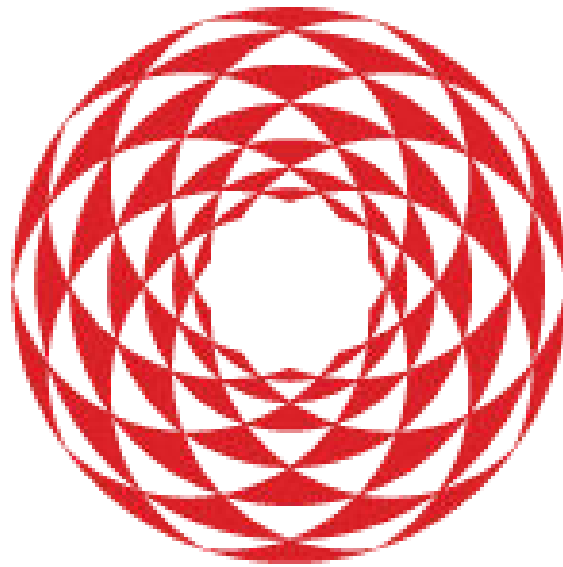


# **Sociology and Anthropology**

## **PhD Handbook**



**ashoka**  
UNIVERSITY

**GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS**

**Monsoon 2025**

## **PhD in Sociology/Anthropology**

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology builds on the unique relationship between sociology and social anthropology as it has developed and flourished over time. We emphasise the critical empiricism, theoretical engagement and comparative approach central to our best disciplinary traditions. Our department encourages interdisciplinary explorations with allied fields of social thought and inquiry, including history, economics, political science, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, environmental studies, computer science, planning and design, natural sciences, arts and aesthetics, law and media.

The department introduced a doctoral programme in the academic year 2021-22. In training doctoral students as professional sociologists/anthropologists, the programme seeks to provide them with the necessary analytical tools to become researchers equipped to deliver critical interventions across a range of public institutions – the university, media, think tanks and advocacy work in NGOs, and as lead fieldworkers for market research and corporate social responsibility.

Students may enter the PhD programme after an MA in sociology, social/cultural anthropology or an allied discipline. The doctoral programme will run for five years with a possibility of a sixth-year extension. The first two years will be spent doing course work, and in the preparation and defense of a project proposal and a pilot study of fieldwork. Students are expected to complete their qualifying exams and proposal defense by the end of their second year, commence fieldwork in their third year, and write up their dissertation in their fourth and fifth, and if necessary, sixth year. Students are expected to defend their dissertation no later than their sixth year.

### **Coursework:**

Requirements for completing the PhD include 36 credits of coursework spread over two years. The first three semesters will consist of full-time course-work and the fourth semester will be spent in preparation for the qualifying exam. The PhD course structure is designed to allow students to explore a wide range of concepts, theories and ethnographies as they move towards formulating their dissertation topic.

Graduate students will sign up for a minimum of 12 credits per semester - 3 courses of 4 credits each. The full load of coursework includes 3 core courses that are compulsory for all graduate students and 4 elective courses. Among the 4 elective courses, students may take upto a maximum of 2 independent study modules (ISM) with a willing faculty member of their choosing. The proposal writing and qualifying exam will count for 4 credits each.

In the summer after the first year, students will carry out a pilot study, i.e. a preliminary exploration of their field site. They will submit a report to their supervisor at the beginning of the second year.

The Anthropology/Sociology PhD Program at Ashoka will be distinguished by close faculty attention to student writing practices across multiple stages of the PhD. Related to, and in addition to, training in the discipline, students will receive dedicated writing instruction and mentorship.

### **Graduate Assistantship:**

PhD students at Ashoka University are addressed as graduate assistants (GA) in order to distinguish them from other teaching assistants/teaching fellows in the university employment. Each graduate student will be expected to carry out teaching responsibilities during their graduate career. The university guidelines specify that a GA will have to carry out a minimum of two GA-ships in two courses and a maximum of six GA-ships over the span of the PhD programme. The SOA department requires the PhD students to undertake two GA-ships in total, which can be completed before the qualifying exam or one of them can be completed after fieldwork. The department strongly recommends that the PhD scholars return to the campus after their fieldwork to write up the dissertation, thereby also participating in departmental activities. Saving 1 GAship for post-fieldwork is therefore advisable. The GAs are also expected to fully participate and help in coordinating the department colloquium series and other academic events.

