

## **GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK**

### **Introduction**

The graduate program in the Department of Geography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has been designed to provide training in cutting-edge geographic methodologies and theories through three core courses and a range of electives. Both Master's and Doctoral Degrees are offered but the programmatic focus is on the Doctoral Degree. The student's Academic Advisor and Committee Members have prime responsibility for developing, with the student, an appropriate course sequence and research program and for mentoring the progress of each student in the program. To foster maximum flexibility for individuals while ensuring a uniformly high standard of geographical training for all graduate students, the department has developed a series of policies and guidelines for students and faculty. These are outlined in this ***Graduate Program Handbook***.

Degrees are awarded by the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and this handbook consists of additions to or amplifications of those of the Graduate School. The Department Handbook should be read in conjunction with the [Graduate School Handbook](#), which is available on-line from the Graduate School's [website](#), where you can also find required forms.

All students should work closely with their academic advisor and their chosen committee members, but they are also encouraged to consult with the Director of Graduate Studies or the Department Chair as necessary with concerns, requests, interpretation of policies and procedures, and other Program needs. It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that all Departmental and University degree requirements are met, but it is a priority of the department to make sure that requirements are clear and to support students in meeting these requirements. In the department, Nell Phillips, Student Services Manager, is an excellent resource for technical program questions. Nell can assist you with questions involving enrollment in courses, independent studies, and thesis hours, and Nell also handles all graduate forms (e.g., for your defenses or committee assignments). Department Manager, Barbara Taylor, will assist you with employee forms and make sure students receive your stipend in a timely manner, and she and Dan Warfield, Accounting Technician, will also handle reimbursements and fellowship disbursements. Course scheduling, teaching assistant assignments, and office assignments are the domain of the Associate Chair.

### **Description of the program**

The student and their Academic Advisor and Committee Members together determine the student's graduate training plan within the general guidelines detailed below. The key components of training for MA and PhD degrees include a) a set of required and elective courses, b) comprehensive written exams for both MA and PhD students, plus an oral exam for PhD students only (a.k.a., the dissertation proposal defense), and c) the approved MA thesis and PhD dissertation by the student's committee. These components are described in detail below.

### *Required and Elective Courses*

All students complete three required courses that introduce them to the basic tenets of geographic thought, perspectives, methodologies, and research design, and provide the skills necessary to communicate the results of that research. These courses also introduce students to individual faculty members and their research programs, as well as build a cohort. The three required courses serve as a foundation of our graduate education. Geography 704 is taken in students' first semester, Geography 702 and 703 are taken in the first or second year.

*Geography 704: Communicating Geography.* All incoming graduate students are required to take this course in the first semester (fall) of the first year. The course: 1) introduces the department and discipline through student-provided introductions of subdisciplines and interaction with existing faculty and graduate students; 2) helps students get a start on their own research through semester-long course assignments; and 3) provides a foundation in professional development by working on a range of capacities that will serve students throughout their career, such as time management, CV writing, grant applications, and presentation skills.

*Geography 702: Geographic Thought: History and Philosophy of Geography.* This course, offered fall term, is to be taken in the student's first or third semester. The course provides an overview of the history of geographic thought while questioning what is included in the canon, why, and with what implications. It is designed to trace the lines of inquiry that have led to shifts in geographic knowledge and identify and engage recent debates within geography. The course builds students' familiarity with a selection of geographic works while also situating key concepts of geography within the historical development of the discipline. Students develop a common base for understanding the diversity within the discipline of geography and develop analytical tools to further question and push forward geographic knowledge.

*Geography 703: Research Design in Theory and Practice.* This course, offered in the spring term, is to be taken in *either* the student's second or fourth semester. In this seminar, students develop a foundational understanding of how to develop a research proposal and how to conduct a research project. Through workshop-based classes and assignments, they move from having a general topic area to specifying operational research questions and identifying how they can contribute to geographic scholarship through their own independent research. Students should consult with their advisor to determine the best time in their curriculum to take the course – taking it the first year may help students jump into MA or PhD research, however, as research ideas also shift in the first year or two, taking it in the second year may be preferable and align better with dissertation proposal writing.

Beyond these three required courses, you can take any graduate course at UNC, as well as graduate courses at nearby institutions in consultation with your advisor or committee, including Duke, North Carolina State University, and other state schools including some in the UNC system and North Carolina Central University, through inter-institutional registration. These are treated as on-campus courses after you fill out the inter-institutional form. [Visit this site for more information](#), and you can get the form from Nell or [here](#). Coursework develops expertise, but also enables students to make connections with other faculty members who may serve on your committee, as well as develop collaborations with other students. Students are strongly encouraged to take geography department graduate seminars. The Department supports the Graduate School recommendation that, when possible, that at least one- half of the courses be at the graduate level (numbered 700 and above) and above. No credit is given to the required credit hours for courses numbered below the 400 level.

Students can enroll in “Special Work in Geography” (Geography 900) to develop research ideas, theories, and practices in any semester, as approved by the Academic Advisor. This can be helpful when seminars don’t match your specific research interests or when you and a faculty member are working on a specific research project together. This needs to be formalized with a learning contract and a syllabus, to be submitted to Nell by the first day of the semester. The first step for an independent study is to reach out to the faculty member with whom you would like to work. The form and syllabus must be approved by your advisor and filed at the start of the semester with the Student Services Manager (Nell).

