



# Geography & Environmental Studies

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO  
COLORADO SPRINGS

## Graduate Student Handbook

<https://ges.uccs.edu/>



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# Tables of Contents

Introduction

General Information

- Email Communication
- Planning your MA program
- Advisor
- Thesis Committee
- Graduate Director
- Annual Activities Report
- Thesis proposal
- Proposal Defense
- MA thesis
- Thesis defense
- Final graduation check
- GES colloquium series
- List of regular GES Graduate Faculty

Program Requirements

- Example program plan

Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities

Campus Resources

## **Introduction**

The Graduate Student Handbook offers students a guide to the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies (GES) Master of Arts (MA) program. This handbook does not detail the Graduate School requirements. Graduate School has specific requirements and deadlines that students should pay attention to, for more information on these go to

<https://graduateschool.uccs.edu/>

and

<https://graduateschool.uccs.edu/current-students/graduating-this-semester>

The GES MA requirements must be met in addition to the general requirements of the Graduate School. The purpose of this handbook is to assist students in understanding the steps and expectations to succeed in their graduate studies. This handbook should be used in combination with the guidelines provided by the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences and the Graduate School. For more information see:

<https://las.uccs.edu/>

## General Information

**Email** communication from the Department, Graduate School, and UCCS will only be sent to your UCCS email account. It is imperative that you check your UCCS email regularly.

**Program planning** is essential to success. Students should plan to complete their degree in a timely fashion. Ideally, students will complete their degree in 2-4 years. Five years is the standard limit for completion of the MA program. A sixth year is possible with a successful written petition to the GES Graduate Director and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. Graduate coursework that is more than six years old will need to be validated by the Graduate Director to be used towards the MA degree.

**The pre-assigned advisor** is the initial contact person for incoming graduate students. The advisor oversees research and the thesis committee, provides guidance on course selection, and approves all aspects of the graduate student's program. When funded by research support from the advisor, the advisor also serves as the immediate work supervisor.

The advisor and student relationship is an important dynamic. Although an initial advisor is assigned to each student, students may change their advisor. During Semester 1, students should make appointments to meet with faculty that share similar research interests and work to find an advisor who shares their research interests and with whom they anticipate a successful

student-advisor relationship. This professor must be a regular [member of the Graduate Faculty](#) in the department (GES). The student and advisor may choose to use a mentoring contract to clarify and formalize the student-advisor relationship. Students should communicate their progress to the advisor regularly and should meet with them a minimum of once per semester. If a student decides to change to a faculty member other than their initial assigned advisor, they must make sure to communicate with all faculty involved and the graduate director to discuss the change. Ultimately the decision rests with the student about advising, but faculty have the prerogative to agree to work with students or not.

**The thesis committee** provides guidance on research, reads the thesis, and is responsible for determining whether the thesis meets the expectations of the MA program. In semesters 1 and 2, students are encouraged to engage with additional (other than their assigned advisor) faculty members to seek out prospective thesis committee members. GES faculty members must constitute the majority of the thesis committee. Committees must consist of three members, with at least two of them being from the GES department. Students are encouraged to establish their thesis committee by the end of the first year in the program. One committee member (but not the advisor) can be included from another department at UCCS, another institution, or from NGOs, providing they meet the criteria and are added to the Graduate Faculty at UCCS.

**The graduate director** supervises and coordinates the graduate program. They serve as a department point of contact for prospective and current graduate students, provide guidance on program expectations, share reminders about upcoming deadlines, review student progress reports, and validate that the department requirements have been met.

### **Annual activities report**

This report briefly compiles students' achievements from the past year, including steps completed in the program (e.g. proposal defense), coursework presentations delivered, and any fellowships, grants, or awards received. The advisor reviews and signs this report, and the student submits the report electronically to the Graduate Director no later than April 5th. *Failure to submit two annual reports may result in dismissal from the program.*

**The thesis proposal** serves as a framework for the thesis research. In the proposal, students will articulate a clear research question, present a review of the existing literature on the thesis topic, describe the purpose, objectives, or hypotheses guiding the research, describe research methods, and establish a timeline toward completion. The proposal will be read and reviewed by the advisor, and then pending any necessary revisions, shared with the committee.

**The proposal defense** is an opportunity for students to meet with their committee to review and discuss their research objectives/questions, engagement with existing relevant literature, methods, and timeline. The proposal defense consists

of is a relatively casual conversation between the student and the graduate committee. The conversation is used to help ensure that the student has an approved research idea, approach, and plan. Refinement of the research idea, approach, and plan is the overarching goal for the proposal defense. Students should give the thesis committee ample time (a minimum of 10-14 days) to read the proposal prior to the thesis defense. The proposal must be defended successfully before students begin the research process.

