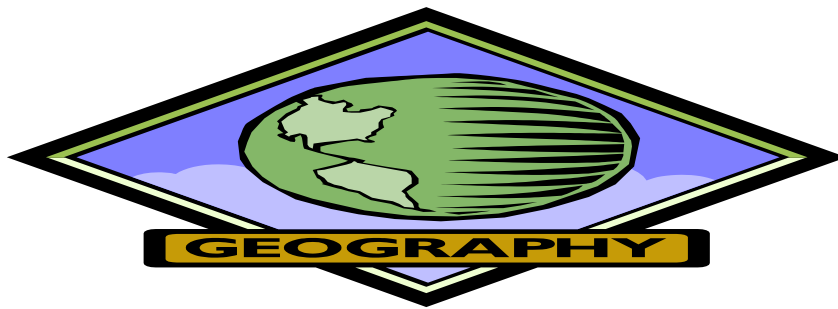


Graduate Program Handbook



Department of Geography, Planning and Environment

East Carolina University
Greenville, NC 27858-4353
252-328-6230
revised November, 2015

1. Introduction

A. Purpose

This handbook is a guide to the East Carolina University (ECU) graduate program in geography for graduate students and faculty. It is meant as a supplement to the regulations set forth by the East Carolina University Graduate School (<http://www.ecu.edu/gradschool/>) and should be used as a reference for department-level policies and procedures. Exceptions to the policies described herein can be made in consultation with the department's Director of Graduate Studies and the student's advisor. The graduate committee will decide to grant or decline the student's petition for an exception.

B. A Word of Welcome (and a note of caution)

Welcome to the graduate program in Geography at ECU! We are delighted that you have decided to join us. You are about to embark upon a truly rewarding journey. Over the next two years, you will have many new experiences and discover unique opportunities for intellectual inquiry, camaraderie and personal growth. That does not mean, however, that graduate school will be easy. So, let us begin with a note of caution.

By pursuing a graduate degree, you are entering a new and different phase of your academic career and intellectual development. Graduate study is not simply a continuation of your undergraduate degree, but is qualitatively different in a number of important respects. As a graduate student, you will:

- Begin a transition from being primarily a consumer of knowledge and information to being a producer of knowledge and information. This transition requires new, different and higher level skills than you employed as an undergraduate.
- Be more independent. Within the requirements of the M.S. program, you will design your own course of study, academic specialization, and thesis or internship topic. Far more of your time will be spent on primary research and independent scholarly activity than on classroom assignments.
- Play an important and active role in your courses. Many graduate courses are seminars. By definition, these seminars involve a substantial contribution from all participants and a give and take between faculty and students.
- Read and write more than you ever imagined possible!

The good news is that most students make this transition quite well, and that the faculty and staff of the geography department are here to assist you. Our goal is not to make your life miserable (although at times we may!); it is to push you to maximize your potential and to give you every opportunity to achieve success. Graduate school will undoubtedly require hard work. But, when you finally hand in that thesis or internship report, you will gain a genuine sense of achievement, and may be justifiably proud of your accomplishments.

C. The "Life of the Mind"

Beyond the formal requirements and coursework, there are numerous opportunities for professional, scholarly, and social enrichment in the ECU geography program. These include guest speakers from other universities and institutions, professional meetings and conferences, and many informal field trips and social opportunities. These opportunities for learning and networking are an integral part of graduate training and are invaluable for professional development. While we recognize that students have lives and responsibilities beyond ECU, we also expect graduate students to actively contribute to the intellectual climate and scholarly culture of the department. Failure to do so may be a consideration in decisions about financial assistance.

2. Administration of the Graduate Program

The department's Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) manages the geography graduate program. The director, in consultation with the departmental graduate committee, generally has decision-making power over admissions, funding, and degree requirements. Students or faculty who wish to appeal a decision of the DGS should see the unit administrator. The geography DGS also serves as the department's representative to the ECU Graduate School.

