

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND SUSTAINABILITY GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Department of Geography and Sustainability

College of Arts and Sciences
The University of Tennessee-Knoxville

2026–2027



Table of Contents

WELCOME TO THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND SUSTAINABILITY!.....	1
1. INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 Introduction to the Graduate School	2
1.2 Purpose of this Handbook	2
1.3 Regulations Governing Graduate Students	2
1.4 Graduate Administration in the Department of Geography and Sustainability	2
1.4.1 Graduate Admissions Committee	3
1.4.2 Graduate Program Committee	3
1.4.3 Support Staff	3
2. GENERAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACULTY AND ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS	3
2.1 Duties and Responsibilities of Faculty	3
2.2 Duties and Responsibilities of Graduate Students	4
3. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND APPLICATION PROCEDURES	5
3.1 Introduction	5
3.2 Admission Requirements	5
3.3 The Application Process	5
3.4 Admission Deadlines	6
3.5 Information for International Applicants.....	7
3.6 Matriculation.....	7
3.7 Accepting/Declining an Assistantship	7
3.8 International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Testing Program.....	8
3.9 Transfer Credits	8
3.10 Five-Year BA/BS–MS Program in Geography	9
4. FINANCIAL SUPPORT	10
4.1 Graduate Assistantships.....	10
4.2 Fellowships.....	11
4.3 Loans Administered by the Financial Aid Office.....	11
4.4 Employment.....	11
4.5 Travel and Travel Reimbursement	12
5. REGISTRATION AND ADVISING.....	12
5.1. Registration Procedures and Timelines.....	13
5.1.1 Incoming Graduate Students.....	13
5.1.2 Returning Graduate Students.....	13
5.2 Types of Courses and Course Credit	13
5.3 Course Load	14
5.4 Geography 515 (Topics in Quantitative Geography) and Geography 516 (Topics in Qualitative Geography)	14
5.5 Geography 502 (Use of Facilities).....	14
5.6 Geography 500 (Thesis) and Geography 600 (Dissertation) Hours	15
5.7 Advising	15
5.8 Independent Study Courses.....	15
6. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS	15
6.1 The Master's Degree.....	16

6.1.1 The Master's Committee	16
6.1.2 The M.S. Program of Study.....	16
6.1.3 Changes in the Master's Committee and the Program of Study	16
6.1.4 Requirements for the M.S. Degree.....	17
6.1.5 Advancement to Candidacy for the M.S. Degree	18
6.1.6 The M.S. Proposal	18
6.1.7 The M.S. Thesis.....	18
6.1.8 Time Required to Complete the M.S. Program.....	19
6.2 The Ph.D. Degree.....	19
6.2.1 The Doctoral Committee.....	19
6.2.2 The Doctoral Dissertation Committee.....	20
6.2.3 Course and Residency Requirements.....	20
6.2.4 Language and Techniques	21
6.2.5 The Dissertation Proposal.....	21
6.2.6 The Doctoral Dissertation	21
6.2.7 Time Limitations for Completion of the Ph.D. Degree	23
6.2.8 Candidacy for the Ph.D. Degree	23
7. EXAMINATIONS	23
7.1 M.S. Students	23
7.1.1 Oral Examination, M.S. Thesis	23
7.1.2 Oral Examinations, M.S. Non-Thesis	23
7.2 Ph.D. Students	23
7.2.1 Ph.D. Written General Examination.....	24
7.2.2 Ph.D. Comprehensive Oral Examination over the Ph.D. Program and Dissertation Proposal.....	25
7.2.3 Ph.D. Final Oral Examination.....	25
7.3 Examinations During the Summer Semester.....	26
7.4 Failure of an Examination	26
8. STANDARDS, PROBLEMS, AND APPEALS.....	26
8.1 Student Rights and Responsibilities	26
8.2 Grades.....	26
8.3 Minimum GPA Requirements for Retention.....	26
8.4 Evaluations.....	27
8.5 Progress in Degree Programs	27
8.6 Changing Advisors	27
8.7 Exceptions to Requirements and Policies	28
8.8 Probation	28
8.9 Student Termination	28
8.10 Appeals Procedures	29
8.11 Early Termination/Withdrawal	31
APPENDIX 1: THESES AND DISSERTATIONS.....	32
A1.1 Introduction	32
A1.2 Editorial Assistance.....	32
A1.3 The Proposal	33
A1.4 Contents of the Proposal	33
A1.5 Graphics.....	33
APPENDIX 2: GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND ASSOCIATES	34

A2.1 Definitions of Titles	34
A2.2 Office Hours	34
A2.3 Duration of Assistantships	34
A2.4 Teaching Responsibilities	34
APPENDIX 3: DEPARTMENTAL AWARDS	37
A3.1 The Robert G. Long Outstanding Graduate Student Award	37
A3.2 Primary Lead Publication Award	37
A3.3 Exceptional Professional Accomplishment Award	38
A3.4 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award	38
A3.5 Outstanding Teaching Associate Award	38
A3.6 Bruce Ralston Geospatial Achievement Award	39
APPENDIX 4: DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES	40
A4.1 The Department Office	40
A4.2 Departmental Communications	40
A4.3 Office Space	40
A4.4 Telephones	40
A4.5 Instructional and Research Laboratories	40
APPENDIX 5: GLOSSARY	41
A5.1 Doctoral Committee	41
A5.2 Doctoral Dissertation Committee	41
A5.3 Examination Committee	41
A5.5 Graduate Program Committee (GPC)	42
A5.6 Master's Committee	42
A5.7 Review Committee	42
APPENDIX 6: MASTER'S PROGRAM CHECKLIST	43
APPENDIX 7: PH.D. PROGRAM CHECKLIST	45
APPENDIX 8: DEPARTMENTAL FORMS	47
FORM A: Request For Change In Master's Or Doctoral Committee	48
FORM B: Certification Of Approval Of A Proposal For A Thesis For The Master Of Science Degree In Geography	49
FORM C: Certification Of Approval Of A Proposal For A Dissertation For The Doctor Of Philosophy Degree In Geography	50
FORM D: Agreement To Serve As Special Field Examiners For The Ph.D. Degree	51
FORM E: Report Of Examination Results	52
FORM F: Application For Permission To Register For Independent Study Courses	53
FORM G: Petition For Exception To Department Policy	54
APPENDIX 9: GRADUATE SCHOOL FORMS	55
A9.1 Admission to Candidacy Application: Master's Degree	56
A9.2 Doctoral Committee Form	57
A9.3 Admission to Candidacy Application: Doctoral Degree	58
A9.4 Scheduling Defense of Dissertation Form	60
A9.5 Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form	61
APPENDIX 10: IMPORTANT WEB SITES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS	63
APPENDIX 11: GENERATIVE AI POLICY	64
A11.1. Purpose And Guiding Principles	64
A11.2. