

**University of Massachusetts, Amherst  
Department of Geosciences**

**Graduate Student Manual for the M.S. Program in Geography**

**January 2011**

The purpose of this manual is to provide graduate students in the M.S. program in Geography at the University of Massachusetts with the information necessary to navigate the series of requirements for the acquisition of the M.S. degree. *Please use this manual, which provides program-specific information, in conjunction with the Graduate Student Handbook provided by the University (<http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/handbook/>).* This manual summarizes the requirements of both the thesis and the non-thesis options of the M.S. degree. You, the graduate student, are responsible for making sure that you have accumulated adequate credits, that they classify as graduate-level credits, and that you have submitted the proper forms along the way to the Graduate Program Director. Do not hesitate to ask your advisor or the Graduate Program Director about any aspect of the requirements that lead to the M.S. degree.

All formal progress toward a graduate degree, except course work, is recorded on forms originating in the Department or in the Graduate School. The student should make sure that any action (such as the selection of a guidance committee) is duly recorded by the Graduate Program Director. The manual provides details about each of these actions that need to be recorded by submission of one form or another.

Each entering student will be interviewed by the faculty and assigned a temporary adviser. The student will work out with the adviser a proposed program of study. Progress in that program will be reviewed each semester by the geography faculty as a whole. Any deficiencies in the student's preparation for graduate study will be identified at the beginning of the student's program and appropriate courses may be required.

**Master's Degree Requirements:**

- A minimum of 30 graduate credits are required for a master's degree
- A minimum of 22 of these credits must be in the field of Geography
- Specific course requirements:
  1. GEO-SCI 604 Geographic Theory and Analysis:, a one-term seminar normally taken during the first term in residence.
  2. Methodology and Techniques: One graduate course in methodology and techniques (not necessarily limited to courses offered in the Geography Program). Eligible courses include those primarily concerned with cartography, computer methods, statistics, survey research, geographic information systems, remote

sensing, or photogrammetry. Other methodology courses may be approved to meet this requirement upon request to the Geography faculty. This requirement may not be satisfied through an independent study or special problems course.

3. Graduate Breadth Requirements: (9 units) Students must take three additional courses at the 600 level or above with three different Geography faculty members. These courses must be 3 or more credits each. A 500-level course may be substituted with permission of the student's committee chair and the graduate program director.

- One to 10 of the 30 credits can be thesis credits, if the student chooses the thesis option (see below). No thesis credits will be accepted under the non-thesis option.
- Independent studies: up to 6 credits, in addition to thesis credits, may be earned through independent studies (596, 696 ...) or special topics (597, 697 ...) courses. Under the non-thesis option, up to 12 credits may be earned in such courses.
- Credits transferred from another institution cannot be used to satisfy the University's requirement for graded credits. At least half of the credits for the degree must be taken as graded courses.
- The Graduate School Regulations require that at least 6 credits be earned at the 600-800 level for the thesis option and 12 credits at that level for the non-thesis option.
- The grade point average (GPA) must be 3.0 or above.

### **Thesis or Non-thesis Track Toward the M.S. Degree**

The Geography Program offers two alternative tracks toward the master's degree: the thesis track and the non-thesis track.

A candidate may elect a program with or without a thesis. The former is appropriate for those with strong focused research interests, and the latter for those wishing to emphasize breadth of geographic and interdisciplinary knowledge. The thesis is encouraged by the faculty for most students. No later than the end of the third semester, a student must have either a thesis or nonthesis proposal approved.

#### ***Thesis Track:***

The thesis track is appropriate for those with strongly focused research interests. Coursework of students in the thesis track is typically focused on the broad field in which thesis work takes place. The student does an in-depth research project and writes a thesis summarizing that study.

If the thesis option is selected, the candidate must deliver an informal lecture on the subject of such thesis in the Department Seminar (GEO-SCI 388) or equivalent forum. The candidate must also pass an oral thesis examination (defense).

### ***Non-thesis Track:***

If a nonthesis option is selected, the student must propose by the end of the third semester a major paper, set of papers, or equivalent project satisfactory to his/her adviser and at least one additional Geography faculty member (who will comprise the student's Graduate Committee). In addition to completing such paper or project, the student must pass a General Examination administered by at least three members of the Department Graduate Faculty. A general examination may be administered either orally or in writing or both, and must include questions from at least two subfields of geography.

### **General Chronology of Events in the Master's Program:**

*Arrival Interview* All incoming students are given an interview with the entire geography faculty on arrival. The purpose of this interview is to review the student's academic background, to assign a preliminary advisor, and to discuss any possible deficiencies in the course background.

*Annual Review* A yearly review is made of each M.S. student's progress toward the degree.

### **If the student has chosen the thesis option:**

*Thesis Topic* In consultation with his/her potential advisor(s), the student chooses a thesis topic.