3. Curriculum

Specific degree requirements are set forth in the graduate catalog for the year of entry into the program. There are two distinct versions of the M.S. degree: the thesis option and the non-thesis option. The difference between the two options has to do with the nature of the research project required of each. The thesis requires an independent, original research project; the non-thesis option requires an internship report. Students declare which option they will pursue by the beginning of their 2nd semester.

All Geography Masters Degree students are required to complete 3 courses: GEOG 6100, GEOG 6110 and a research skills course. For the research skills course, students generally choose between a quantitative methods or a qualitative methods class. The program is designed to lead students to the development of an independent research project (thesis or report). In each case, students begin to identify a potential research subject area in GEOG 6100 in the fall semester of their first year in the program. In the spring semester in GEOG 6110, students refine the thesis project into a specific topic and amplify on specific research questions and a methodology that will allow them to collect data that will provide answers to the research question. The goal at the end of the spring semester is to present a research proposal to their Thesis Committee, the Graduate Faculty and their peers.

A. Thesis Option

The 'Thesis Option' is the standard option for students who want the opportunity to engage in independent scholarly research on a topic of interest, culminating in the writing of a thesis. The degree requires 30 hours of coursework, including 9 hours of required courses (GEOG 6100 and 6110, and a Research Skills course) and 3 or 6 hours of thesis credit (GEOG 7000).

A typical 2-year program under the Thesis Option:

YEAR 1	YEAR2
Fall GEOG 6100 (History and Philosophy) Elective or Research Skill Elective	Fall Elective Elective or Independent Study GEOG 7000 (Thesis)
Spring GEOG 6110 (Research Design) Elective or Research Skill Elective	Spring GEOG 7000 (Thesis) (Electives)

B. Non-Thesis Option

Also called the 'Internship Option', the Non-Thesis Option can be viewed as an applied geography degree, and is suited for students who have been or will be engaged in professional practice, or who wish to apply geographic knowledge to the solution of a concrete 'real-world' problem. This is accomplished by pursuing an internship in a public or private enterprise. It is the student's responsibility to identify a suitable internship early in their program. Be aware that some experiences will serve better than others and students are advised to research their internship opportunities carefully.

Students who pursue the non-thesis option are required to identify an applied problem on which to focus their internship experience. This process parallels the thesis proposal process. At the conclusion of the internship, students prepare a professional report, which is generally written on behalf of a specific client or constituency. The report should specify how the internship experience is related to the geographic literature and how the experience provided insight into the applied research question identified in the proposal. Students must defend their report in front of their Committee.

The non-thesis option requires 36 hours of coursework, including 9 hours of required courses (GEOG 6100 and 6110, and a Research Skills course), a 6 hour internship 'specialization', and 3-6 hours of internship credit (GEOG 6801, 6802, and/or 6803).

A typical 2-year program under the Non-Thesis Option:

YEAR 1	YEAR2
Fall GEOG 6100 (History and Philosophy) Elective or Research Skill Elective	Fall Elective Internship specialization GEOG 6803 (Internship)
Spring GEOG 6110 (Research Design) Elective or Research Skill Elective	Spring Elective Internship specialization Elective or GEOG 6803 (Internship)

C. Areas of Interest, Concentrations and Certificates

1. Areas of Interest

While there are no distributional requirements for the basic Masters degrees, the department's topical strengths of the program fall into five broad areas of interest:

1. Social justice/global issues/sustainable development
2. Applied atmospheric science
3. Environmental geomorphology
4. Geographic Information Science
5. Urban and regional planning

Students generally choose to focus their educational program on one of these groups and associate with faculty whose research fits in them as well. The course schedule is generally designed so that there is always a class for students interested in these different topics.

2. Concentrations

While students aren't required to officially identify their affiliation with a specific area of interest, they may opt to focus their education by selecting to follow one of two optional 'concentrations' within the M.S. degree: *Rural Development* or *Planning*. These concentrations have been developed to provide students with the theoretical background and practical expertise necessary for a wide range of professional occupations. The default concentration is *Geography*.