Before you register for your courses, you will usually want to coordinate with your advisor or committee to find out what they suggest you take. You might also want to ask committee members and other students in the program who share your interests (especially to find out about classes outside the department). All enrolled students planning to use university resources the following semester must be registered before the beginning of the semester – look for emails from Nell about this! Registration typically begins in October for spring semester and in March for fall semester ([see registrar’s calendar for dates](#)). Students who are not pre-registered are ineligible for tuition remission (remission is the way the department pays tuition for teaching assistants).

#### *MA, MA/PhD, or PhD Tracks and Minimum Course Requirements*

There are three potential degree tracks in the program. If you enter with an MA/MS (even if it is in another field) you can proceed directly into the PhD track. If you enter the PhD program with a BA/BS, you can either complete an MA and then a PhD, or you can do the direct-to-PhD track. If you have been admitted to the MA/PhD program, **Appendix 5b** must be completed in order to proceed to the PhD after completing the MA. If you have been admitted to the MA-only program, you may apply to continue on to the PhD.

The three tracks are outlined below and considerations are discussed below the list. If students choose the direct-to-PhD track, by the end of the third semester in residence, they must inform the Academic Advisor and DGS (form: **Appendix 5a**). While not necessarily a binding and limiting decision, the student declaration is used to inform the DGS and Academic Advisor and Committee Members about the intentions of the student so that the most suitable course work and appropriate training experiences can be developed to meet the needs and career goals of the student. Credit requirements are listed here:

- A. For PhD students entering the program with a MA/MS degree** earned from an academic unit and institution other than the Department of Geography at UNC-Chapel Hill:
  - a. PhD: at least 30 hours of coursework (including directed research and readings courses, i.e., independent study) plus at least 6 hours of Geography 994 (Dissertation credits).
- B. For PhD students entering the program with a BA/BS degree** there are 2 options:
  - 1. The MA then PhD tracks:
    - MA: this requires at least 30 hours of coursework (including directed research and readings courses) plus at least 3 hours of Geography 993 (Thesis credits).
    - PhD: this requires at least 24 hours of additional course work (beyond the MA courses completed in the Department of Geography, UNC-Chapel Hill) for a total of 54 credit hours (including directed research and readings courses) plus at least 6 hours of Geography 994 (Dissertation credits).
  - 2. Direct PhD track:

- a. The PhD requires: at least 54 hours total course work (including directed research and readings courses) plus at least 6 hours of Geography 994 (Dissertation credits).

### **C. For MA students**

MA: this requires at least 30 hours of coursework (including directed research and readings courses) plus at least 3 hours of Geography 993 (Thesis credits). Students admitted for the MA program can apply for the PhD program.

Thesis (Geography 993) and Dissertation (Geography 994) hours can only be taken after all required coursework has been completed or in the final semester of coursework.

### *Theses and dissertations*

The MA thesis and PhD dissertation are your record of research completed for the degree, and can take the traditional form (introduction, chapters, conclusion), or, in agreement with your advisor, may be completed in article format (e.g., one article for the MA, and generally three for the PhD, supplemented in both cases by an introduction and conclusion). Ultimately, your advisor is your guide to the thesis and dissertation and will lay out their expectations, but all committee members must sign off on the thesis or dissertation before it is submitted to the college. It may be helpful to take a look at some of the completed theses or dissertations, which are [available at UNC library](#) (put geography in the subject field). Throughout the preparation of the thesis or dissertation, including proposal development, it is expected that the student will maintain close contact with the advisor and the committee. The advisor will play the major guidance role, but all Committee members will have areas where their expertise is beneficial, and they should be consulted regularly.

The Graduate School publishes a "[Guide to Theses and Dissertations](#)" that provides details of the required submission format. Digital submissions of theses and dissertation are required by the Graduate School. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain authorization signatures from the advisor and committee members prior to the submission of the final approved draft of the MA thesis or Doctoral dissertation to the Graduate School. After the student has defended the thesis, the committee confers about what changes are needed (if any) for the thesis or dissertation to be accepted. In some cases the committee will leave the final acceptance of the thesis or dissertation to the advisor, while at times they may wish to see the revision (or portions of it). Thesis and dissertation candidates must obtain "authorizing signatures" from the advisor and committee prior to submission of the final "approved" version of document to the Graduate School.

### *Transfers, Supplementary Courses, and Registration Requirements*

The Department supports the transfer of credit as allowed by the Graduate School. Students desiring such credit should check with the Director of Graduate Studies (form: **Transfer Credit Recommendation**).

The University requires students to be registered in the term (fall, spring, or summer) in which they do any academic work requiring interaction with faculty (e.g., advising, exams, defenses, etc.). This means that students who schedule thesis or dissertation defenses and exams in the summer (generally not encouraged, see below) are themselves responsible for paying summer registration and tuition since the tuition remission accompanying RA or TA awards does not cover summer registration and tuition. The Graduate School counts spring registration as extending until the first day of the first summer session (typically mid-May) and fall registration beginning with the first week of classes in the fall. Registration for either summer session (a minimum of 3 hours) will cover a student for the entire period between the end of spring and the beginning of fall. If you are

going to graduate in a given semester, keep in mind that you will have to apply to graduate early in the semester. Each semester, Nell will send out an email detailing these dates.

### *Advisor, committees, and their role*

Each student is admitted to the program with an initial faculty advisor (or co-advisors). Once the student has begun the program, they are responsible (with input from their advisor) for selecting other faculty from the department and beyond to comprise the complete committee. All geography departmental policies also must follow the Graduate School's requirements.

