Examination, the student becomes a candidate for the PhD degree and has four calendar years to complete remaining requirements. See the *Guide to the*

*Preparation and Submission of Theses and Dissertations* on the Graduate School webpage.

### **Econometrics and Statistics**

Students are encouraged to pursue a Field in Econometrics that requires 4 courses in econometrics beyond the first year core with a minimum grade of B in each course. Up to two courses in Statistics at the 7000 level or above may be substituted for econometrics courses upon consent of the major professor.

Students may also 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.

## **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.

### **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 course work including Special Problems 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 prerequisites 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 course entitled "Research and Thesis" is AGEC 7990. The student must register for a minimum of six (6) credit hours of 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. Generally students on tuition waivers, and students taking ten or more hours of coursework, will register for enough AGEC 7990 hours to have 15 total hours in a semester. No grade is assigned for the 7990 course. The enrollment requirement for students on assistantships may be met by registering for one hour of AGEC 7990.

The *Guide to the Preparation and Submission of Theses and Dissertations* contains information about requirements for the thesis, and is available in the University Bookstore or on the

web at [www.grad.auburn.edu](http://www.grad.auburn.edu). 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**

Research Methods (AGEC 7700), Mathematical Economics ECON 7130, Econometrics 1 AGEC 7590, and Advanced Microeconomics 1 ECON 6020 are required of all MS students. Course substitution for ECON 6020 will be allowed upon approval of the Graduate Program Officer. This is a total of 12 hours of required courses in a program of 24 course hours. 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 [www.grad.auburn.edu](http://www.grad.auburn.edu) or in the Graduate School. 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. One to three changes may be made by using the simplified “Change in Existing Plan of Study Form” available from the Graduate School or on the web. Four or more changes require a new Plan of Study. 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.

### **Residency Requirement**

All candidates for the MS degree must spend a minimum of one semester (15-week term) on campus as a full-time student. This will require that the student register for a minimum of 10 credit hours, which may involve formal course work, research, seminar or a combination of the three. This requirement concerns academic residency only; it has nothing to do with residency for fee purposes.

### **Time Limit**

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

## **Interdepartmental Program in Sociology**

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

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 is recommended for students who might be interested in pursuing advanced graduate work and who are interested in gaining research experience. 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.

## **Admissions Requirements**

The Graduate School at Auburn University and our Interdepartmental 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, and (2) review of the application by the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee. Once a completed application has been received by the AU 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. The Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Sociology is particularly concerned that students have appropriate grounding in our three core areas: Statistics, Methods of Social Research, and Social Theory.

## **Degree Requirements – Thesis Option**

1. Graduate students are required to earn a minimum of 30 graduate-level semester hours, up to 6 of which may be thesis credits.
2. There are three required core courses for all graduate students in the Interdepartmental Program: SOCY 7000 (Advanced Sociological Theory), SOCY 7100 (Statistical Applications in Sociological Research), and RSOC 7700 (Research Methods in Sociology). The remaining course work is selected by the individual student in consultation with the student's Graduate Advisory Committee.
3. A grade of B or better must be earned in each of the core courses listed above.

4. If a prospective student has not had one or more of these 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 course work with a grade of at least a B before being allowed to take graduate courses in any core area.
5. Undergraduate back-up 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 7900 (Independent Study) 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.
10. Graduate students are guided through their program by an advisory Committee consisting of at least four 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 at least two of the three participating departments.
11. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to form their Advisory Committee and identify a plan of study for course work by the end of their first semester of course work. Revisions to the plan of study and/or to the composition of the Advisory Committee are possible should the need arise.

## **Degree Requirements – Non-Thesis Option**

1. Non-thesis students will be guided in their program by an Advisory Committee made up of graduate faculty from at least two of the component units of the Interdepartmental Program. 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.
2. Non-thesis students will be required to earn a total of 36 hours of graduate credit. Normally, at least 24 of these hours would be 7000-level or above courses offered in one of the three constituent departments in our program. Any exceptions to this must be approved by the co-Directors of the Interdepartmental Program.
3. The choice of courses taken will be made in consultation with the Advisory Committee, who will indicate their approval through signing a Plan of Study filed with the Graduate School by the end of the first semester in residence or before completion of 12 graduate-level semester hours.
4. Non-thesis students will be required to take the same three core courses in theory, methods, and statistics as students pursuing the thesis option.
5. No more than 6 hours of course work can be in the form of directed readings or independent studies.
6. In lieu of a thesis, non-thesis students will prepare a substantive research paper which will be presented and defended at a meeting of the Advisory Committee. This research paper could take a number of different 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 a piece of work that reflects the students' interests and abilities to integrate elements of what they have learned in the graduate program.
7. Funding decisions are made by individual departments within the program. That said, it is the firm intent of all participating departments that students pursuing a non-thesis option are not eligible for graduate teaching assistantships and graduate research assistantships. The non-thesis option is being created primarily to serve the needs of potential graduate students who already are embarked on their professional careers and who see our program as an opportunity to expand their personal and professional horizons.
8. Students admitted into the Interdepartmental Graduate Program must declare whether they intend to follow a thesis or non-thesis option. 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 a majority vote of the Coordinating Committee of the Interdepartmental Graduate Program. 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.

### **Deciding on a Thesis or Non-thesis option**

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

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.

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 course work, in addition to a major 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 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 rejected for admission or admitted on the master's level.
4. Non-thesis candidates will normally not be considered for funding by any of the three departments 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 obviously go to thesis candidates;
- c. We regard the assistantship as part of an academic socialization process to prepare students to teach and/or do research in preparation for advancing to the 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.

We encourage you to think about these factors very carefully in deciding on which 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, and we encourage you to talk with your faculty advisor and/or one of co-Directors of the Interdepartmental Program in Sociology before making such a decision.

## **Master of Agriculture**

The Master of Agriculture is a non-thesis option that provides a broad graduate training in Agriculture, Agricultural Economics, or Rural Sociology. 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 AGECE 7970 or RSOC 7970, 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.

## **Master of Business Administration**

An MBA degree with special options in agricultural economics was added in 1990. Specialties in either Agribusiness or Natural Resources and Environmental Management may be pursued. Application for admission to either specialty should be made through the College of Business.

Requirements include 36 graduate credit hours, 24 in business and 12 in agricultural economics or a closely related field. Because this is a non-research degree, MBA students are not eligible for Graduate Research Assistantships. However, the Department does have one or two Graduate Teaching Assistantships for which the MBA student may be considered. Also, hourly research work as a Graduate Research Aid is sometimes available.

**GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP APPLICATION FORM**  
**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

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