### **Faculty Supervisor:**

PhD students are expected to identify their supervisor by the end of their first year. This should be the faculty member with whom the student feels most compatible both intellectually and personally. Normally, up to two supervisors may jointly supervise a PhD student. At least one supervisor should be from the department in which the student is admitted, while the co-supervisor, if any, may be from the same or another department.

It is the responsibility of the students to find out the right fit and reach out to concerned faculty for supervision. In case of any difficulty, a student can contact the PhD Coordinator and/or the HoD. They can also write to the PhD Advisory Committee for any advice on this matter.

Students are free to change their supervisor(s) at any time to a faculty member who has agreed to work with them, based on consultation with the departmental PhD Advisory Committee. Students can consult with their supervisor on their course selections and on their research and career plans.

### **Student Research Committee (SRC):**

Ashoka University mandates the formation of a Student Research Committee (SRC) in keeping with UGC guidelines. The SRC for each individual student will be appointed by the departmental PhD Advisory Committee before the student plans to defend his/her project proposal. It will include as members: (a) the student's supervisor as chair of the committee (b) co-supervisor, if any, or (c) two faculty members who specialize in the related area, one of whom could be from a different department, or, if needed, from outside the university. The SRC will be composed of at least three members out of which at least two, including the Chair, have to be from Sociology and Anthropology, and at most one can be from outside the university.

By the end of the third semester, the names of the SRC members should be communicated to the departmental PhD Advisory Committee. The primary role of SRC is to periodically monitor progress of the student, help overcome problems, and assess his/her dissertation before it is sent for evaluation by external examiners

### **Ph.D. Advisory Committee**

As per the Ashoka Ph.D. Handbook, the department must constitute a Ph.D. Advisory Committee comprising faculty members. This committee is responsible for overseeing the formation of the Student Research Committee (SRC) and supporting other key aspects of the Ph.D. programme. This committee is chaired by the PhD Coordinator and consists of 2-3 other faculty members from the department.

#### **Members:**

- Ph.D. Coordinator – Chair
- Head of Department – Ex Officio Member
- **Dr. Nishita Trisal** – Faculty Member
- **Dr. Deepak Mehta** – Faculty Member

### **Qualifying Exams and Dissertation Proposal Defence:**

Students are expected to take their qualifying examinations and defend their project proposals in the fourth semester, after which they will commence their dissertation fieldwork and writing. The candidate must satisfy the SRC regarding the requisite language competence to carry out fieldwork.

Students will prepare three essays for the qualifying exam. The themes and bibliographies for these essays will be developed by students in consultation with their committee members. The final essays should be between 25 and 30 pages and demonstrate mastery of the important debates in their field. Upon approval by the committee, students must circulate their essays at least two weeks before the date of the oral examination/viva voce.

During the viva voce, students will defend their dissertation proposals which would also have to be circulated two weeks before the date of oral examination. It is expected that students will be promoted to Senior Research Fellow (SRF) after the successful completion of their qualifying examination and may proceed to their dissertation research.

Prior to the exam, students are expected to have completed all coursework and language training requirements.

### **Dissertation Research:**

From the fifth semester (i.e. Monsoon semester of the third year) each student will carry out fieldwork until the fourth year. During their fieldwork, students will submit a report every three months to the members of their committee.