**The MA thesis** should demonstrate the student's ability to perform original research. The thesis typically follows a monograph-style, and should be prepared according to the requirements of the Graduate School. The advisor provides feedback and comments on all initial versions of the thesis. Students should work with their advisor to create a schedule and plan for the writing and revising process, as some advisors will ask to review each chapter as it is drafted, while others may wait to see a complete full draft. Once the advisor indicates the thesis is ready to be defended, the student will share this version of the thesis with the full thesis committee. Students should give the thesis committee ample time (a minimum of 10-14 days) to read the thesis prior to the thesis defense.

The Graduate School has strict [guidelines for the formatting](#) of the document, and it is the student's responsibility to ensure that these guidelines are met. The thesis must be defended successfully before it can be submitted to the graduate school. Deadlines for defending the completed thesis are usually

approximately 4 weeks prior to the end of the semester, so it is important to plan ahead!

**The thesis defense** is a formal and public presentation of the MA student's research. There are four potential outcomes for the thesis defense:

- 1) pass
- 2) pass with minor revisions
- 3) pass with major/significant revisions
- 4) fail

When determining the defense timeline, begin by working backwards from the intended target date to ensure sufficient time for completing all necessary tasks. Students may not defend their thesis until the advisor agrees it is ready to be defended. A generous allowance for all committee members to review the document – a minimum of two weeks is a prudent guideline. The advisor should have already provided feedback on earlier drafts of the document before the thesis is distributed to the entire committee.

As you plan for degree completion, please remember that most faculty are on 9-month appointments and as such are not available for summer thesis defenses. Also, please pay close attention to the [Graduate School's deadlines](#) for graduation and thesis submission. *It is your responsibility to know and meet the graduate school deadlines.* Failure to meet the graduate school deadlines will result in a delay in graduation.

Once the thesis defense has been scheduled students must email the following information to the Graduate Director so that a thesis defense announcement can be made to the department and campus:

- Title of thesis
- Names of the faculty members on thesis committee
- Date of the defense
- Location of the defense

This information must be emailed to the Graduate Director at minimum 2 weeks prior to the defense date.

### **Final graduation check**

Each student must schedule a Final Graduation Check with the Graduate Director the semester prior to the semester they plan to graduate. The student needs to bring a printed copy of their most recent (unofficial) transcripts to the meeting with the Graduate Director.

At the beginning of the semester in which a student plans to graduate, a graduation card must be filed. Additionally students must submit the [Application for Admission to Candidacy](#) for an Advanced Degree to the Graduate Director a minimum of two weeks prior to the Graduate School deadline for programs to submit Application for Admission to Candidacy.

Please be aware of the Graduate School's deadlines for applying for graduation and thesis submission. These deadlines can be found [here](#).

## **GES colloquium series**

The department occasionally invites speakers to campus to present research. These events offer graduate students the opportunity to 1) engage with external scholars, 2) share their research ideas and receive feedback, 3) give and receive intellectual stimuli, 4) learn about research design and techniques, and 5) engage with faculty and invited speakers in a professional setting. Graduate students are expected to attend these events.

## **Program Requirements**

The GES MA degree requires 24 credit hours of coursework and 6 credit hours of thesis work, for a total of 30 credits. All graduate students are required to take:

- GES 5770: History & Nature of Geography (3 credit hours)
- GES 5010: Geographic Research Seminar (3 credit hours)
- GES 5000: Quantitative Methods (4 credit hours)
- GES 6000: Graduate Forum on Geographic Research & Professional Development (2 times, 1-credit hour each).
- GES 7000: Master's Thesis (6 credit hours)

Students who have taken an upper division statistics course during their undergraduate career may request a waiver for the GES 5000 requirement. To receive this waiver students must email the following documents with the Graduate Director:

- ❖ unofficial copy of transcript highlighting the semester the statistics course was taken and the grade
- ❖ syllabus from the statistics course which outlines the topics covered in the course or the official course description

Students will choose 5000-level courses to complete the remaining credit hours. Students may take a maximum of 6 credits at the 4000 level if the relevant courses are taught by UCCS Graduate Faculty. Please be aware that most GES 4000-level courses do not qualify; this primarily applies to courses offered by other departments that do not have 5000-level courses. Students may choose to do up to six credit hours of Independent Study (GES 9600) and up to three credit hours of Professional Experience.

A maximum of six credits from outside GES may count towards the MA degree. These credit hours must be taught by graduate faculty. It is the student's responsibility to verify with the Graduate Director that courses taught outside of GES are taught by graduate faculty.

All students must maintain a 3.0 GPA each semester to remain in good academic standing. A grade of B- or higher is required in GES 5010 to remain in the MA program. A grade of B- is the lowest grade accepted towards the degree.

### **Example Program Plan**

The table on the following page shows the MA program course requirements and recommended actions students should take to ensure timely completion of the MA degree.