#### *Thesis Committee*

- In order to officially constitute a thesis committee, fill in **Form #2b** in this manual and submit it to the Graduate Program Director.

In consultation with the faculty, the student selects a thesis committee consisting of at least two members as soon as a thesis topic has been chosen. This typically occurs during the first or second semester of residence. All members of the committee must agree to serve on the committee before form M.3 can be filed. One member of the committee must be designated as the chair of the thesis committee (the "thesis advisor"). The thesis advisor does not have to be the same as the preliminary advisor.

### *Thesis Proposal (Thesis Outline)*

- The proposal must be submitted at least four months prior to the thesis defense date.
- The student must deliver a copy of the thesis proposal to the Graduate School Records office in Goodell and to the Graduate Program Director

The student writes a thesis proposal and submits it first to his or her thesis advisor, then, when the advisor has approved it, to the rest of the thesis committee. Faculty will undertake to return thesis proposal drafts to students within three weeks of receipt. When all committee members are satisfied with the proposal, they sign **Form #3** (an example is included in this manual). At that time the student takes one copy of the thesis proposal to the Graduate School Records office in Goodell and gives one copy of the thesis proposal to the Graduate Program Director to be placed in the student's file. The title page of the proposal must be in the format specified by the Graduate School, which can be found in the Graduate School Handbook.

*Thesis* Thesis research and writing takes place during the second, third, and sometimes part of the fourth semester of residence. The completed thesis should be submitted to the thesis advisor, who has three weeks to read and comment on it. Revisions are then made and the thesis is re-submitted to the advisor. Further revisions may warrant submission to the entire committee, or to the advisor again, at the discretion of the advisor. The committee members ultimately have three weeks to read and comment on the thesis. When the thesis is considered by all committee members to be defensible, even if not in its final, 'perfect' form, the student can schedule a thesis defense. Please be aware that the time frame of writing, reading, and revision will usually take several months, so plan accordingly. *Except in unusual circumstances, thesis defenses will not be scheduled after the first week in June or before the last week in August.*

*Public Lecture* Each student is required to give a presentation of his or her research at least once during tenure as a graduate student. This can be done in a variety of venues in consultation with the thesis advisor, such as a departmental talk series or a class. Complete department Form #4 to verify the public lecture.

### *Thesis Defense*

- The thesis defense must be scheduled at least two weeks after approval of the thesis by all committee members.
- A copy of the thesis must be placed in the Department Office for perusal by the faculty one full week prior to the defense.
- The student must complete **Departmental Form 5**, included in this manual, with all signatures, before the thesis defense.

- After the defense, the student must fill out **Graduate School Form M.5** and submit to the Graduate Program Director who will prepare the official form.

One week before the thesis defense, scheduling information must be given to the Department Secretaries who will make up notices that will be posted. Information that must be supplied includes: 1) thesis title, 2) name of M.S. candidate, 3) date and time of defense, and 4) thesis committee chair (advisor) and members. The defense will include a 15-20 minute presentation of the results of the thesis research. Members of the student's thesis committee will have the opportunity to ask questions following the presentation, and other members of the faculty and other graduate students and onlookers will have the opportunity to ask questions following those of the committee members. A copy of the thesis must be placed in the department office at least one week before the defense date. Departmental M.S. Form 4, included in this manual, must be completed, with all signatures, before the thesis defense. The form must be posted at the place of the defense. After the defense, **fill out Graduate School Form M.5** (also supplied in this manual) and submit to the Graduate Program Director who will prepare the official form.

**If the student has chosen the non-thesis option:**

*Program of Study* A proposed Program of Study must be approved by the non-thesis committee, generally by the end of the second semester of residence. The program should outline a suitable breadth of course work, and should state a research topic. At least 12 credits of the total 30 must be numbered 600 or above.

*Selection of Examination Committee*

- Complete **M.S. Non-thesis Form 2a**, included in this manual, to the Graduate Program Director when you have established your examination committee.

At the same time as the program of study is developed, an examination committee should be established. The student and his or her advisor suggest three faculty members to act as members of the examination committee, but the final choice of the committee rests with the geography faculty as a whole. **Complete M.S. Non-thesis Form 2a**, included in this manual, to the Graduate Program Director when you have established your examination committee.

*The Comprehensive Exam:*

- **Departmental Form 5**, included in this manual, must be completed, with all signatures, before the comprehensive exam.
- Fill out **Graduate School form M.5** after the exam and submit to the Graduate Program Director or Department Secretaries who will prepare the official form.

An oral comprehensive exam is required, and is normally taken in the spring semester of the second year of residence, near the end of completion of the research project.

Questions from each examiner can range across the fields of geography, but are typically focused on the field of expertise of the faculty member. The time and place of the exam must be announced to the Department Faculty at least one week ahead of time.

**Departmental Form 5**, included in this manual, must be completed, with all signatures, before the comprehensive exam. The form must be posted at the place of the exam. Fill out non-thesis form M.5 (supplied in this manual) after the exam and submit to the Graduate Program Director or Department Secretaries who will prepare the official form.