### **Dissertation Writing:**

The fourth and fifth years will be spent in writing the thesis. Dissertation defense is expected to take place no later than the end of the sixth year. After students return from their fieldwork, they will spend a year 'writing the field'. They will address the key anthropological and sociological question of how ethnographies are written. Students are expected to read a range of carefully selected ethnographies, as well as texts about ethnographic writing in consultation with their supervisor. They will also understand many of the 'genres-along-the-way' that go into making ethnographies — jottings, fieldnotes, reports, visual records, interviews, surveys, and so on — and begin to make sense of, and grapple with all the material that they themselves have collected and generated over the course of their fieldwork year. In a peer- and faculty- supported manner, they will write up their own material, engaging with multiple genres along the way, in an iterative process that culminates in their theses.

### **Academic Standing:**

All students in coursework are required to maintain a minimum GPA of 3, which translates into a grade of B or above. This will be assessed at the end of each academic year. Students can be asked to leave the programme at the end of their first two years on the following grounds:

- 1) If, at the end of the first two years of course work, the student has less than a minimum GPA of 3.0.
- 2) If a student has outstanding Incompletes. All Incompletes will need to be finished within one semester of the semester in which the course was taken. If a student has an Incomplete at the end of their third semester, then he or she will have to complete that latest by the end of the fourth semester in order to stay in the programme and be eligible for the qualifying exam.
- 3) With reference to students' dereliction of duty, this includes missing a series of classes without notice, shirking one's responsibility as graduate assistants, missing pre- arranged meetings without notice, and not completing both academic and non-academic assignments.

Note: For any additional or missing information, please refer to the [Ashoka University Ph.D. Handbook](#).

## Course Structure and Outline

<b><u>Semester I</u></b>	<b><u>Core Course</u></b> SOA 6101 Concepts, Contemporaneity and the Social  SOA 6102 Critical Writing Workshop	<b><u>Elective</u></b>  Minimum One Elective
<b><u>Semester II</u></b>	SOA 6103 Research Methodology Workshop	Minimum Two Electives
<b>Summer Semester</b> Pilot Study		
<b><u>Semester III</u></b>	Proposal Writing	Minimum One Elective
<b><u>Semester IV</u></b>	Qualifying Exam	
<b><u>Semester V</u></b>	Fieldwork	

<b><u>Semester VI</u></b>	Fieldwork
<b><u>Semester VII</u></b>	Fieldwork/ Dissertation writing
<b><u>Semester VIII</u></b>	Fieldwork/ Dissertation writing
<b><u>Semester IX</u></b>	Dissertation writing
<b><u>Semester X</u></b>	Dissertation writing/ Defence
<b><u>Semester XI</u></b>	Dissertation writing (If extension granted)
<b><u>Semester XII</u></b>	Dissertation writing (If extension granted)

## **CORE COURSES - 4 credits each**

### **Concepts, Contemporaneity and the Social**

This course will school students into how contemporary sociology/anthropology carves out its objects of study. Part of this carving extends the classical canon, but also differs significantly from it. The course will introduce contemporary debates and ethnographies ranging from the ecological crisis to contemporary religiosity and the problems of the secular, from collective violence to public health, from gift economies to commodity cultures and the market. In the process of study, the course will draw the links between specific concepts and their theoretical moorings, showing how the history of the discipline continues to challenge itself by drawing new boundaries.

### **Critical Writing Workshop**

In the first semester, all students will participate in a critical writing workshop. This workshop will introduce them to argumentative and rhetorical practices within academic writing, addressing questions of genre, structure, reasoning, evidence, citation and style. Students will both understand how and why texts are constructed in particular ways, as well as write ‘practice pieces’ along the lines of multiple “actually-existing” genres — from book reviews to literature reviews. They will receive detailed feedback — both instructor feedback, and written peer-review — on the same. The approach to writing is not, however, merely imitative, but rather genealogical and critical. What are identifiable writing conventions within different disciplines? How did we come to those particular genre conventions? How have they changed with time? In what ways can these conventions be questioned and approached differently? Students will emerge with the beginnings of a meta- cognitive and rhetorical understanding of academic writing, broadly conceived. Writing will continue to be addressed and discussed both in subsequent core and elective courses in our department.

