

Sociology Graduate Student Organization (SGSO)
Handbook

Mission Statement

The SGSO's mission is to provide an open forum for graduate students to discuss and address issues and concerns related to graduate student training and progress, and to help facilitate communication and career building between graduate students and faculty/staff. The SGSO is open to and run by graduate students and should maintain a democratic organizational structure so that all graduate student concerns and activities can be voiced and are received and treated with equity and fairness.

Specifically, the SGSO strives to 1) maintain effective communication with other graduate students and with faculty within our department via committees and meetings, 2) organize resources and workshops important to graduate student training and career building, 3) provide a forum for, and offer advice to, graduate students on ways to address and resolve departmental issues and how to maintain progress through the program, 4) to act as a liaison or third party between graduate students, and/or between grad students and faculty, when possible, 5) to provide mentorship to sociology undergraduate students, and 6) to provide service to Washington State University and its surrounding communities.

The SGSO has very limited authority in departmental policies and affairs but, as a collective democratic organization, it can and should provide graduate student feedback regarding relevant policies and procedures and to work with faculty to build and maintain a better sociology graduate student program at WSU.

Benn Lee Messer, 2006 Cohort
Morgan Millar, 2005 Cohort
Lindsey Trimble, 2005 Cohort
Rayna Sage, 2007 Cohort
Meredith Williams, 2007 Cohort

Brief History of SGSO (late-1990s – 2014)

In the late 1990s the SGSO was a Registered Student Organization (RSO) recognized by the University. RSO status requires the organization to have a leadership structure - a President, Vice President, and Treasurer - but also makes the RSO eligible for certain university funds and incentives. During this time, the SGSO was tightly structured around the requisite RSO status; the organization elected leaders and conducted regular meetings and activities. In the early 2000s the SGSO was transformed into a loosely structured democratic organization. Many factors precipitated this change, but the departure of several faculty and graduate students from the department was primarily responsible for initiating this restructuring of the SGSO. Under the new organization, graduate students took turns keeping and maintaining the “red SGSO notebook”, with a different student acquiring the notebook after each meeting. Whoever had the notebook was the SGSO “administrator” and meetings were held anytime a graduate student(s) requested a meeting, which they then organized through the “administrator.”

In 2007, the SGSO changed again into its current form. An SGSO committee was created to serve as an administrator responsible for organizing and facilitating SGSO meetings, which again began to be held at regular monthly intervals. The creation of the committee was an attempt to maintain a balance between the more tightly structured RSO-type organization, with required leadership positions, and the more loosely structured “alternating notebook” organization, with little administration or leadership.

In 2014, the SGSO once again acquire RSO status in order to be able to reserve meeting rooms and acquire RSO resources. The principle reason to register was persistent conflicts in reserving meeting room and lack of connection and involvement with the university and community. The SGSO will still follow its current structure but will meet the requisites to maintain RSO status. However, the SGSO has and should continue to endeavor to maintain an organizational structure that is most effective for carrying out its mission under different departmental and university conditions.

Organization and Administration

Since 2007, the SGSO has held regular monthly meetings and has been organized into nine committees. The SGSO and each committee are responsible for carrying out the SGSO’s mission of recognizing and addressing graduate student concerns, facilitating communication and career building, and attending to administrative responsibilities.

SGSO meetings and activities have been loosely organized in the following ways. At the beginning of each semester, typically in the first couple of weeks, the SGSO Committee sets up a Doodle poll (www.doodle.com) to determine the day and time that is open for the most graduate students to attend the SGSO’s monthly meeting. During the first meeting of the academic year, graduate students volunteer for various SGSO committee positions and discuss possible agendas for the semester. Before each meeting, a member of the SGSO Committee sends an email to inform graduate students of the meeting time and place and to collect various topics of discussion to place on the agenda. In each meeting, an SGSO Committee person facilitates the meeting and the other SGSO Committee person records meeting minutes. Members of the

various SGSO committees report information relevant to graduate students collected from their meetings with faculty and/or others, and all graduate students discuss issues, activities, etc. of relevance or concern. The meetings are not adjourned until everyone has had a chance to share relevant information. After each meeting, recorded meeting minutes are emailed to the entire graduate student body (via gradforum) and the process begins again for the next scheduled meeting.