The academic advisor is responsible for helping students decide what courses to take, advising them on the course of their independent thesis and dissertation research, and all other aspects of the research program. The advisor also evaluates progress toward the degree and administers the MA and PhD comprehensive exams and thesis and dissertation defenses. The advisor or co-advisor has overall responsibility for helping the student develop their research program, but the student and advisor work together with the rest of the student's committee members and the DGS as needed.

The advisor must be a regular member (i.e., tenured or tenure track) of the graduate faculty within the UNC Department of Geography. The advisor should be selected as early as possible; the Department encourages students to have their academic advisor in place by the end of the second semester in residence (See **Appendix 1: "Steps and Progress to a Degree"**). Although most students continue to work with their initial advisors, some may change advisors (for a variety of reasons) during their graduate career, and students should feel welcome to consult directly with the DGS about any advising concerns.

The advisory committee is formed by the student, in close consultation with the academic advisor, and, for the PhD, must be approved by the DGS and filed with the Graduate School. [Forms formalizing the PhD committee are available here and must be submitted to Student Services Manager Nell Phillips \(nphillip@email.unc.edu\).](#) We recommend you form your committee early in the third semester in residence for MA and by the end of the fourth semester in residence for PhD. If you complete your MA and go on to the PhD you may shift your project and need to change who is on your committee – discuss this with your advisor and committee members; as always, students can also consult the DGS as needed. Once formally established, changes in Committee composition will be considered by the student's Academic Advisor and approved by the DGS. Where required by the Graduate School, a written petition must be signed by the student and the Academic Advisor.

Occasionally, a student may need to add a committee member from another academic institution because they have expertise that UNC-CH cannot provide. Students should speak with their advisor about this and the outside member will need to provide a CV for approval by Nell Phillips and the DGS.

The committee, including the academic advisor, consists of the following:

**MA Committee:** The MA committee requires three members. The advisor (chair) and majority of the committee must be regular members of the [UNC-CH graduate faculty](#) from the Department of Geography. There is no requirement for an external committee member for the MA committee.

**Ph.D. Committee:** The PhD committee must have at least five members. The advisor and a majority of the committee must be regular members of the [UNC-Chapel Hill Graduate Faculty](#) in the



Department of Geography. Other members may be “Regular Graduate Faculty” (see below) or special appointees to the Graduate Faculty (i.e., not “regular graduate faculty” at UNC-Chapel Hill). At least one committee member *must* be from outside the department, normally from another academic department at UNC-Chapel Hill. The composition of the Committee must be officially approved by the DGS Director of Graduate Studies prior to the Doctoral Written Examination and officially accepted by the Graduate School prior to the Dissertation Proposal Defense ([form: Report of Doctoral Committee Composition](#)). The Department recommends that the PhD Advisory Committee be selected by the end of the fourth semester in residence (see **Appendix 1**).

### Required meeting with the DGS

Beginning in the semester during which required coursework is completed for the MA or PhD, students may register for 3 credit hours of Geography 993 or Geography 994 (commonly called thesis or dissertation hours), following Graduate School regulations. Prior to registering for these credits for the first time, students with their advisor are required to complete the Exam Checklist (**Appendix 4**) and to submit this in a meeting with the DGS. The goal of this meeting is to clarify degree requirements as well as advisor expectations and to support students as they transition to independent research.

### Comprehensive Exams

Both the MA and the PhD require written comprehensive exams (“comps”), which cannot be taken until the final semester of coursework and must be taken within one year of the completion of such course work. The PhD comprehensive exams are usually held in conjunction with your PhD proposal defense (below). The comprehensive exams are for the student to demonstrate to their committee that they possess the necessary expertise in their chosen subdisciplines to carry out their thesis or dissertation research. Comprehensive exam format may vary between subdisciplines (e.g., physical geographers, qualitative human geographers, quantitative human geographers), so it is important to get a sense for how the advisor runs comprehensive exams. The student is strongly encouraged to communicate well ahead of time with each committee member about the outline of the research and to seek out feedback about how to best to prepare for the exam, such as by creating a reading list. These expectations should then be formalized in the Exam Checklist as described above. All examinations are scheduled by the Academic Advisor, in consultation with the student, the Thesis/Dissertation Committee, and the Director of Graduate Studies. This exam may or may not be closed book – ask your advisor how they run this exam.

The MA comprehensive examination is a six-hour exam. Any deviations from this length should be discussed with and approved by the DGS using the Exam Checklist form. The doctoral written examination consists of three days of examinations, each up to eight hours in length. The advisor and student should plan this to fit the student’s needs – for instance, students may take a day off in between exams (for instance, having their three days be Monday, Wednesday, Friday).

For all comprehensive exams, the Advisor will construct a balanced examination from questions submitted by committee members. For each question, the individual submitting the question(s) will have responsibility for grading it, along with the Advisor, using the standard graduate student grading scale: High Pass (H), Pass (P), Low Pass (L), (include +/- as appropriate), Fail (F). Results will be transmitted to the Academic Advisor. Some advisors may also wish to assign a “secondary reader” for each question among the Committee members. The Academic Advisor and Committee will evaluate the student’s performance. If there is no grade of “L” or lower, the student unconditionally passes. A candidate receiving at least one “F” from at least two members of the Committee automatically fails. In the intermediate situation, the Committee must meet to evaluate

options. Some form of re-testing may be required, as determined by the Academic Advisor and the rest of the Committee.