A student choosing the Rural Development concentration must take GEOG 6350 (Seminar in Rural Development) and GEOG 6355 (Rural Development Practicum) as electives in either the Thesis or Non Thesis Option. Students choosing the Planning concentration **must follow the non-thesis option** and take 15 hours of planning electives, as detailed in the graduate catalog. Successful completion of a concentration will be reflected on the student's transcript.

3. Certificates

The Geography Department offers a graduate certificate in *Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIST)*. Students may complete it while pursuing their Masters degree, or as a separate independent program. The GIST program requires completion of 12 hours of coursework that includes 9 hours of core courses (GEOG 6410, GEOG 64420 and GEOG 6430) and 3 hours of an elective.

For additional information about degree requirements consult the appropriate graduate catalog.

4. Coursework and Grade Policies

A. Course Schedule

The typical course load is three courses, or 9 hours, per semester. In some cases, 12 or even 15 hours may be taken, although this is generally discouraged. For most purposes, a student is considered full time if they are registered for 9 or more hours in a given semester. An exception is made for thesis students in the latter stages of their program. *A student registered only for GEOG 7000 is considered by the registrar to be a full-time student.* A student must be registered for at least 5 hours to be eligible for financial aid. A student must be registered for at least 4 hours to avoid FICA taxes.

B. Advising

All course selections must be approved by the student's academic advisor (this is usually the thesis or internship committee chair). The Director of Graduate Studies will serve initially as temporary advisor, but students should select a permanent advisor before the beginning of their second semester. Advisors must be members of the graduate faculty. Students may change their advisor upon mutual agreement between the student, the new advisor, and the Director of Graduate Studies.

C. Core Courses

All students must take GEOG 6100 (History and Philosophy of Geography) and GEOG 6110 (Research Design). Together, these courses are designed to provide students with a solid foundation in the philosophical and methodological approaches commonly used in geography, and to facilitate the preparation of a thesis or internship proposal. It is strongly recommended that 6100 be taken prior to 6110.

D. Research Skills Course

Students must complete one 'research skills' course in geography or an allied department. The course must be approved by the student's advisor (or the Director of Graduate Studies) and should reflect the methodological approach (quantitative or qualitative) to be used in the student's thesis or internship project. In most cases, students pursuing topics in physical geography or GIScience should take GEOG 6150 (Quantitative Methods in Geography) or its equivalent in another department. Students pursuing human geography topics may opt for an appropriate qualitative methods class in geography or another department, if suited to their research design. *Courses in GIScience or other geographic techniques do not fulfill the research skills requirement.*

E. Electives

Elective courses should be chosen in consultation with the student's advisor. Students are encouraged to take one or more courses outside of geography, and to select courses that combine to form a coherent program of study. Students in the 'non-thesis' option should designate 6 hours of coursework as a 'specialization' that directly supplements or enhances their practical internship experience. Independent study courses may not normally be counted toward the internship specialization.

F. Independent Study

An Independent Study is a scholarly exploration of a specified topic, carried out under the direction of a faculty member. A student wishing to undertake an independent study must have the instructor complete an **Independent Study Proposal Form** on sharepoint, detailing the scope of work to be pursued and the means of evaluation. Independent studies cannot be used as an alternative to a regular graduate course. *No more than 6 hours of coursework in the form of independent studies (GEOG 6291-3, 6391-3, and 6491-3) may count toward the degree without the approval of the DGS.*

G. Thesis and Internship Credit

GEOG 7000 (Thesis) is a required 3 hour course within the Thesis Option. It is designed to provide students with the time necessary to work toward completion of the thesis, generally in the second year. The course may be repeated one time (for a total of 6 hours).

Internship in Geography (GEOG 6801, 6802 and/or 6803) is required for students pursuing the Non-Thesis Option. In combination, internship hours must total a minimum of 3 hours but not more than 6 hours toward the degree. Students wishing to enroll in Internship hours must submit an **Internship Duties Form** describing their expected duties.

