

**Texas State University**

**Department of Geography  
and Environmental  
Studies and  
Environmental Studies**

**Master of Science  
Policies and Procedures  
Handbook**

**Fall 2024**

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## **I. Purpose, Objectives, and Administration of the M.S. Program**

### *Purpose of the Handbook*

The purpose of this Handbook is to identify and describe the objectives, curriculum and regulations of the Master of Science (M.S.) programs in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Texas State University. The Graduate College awards the M.S. degree. In addition to the regulations of the Department specified in this Handbook, students must comply with the regulations of the Graduate College as specified in the most recent edition of the Graduate Catalog. The regulations of the Graduate College take precedence over the regulations of the Department in the event of any conflict or ambiguity.

Students are responsible for knowledge of the contents of the Handbook and the latest edition of the Graduate Catalog. Students are responsible for compliance with the regulations of the Department and the Graduate College.

### *Objectives of the Program*

The objective of the M.S. program is to provide theoretical, research-oriented master's-level instruction in environmental geography, geographic education, and other areas of departmental expertise to interested and qualified students who wish eventually to pursue doctoral work in Geography or prepare themselves for research-oriented or teaching careers. The program was formally approved by action of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in August 2000.

### *Administration of the Programs*

The M.S. program is administered by members of the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. The Graduate Faculty consists of full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty members who are eligible to teach graduate-level courses, serve on graduate committees, and direct theses in accordance with the standards of the Graduate College.

While the Graduate Faculty of the Department shares in the administration of the program, the Graduate Program Graduate Coordinator, the Department Chair, and the Graduate Committee of the Department have special roles in program administration. The Coordinator is responsible for day-to-day program administration and supervision. The Coordinator serves as the Department's formal liaison to the Graduate College through membership on the Graduate Council, which is responsible for the administration of graduate programs across the University.

The Graduate Coordinator also serves as chair of the Graduate Committee, which consists of several members of the Graduate Faculty along with the Department Chair ex officio. The Department Chair is authorized to undertake any of the Graduate Coordinator's responsibilities as described in this Handbook in the Graduate Coordinator's absence. The Graduate Committee is charged with reviewing the program's structure and requirements and with initiating proposed changes that are then voted upon by the full graduate faculty of the Department.

### *Structure of the Program*

The M.S. degree requires completion of 30 graduate hours, including a nine-hour core curriculum and six hours of thesis credit. The remaining fifteen hours are electives. Passing a comprehensive examination is also required for graduation.

## **II. Admission**

### *Admission Procedure*

To be admitted to the M.S. program, applicants must submit a completed application to the Graduate College in accordance with the procedures specified in the Graduate Catalog. The completed application must include the **application form located at <http://www.gradcollege.txstate.edu/>**, official transcripts of all universities attended, statement of purpose, Resume, three letters of recommendation, These documents are to be submitted directly to the Graduate College. International students should see the Graduate College website for additional procedures.

Admission to the M.S. program requires a grade-point average of at least 3.25 on a 4.0 scale in their undergraduate course work.

Students who meet these criteria are eligible for admission and are admitted if approved by the Department. The Department's admission decisions are based on academic performance and potential as evaluated on the basis of the GPA, letters of recommendation, the compatibility of the research interests with the current research objectives of the Department's Graduate Faculty, and the Department's interest in maintaining a balance among the number of

students pursuing research topics with particular advisors.

Admission decisions are made twice per year. Applications received by the Graduate College **before October 15th** are eligible for admission in the spring semester. Applications received by the Graduate **College before May 1<sup>st</sup>** are eligible for admission in the fall semester.

#### *Applicants Lacking Backgrounds in Geography*

An applicant who holds a bachelor's degree in a discipline other than geography can be admitted to the program at the discretion of the Department if he or she meets the GPA requirements and is approved by the Department in accordance with the procedure specified above.

The fundamental learning outcomes upon graduation for all graduate students of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies are to have a working knowledge of the core concepts of geography as well as an insightful understanding of the essential concepts of their particular specializations that would be expected at the master's level of study.

Leveling courses may be taken at any accredited institution. They may be taken before or after initial enrollment in the M.S. program but should be taken as early as possible in the course of study. Students completing a leveling course at a college or university other than Texas State should provide a copy of a grade report or transcript to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible after completing the course to ensure that the appropriate leveling course requirement has been satisfied.

Because Geography 3301 (Quantitative Methods in Geography) is a prerequisite for Geography 5301, students who have not had Geography 3301 or an equivalent introductory course in statistics with a grade of B or better are required to complete Geography 3301 or equivalent as a leveling course.

### **III. Degree Outlines and Plans**

#### *Degree Outlines*

After being admitted to a program, the student may access a degree audit from **CATSWEB (catsweb.txst.edu)**. The degree audit will guide the student in selecting courses for registration each semester. The student should meet with his or her graduate advisor during the first semester of admission to discuss options and review the degree program. Requests for changes to a student's degree audit must be submitted by the student's advisor and approved by the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Coordinator will then forward the request to the Dean of the Graduate College for approval.

#### *Changes in the Degree Outline*

Any deviation from the degree outline requires a formal change in the degree outline. Failure to initiate a change in the degree outline when a course or courses that do not appear on the degree outline are taken prevents such courses from counting toward the degree. This omission may cause a significant delay in completing the degree.

Changes in the degree outline must be approved by the Graduate Program Coordinator. If the Coordinator approves the proposed change, the Coordinator submits a request to the

Graduate College requesting that change. If the Dean of the Graduate College concurs with the requested change, the Graduate College issues a new degree outline. The new degree outline then replaces the old one.

In accordance with Departmental policy, the Graduate Coordinator will not approve requests to substitute for the core courses (GEO 7300, 5309, and 5301 or 5304 for the M.S.). An exception to this policy is that students who have completed a graduate-level course in multivariate statistics with a grade of B or better may be allowed to substitute for 5301 upon approval of the Coordinator and the professor responsible for teaching GEO 5301.

#### *Degree Plans (as specified on Degree Outline)*

The degree plan for each student appears on the degree outline. All degree outlines include leveling courses if required and the core curriculum appropriate to the degree.

#### *Core Curriculum*

The core curriculum for the M.S. degree includes three courses: GEO 5309, GEO 5301 or GEO 5304, and GEO 7300 (Advanced Research Design). Students are expected to complete these three courses within the first 12 graduate hours.

- GEO 5309 is offered in the fall semester of every academic year. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the graduate faculty of the Department and their research interests. All entering students are expected to take GEO 5309 during their first fall semester in the program.
- GEO 5301 is offered each spring semester. It should be completed within the first full year of residence, after completing a prerequisite statistics course (GEO 3301 or equivalent) if needed.
- GEO 5304 is offered each fall semester. It should be completed within the first full year of residence.
- GEO 5300 and GEO 7300 are offered during the spring semester. The appropriate one should be taken immediately after GEO 5309. Students beginning the program in the fall should take this course in the spring semester of their first year in the program. Students should select their research advisors upon completion of GEO 5309, and GEO 5300 or GEO 7300.

#### *Electives in Geography or Outside the Department*

Students in the M.S. program may substitute up to six hours outside the Department for elective course work inside the Department.

## **IV.Course Work**

#### *Course Load*

The standard course load for a full-time M.S. student is nine credit hours

per semester. Students working full time are advised to take no more than three to six credit hours per semester.

### *Problems in Applied Geography*

GEO 5395 is a number reserved for Problems in Applied Geography. This course is taught by various faculty members on an occasional basis to allow investigation of topics outside the standard curriculum. GEO 5395 can be repeated for credit for up to six hours.

### *Independent Study*

Students who wish to pursue independent investigation into topics outside and beyond formal course work may elect to take independent study hours. The independent study courses are GEO 5190, 5290, and 5390. These entitle students to one, two, or three hours of credit respectively. Students may count up to six hours of independent study toward the M.S. degree.