### Doctoral Oral Examination (Proposal Defense)

For the PhD degree, the student will need to defend the dissertation research proposal in front of the doctoral committee to show that they have a sound plan to complete their dissertation after finishing the written comprehensive exam. The goal of the proposal defense or oral exam is also to make sure that the student begins their research with the strongest research design and to get feedback from your committee members regarding the feasibility and the significance of your dissertation research. It is not unusual for students to make significant changes in their dissertation proposal after the defense. The dissertation proposal defense usually happens at least one month after the written exam, but not more than a semester.

The Examining Committee is the student's Dissertation or Academic Advisory Committee (see more details in the committee section). Working with the primary advisor and in consultation with individual committee members, the student should provide a dissertation proposal draft at least two weeks before the defense to the committee. The dissertation proposal defense is essentially an oral examination of the dissertation proposal that assesses whether the specific research plan for the dissertation is feasible. The feedback from the committee may include modification of the scope of the research, specific methodology to be used, or other dimensions of the project. It may also include questions following up on the candidate's written exams. A student who passed both the written and oral exams becomes a PhD candidate, also known as ABD, i.e., all but dissertation.

For the MA degree, there is no required proposal defense, but your advisor may ask you to share a description of your planned research with the committee in order to help them write questions for your comprehensive exams. This expectation should be formalized in the Exam Checklist as described above.

### Final Oral Examination (Dissertation and Thesis Defense)

Thesis and dissertation defenses are scheduled when research and writing is complete and a full draft of the thesis or dissertation is ready to be circulated to the committee. Usually the thesis or dissertation should be completed well before the due date at the Graduate School. The primary advisor often reads the initial draft of the thesis or dissertation and suggests improvements before the document is disseminated to the entire committee. Graduate students are strongly advised to keep the committee members well informed about the progress of the research methodology used, findings derived from the research so that mistakes or misunderstandings can be corrected in a timely manner. It is almost always the case that the thesis or dissertation committee will have some revision suggestions for the degree candidate. The defense should be scheduled so that you have time to conduct such revisions before the due date. Defenses consist of a public presentation of the research followed by a private defense with the committee members, who ask questions to make sure the work is carried appropriately; the results are sound and correctly interpreted. They even make suggestions for future work, publication, and other advice beyond the dissertation. After the defense, students make edits and revisions based on the feedback from the committee members before submitting a final version of the thesis or dissertation to the university. Defenses occur during the last semester of your degree program.

The final oral examination consists of two parts. The first part is a public presentation of the research. Prior to this presentation, a minimum of two weeks is required for review of the "approved" (by the Academic Advisor) dissertation or thesis draft by the Academic Advisory

Committee (some Committees may require more time). Public presentations and final examinations should, when possible, be scheduled at times when departmental graduate seminars are not being taught, taking place in Carolina Hall. The defense must be advertised (e.g., on the Department's faculty and graduate student listservs) no less than one week prior to the defense. This notice should include the title of the work, name of the student and of their Advisor and Academic Advisory Committee members, and an abstract. The public presentation is typically 20-30 minutes in length for a thesis defense, and 30-45 minutes in length for a dissertation defense. Following the public presentation, the student answers questions from the audience, i.e., non-committee members.

The second part of the final oral examination is for the candidate to defend the thesis or dissertation in front of the dissertation committee, which is closed to the public. In this part of the defense, the candidate answers questions from each committee member in turn regarding the methodology, the findings and the interpretation of the results. This is usually held immediately after the public presentation. Since faculty are not officially in residence during the summer, and thus are under no obligation to conduct examinations during that period, considerable advance planning is likely to be required if a summer defense is contemplated. Remember that defenses during the summer may also require you to pay summer tuition and registration – please check with Nell for these details.

## Progress, Milestones, and Timeline

### *Satisfactory Progress, Degree Time Limits, and Continuous Registration*

Students are expected to make steady and continuous progress towards their degree – represented by “milestones,” such as completing coursework or taking exams. **Appendix 1** provides a basic outline of expectations as a guide, but the rate of progress or the order of events may vary slightly from student to student and advisor to advisor – if your schedule looks different check in with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or advisor to see if you are on track.

Progress, as recorded in the department's annual (spring) Graduate Student Assessment, is evaluated by the Advisor and the DGS (in consultation with the Graduate Committee as needed) at the end of each year. From time to time, students face challenges and delays, and the department tries to be flexible and accommodating in such cases. If there are significant delays, the department may not have enough resources to continue supporting a student financially. Before this occurs, meetings will take place with the DGS, advisor, and chair to work out a plan to keep the student on track. If you have concerns about this or the timeline, please speak with the DGS, your advisor or the chair right away.

The Graduate School stipulates a limit of 5-years for the MA and 8-years for the PhD, between the time of first registration in the UNC Graduate School and the completion of the degree. This comes from outside the department and is beyond our purview. However, a student may petition the department's DGS and, if approved, the Graduate School will provide an extension of the total time limits. These cases are very rare, as most students maintaining satisfactory progress will have completed the degree well before these limits are encountered. If you think anything may be delaying you to such an extent that you might exceed these limits, please be in touch with the DGS sooner rather than later! Extensions may require additional coursework and/or retesting of the written examination material to ensure that they are familiar with recent advances in the discipline.



Under the Graduate School's [Continual Enrollment Policy](#), all graduate students must maintain continual enrollment in three or more hours per semester in order to remain in the program, including during extended periods of fieldwork. Students who have external funding for their research that covers the minimum stipend can apply for a [Graduate Tuition Incentive Scholarship](#) from the Graduate School to cover tuition and fees. Students facing challenges or other personal issues may also need to take a [leave of absence from the program](#) – for instance if facing difficult personal circumstances, persistent health challenges, or care needs. The latter, if approved by the Department and granted by the Graduate School, extends the degree time limits by the period of the leave but the student is deemed to have left the program and must reapply for re-admission. Following childbirth, a student who is the primary caregiver is also eligible for [a six-week parental leave](#).

### Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Science

The Department offers a Graduate School-approved Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Sciences (GISc) that requires 18-hours of graduate-level university credit selected from a list of core and elective courses. The Certificate Program is administered separately from the Department's Graduate Program, and while approved by the Graduate School, students admitted into the Certificate Program are not admitted into the MA or PhD programs. Students already enrolled in the Graduate Program can become part of the GISc Certificate Program by sending the Program Director an email indicating interest in joining the program and having their advisor send an email stating their support of the student's enrollment in the program. The GISc Certificate can be completed simultaneously with the MA and/or PhD degrees; a maximum of six credit hours for the GISc Certificate can overlap with courses taken to fulfill requirements for the student's MA and/or PhD requirements. Upon completion of the GISc Graduate Certificate Program, the Program Director will notify the Graduate School, and a notation of the awarded GISc Certificate will be added to the student's transcript. More information on the GISc Graduate Certificate Program can be found [here](#).

### Environment and Geography Dual Degree Program

The Department of Geography and the [Environment, Ecology and Energy Program](#) offer a joint M.A. in Geography and B.A./B.S. in Environmental Studies/Science. Undergraduate majors in Environmental Studies or Environmental Science who also complete a major or minor from the Geography department (or 9 credit hours as approved by their geography sponsor) are eligible to pre-apply to the dual degree program in their junior year and to take 9 credit hours in their senior year above their BA/BS requirements to be counted towards an MA in Geography. All MA requirements described in this document also apply to these students. For more information on this program, see [here](#).

### Reporting & Assessment

The Graduate School has required that (in addition to any other meetings with the Advisor and full Committee) the advisor should meet with the student at least once per year specifically to evaluate progress and recommend future actions. In our department, each student will complete an annual progress report, which will be sent to their advisor. This form asks about milestones completed, as well as other kinds of progress such as coursework, teaching, presentations, and publications. This is also a chance for the student to share any challenges or concerns.

The advisor also completes an assessment of the student's progress and shares their assessment with the student (either in a meeting or in written form). This report can offer context for the

student's progress report, or interpretation of their progress through the program. It is also an opportunity for them to share any concerns or tell the DGS how the program can better support the student.

These reports will be reviewed by the DGS. The DGS also encourages each student to have an annual DGS check-in to assess their progress. In reviewing the submitted reports, the DGS may consult with the Graduate Committee and program faculty as needed, to identify evidence of suitable status and progress of the student in the program, exceptional student scholarship, and any special problems or challenges that require DGS and/or Advisor attention.

## Professional Development

The development of an understanding of academic institutions and the discipline and the cultivation of professional skills is an integral part of the degree program. The Department encourages all students to take advantage of [The Graduate School's Professional Development](#) programming and the resources provided by the [Center for Faculty Excellence](#). Every student is expected to participate in Departmental events and activities, including attendance at lectures by guest speakers and Departmental colloquia. Students are also encouraged to attend professional meetings. Where possible and when needed, Departmental funds are provided to facilitate participation.

In the later stages of their degree program, students are encouraged to present papers at professional meetings as part of their training. This is regarded as one measure of satisfactory progress. Students are also encouraged to organize or chair sessions as appropriate. The Department also encourages the submission of research results for publication in refereed journals, edited volumes, and other scholarly publications. The Department also, in conjunction with the UNC Graduate School and the Office of Research Services, encourages the submission of research proposals to extramural funding agencies.

### A. Teaching

Teaching is likely to be an integral part of the careers of many students. The department offers opportunities for the orderly development of high-quality teaching skills. No teaching is required of any graduate student, but teaching is encouraged for most doctoral candidates. To this end, the Department has established a sequence of steps for the development of teaching skills, as described in **Appendix 3**.

## Student Finances

### A. Financial Support

The Department strives to provide support for all students who require it in the form of teaching and research assistantships, and endeavors to maintain support throughout the student's program given satisfactory academic progress (see **Appendix 1**). Several funding sources are available to the Department, and individual students are encouraged and assisted in seeking their own external funding.

Under normal circumstances and with students demonstrating satisfactory progress towards their degree, there are limits to the total length of time a student can expect to be funded using Department funds (excluding faculty research funds and fellowships). Below indicates the general funding intentions of the Department:

- 2-years for MA
- 4-years for PhD with prior MA
- 5-years for PhD without prior MA

Under exceptional circumstances, students who exceed the 10/8/4 semester limit may apply to the Director of Graduate Studies for a waiver of the rule on tuition support. The request should include: (1) a written request specifying the reason for the request and the stage in the student's program, and (2) a supporting letter of the faculty advisor signed by all departmental committee members, specifying that the student is making good progress and indicating the expected date of completion. Awards of waivers will depend on the availability of tuition support funds. If funding is available, a 5<sup>th</sup> year (with prior MA) and 6<sup>th</sup> year (without prior MA) of funding will be provided to students in good standing who are making satisfactory progress towards their degree. Funding will be as a teaching fellow with primary responsibility for a course. In exceptional and extenuating circumstances, such students may be awarded a TA assignment. Students who have not made adequate progress towards their degrees will not receive funding after 5-years except in exceptional cases and with extenuating circumstances. At a minimum, adequate progress refers to meeting the deadlines of the graduate program and having reached ABD status by the end of the spring semester of the 4<sup>th</sup> year.