Both Thesis and Internship courses are graded pass/fail. A grade of 'Q' (or, 'in progress') will be assigned by the registrar until all requirements for the degree have been met, including the successful defense of the thesis or internship report, after which the grade will revert to an 'R' (or 'pass').

H. Grade Policies and Incompletes

According to ECU Graduate School Policy, a student must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 once they have 9 hours completed. Failure to record a 3.0 cumulative GPA will initially result in being placed on Academic Probation. The probationary period lasts until the next 9 hours of course credit are completed. Failure to redress the reason for the probation designation will result in termination from the Graduate School.

If a student receives a grade of 'Incomplete' for any course, they are given one year to complete the coursework. *After one year any grade of I will automatically become an F.* It is the student's responsibility to ensure that a 'change of grade' form is submitted by the appropriate faculty member once an incomplete has been resolved.

5. Program Steps and Milestones

Graduate students should adhere to the schedule in Table 1 if they plan to complete the program in two years. Meeting the milestones listed is considered "satisfactory progress" toward completion of the degree. Failure to meet them can jeopardize financial aid. It is the responsibility of the student (not the advisor) to see that any necessary paperwork is completed at the appropriate time.

Note that, according to graduate school policy, any course taken more than six years ago may not count toward a degree. That is, students who do not complete their program in six years will be required to repeat coursework in order to receive their degree.

A. First Year Milestones

1. Thesis or Internship Committee

The thesis or internship committee consists of an advisor (the committee chairperson) in geography and two additional members of the geography graduate faculty. For a planning concentration, at least one of the three committee members should be a member of the planning faculty. Additional members, formal or informal, may be added to any committee by mutual agreement between student and advisor.

For the thesis committee, an external reader (or, 'consultant') is recommended at the time of the thesis defense. The external reader is normally a member of the graduate faculty in another ECU department, but (subject to the approval of the DGS) may be another individual outside the university whose credentials are appropriate. It is not customary for the reader to be present during the proposal defense.

2. Thesis or Internship Proposal

All graduate students will develop a written proposal by the end of their first year, and give an oral presentation of the proposal to faculty and students. The advisor has discretion over the length and format of the document, but in general the proposal should include a review of the relevant literature, and clearly describe the research questions, theoretical framework, methodology and expected outcomes of the thesis or internship project. In addition, students should provide a discussion of how the proposed work fits into the theories and philosophies of geography discussed in GEOG 6100. Copies of the proposal will be distributed to the advisor and committee members about two weeks prior to the oral presentation of the proposal.

The *proposal defense* will take place at the end of the student's second semester. The defense will begin with a presentation by the student of approximately 15 minutes, followed by questions from the audience and then a defense before the committee. The Pre-Thesis Research Approval form should be filled out at this time. The student's advisor and committee members will confer and vote pass or fail on the proposal.

Passing is required to pass the Research Design course (GEOG 6110). If the outcome of the vote is not unanimous, the student's committee will decide upon additional requirements. The advisor will submit a written pass/fail evaluation of the proposal to the graduate secretary soon after the presentation.

Table 1. Summary and Checklist of Graduate Program Milestones

First semester

- Take GEOG 6100
- Identify a thesis topic (Thesis option)
- Identify an advisor

First or Second Semester

- Take Research Skills course

Second semester

- Identify suitable internship (Non-Thesis option)
- Take GEOG 6110
- Assemble a thesis or internship committee
- Write and defend thesis or internship proposal
- Submit the **Pre-Thesis Research Approval Form** if applicable

Summer

- Begin working on thesis/internship project!

Third semester

- Begin writing thesis/internship report
- Submit the Graduate Application for Graduation Form

Fourth semester

- Finish writing thesis/internship report
 - Schedule defense
 - Defend thesis/internship report
 - Submit thesis to the graduate school (Thesis option)
 - Return keys and fill out Alumni Contact Sheet
-

4. Pre-Thesis Research Approval Form

The Pre-Thesis Research Approval Form will normally be completed at the end of the second semester after a topic has been identified, the committee has been formed, and the proposal has been successfully defended. It should be filled out by the student, signed by the advisor and graduate program director, and given to the graduate secretary.