### **Research Methodology**

This is a required course in the second year of graduate study, after completing pre- dissertation pilot study in the summer of the first year. Students will be trained in anthropological methods tailored to specific research projects as well as writing proposals for external funding. The heart of this course will show how the discipline is made and critiqued in the process of ethnographic fieldwork. Attention will also be focused on how the archive functions as a classificatory and technological system of power.

## **ELECTIVE COURSES - 4 credits each**

**Elective courses include but are not limited to the following list. The list is representative and may change to accommodate student interests.**



### **Imagining South Asia**

This course will look at how South Asia as a region has been conceived in anthropological traditions of scholarship. Rather than view South Asia as framed by geography alone, we track transformations in how the region is re-imagined through academic debates in ways that generate both data and concepts. Instead of working with the constraint of the boundaries of nation state, we will outline a cultural cartography that transacts caste solidarities, linguistic affinities and repertoires of violence that connect the regions of one nation state to that of another. A major concern will be to analyse the link of nationalism and populism across the Subcontinent.

### **Power, Resistance and Legitimacy**

This course will explore the political, regulatory and imaginative practices of state and non- state forms of authority and enforcement, as well as their undoing in relation to anthropological thought.

### **Kins and Neighbours**

Human beings are enmeshed in networks not of their own choosing –networks made up of family, friends, neighbours, strangers, environments and other forms of life. This makes us who we are. This course will work through the way we use our bodies; how we arrived at who we are; what our communities, families, and other groups look like – all of this comes about in and through these networks combining with things beyond us. These networks take on different patterns across history and across geography, and they shape the possibilities of what it means to be human.

### **Economy, Ecology and Infrastructure**

This course will examine the politics, practices and media of cultural and material exchanges. Attending to the entanglements between human and non-human worlds, it will interrogate the role of economic, ecological and technological horizons in the generation of value, the creation of social bonds and their variations.

### **Nature, Culture, Power**

This course examines the political economic contexts of environmental transformations and the ways in which our understandings of and relations with nature are materially and discursively bound up with notions of culture, identity, and power. In the Anthropocene, it has become particularly important to re-examine the meaning(s) of nature, and the relations that humans have with the non-humans, including material artefacts, across different scales. Equally relevant is to question what constitutes anthropological knowledge and how it is produced. This course engages with these issues by drawing on scholarship in political ecology, agrarian studies, and the Anthropocene.

### **Medicine, Technology and the Body**

This course will study the ways in which models of affliction, therapy, death, sex and bodily experience are embedded, understood and transformed in distinct social and cultural worlds in ways that foster dialogue between scientific intervention, medical technologies and anthropology.

### **Language, Science and the Social**

This course will examine new understandings of how power intersects with knowledge in past and contemporary societies. Moving from semiotic systems of communication and exchange, the course will show how structures of signification incorporate and are altered by webs of meaning that allow for the emergence of ‘facts’ and ‘norms’, thereby interrogating the production of the normal by showing how this emergence relies on technical expertise.

### **Gender & Sexuality**

The course focuses on gender and sexuality as arenas for structuring, challenging, and transforming social relatedness, through the analytical examination of their production in the domains of law, work, kinship and science.

### **Gaze, Screen & Performativity**

The aim of this course is to introduce students to critical concepts of spectatorship with an understanding that “performance” is not always a simple or self-evident term. It will study performances as exceeding the sum of histories, scripts and cast members, and the relations between spectatorship and social contingencies that produce and transform the meanings of performance and the construction of narratives.

### **Law and Society**

The course will examine the cross-cultural facets of changing laws and legal institutions in the context of an increasingly transnational legal, economic, technological and social world. Some of the questions addressed include how laws and legal institutions are made, used and reshaped; how legal norms, actors and institutions affect the everyday life and the cultural fabric of society; and with what effect actors come to be embedded in transnational personal, religious or economic relations as they negotiate between the plurality of norms and institutions.