## **B. Fellowships and Assistantships**

The Graduate School's website provides details of [fellowships and scholarships](#) competitively available to UNC Graduate Students. Some are directly administered by the University and are awarded in conjunction with the Department, while others, frequently circulated on Geography graduate listserv and other venues, are from extramural sources, and an individual must take a lead role in securing them. Most require no service to the University or the Department on the part of the recipient. They are designed to allow the recipient to engage full time in scholarly activity.

Most students are supported by Assistantships, which require departmental service. These are of two basic forms: Research Assistantships and Teaching Assistantships.

**Research Assistantships:** require that the recipient work with a specific faculty member on a particular research project. Frequently specialized skills are needed to undertake the required work. Since funds from sponsored research come to the Department from a variety of extramural and on-campus sources, the nature of the work, and the time commitment required depend on the project.

**Teaching Assistantships:** the role of teaching assistants (TAs) is to assist in the undergraduate instructional mission of the Department and University. Individual TA's are assigned to individual faculty members to assist in specific courses. As far as possible, assignments will be made in such a way that the student is exposed to a variety of teaching styles and subject matter and gains increasing experience and expertise throughout his/her graduate program. The normal maximum time commitment is an average of 20-hours per week during the regular semesters.

Prior to each semester, the Associate Chair of the Department requests for input from students and faculty and assigns TAs to particular courses. In general, the priority order for courses assigned TAs is:

1. Large (>100 student) Introductory Geography (courses at the 100 level) classes
2. For remaining resources, consideration will be given for:
  - a. additional resources for those teaching exceptionally large classes (>150),
  - b. courses with large laboratory content
  - c. courses being developed or significantly modified
  - d. other exceptional circumstances

### **C. Student Funding Policy**

The Student Funding Policy provides the basic guidelines for using TA funding to:

1. Optimize the use of all resources available to the Department, thus maximizing the benefit to the maximum number of people;
2. Minimize risk of any student who is making satisfactory progress within Departmental time limits being unable to complete a degree program because of withdrawal of funding;
3. Ensure that students are treated as equally as possible, while maintaining the flexibility of an individual faculty member's and/or student's research and education program;
4. Encourage the search for and use of all funding sources available to the Department and its students.

Funding for graduate students is usually granted on an academic year (Fall through Spring Semesters) basis. Preliminary offers to students are usually made in the spring. Final TA assignments will be made immediately prior to the Fall Semester. Consequently:

1. Requests for funding source changes after the August final assignment must be approved by the Chair or Associate Chair of the Department. This is also required for students with external funding in the Fall who seek TA funding in the Spring.
2. All funding beyond the first year is dependent on the satisfactory progress of the student as determined by course work results and/or the decision of the student's Academic Advisor, committee (if appropriate), and DGS.
3. The Department will endeavor to ensure that students who receive university-approved scholarships, fellowships, etc. that pay less than the current departmental TA rate will be topped-up from Departmental funds.
4. No student can normally receive, from university-related sources, remuneration for work involving more than 20-hours per week during the regular semester.

### **D. Tuition and North Carolina Residency Status**

Agencies supporting graduate students through University-affiliated sources (e.g., Departmental Teaching Assistants, those funded by faculty grants, University Scholarship holders) pay, directly to the University, tuition at the rate applicable to North Carolina residents. For students who are not residents of North Carolina for tuition purposes and who are also paid from University-affiliated sources, the Department must cover the difference between in-state and out-of-state

tuition rates, hence it is critical to Department finances, and to our ability to recruit high quality graduate students, that continuing students who qualify for NC residency apply for state resident status as early as possible, usually at the end of their first year in the program. Upon moving to North Carolina, incoming students are advised to begin establishing residency *before the semester begins* through documentation including, but not limited to: North Carolina Driver's License; local bank account; utilities accounts; pet licenses (if applicable); etc. For more information on how to apply for North Carolina residency, please see the Graduate School's [website](#).

**APPENDIX 1:**  
**Steps and Progress to a Degree: Student Milestones**

Semester #	MA/PhD (and MA) (54 hrs + thesis/diss.)	PhD Direct (54 hrs + diss.)	PhD with previous MA (30 hrs + diss.)
Semester 1	-Course work (including GEOG 704)	-Course work (including GEOG 704)	-Course work (including GEOG 704)
Semester 2	-Course work (including GEOG 702) -Select MA advisor	-Course work (including GEOG 702) -Select PhD advisor	-Course work (including GEOG 702) -Select PhD advisor
Semester 3	-Course work (including GEOG 703) -Create MA committee	-Course work (including GEOG 703) -Recommendation to Bypass MA degree (form: Appendix 5a)	-Course work (including GEOG 703) -Create PhD committee (Semester 3/4) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Report of Doctoral Committee Composition)
Semester 4	-Course work if needed -MA Written Comps Exam -Defend MA Thesis (Final Oral Exam) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Master's Comprehensive Exam Report) -Committee recommendation following MA completion (form: Appendix 5b)	-Course work -Create PhD committee (Semester 4/5) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Report of Doctoral Committee Composition)	-Course work if needed -Create PhD committee (Semester 3/4) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Report of Doctoral Committee Composition)
Semester 5	-Course work -Create PhD committee ( <a href="#">form</a> : Report of Doctoral Committee Composition)	-Course work -Create PhD committee (Semester 4/5) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Report of Doctoral Committee Composition)	-Course work if needed/Proposal development -PhD Comprehensive exams – Written exam and 1 <sup>st</sup> Oral exam (proposal defense) (Semester 5/6) ( <a href="#">forms</a> : Report of Approved Doctoral Dissertation Project; Doctoral Exam Report)
Semester 6	-Course work if needed/Proposal development -PhD Comprehensive exams – Written exam and 1 <sup>st</sup> Oral exam (proposal	-Course work if needed/Proposal development -PhD Comprehensive exams – Written exam and 1 <sup>st</sup> Oral exam (proposal defense)(Semester 6/7)	-PhD Comprehensive exams – Written exam and 1 <sup>st</sup> Oral exam (proposal defense) (Semester 5/6) ( <a href="#">forms</a> : Report of Approved Doctoral Dissertation Project; Doctoral Exam Report)