B. Second Year Milestones

1. Application for Graduation

This form is available from the Graduate School or Registrar's Office and must be filled out by the student the semester prior to that in which he/she plans to graduate. This will normally occur at the end of the student's third semester. At the time of application, students will be required by the graduate school to complete an on-line graduate student exit survey.

2. The Thesis or Internship Report

The M.S. thesis should represent a substantial piece of original, innovative research. Guidelines for preparation and presentation of thesis texts are available from the Graduate School. The student and advisor should agree in advance on a referencing style utilized by a major geography journal. Normally, the student and advisor consult until the advisor feels the thesis draft is of sufficient quality to be reviewed by the committee. The draft is then submitted to the entire committee. The committee may elect to require further work or modifications, or determine that the thesis is ready to defend.

The M.S. internship report should represent a combination of knowledge gained in the academic environment and application of this knowledge to the real world for solving practical problems. Critical thinking skills and discipline-specific information learned in coursework should demonstrate how practical problems or issues can be addressed and solved in the student's job assignments. Finally the student should compare the similarity or dissimilarity of problem solving and decision making processes presented and learned in academia and the literature with those carried out in the real world. These comparisons should include rationale, methodologies, results, etc. Guidelines and referencing styles used for theses can be used in the internship report. Generally, the student and advisor should consult until the advisor feels that the report is of sufficient quality to be reviewed by the committee. The report is then submitted to the entire committee. At this point the committee may elect to require further work or modifications, or determine that the report is ready to defend.

3. Timing and Scheduling of the Defense

When the committee determines that the thesis or internship report is ready to defend, a date is set. As a matter of courtesy and pragmatism, students should allow committee members at least two weeks to evaluate the draft thesis or internship report. It is the responsibility of the student to publicize the date and reserve a room for the defense by making arrangements with the graduate secretary.

Students wishing to graduate in the spring semester face a mid-April deadline for successfully defending their thesis or internship report (see the current Graduate School Academic Calendar for the exact dates). To meet a Spring deadline, students are strongly advised to complete a final draft of their thesis or internship report no later than March 15, in order to ensure sufficient time for edits and revisions.

Students who are registered in the Spring but do not finish their degree requirements may graduate in the summer without registering or paying tuition. There is a mid-July deadline for completing the defense of the thesis/internship report (see the current Graduate School Academic Calendar for the exact dates). Please note that faculty are frequently unavailable during summer months. Students should not expect to receive significant input from their committee and will likely have to work around busy schedules. To meet a Summer deadline, students are strongly advised to complete a final draft of their thesis/internship report no later than June 15, in order to ensure sufficient time for edits and revisions.

Students anticipating a defense at other times of the year should consult the current Academic Calendar for deadlines. If a student has accumulated sufficient hours for their degree, they no longer need to register for classes while finishing a thesis or internship report. An inactive student, however, must apply for readmission to the graduate school, and must be registered for at least one credit hour during the semester in which they intend to graduate.

4. The Defense

The thesis or internship report defense represents the final assessment of the student's knowledge in his or her area of expertise and the quality of the research project. This defense will normally take place in the student's fourth semester. Students should allow at least one week advance notice, so that those interested will have an opportunity to review the manuscript. The defense should be well publicized, and all geography faculty and graduate students invited to attend.

The defense will begin with a 15 to 20 minute presentation by the student, highlighting the major findings and implications of the thesis research or internship experience. Following a brief question-and-answer period, the committee will meet in closed session with the candidate for the formal defense. The committee may ask questions about the research documented in the thesis or internship report and further assess the student's knowledge in the area of expertise. After the committee's questioning period, the committee will determine whether the student has passed or failed. Students passing the defense should expect that they will have to make additional changes to the thesis or internship report to remedy deficiencies identified by the committee. Students failing the defense should work with their committee to correct problems and schedule a future defense.