Independent study credit requires permission of the instructor. Before requesting independent study credit, a student should have a clear idea of the topic(s) to be investigated. The student and the instructor must agree on what final product (for example a research paper) is expected of the student before the student formally enrolls for independent study.

Before the student enrolls, the instructor must send an email indicating approval for the student to enroll in an Independent Study course. The Graduate Staff Advisor enters an override onto the computerized enrollment (Banner) system allowing the student to enroll. The Graduate Staff Advisor will then send an email to the student letting them know that the override has been entered and the student may enroll in the course.

### *Graduate Courses Taken at Other Institutions*

Up to six hours of graduate-level course work taken at another accredited university may be counted toward the graduate hours required for the M.S. degree. These hours must not have been used toward completion of any other graduate degree. A request to count graduate-level hours taken at other institutions requires approval of the Graduate Coordinator and the Dean of the Graduate College. Prior approval is required if the course is taken after admission to the M.S. Program. The Graduate College requires an official transcript or other evidence that the courses to be transferred were graduate-level courses.

### *Paper Preparation Style*

All formal papers submitted in partial fulfillment of course requirements in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies are to be completed using the style requirements as detailed in the most recent edition of Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* using the PR and RL formats, or the *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers*. The same requirement applies also to the thesis.

## **V. Grades, Retention, and Time Limits**

### *Retention, Probation, and Suspension*

M.S. degrees require a minimum grade-point average of 3.0. Students must maintain a

minimum grade-point average of 3.0 for all coursework taken.

Students whose grade-point averages falls below this standard are placed on academic probation. Students on academic probation have one semester to raise their grade-point averages to the minimum standard. Students who fail to do so are suspended from the Graduate College and are not permitted to enroll in courses.

After being on suspension status for six months, students may petition for permission to re-enroll in the M.S. program in accordance with the policies of the Graduate College. The petition process requires permission of the Graduate Coordinator. Except under extraordinary circumstances, the Coordinator will not support petitions for re-enrollment and will not do so without the explicit approval of the Department Chair and the student's research advisor.

#### *Completion Time Limit*

Students in the M.S. program must complete all requirements for the degree within six calendar years of initial enrollment.

## **VI. Advising**

#### *Orientation and Temporary Advising*

Advising is critical to a student's success in the M.S. program. Over the course of the M.S. program, students will work closely with her or his major research advisor. Therefore, students are encouraged to identify a research advisor before the end of the first semester in the program. The research advisor guides a student in course selection, research, and other academic activities. Before a student identifies a research advisor, the Graduate Program Coordinator serves as the temporary research advisor.

At the beginning of each fall semester, the Graduate Staff Advisor provides orientation information to all new master level students about academic advising and degree plans in GEO 5309 (Geographical Analysis).

#### *Research Advisor*

The major research advisor plays a critical role in the student's program. The research advisor serves as the committee chair of a student, directs the thesis, chairs the comprehensive examination committee, and takes the lead in ensuring that the degree is completed in a rigorous and timely fashion. Any member of the Geography faculty who holds graduate faculty status can serve as the research advisor. A list of those persons holding such a status, along with their research interests may be viewed on the Department's website. Again, the selection of the research advisor must be made by the end of the student's first fall semester.

Although the Department as a whole is committed to the advising of all students who enroll in the M.S. program, individual faculty members are under no obligation to accept advisees. Nor are individual faculty members under obligation to advise students in areas outside their own major research interests. Students should be prepared to modify their ideas about potential thesis topics in a manner compatible with faculty research interests.

Once the research advisor has agreed to accept a student as an advisee, the research advisor and the student must fill out the Master Advisor form. The form is emailed to students while

enrolled in GEO 5309, Geographical Analysis and available online on the Departmental website.