	defense)(Semester 6/7) ( <a href="#">forms</a> : Report of Approved Doctoral Dissertation Project; Doctoral Exam Report)	( <a href="#">forms</a> : Report of Approved Doctoral Dissertation Project; Doctoral Exam Report)	-Field/Lab work
Semester 7	-Course work if needed/Proposal development -PhD Comprehensive exams – Written exam and 1 <sup>st</sup> Oral exam (proposal defense)(Semester 6/7) ( <a href="#">forms</a> : Report of Approved Doctoral Dissertation Project; Doctoral Exam Report)	-Course work if needed/Proposal development -PhD Comprehensive exams – Written exam and 1 <sup>st</sup> Oral exam (proposal defense)(Semester 6/7) ( <a href="#">forms</a> : Report of Approved Doctoral Dissertation Project; Doctoral Exam Report)	-Field/Lab work
Semester 8	-Field/Lab work	-Field/Lab work	--PhD Final Oral Examination (Dissertation defense) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Doctoral Exam Report)
Semester 9	-Field/Lab work	-Field/Lab work	<i>*Some students, particularly those engaged in extensive, field-based research, may require 1-2 additional semesters of graduate work.</i>
Semester 10	--PhD Final Oral Examination (Dissertation defense) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Doctoral Exam Report)	--PhD Final Oral Examination (Dissertation defense) ( <a href="#">form</a> : Doctoral Exam Report)	
Semester 11 or more	<i>*Some students, particularly those engaged in extensive, field-based research, may require 1-2 additional semesters of graduate work.</i>		

### Steps and Progress to a Degree: Additional notes

- During their graduate careers, all students will normally be expected to undertake additional activities as part of their scholarly and professional development such as: presentation of conference papers, submission of articles to refereed journals, participation in departmental colloquia, review (referee) of journal papers and book chapters, organization of conference sessions, and submission of extramural research funding and fellowship proposals.
- While the above chart reflects a normal temporal model of student milestones, the timing may vary for different students depending on their research models, advisors, nature of the research project, time required in the field, availability of external funding, and other circumstances.
- The Academic Advisor has overall responsibility for the student's program, working in conjunction with the student's Academic Advisory Committee and the DGS as needed. Students with questions or concerns should discuss their programs with the Academic Advisor and, if appropriate, DGS.

## APPENDIX 2

### REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL GRADUATE SCHOOL FORMS

All Graduate School forms referenced in this Handbook (among others) can be downloaded as pdf files from the Graduate School's [website](#). Available forms include:

For MA students:

- Master's Comprehensive Exam Report
- Recommendation to Proceed
- Recommendation to Bypass Master's Degree (Departmental form required; **Appendix 5a**)

For PhD students:

- Report of Doctoral Committee Composition
- Report of Approved Dissertation Project
- Doctoral Exam Report

General:

- Transfer Credit Recommendation
- Request Extension of Time
- Request Leave of Absence
- Request Reinstatement
- Readmission Application
- Parental Leave Application Form

Additional, Departmental forms (identified as **Appendix #** in this Handbook) and other materials can be found below. Questions about these forms and policies can be addressed to the Student Services Manager, Academic Advisor, and DGS, as appropriate.

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **Guidelines and Principles for Graduate Student Teaching in Geography**

This document borrows from Provost's guidelines, Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) documents, and Graduate Committee's GTA development document. It outlines general policies and recommendations for training; for expectations and responsibilities for both faculty and TA/TFs; and for supervision, evaluation, and recognition of TA/TFs.

#### **General Policies**

All students participating as TAs or Teaching Fellows (TFs) will be in good standing with the department and graduate school, be proficient in the English language, and be making satisfactory progress towards their degree. Student participation (and funding) as a TA or TF is a special opportunity and can be withdrawn with cause as the need arises. Participation as a TA is a service to the professor, the department, and university, as well as an opportunity for professional development for the student/TA. The Department should recognize this duality in course assignment, training, assessment, and recognition. Moreover, professors supervising TAs should participate in the professional development of students assigned as their TAs.

It is strongly recommended that all students participate as TAs at some point in their career since communication and teaching skills are essential to any field of endeavor. It is strongly recommended that all students intending on a college/university career participate in the extra training noted below even if they do not have the opportunity to participate as a Teaching Fellow.