**Regardless of Choice of Thesis or Non-thesis option:**

*Department Check-Out*

- Obtain all necessary signatures on **departmental form 6** and submit the form to the Department Manager in the Geosciences Office.

Final processing of the degree will depend upon 1) returning all departmental equipment, 2) cleaning all laboratory or other workplaces, 3) archiving or discarding all samples, 4) returning all keys to the Department Manager. Obtain all necessary signatures on M.S. form 6 (included in this manual) and submit the form to the Department Manager.

*Degree Eligibility Form*

- A completed “degree eligibility form”, with all necessary fees and signatures, must be submitted to the Office of Degree Requirements by the posted deadline for your target official graduation date

This yellow form must be completed by the master’s candidate and signed by the Graduate Program Director and Department Head. The graduate student should verify the accuracy of the information that is put on this form from his or her permanent record. You can obtain an unofficial copy of your record in the Graduate Records Office. The completed form, with all necessary fees and signatures, must be submitted to the Office of Degree Requirements by the posted deadline for your target official graduation date.

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**M.S. Geography Flow Sheet**

**Note: Differences between non-thesis and thesis tracks are indicated in bold.**

	<b>Semester</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Appointment of Preliminary Advisor	1	-	At introductory interview	
<b>Non-thesis project:</b> Submittal of Program of Study and Selection of Examination Committee	1 or 2	2a		
<b>Thesis:</b> Appointment of Thesis Committee	1 or 2	2b	Form M.3 to Graduate School	
<b>Thesis:</b> Submittal of Thesis Proposal	2 or 3	3	Use Form M.4	
Complete Classes and Research Project	3 to 5	-		
<b>Thesis:</b> Public Lecture	3 or 4	4		
M.S. Comprehensive Examination or Thesis Defense	4 or 5	5	Form M.5 to Graduate School	
Department Check-out	4 or 5	6	“Yellow Sheet” to Graduate School	

## **Geography MS Program**

M.S. (Project) Form #2a: Program of Study and Examination Committee

The program of study should be developed in consultation with your examination committee as early as possible. The program should include the subject of the intended research project. At the same time, an examination committee should be proposed. This consists of three faculty members.

Attach this form to your program of study and submit to your Advisor:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Examination Committee

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Program and Committee Approved by Faculty:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Program Director:

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M.S. (Thesis) Form #2b: Selection of Thesis Committee

The thesis committee (at least 2 members) should be selected by the candidate in consultation with the preliminary guidance committee as soon as a topic has been chosen. Submit this completed form to the Graduate Program Director.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Thesis Committee:

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Optional Additional Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Optional Additional Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate School Form M.3 officially requesting the committee appointment must be signed by the Department Head or Graduate Program Director and submitted to the Graduate School.

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M.S. (Thesis) Form #3: Submittal of Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal must be approved by the thesis committee and the Department Head and submitted to the Graduate School at least 4 months prior to the expected date of the defense. Attach a **copy** of the signed proposal to this form and submit to the Graduate Program Director. Deliver the signed **original** to the Graduate School, where it will be logged in on their computer.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

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M.S. (Thesis) Form #3: Completion of Public Lecture

Each student choosing the thesis option is required to give an oral presentation concerning their research. This may be done in the department's professional seminar (Geosciences 701), at a professional meeting, or in an alternate appropriate venue approved by the thesis advisor.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

A lecture entitled: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

was presented on \_\_\_\_\_

Date

at:

\_\_\_\_\_

This lecture satisfies the requirement for an oral presentation of the preliminary results of research for the M.S. degree.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

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M.S Form #5: M.S. Thesis Defense or Comprehensive Examination

The date of the M.S. examination will be scheduled by the candidate in consultation with the thesis or examination committee.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Scheduling of Exam

Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Committee chair: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Announcement of approved examination date placed in faculty mailboxes at least TWO WEEKS prior too exam.

c. Result of examination: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Committee chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Examination Committee members:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Return this form to the Graduate Program Director.

*Graduate School Form M.5, signed by the Department head or Graduate Program Director, must be sent to the Graduate School.*

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M.S Form #6: Department Check-Out

Final processing of the degree will depend upon fulfilling the remaining obligations to the Department and the Graduate School. Obtain the signatures on the form below and bring it, along with an original and one copy of the completed “yellow sheet” to the Graduate Program Director and Department head for final clearance. Bring the signed original yellow sheet to the Graduate School.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. All Departmental equipment has been returned (if applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_                      \_\_\_\_\_  
Date:                              Equipment Quartermaster

- b. Office or other workspace has been cleared.

\_\_\_\_\_                      \_\_\_\_\_  
Date:                              Committee Chair

- b. All keys to the Department have been returned.

\_\_\_\_\_                      \_\_\_\_\_  
Date:                              Departmental Administrator