### **Constructing Disciplinary Pasts**

This course examines the ways in which the history of social theory and disciplinary pasts of anthropology and sociology have been conceived at different moments and global locations. Rather than taking the idea of a canon as given, this course invites students to consider what constitutes enduring texts and questions in social theory, how intellectual influences and imperatives move across generations and geographical locations, and the vantage points from which disciplinary histories are constructed or reconstructed. Instead of an overview, this course seeks to closely re-inhabit particular moments, texts, and trajectories, and to ask how those histories, tensions and forms of illumination remain alive in the present.

### **Proposal Writing - 4 credits**

In their third semester (i.e. Monsoon semester of the second year), students prepare to write three area-essays for their qualifying exams, as well as develop their research proposals. After receiving writing-related mentorship across courses in the programme in their first year, they will spend a month closely reading a series of carefully selected essays and articles that address the genres in which they are expected to write their essays. Through beginning to understand the

essay as an evolving genre, and its genealogy, and then reading 'classic' and contemporary essays in the discipline of anthropology and sociology, as well as literature reviews and annual review essays, they will emerge with an understanding of myriad ways to structure a comprehensive essay in the field. They will begin to write their exam essays through an iterative process of drafting and revision and will also write in a number of related genres, including annotated bibliographies, abstracts, and proposals

Faculty feedback, structured peer review, drafting and revision are central to this course. Students are encouraged to workshop among themselves their ideas and proposals in progress. A first draft of the proposal will be due in October of the second year of graduate study. The proposal writing and preparation for dissertation proposal defence count for 4 credits. Please note that proposal writing is not a course but a semester long research activity.

### **Qualifying Exam and Dissertation Proposal Defence - 4 credits**

Students will write three essays as part of their qualifying exam in the fourth semester. They will also defend their dissertation proposal. The oral presentation of the proposal will be open to the Ashoka community, followed by a closed-door examination by the SRC. The qualifying exam and proposal defence together count for 4 credits.

### **Admission Requirements:**

Candidates with a background in Sociology or Anthropology or related disciplines, including history and the humanities, and a thorough knowledge of at least one Indian language are encouraged to apply. The minimum requirement to apply is a Master's degree with at least 55% aggregate. Required documents include a cover letter (1 page), resume, research proposal (3-5 pages, including bibliography), and one writing sample (15 -20 pages). Candidates will be shortlisted for a written test based on their application materials. Further shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview.

Recommended preparation for the PhD programme: A robust background in sociology or anthropology or related disciplines, including history and the humanities, and a thorough knowledge of at least one Indian language.

### **Timeline of the Admission Process:**

- Deadline for Monsoon Admission: February
- Resume Requirement: Yes
- Research Proposal: Yes 3-5 pages, including a bibliography
- Writing Sample: Yes
- Writing Sample Number of Pages: 15-20 pages
- Degree Programmes: Full Time

### **Fees:**

- Tuition fee: Rs. 12,500 per semester.
- One time admission fee: To be at par with that paid by other students.
- Dissertation assessment fee: Rs. 15,000 for

the first time, and Rs. 5,000 the second/third time.

- The quantum of fees paid by PhD students will be reviewed from time to time.

### **Stipend:**

- The monthly stipend paid to all PhD students selected for fellowships funded by Ashoka University will be Rs. 50,000 per month. An additional amount of Rs. 10,000 will be provided as HRA.
- Once PhD students are eligible for Senior Research Fellowship (SRF) after completing the qualifying exam, the university will pay a stipend of Rs. 55,000 per month to each Senior Research Fellow, plus the Rs. 10,000 HRA.
- A contingency grant of Rs. 20,000 per annum will be made available to each PhD student.
- The annual contingency grant given to PhD students who receive a scholarship from UGC, CSIR or a partner organization will be decided based on terms of the funding agency.
- The quantum of stipend paid to PhD students will be reviewed periodically.

### **Health Insurance:**

The university provides a health insurance (floater) cover upto Rs 1,00,000 per year.

### **Conference and Professional Development Support:**

Ashoka University offers financial assistance to PhD students for presenting their research ideas/findings in reputed international conferences. This facility can be availed once by each PhD student. Maximum amount of aid is Rs. 2,00,000/-

### **Leave Policy:**

According to university guidelines, PhD research scholars are entitled to a maximum of 30 days of leave per academic year. Researchers are also eligible for maternity/ paternity leave, medical leave, etc. as per government norms.