The plan shown in the table below assumes the:

- student starts the MA program in the fall semester
- student needs to take GES 5000
- student is full-time
- student will graduate in 2.5 years

<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Semester 2</b>
<p>Required courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● GES 5770: History &amp; Nature of Geography (3 credit hours)</li> <li>● GES 5000: Quantitative Methods (4 credit hours)</li> <li>● GES 6000: Graduate Forum on Geographic Research &amp; Professional Development (1 credit hour)</li> </ul>	<p>Required courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● GES 5010: Geographic Research Seminar (3 credit hours)</li> <li>● 3 additional credit hours at the 5000-level</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Meet with your Advisor to discuss your ideas for your thesis and the courses you plan to take during the program</li> <li>● Meet with other GES faculty to introduce yourself and discuss your research ideas/interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establish Thesis Committee</li> <li>● Begin writing thesis proposal and share drafts with Advisor</li> <li>● Submit Annual Activities Report to Graduate Director</li> </ul>
<b>Semester 3</b>	<b>Semester 4</b>
<p>Required courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 6 credit hours at the 5000-level</li> </ul>	<p>Required courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 6 credit hours at the 5000-level</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Once the thesis proposal is approved by the Advisor, share the thesis proposal with the Thesis Committee</li> <li>● Schedule thesis proposal defense</li> <li>● Upon successful defense of thesis proposal, begin research process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Write thesis and share with Advisor</li> <li>● Schedule a Final Graduation Check with the Graduate Director</li> <li>● Submit Annual Activities Report to Graduate Director</li> </ul>
<b>Semester 5</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● GES 7000: Master's Thesis credit hours</li> <li>● GES 6000: Graduate Forum on Geographic Research &amp; Professional Development (1 credit hour)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Submit Application for Admission to Candidacy for an Advanced Degree by the deadline</li> <li>● Share thesis with Thesis Committee 2 weeks prior to Defense</li> <li>● Schedule &amp; defend thesis prior to graduate school deadline</li> <li>● Upon successful defense of the thesis, submit the thesis to graduate school graduate school deadline</li> </ul>	

## **List of regular GES Graduate Faculty**

Dr. Christine Biermann

Email: [cbierman@uccs.edu](mailto:cbierman@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2037

Dr. Diep Dao

Email: [tdao@uccs.edu](mailto:tdao@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2035

Dr. Cerian Gibbes

Email: [cgibbes@uccs.edu](mailto:cgibbes@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2017

Dr. John Harner

Email: [jharner@uccs.edu](mailto:jharner@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2013

Dr. Dylan Harris

Email: [dharr14@uccs.edu](mailto:dharr14@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2033

Dr. David Havlick

Email: [dhavlick@uccs.edu](mailto:dhavlick@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2015

Dr. Curt Holder

Email: [cholder@uccs.edu](mailto:cholder@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2031

Dr. Irina Kopteva

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Dr. Rebecca Theobald

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Dr. Emily Skop

Email: [eskop@uccs.edu](mailto:eskop@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2021

Dr. Brandon Vogt

Email: [bvogt@uccs.edu](mailto:bvogt@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2011

Dr. Fuzhen Yin

Email: [fyin@uccs.edu](mailto:fyin@uccs.edu) Office: Columbine Hall, rm. 2022

## **Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities**

Graduate students have the right...

- to a rigorous preparation for their future careers
- to appropriate acknowledgment relevant to the level of contribution on scholarly works
- to be involved and aware of decision-making processes regarding issues that affect their progress to degree
- to timely communication when faculty are on contract
- to specific and concrete requirements for degree completion
- to have their progress toward achieving an advanced degree be evaluated in an objective manner
- to regular feedback and mentoring as jointly determined appropriate and feasible by the student and advisor

Graduate students have the responsibility...

- to respect and uphold all relevant university policies
- to engage with the faculty and staff in a professional manner
- to uphold accepted research ethics and norms
- to communicate clearly and in a timely manner
- to fulfill assigned teaching and research obligations
- to commit the necessary time and effort towards ensuring degree completion

- to take initiative in their education and professional development
- to actively contribute to the development of mentor relationships with faculty members
- to be proactive about asking questions about academic requirements, expectations, and norms
- to contribute to the GES MA graduate community

## **Leave of Absence**

If a student needs to take a break from the MA program for longer than one semester, the student can request a leave of absence (LOA) from the program by filing the Leave of Absence paperwork with the Graduate Director. If a student is considering taking a LOA they are encouraged to meet with both the Graduate Director and their advisor to discuss the circumstances. This communication ensures the faculty and MA program have the information needed to provide support to the student.

## **Campus Resources**

- Department of Geography & Environmental Studies  
<https://ges.uccs.edu/>
- UCCS Graduate School, Email: [gradinfo@uccs.edu](mailto:gradinfo@uccs.edu)  
<https://graduateschool.uccs.edu/>
- Kraemer Family Library <https://kfl.uccs.edu/>  
GES Library Liaison: Joel Tonyan, [jtonyan@uccs.edu](mailto:jtonyan@uccs.edu)
- CCS Writing Center Columbine 316  
<https://writingcenter.uccs.edu/>
- Financial Aid: Cragmor Hall, room 201.  
<https://finaid.uccs.edu/contact-financial-aid>
- Gallogly Recreation and Wellness Center  
<https://recwellness.uccs.edu/>