

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES

M.A. Program in Geography Faculty of Geography, School of Natural Resources University of Nebraska, Lincoln

This is a guide for students and faculty to use in planning an M.A. program. The information in this document supplements the [Graduate Studies Bulletin](#) and the [Graduate Studies website](#). Students should become familiar with both this guide and the Graduate Studies Bulletin, as well as specific instructions for Master's students found on the UNL Graduate Studies website, paying particular attention to the [Master's Degree Forms and Deadlines](#).

M.A. Degree Options

The M.A. degree may be obtained under one of three options:

- Option I (thesis) is considered the standard program.
- Option II (non-thesis) is designed for those not planning to pursue a Ph.D. degree. Students planning to pursue a Ph.D. degree at UNL after completing their M.A. degree may consider Option III.
- Option III (non-thesis, but publishable manuscript) is available only to students who receive approval from the Geography Graduate Committee after one full academic year of enrollment as an M.A. candidate at UNL.

M.A. Program, Option I: (thesis)

Graduate Studies requirements:

- A minimum of 30 semester hours coursework, of which 20-24 are regular coursework and 6-10 are thesis.
- At least half the hours, including thesis, must be in geography and at least 8 hours must be in courses open only to graduate students - 900-level courses, or 800-level courses that do not have a 400-level component.
- Up to 12 hours of M.A. level course credits can be transferred from other graduate schools, subject to the approval of the student's Advisory Committee.

Geography program requirements:

- A written comprehensive examination. An oral comprehensive exam may also be required by the Advisory Committee.
- A thesis with an oral defense (sometimes referred to as the final oral examination). Procedures for the defense and acceptance of the completed thesis must follow Graduate Studies regulations and deadlines as explained in the [Guidebook for Preparation and Submission of a Thesis](#).

M.A. Program, Option II: (non-thesis)

Graduate Studies requirements:

- A minimum of 36 semester hours of coursework, with at least 18 hours in geography and at least 9 hours of coursework from a minor department (all 9 hours from a single department).
- At least 12 hours of this must be in courses open only to graduate students - 900-level courses, or 800-level courses that do not have a 400-level component.
- Up to 18 hours of M.A. level course credits can be transferred from other universities or colleges, subject to Advisory Committee approval.

Departmental requirements:

- A written comprehensive examination. An oral comprehensive exam may also be required by the Advisory Committee.

M.A. Program, Option III :(straight through to the Ph.D.)

Graduate Studies requirements:

- A minimum of 36 hours of coursework, with at least 18 hours in geography courses, but with no M.A. thesis.
- At least 18 hours must be in courses open exclusively to graduate students - 900-level courses, or 800-level courses that do not have a 400-level component. It should be noted that this option is rarely elected by students.

Departmental requirements:

- One year of graduate work at UNL prior to consideration and acceptance for Option III. The Geography Graduate Committee must approve admittance to the Option III program.
- A written comprehensive examination. An oral comprehensive exam may also be required by the Advisory Committee.
- Submission of a solely authored scholarly paper to a nationally or internationally refereed journal by the end of the student's second year (i.e. the fourth semester). This paper should be considered publishable by the student's Advisory Committee before submission.

Student Preparation

The enrolling student is expected to have an undergraduate background in geography. Approximately eighty percent of our M.A. degree students have a B.A. or B.S. degree in geography; however, students with bachelors' degrees in other fields are encouraged to apply, especially if their training is applicable to geography. For example, students who majored in biology or natural resources as undergraduates can specialize in environmental studies; a history background may lead to a specialization in historical/cultural geography at the graduate level. There are many possibilities and students will find flexibility in the design of individual graduate programs.

Students with little background in geography may be required to take from one to four prerequisite courses

to make up for deficiencies in their geography backgrounds. Those prerequisites will be decided by the Geography Graduate Committee at the time of each applicant's evaluation for admission. Prerequisite courses will normally be undergraduate-level courses and will not count toward the required coursework for the M.A. degree

Required Coursework

Geography graduate students are required to take (or establish that they have received equivalent credit for):

- **GEOG 901** - Proseminar in Research Methods and Professional Development (2 cr)
- **GEOG 903** - History and Philosophy of Geography (3 cr)
- **A course in elementary statistics** (such as STAT 801) (4 cr)
- Students are also expected to attend the **Geography General Seminar (GEOG 902)**. The seminar currently meets for one hour every other week. Students must enroll once (for 1 cr) at some time during their time in residence.

All other courses required for completion of the degree are selected by the student in consultation with his/her advisor and committee. Note that these courses must include at least 8 credits of graduate-level-only courses in accordance with the policies of the Office of Graduate Studies at UNL (described in the [Graduate Bulletin](#)). These are 900-level courses, or 800-level courses that do not have a 400-level component.