### *Changing Research Advisors*

Occasionally, students may need to change research advisors. A change in the research advisor may be the result of one of the following circumstances:

- Death, retirement, incapacity, or resignation from the university of the research advisor.
- Loss of status as Graduate Faculty on the part of the research advisor.
- A student's decision that his or her academic and professional interests would be better served with a different research advisor.

If a change of research advisor is necessitated the student needs to fill out another Major Advisor form.

### *Summer Advising*

Students and their advisors should make every effort to complete their major degree requirements, including the comprehensive examination and the proposal preparation, within the time limits during the fall and spring semesters as specified in this Handbook.

Summer teaching depends on the availability of funding from the University and the willingness of the faculty to teach in the summer, there is no guarantee that specific course work in Geography will be offered during the summer sessions. Faculty who are not paid to teach summer school are under no obligation to supervise independent study projects, theses, and directed research projects during the summer. The Geography faculty works on nine-month contracts. During the summer, their primary responsibilities include professional research along with the completion of grant and contract activities. Because of these activities, many faculty members are away from the San Marcos area for extended periods of time during the summer.

For these reasons, students do not have the right to expect advising during the summer sessions. Students must plan carefully to avoid having completion of their degrees delayed during summer sessions.

## **VII. Comprehensive Examination**

### *Comprehensive Examination Requirement*

The Graduate College requires that all candidates for the master's degree pass a comprehensive examination. Ordinarily, the comprehensive examination is taken after formal course work has been completed and the research proposal has been presented to the committee. The examination covers the research proposal, course work, and general knowledge of geography as developed throughout the curriculum.

### *Selecting the Examination Committee*

A student in the M.S. program will have an examination committee consisting of at least three members including the research advisor. At least two members of the committee,

including the chair, must be members of the Graduate Faculty in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. The responsibilities of the committee include the comprehensive examination and evaluating the thesis.

Students identify potential committee members in consultation with their research advisor(s). After all members of the committee have agreed to serve, the student or the research advisor must sign an Advisor and Master Committee Request Form. The committee should be identified as soon as possible after the research advisor has been selected.

#### *Examination Procedure*

The research advisor arranges the date and location of the oral examination in consultation with the student and the committee. Except under extraordinary circumstances, such as a medical emergency, all members of the committee must be present at the examination. The examination lasts no more than two hours.

Except under unusual circumstances approved by the Graduate Coordinator, the examination may not take place less than three weeks before the end of the fall or spring semesters or at any time when the University is not in session.

#### *Evaluating the Comprehensive Examination*

The committee evaluates the comprehensive examination. The research advisor fills out the Comprehensive Examination Form and forwards this form to the Graduate Staff Advisor, who then sends it to the Graduate College.

In evaluating the examination, the committee has two options: pass or fail. Students who fail the examination may be required by their committees to complete additional course work or undertake research projects. These must be completed to the satisfaction of the committee before the examination is retaken. Students who fail the examination may retake it at least thirty days after the scheduled date of the original oral examination.

### **VIII. Research Proposal**

The thesis project begins with the preparation of a research proposal only at the research advisor's discretion. Students who elect to write a thesis must follow the formal proposal requirements of the Graduate College.

#### *Elements of the Research Proposal*

The proposal for the M.S. must include the following elements:

1. An appropriate, concise title.
2. A clear statement of purpose.
3. A statement of the research problem including the goals and objectives of the study.
4. A brief survey of relevant professional literature.
5. A statement of hypotheses or expected findings.
6. A clear description of research design and methods to be used to evaluate the hypotheses and/or determine the research findings.
7. A statement of the significance of the research.
8. A bibliography of cited references.

### *Proposal Approval Process*

Students work closely with their research advisor(s) in preparing the proposal. Drafts of the proposal should not be circulated to the committee until the research advisor is satisfied that the student has completed a reasonable draft incorporating all the elements described above. Once the committee has approved the

## **IX. Thesis**

### *Thesis Requirement*

M.S. students are required to complete a thesis. Six hours of credit are given for the thesis (GEO 5399A and 5399B). Students should be aware that thesis projects require considerably more time and effort than do ordinary courses. Ordinarily the completion of a thesis takes at least one and a half semesters.