Any academic activity outside the university (as needed for the PhD academic structure) to carry out fieldwork, library work, computational work, experimental work, research work, attending conferences and courses, etc. are considered part of the PhD program and not counted as leave of absence.

PhD scholars may be granted leave (if applicable) with the approval of the supervisor on condition that all research and teaching activities can be maintained as per the decided plans.

### Important Timeline:

1	Identifying a potential PhD Supervisor	Second semester
2	Constitution of the SRC	Third semester
3	Qualifying Exam	September 15 of the 5th Semester at the latest
4	Graduate Assistantship	<p>Two GAs are mandatory.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1st GAs: Must be completed before the qualifying exam</li><li>• 2nd GAs: Can be completed after fieldwork</li></ul>
5	Annual Update Form	Must be submitted at the end of AY I & II (Thereafter, this will be replaced by the SRC form)
6	SRC meetings/reports	A 6-monthly SRC report is required, and 1 SRC meeting a year.

## **FAQs**

**1) Would we need IRB clearance for our Summer pilot? If yes, please advise on the steps.**

You will need to apply for IRB review. Read the instructions [here](#).

**2) Do we need to undergo ethics training at any stage? If yes, when would that be?**

You need to have completed a certified ethics course before applying for IRB approval. Details about the course can be found [here](#).

**3) Is there a mechanism of periodic progress review, self-evaluation, and/or feedback from the department?**

There is an Annual Update Form (AUF) that PhD students need to fill in and submit to their advisor at the end of each academic year. The AUF allows for student's self-evaluation as well. Once the advisor puts in their comment and signature on the form, the PhD Coordinator signs and forwards the form to the Research and Development Office (RDO). Additionally, the university guidelines mandate that the SRC submits an annual progress report to the RDO.

**4) If we would like to take graduate electives in other departments, how do we confirm whether the specific course(s) chosen are eligible to be counted towards our electives requirements?**

Any elective course of 3000 level and above will be counted towards PhD elective requirement. These courses can be chosen from those offered by the SOA department or by other departments. Both graduate and undergraduate/ASP courses in other departments will be counted. Students who do not have a background in sociology and anthropology are strongly encouraged to opt for 3000 or 2000 level electives within the department as their electives.

**5) If we do take up GA-ship twice, do we have the provision to do one for an elective and one from the foundation course?**

Yes, it is up to a student to choose the course they want to GA for, as long as the faculty teaching the course accepts the student for the GA-ship.

**6) Could we have a policy on ISMs? Could professors be incentivised to take ISMs by providing them benefits/credits for the same?**

Students are free to approach any faculty for ISMs. In fact, we encourage students to take an ISM with their advisor in their second year, which can help them prepare for their candidacy. However, whether to offer an ISM or not is entirely a prerogative of the faculty, since it is additional work for faculty for which they do not get teaching credit.

**7) What is the policy if the supervisor leaves? Can they continue as supervisor or will we have to find other options?**

The outgoing supervisor will ensure that the student will be assigned a new supervisor. The outgoing supervisor can also co-supervise the student after all the required formalities are completed and approval is secured for the co-supervision.

**Contact:**

In case you have any further questions or concerns, you can contact:

**Dr Mitul Baruah, Ph.D. Coordinator**

[phdcoordinator.soa@ashoka.edu.in](mailto:phdcoordinator.soa@ashoka.edu.in)

**Dr Ravindran Sriramachandran, HOD**

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**Pratima Kadian, Department Manager,**

[pratima.kadian@ashoka.edu.in](mailto:pratima.kadian@ashoka.edu.in)

In case you have questions regarding registration, financial aid, or research grant-related issues, you can contact Gunisha Dhawan of the Research and Development Office.

[scholar.management@ashoka.edu.in](mailto:scholar.management@ashoka.edu.in)