Committees & Responsibilities

Below is a list and description of each SGSO committee and its responsibilities, with tips from previous committee members. Ideally, each committee should change members annually and two person committees should be comprised of at least one graduate student with prior experience in the SGSO, though this is not a “rule”.

SGSO Committee (2 members)

This committee is responsible for 1) organizing and facilitating SGSO meetings and recording meeting minutes, 2) regularly informing students of SGSO and departmental affairs (e.g. list of faculty committees), 3) conducting and analyzing the SGSO survey in April, 4) organizing the annual graduate student picnic in August to welcome the incoming cohort, and 5) updating and maintaining the SGSO Handbook.

Ideally, SGSO Committee members should serve two years on a rotating schedule so that after each year the Committee is comprised of a “senior” member who has acquired experience from the previous year and a new “junior” member without any prior experience in this Committee, but who would serve as the “senior” member the following year. The “term” for this Committee officially begins/ends after the last SGSO meeting of a school year (in the Spring semester), in which committees are filled with new volunteers. Generally, the “new” SGSO committee members are elected between March 15th and April 15th of Spring semester. SGSO committee members can be re-elected if they have not served two terms (two years) in the same position.

I. Organizing & Facilitating Meetings

a. The First Meeting

- i. During the second week of the Fall and the first week of the Spring semester organize a Doodle poll (www.doodle.com) and send two emails to gradforum, the first email will be an official announcement with the Doodle link and the second a reminder with the Doodle link a few days after the first. Close the poll after a week and determine the meeting day and time based on the most availabilities. Announce the meeting time via gradforum.
- ii. For the first meeting of the Fall semester, the announcement email should contain information on SGSO committees and graduate students will volunteer for each committee during the meeting.

- iii. After the meeting, contact the department chair and/or staff person to obtain a faculty committee list. Distribute the list to gradforum.
- b. For Each Meeting
 - i. Reserve a meeting room at least two weeks before a meeting. Wilson-Short 201, 130, and 101 have been accommodating in the past. Reserve 201 via the Sociology department office, 130 via the SESRC office, and 101 via the CES department office. Also, as a RSO a meeting room can be reserve via <https://scheduling.wsu.edu/default.aspx>.
 - ii. One week before each meeting send an announcement (date, time, place, and agenda) via gradforum, including a request for agenda topics; send a reminder one to two days before the meeting (with the same info).
 - iii. During each meeting the facilitator ensures that each agenda topic and all other issues are discussed/addressed and the other member will type minutes.
 - iv. After each meeting, email meeting minutes to gradforum. Include highlights of the meeting in the email text and attach minutes.

II. *Communications*

- a. OrgSync
 - i. SGSO committee members or volunteer(s) should manage SGSO's orgsync page.
- b. Emails to Grad Students
 - i. Use gradforum@lists.wsu.edu to communicate with graduate students.
 - ii. Reply to any and all requests or responses from other graduate students regarding the SGSO.
 - iii. Include each SGSO Committee member's contact information in all emails that may induce a response.
- b. Emails to and Meetings with Faculty
 - i. The SGSO as a whole typically communicates most with the department chair and Graduate Studies Committee co-chairs regarding graduate student-wide issues and to schedule a potential meeting with the "faculty". It is encouraged that the SGSO Committee arranges a graduate student-wide meeting with these individuals at least once during the academic year.

- ii. Grad students do not have access to a faculty-only listserv but can send an email to faculty only via a faculty member or the entire department via socannouncements@lists.wsu.edu (though this is rarely used).