### *Thesis Committee*

The thesis is evaluated by the student's committee (thesis – 3 members) chaired by the research advisor. The research advisor assigns a "PR", for Progress for GEO5399A and GEO 5399B. Once the thesis is complete and approved by the committee, the advisor will assign a "CR" grade for Credit. Ordinarily, the comprehensive examination committee also serves as the thesis committee. If changes to the committee are necessary, the research advisor should report these changes to the Graduate Coordinator as soon as possible. Such reports should indicate the approval of all old and new members of the committee.

### ***Completion of the Thesis***

Once the proposal for the thesis has been approved by members of the committee, the student then proceeds to complete the research. During this period, the student works closely with the research advisor. Absent the approval of the research advisor, students should not circulate drafts of the thesis to committee members until the research advisor is satisfied that the work is reasonably close to completion. The thesis is considered approved when the majority of the Committee signifies to the research advisor that the thesis meets their expectations.

Thesis approval requires the signatures of members of the committee on a Thesis Submission Form in accordance with the regulations of the Graduate College. Also, an electronic copy of the thesis must be downloaded to the Viero system on the Graduate College's website. Details about thesis preparation are included in the Thesis Handbook, which is published and distributed by the Graduate College.

### *Thesis Deadlines*

Students are responsible for compliance with deadlines for completion of theses established by the Graduate College and the department.

### *Thesis Defense*

Once the thesis has been written and approved by the student's committee, the student must defend the thesis in a **public presentation**. For the thesis to be publicly defended, the student will need to email the Graduate Staff Advisor the following information: date and time of the defense,

Zoom, the room number or both, the title of their thesis, and an abstract. The Graduate Staff Advisor will then send this information out to the department promoting the defense.

## **X. Transfer and Transition between the M.A.Geo. and M.S. Degree Programs**

### *General Requirements for Transfer between Programs*

A student currently enrolled in the M.S. program may transfer to the M.A.Geo. program upon request. A student currently enrolled in the M.A.Geo. program may transfer into the M.S. program provided that the following conditions are met:

The student must have completed at least 9 graduate hours in Geography with a GPA of 3.6 or better. If the student has not completed 12 graduate hours in Geography, he or she must have a 3.4 grade-point average in the last sixty hours of undergraduate course work.

### *Transfer of Hours between Programs*

A student who transfers from the M.A.Geo. program to the M.S. program will be permitted to count all courses that are approved for M.S. students toward the M.S. degree regardless of whether they were taken before the transfer. In addition, the student may count up to six hours of M.A. Geo., non-M.S. courses toward the M.S. degree as outside electives. Except for these courses, others taken toward the M.A.Geo. degree will not count toward the M.S. degree.

A student transferring from the M.S. program to the M.A.Geo. program may count all course work applicable to the M.A.Geo. program along with up to six hours of M.S., non-M.A.Geo. courses. Except for these courses, others taken toward the M.S. degree will not count toward the M.A.Geo. degree. With the approval of the research advisor, the Graduate Coordinator will request exceptions to this policy to the Dean of the Graduate College.

## **XI. Graduate Student Forum**

### *Purpose of the Graduate Student Forum*

Geography graduate students have organized the Graduate Student Forum. The purpose of the Forum is to provide students with an opportunity to discuss concerns about the program, to provide formal feedback to the Graduate Coordinator, the Department Chair, and the faculty of the Department about these concerns, and to encourage the dissemination of information about the program among the graduate student population.

### *Graduate Student Representation*

The Graduate Student Forum is empowered to elect a master's degree student, along with a Ph.D. student, as representatives to the regular meetings of the departmental faculty and the Graduate Committee. The representative may participate in any discussions involving the graduate program, and vote, except in personnel matters, in Graduate Committee meetings. The representatives can participate in discussions.