

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY GEOGRAPHY AND CARTOGRAPHY GRADUATE GUIDELINES 2008

This statement is to provide guidance to graduate students in the Geographic and Cartographic (GECA) Master of Science degree program. It is a supplement to the catalogs of the university. The GMU catalogs are the official guidelines for all students. Please note that students may follow the catalog guidelines for either the semester they first enroll or the semester they will graduate. It is the decision of each student. You should obtain a catalog and use it as a reference for most topics.

1) Degree Requirements

Students must complete the following four required core courses:

GEOG 553 Geographic Information Systems
GEOG 579 Remote Sensing
GEOG 585 Quantitative Methods
GEOG 680 Seminar in Thought and Methodology

Students are strongly encouraged to take these courses as early as possible during their graduate program to prepare for other classes and to avoid delaying graduation while waiting for a required course. Geography 680 should normally be taken during the first year. Please refer to the graduate catalog for course prerequisites.

In addition, students must select one of the following options to fulfill the degree requirement:

Option 1: Thesis

Complete at least 30 hours that includes 3-6 hours of thesis (GEOG 799). Successfully defended theses should meet the thesis requirements of the university (please refer to the "Thesis, Dissertation, or Project Guide").

As soon as a student chooses the thesis option, he/she should form a committee of three including at least two full-time Geography faculty members, one of whom should be the committee chair. The student can choose a faculty member other than his original advisor to supervise the thesis. A third faculty member, either from Geography (full-time, part-time or adjunct), another local academic unit (department, institute, or center), or from outside the university must be added to complete the committee. The committee must be approved by the Departmental Chair and College.

In consultation with the committee members, the student should prepare a thesis proposal according to the format described in the "Thesis, Dissertation, or Project Guide". The proposal should state the nature, scope, and the expected outcomes from the

research. A student can not enroll in GEOG 799 (Master Thesis) until the proposal is approved by the committee and the appropriate materials submitted to the office of the Dean. When the thesis is finished, the student should give a public presentation to defend the thesis.

Option 2: Non-thesis

Complete 36 hours of course work and pass a comprehensive examination administered by a two-person Departmental full time faculty committee. It is the student's responsibility to request which faculty will serve on the committee. The committee may consist of more than two members and include faculty members from other local academic units, but the majority of the members should be from the Department and the chair must be a core member of the Department.

Prior to the exam, the student should provide a statement indicating his or her academic areas of specialty. The scope of the exam will be based upon this statement and the student's course work. The exam must be completed by the middle of the semester in which the student expects to graduate. There is no set format for the examination; it will be determined by each individual faculty committee. Normally it is a written examination take-home over a weekend. The committee may request an additional oral exam to augment the written exam.

2) Advising

Students are assigned an initial advisor during the admission process. This advisor or the Graduate Coordinator can provide orientation to the program including course selection, the thesis or non-thesis options, faculty interests and other academic matters.

Each student may request a change in advisor to better reflect his or her specific interests. The initial advisor and the Graduate Coordinator may assist in that determination. A final advisor must be selected for the thesis or comprehensive examination option.

3) Transfer courses and course selection

Students may have taken graduate courses in other institutions prior to their admission to GMU. Credits earned from another institution cannot be applied to the GECA program automatically. Subject to University guidelines, the department will evaluate individual cases. If a student wants to apply those courses to the GECA program, they must submit a completed GMU Graduate Transfer of Credit Request form and supporting documents (such as syllabi, assignments, projects, etc.) to their advisor demonstrating that they have already acquired the skills and knowledge provided by particular GEOG courses. GMU has a policy of transferring a limited number of credits into a MS program from other universities. In general, training courses taken from Federal agencies or the private sector are not acceptable for transfer.

Students who took graduate courses at GMU under extended studies or non-degree status prior to formal admission to the GECA program must also transfer those courses using a Graduate Transfer of Credit Request form. This includes any geography courses. Courses may not be transferred during Provisional Status.

With prior departmental approval, students may apply up to nine hours of course work from closely related disciplines at GMU to the degree. If students want to transfer credits earned from another program, they should consult with their advisor.

4) Waiver of core courses

A student may request a waiver of a core course if he/she has taken a similar course elsewhere, even as an undergraduate. Such a waiver should be initiated with GMU Substitution/Waiver form to the Graduate Coordinator and supporting documentation.

5) Subject-area deficiencies

Students who are admitted to the GECA program should possess knowledge in physical geography, human geography, and regional geography. If students have not taken courses in these three areas, they may be required to take make-up courses normally as part of their graduate program. Students should have at least one course in statistics before they enter the program. Students with no prior cartographic education may be required to take a basic course in cartography or Geog 550. Subject area deficiencies are often reason for provisional admission to the program. Provisionally admitted students for subject area deficiencies should inform the Graduate Coordinator when they have resolved the deficiencies to have the Provisional status removed.

6) Internships

The Department usually does not initiate internship arrangements. If a student feels that an internship will be beneficial to his/her program, the student should search for potential sponsor(s). After the student and the potential sponsor identify the tasks and the scope for the internship, either the student or the sponsor should document the nature, scope, specific tasks, and the duration of the internship. This document should be submitted to the student's advisor or other faculty member. If the proposed internship is acceptable, the student should enroll in GEOG 695 with the sponsoring faculty member.

Internships should be opportunities for students to gain knowledge or experience that cannot be acquired through courses. In general, three credit hours of internship requires 150 hours of work with the sponsor. Ideally, the nature and scope of an internship should be integrated with the department's curriculum and the student's specific academic interests. It is expected that the sponsors will be able to supervise students on the described tasks. At the end of the internship period, the sponsor and faculty member will communicate to render a grade to the student.

The department occasionally receives internship requests from private and public organizations and posts that information. A collection of such requests is also kept in a departmental binder. Internship credit is normally not provided for a student's current employment.

7) Financial Support

In each academic year, the department receives a limited amount of money from the College as Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs). Students who want to be considered for a GTA position should have filled out the section for GRA/GTA consideration in the application packet and inform the graduate coordinator or their interest each academic year. Each assistantship award usually lasts for one academic year. When the department awards a GTA to a student, it is not obliged to provide financial support to that student in subsequent year(s) but normally every effort is made to continue the support for four semesters.

Individual faculty members and/or the Department may receive research funding from the University or outside sources to hire Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs). If students are interested in this kind of financial support, they should contact individual faculty members directly and inform their advisor and the Graduate Coordinator of their interest.