III. *The SGSO Survey*

Administering the SGSO Survey is optional because the Department of Sociology already administers a similar evaluation survey annually.

a. Survey Purpose and Resources

- i. The SGSO Survey provides sociology graduate students an opportunity to provide feedback regarding their experience(s) and to “rate” the sociology graduate program. Using the most sound and confidential survey methods possible, the SGSO Committee designs and implements the survey in mid-April, typically after the annual Sociology Banquet, and compiles and emails results to the department chair and Graduate Studies Committee co-chairs before the end of the following Fall semester.
- ii. Paper versions may be printed and/or copied for free using a departmental code and WSU’s Internet survey service is available for use free of charge (recommended).

b. Methods

- i. Previous versions of the SGSO survey should be available in the SGSO notebook as guides for future survey designs. The survey should contain core questions regarding the graduate student experience and a “rating” of that experience but should also be updated as needed to obtain feedback on potential issues or changes in the department that occurred during the previous academic year. The survey design and individual questions should be designed using Dillman’s (2000) suggestions.
- ii. The survey should be created and ready to implement by early April. A graduate student volunteer should register with WSU’s Internet survey service (currently called Skylight, found at skylight.wsu.edu) and create and manage the SGSO survey on their account. If paper versions are used, a graduate student volunteer should design and print the paper questionnaires using word processing software and the department’s printers/copier. If both Internet and paper are used, follow Dillman’s (2000) uni-mode construction suggestions.
- iii. The Internet version is recommended since it allows for the most confidentiality. The SGSO cannot determine who responds and who does not. It also seems to solicit a higher response rate. However, a potential downside is that all graduate students are provided the same URL. This allows for confidentiality, but also could allow students to respond more than once. The

paper version can be confidential if implemented carefully but has several shortcomings. In the past, paper versions have been placed in student mailboxes for students to respond and return to an anonymous mailbox or place. However, this can be difficult for graduate students at other campuses (e.g. WSU Vancouver). Also, confidentiality can be a problem if paper versions are left in student mailboxes, allowing others to see whether or not a student has responded. Thus, it is recommended to push the Internet as the preferred method of response and possibly provide a paper version only for those who want it.

- iv. In mid-April, one SGSO Committee member should send a “pre-notice” email to gradforum announcing that they will be receiving the SGSO survey invitation soon, including a description of the purpose of the survey. In two or three days, the same person should send the official email invitation, including the survey link (if the Internet service is used) and/or an announcement that paper versions are being distributed, and indicate the date the survey will end. One week later, the other SGSO Committee member should send a “reminder” email informing graduate students who have not responded to do so. After another week, a volunteer outside the SGSO Committee should send a “final reminder” email.
- v. The survey should be in the field at least 2.5 weeks.
- vi. During the summer or early-Fall, the SGSO Committee (and other possible volunteers) should analyze the data and report the methodology (including the response rate) and trends in the results in an “Executive Summary”. See the SGSO notebook for an example.
- vii. In the Fall semester, the “Executive Summary” should be emailed first to gradforum to get feedback and then to the department chair and Graduate Studies Committee co-chairs, with a request that it be forwarded to the entire faculty.
- viii. A meeting with faculty may be held to discuss the survey results.

IV. *Graduate Student Picnic*

a. Purpose

- i. It has been a tradition that during Orientation Week in the Fall semester, typically the week before classes begin, the SGSO Committee organizes a graduate student picnic to welcome and meet the incoming cohort, including introducing them to the SGSO. Traditionally the picnics have been held at Kamiak Butte.

b. Organization

- i. In early August, an SGSO Committee person (and/or graduate student volunteers) should communicate with the faculty Graduate Studies Committee co-chairs to organize a date, time, and place to have the picnic in order not to conflict with their schedule activities for the incoming cohort. Then, communicate with the departmental staff to arrange funds to pay for food, etc.
- ii. On or before Monday of Orientation Week, an SGSO Committee person should email gradforum announcing the date, time, and location of the picnic, and organize possible carpools if needed.
- iii. The day before or day of the picnic, one or two volunteers should visit a local grocery store to pick up food, etc. for the picnic. Volunteer(s) should arrive early to organize the picnic if possible.