#### **Training Requirements**

- (1) Common training is required for all departmental TAs prior to TA assignment. Those not initially in TA assignments may defer the training if desired. This training consists of: (a) CFE orientation (offered before fall and spring semesters), (b) Departmental orientation covering departmental policies regarding the role of TAs and faculty, evaluation and recognition, etc., (c) Further, TAs are strongly encouraged to participate in the seminars offered by CFE or the Graduate School during the semester.
- (2) Focused extra training is required (in advance) for all Teaching Fellows (i.e., students with complete course responsibility).
  - (a) To be eligible for a teaching fellow assignment, students must:
    - (i) Request a course teaching assignment from the Associate Chair who will make a recommendation to the departmental chair. There is no guarantee that the department will be able to honor the request given budget, course, and schedule restraints.
    - (ii) Have a MA degree and have completed their PhD course work.
    - (iii) Making satisfactory progress towards the degree as indicated by the student's advisor and committee.
  - (b) Have completed a formal course on university teaching or a customized CTL course consultation or have evidence of appropriate teaching experience. Exceptions will be granted only with documented evidence of completion of a similar course elsewhere or equivalent experience.
  - (c) Participate in the Department's and the CTL's program of teaching evaluation.

#### **Expectations and Responsibilities**

- (1) Guidelines for selection of TAs include both graduate student qualifications (see above) and faculty

- and departmental course needs. (a) Size of enrollment and/or special needs (e.g., for computer or other lab help). (b) Need/desire for TA help (carries with it a responsibility for TA mentoring).
- (2) The expectation is that TAs are 'professors in training' and their roles should reflect more than simply clerical or technical labor. Responsibilities for TAs may differ and should be progressive— according to experience and position. By accepting TA help, faculty are accepting responsibility in the TA's professional training as well. (a) 1st time TAs should have limited (but escalating) responsibility; progressing from only mentoring, clerical, or technical tasks to more responsible ones such as grading, presenting an occasional lecture (planned with help from the supervising faculty and/or [CFE](#)), helping prepare tests or web sites, etc. (b) More experienced TAs should be given more responsibility where possible (e.g., responsibility for creating exams (or parts of exams), lectures, assignments, web sites, etc.).
  - (3) TAs are expected to reflect on their experience as a TA in each class (e.g., what they learned, what is needed to make the course function better, etc.) and communicate that to the supervising professor, the DGS, or Department Chair if appropriate.
  - (4) There is an expectation that TAs and professors will discuss and agree upon responsibilities, duties, work-loads, and performance standards.
  - (5) The TA work load is to average no more than 20 hours weekly. In some weeks this will be exceeded due to course requirements and others will require less.
  - (6) There may be the need to resolve potential disputes between a TA and supervising professor. In these cases the TA or professor should initially discuss the problems together or with the DGS (or Associate Chair, if the DGS is not appropriate). If warranted, the issues will be escalated to the Department Chair for arbitration.
  - (7) It is expected that potential exceptions may arise to any of these expectations and that some combination of the DGS, the TA, the supervising professor, and the department chair will pursue an appropriate remedy. In other words, expectations and responsibilities should be flexible.

### **Supervision, Evaluation, and Recognition**

- (1) There will be supervision and evaluation of all graduate students in teaching roles.
  - (a) Teaching Assistants
    - (i) Supervising faculty will observe and consult where appropriate and report the TA's overall performance in a brief note to the TA, Associate Chair and DGS. Graduate students are encouraged to use CFE teaching [resources](#) as well. (ii) Where appropriate, a standard departmental (qualitative) teaching evaluation survey (in addition to the usual quantitative course evaluation) will be administered to evaluate the TA's performance.
  - (b) Teaching Fellows
    - (i) A member of the departmental teaching committee will formally observe and evaluate at least one lecture and evaluate the course design, exams, etc. This teaching committee evaluator will create a written teaching performance comment/evaluation that will be given to the TF, the DGS, and department chair. (ii) A standard departmental (qualitative) teaching evaluation survey (in addition to the College's numerical course evaluation) will be administered to evaluate the TF's performance. (iii) Teaching Fellows will organize an evaluation of their teaching with the [CFE](#) including video-recording if appropriate.
- (2) Formal recognition will be encouraged for all TAs and TFs through annual graduate student teaching awards. Using formal evaluation and faculty observations, the departmental teaching committee (with help from supervising faculty) will also submit appropriate TAs and TFs to University-wide teaching prize competitions and [fellowships](#).

## APPENDIX 4 Exam Checklist

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ PID#: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Degree currently pursuing (MA or PhD): \_\_\_\_\_

**What semester do you plan to:**

- Take thesis or dissertation credits for the first time: \_\_\_\_\_
- Take your MA/PD comprehensive exams: \_\_\_\_\_
- [PhD only] Defend your PhD proposal: \_\_\_\_\_

Tentative committee composition: \_\_\_\_\_

Required courses taken to date, including currently enrolled (702/703/704): \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of credits taken or currently in progress: \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the planned process for the exams and/or proposal defense.** Include: any deviations from the above-outlined rules for exams and defenses, any reading lists to be prepared, any documents to be circulated before the exams, the duration and format of the exams, and (for PhD students) expectations for the proposal document and defense.

**Signed**

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

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

Director of Graduate Studies: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 5a**  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY**

**RECOMMENDATION TO BYPASS THE MASTER'S DEGREE**

**Student's Name: (please print)** \_\_\_\_\_

**PID#** \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

**Preliminary description of PhD dissertation project:**

**Speaking for the Committee, I recommend that this student bypass the Master's degree & pursue the doctoral degree.**

**Signed**

**Committee Chair\*:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Director of Graduate Studies:** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Under separate cover, Committee Chair should send a note to DGS explaining why the student has been recommended to bypass the MA degree and noting evidence of student preparedness and capabilities.**