M.A. Advisor and Advisory Committee

Upon acceptance to the graduate program, students will be assigned a temporary advisor with whom they should meet as soon as possible after arriving on campus. Students should choose a permanent advisor no later than mid-term of their second semester. The permanent advisor may or may not be the temporary advisor; that is up to the student.

An Advisory Committee will be selected by the student in consultation with his/her permanent advisor. For the M.A. degree, the Advisory Committee must be composed of at least three members of the UNL Graduate Faculty including the permanent advisor. Two members of the Committee must be geographers

After the Advisory Committee is established, but before the completion of half of the M.A. program coursework (usually from 15 to 18 credit hours), students are required to submit a completed [Memorandum of Courses \(MOC\)](#) form to the Office of Graduate Studies. The purpose of the MOC is to outline the student's entire M.A. graduate program. Students should begin this process by presenting a first draft of the MOC to their M.A. advisor, and then make appropriate changes in consultation with the advisor. After this, the entire Advisory Committee should meet with the student to discuss the MOC and, if the student will be researching and writing a Master's thesis, examine potential thesis topics. Upon approval of the M.A. program by the Advisory Committee, the student's advisor, the Chair of the Geography Graduate Committee, and the Minor Committee Member must sign the MOC, which is then submitted to the Master's Specialist in the Office of Graduate Studies (Terri Eastin) for final approval.

Comprehensive Examinations

All M.A. students will take a written examination, usually in the last semester of coursework. The examination will be administered by the Advisory Committee. It is the Advisory Committee's task to decide on the general composition of the written examination, consistent with the student's field(s) of interest in geography. At the discretion of the Advisory Committee, students may also be required to take an oral examination. Students with a formal minor **may** be required by the minor department to take a written examination in that field.

It is the student's responsibility to:

- Schedule a time and date for the exam acceptable to all Advisory Committee members.

It is the advisor's responsibility to:

- Contact Advisory Committee members to request questions for the exam.
- Obtain such questions sufficiently in advance of the examination to allow time for changes.
- Determine the time allowed on the examination questions.
- Assemble, and administer the exam.
- Report the results of the exam to the student

Students failing all or part of the written exam may attempt another examination at a time agreeable to the advisor and other Advisory Committee members.

Assistantships

The M.A. degree program is considered a two-year program. A graduate student holding a teaching assistantship must register for at least 9 credit hours of courses per semester. When the department offers a teaching assistantship to a student, it does so with conditions that allow for removal of such aid any time, if either of the following occurs:

- The student has not shown successful academic progress toward the degree, or
- The student has not performed his/her teaching assistantship duties satisfactorily.

M.A. students who do not enter the Geography Graduate Program with a teaching assistantship may compete with other students for a teaching assistantship for subsequent academic years, beginning in the fall of the second academic year. Option I and Option II M.A. students, who enter the program with teaching assistantships are eligible for two years of assistantship (i.e. four semesters), provided they meet scholarship and performance standards. After the second year of assistance, the student may be eligible for a third year of funding on the basis of meeting all of the following conditions:

- The student must write a letter to the Geography Graduate Committee requesting to be considered for a third year of funding.
- The student must have demonstrated progress toward their degree, as observed by their advisor.
- The student must have performed prior teaching assistant duties in a satisfactory manner as indicated by their end-of-semester teaching evaluations.

If eligible, the student must compete for teaching assistantships with all other eligible students.

Academic Performance

A student who receives two unsatisfactory course grades will be withdrawn from the Geography Graduate Program. Unsatisfactory grades are defined by the Graduate Studies as:

- grades lower than B in 400/800 level courses in the student's major department, or
- grades lower than C, or lower than P (pass) in 400/800 level courses in the student's minor, collateral, or supporting areas of work, or
- grades lower than C in 900-level courses, or 800 level courses that do not have a 400 level counterpart.

Students may request reinstatement to the graduate program by submitting a written petition to their advisor. This petition should give reasons why the student should be reinstated to the Geography Graduate Program. Advisors will present this petition and their accompanying recommendations to the Geography Graduate Committee. Reinstatement to the graduate program requires a majority vote of the Geography Graduate Committee.

Important Contacts

Questions about the specifics of the M.A. program should be directed to the student's temporary or permanent advisor. Questions may also be directed to:

- The Geography Program Secretary (Joyce Hurst jhurst3@unl.edu; 472-2865)
- The Chair of the Geography Graduate Committee (James Merchant jmerchant1@unl.edu)
- Terri Eastin, M.A. student advisor, Master's Programs Specialist (teastin1@unl.edu, 2-8665)