V. *Staff Appreciation Day*

- a. SGSO committee members send an email via gradforum to request for volunteers to organize the Staff Appreciation Day. Staff Appreciation Day is held in April to recognize and honor departmental staff.
 - i. Duties for Staff Appreciation Day include soliciting and collecting donations from fellow graduate students, using donations to purchase gifts for the staff, organizing a time to hold a short social hour to formally recognize the staff, and decorating the main office/setting up refreshments for this social hour.
 - ii. The Department of Sociology administrative staff will provide funds to purchase light refreshments and appetizers.

VI. *SGSO Handbook*

a. Purpose

- i. The SGSO Handbook describes the mission, history, and organization of the SGSO to be used as a reference for the SGSO.

b. Organization

- i. In the Fall semester of each year the SGSO Committee should update the handbook to reflect any changes in the mission, history, or organization of the SGSO. SGSO Committee members should make updates and send them out to gradforum for additions, revisions, and approval by other graduate students. The updated handbook should be posted on the SocWiki web site and distributed to gradforum during the Fall semester.

VII. *Committees*

*Note: If you are not allow to attend the faculty meeting(s), please email or schedule an appointment with the faculty committee chair (recommended) or a faculty committee member to get possible updates.

a. Teaching Resources Committee (2-3 members)

This committee is responsible for maintaining and improving teaching resources available to and provided by graduate students. Committee members organize and maintain three major resources: 1) the Tuesday/Thursday Teaching Teas, 2) the SocWiki web site, and 3) the Teaching Resources Center.

- i. The Tuesday/Thursday Teaching Teas have been ongoing since August 2009. In these, graduate students meet monthly or bi-monthly to have tea and discuss effective teaching methods for different courses and learn about various teaching resources available through the department, university and elsewhere. So far, each semester the committee has solicited suggestions for topics, then scheduled a full semester in advance. It may be helpful to make a flyer with a schedule for the semester, then post it around the department and send it to gradforum. The topics can be graduate students teaching each other our areas of specialization, or can be about broader topics, such as university resources, or general teaching tips. Past examples are available in a “Teaching Tea” notebook in the Teaching Resources Center. Any handouts from Teaching Teas should be added to this notebook.
- ii. Another resource is the SocWiki web site, built and maintained by sociology graduate students. The web site is found at wsusoc.pbworks.com; the login is wsusociology@gmail.com and the password is soc3-2life. On this web site is a plethora of documents, links, and other resources related to teaching and studying sociology, and progressing through the graduate program. The committee should at least one time per semester send an email to gradforum reminding graduate students of the resource, and solicit contributions. Committee members should also be available to add resources to the site, should someone feel uncomfortable. It has been helpful to provide a demonstration of how to edit the SocWiki at least once per year at an SGSO meeting.
- iii. The Teaching Resources Committee created the Teaching Resources Center off of the graduate student computer lab in Wilson-Short hall in August 2010. The Center contains a computer with two monitors, a TV with VHS and DVD capabilities, a filing cabinet, and bookshelves. The computer is available to visit and contribute to the SocWiki, other teaching resources, or to plan lessons. There are plans to add a folder of teaching-related links and other resources to the desktop. The TV is available to screen teaching films, which are located in the filing cabinet below the TV. These films are available to

check out, and contributions are welcome. They should have a cover that describes the film, and major topics. That same information should be posted on the SocWiki with a note that the film is available in the SGSO film library. Also in the filing cabinet is a set of markers and glue sticks. These are available for check out for in-class activities. There are also magazines available, and contributions are welcome. There are currently two sets of bookshelves. Above the desk, there are books that have been donated to the department for improving our teaching. Those books may not leave the Teaching Resources Center, as they cannot be replaced. The other bookshelf, currently located near the window, is a location for a free book exchange. Here, graduate students may drop off extra books, or find books to help them plan their courses. Committee persons are responsible for maintaining and improving the Center and its resources.