5. Submission

The Graduate School has strict guidelines governing the formatting of any ECU thesis. Students should consult the Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Manual for details. Upon completion of all required revisions, the student must print out the thesis 'signature page' and have it signed by the student's thesis advisor, committee and the department chairperson. *The Graduate School now requires electronic submission of theses/internship reports.* The submission process is described in detail in the Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Manual.

For students pursuing the non-thesis option, the final, formatted Internship Report must be printed, bound and submitted to the graduate secretary. *Students will not receive credit for Internship hours, and may not graduate, until final copies of their Report have been received.*

6. Before you leave

Students are reminded to please turn in all keys and fill out an Alumni Contact Sheet at the time of graduation. We wish you well – please keep in touch!

6. Departmental Assistantships

Departmental assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis, and provide modest stipends to students in exchange for employment. The number and dollar value of assistantships are dependent upon both levels of funding and the nature of the student applicant pool, and may vary from year to year. Generally, there are two types of funding. *Graduate Assistantships (GAs)* are funded by the ECU graduate school and allocated by the Geography Graduate Committee. *Research Assistantships (RAs)* are associated with external research grants to individual faculty, and are awarded at the discretion of the grant recipient in consultation with the Graduate Committee. Assistantships may be awarded for the academic year, or for a single semester. Students are not typically funded for more than four semesters.

Summer funding is separate from semester funding. The department occasionally has money left in the budget at the end of the academic year, and will use this money to support faculty research projects that need graduate student help. Awards are made on an *ad hoc* basis, and should not be counted on by graduate students.

The research projects for which faculty have received funding may have money budgeted for summer work. If you are supported by these projects, there may be the opportunity to receive summer funding. Students should discuss these with the senior faculty on the project.

Continued funding is contingent upon both satisfactory progress toward the degree and acceptable performance of assistantship duties. In addition to resulting in probation from the Graduate School, failure to maintain a 3.0 GPA will result in a re-evaluation of your assistantship status. All students receiving funding through the department will be evaluated at the end of the academic year for their academic and work performance. Renewal of a departmental assistantship is contingent upon a satisfactory evaluation. Students employed on research grants should discuss renewal with the senior faculty. Those faculty are encouraged to conduct a similar evaluation of the student and to inform the Graduate Director of their renewal status.

A. Duties, Responsibilities, and Evaluations

The typical Graduate or Research Assistant works 20 hours per week. Assistants are responsible for doing their jobs during all times school is in session, regardless of the demands placed on them by course or thesis work. GA assignments are made by the DGS, and generally involve employment under the supervision of one or more faculty members. GA's are expected to meet with their faculty supervisor at the beginning of each semester to set up a work schedule, *and should check in frequently throughout the semester.* RA duties will be determined by the faculty member in charge of the grant. Graduate assistants will be evaluated at the end of each semester, and poor performance may result in the discontinuation of funding.

B. Tuition Remissions

The Geography department may award a limited number of out-of-state tuition remissions to individual students on a competitive basis. Students receiving a remission pay tuition at the rate of a North Carolina resident. Remissions will not automatically be renewed for a second year, and students are strongly encouraged to take the necessary steps to secure North Carolina residency by the beginning of their second year. Students who leave their assistantship or drop courses will be responsible for paying their remissions in full. Remissions may not be used to pay for distance education courses.

C. North Carolina Residency

Out of state students who are US citizens may qualify for North Carolina residency (and thus in state tuition rates) after one year if certain conditions are met. Information about the requirements and application procedures for residency can be found at the graduate school web site.

D. Desks, Offices and Labs

The department has a limited amount of graduate student office space. Priority will be given to students receiving departmental assistantships. Desks and offices are intended to be active work spaces, not storage closets or social areas. Students who are not making appropriate use of their office space will have their desk reassigned to another student.

Please endeavor to keep department laboratory facilities neat and clean. Use of departmental equipment is limited to work-related activities, and students should refrain from using departmental computers or printers for personal matters.