Beyond these three tasks, the Teaching Resources Committee may also propose and help organize possible teaching and career-building workshops hosted by various sociology faculty or university staff.

b. Awards Committee (2 members)

- i. This committee is responsible for meeting with the Faculty Awards Committee beginning in the Spring semester to provide input on the granting of various departmental awards. Only one Awards Committee member is required to attend the Faculty Award Committee meetings.

In the past, the committee members were unable to apply for departmental awards during the academic year they serve on the committee. However, the Award committee members are now eligible to apply for awards.

- ii. In addition, the committee organizes and arranges the presentation of the Louis N. Gray Graduate Mentoring Award, which recognizes a faculty member who has demonstrated exceptional graduate student mentoring and advocacy over the past year.

In late March, after Spring Break, the committee members sends an email to all graduate students (via gradforum) about completing the **paper ballots** placed in their departmental mail boxes for the award. The paper ballots lists all faculty in which up to three faculty may be nominated. Afterwards the votes are tallied and a winner is determined, but must be kept secret from the faculty. The committee person is unable to cast a vote and will arrange for someone to present the award to the faculty member at the annual sociology banquet held in mid-April. The person who will present the award will be someone who has work extensively with the faculty member.

c. Search Committee (2 members)

Serves with faculty on the Search Committee when the Department of Sociology is participating in an open job search for faculty or chair.

- i. This committee meets with the faculty Search Committee to provide graduate student feedback on potential new hires.
- ii. This committee administers a job candidate evaluation survey to graduate students who attended the job talk and lunch. The compiled data is analyzed and the results are given to the Search Committee.

d. Colloquium Committee (2 members)

Lately, the faculty Colloquium Committee has not met at all due to limited funds and staff. As a result, graduate students can only volunteer in this committee when the department needs help organizing a colloquia and workshops.

Duties have included 1) participating in discussions about whom to invite to come give a presentation, 2) developing timelines and schedules for speakers' visits, 3) advertising events by posting fliers or sending emails, 4) organizing the logistics of the events, such as purchasing refreshments, setting up and taking down chairs, tables, etc.

e. Graduate Studies Committee (2 members)

- i. This committee meets with the faculty Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) to provide feedback on issues related to graduate students and offer assistance on matters related to departmental graduate policies and procedures. Only two student member can attend faculty Graduate Studies Committee meetings.
- ii. The Graduate Studies Committee assists the directors of graduate studies in organizing and mobilizing graduate student assistance with prospective student events.
- iii. The Graduate Studies Committee will help redesign the recruitment process from attracting applicants to encouraging those who are accepted to the program to attend the program.

f. Undergraduate Studies Committee (2 members)

- i. This committee meets with the faculty Undergraduate Studies Committee to provide feedback on issues related to undergraduate teaching and resources and assist with matters regarding undergraduate policies and procedures.
- ii. This committee will assist in recruiting sociology majors.
- iii. This committee will help in informational events related to sociology majors.

g. Faculty Meeting Committee (2-3 members):

This committee attends faculty meetings, usually held twice a month, to take notes on discussions regarding graduate students or the graduate program and to provide feedback on behalf of graduate students.

h. GPSA Senators (2 PhD members; 1 MA member)

These committee members attend monthly GPSA meetings, usually held on Monday evenings, to represent graduate students in the Sociology department. Senators take notes on issues related to graduate students and sociology in particular, and may serve on various GPSA committees regarding graduate and professional student activities and teaching and research resources. GPSA Senators are paid a modest amount for their time and can also indicate their participation in the GPSA on their curriculum vitae, particularly regarding “service to the university”.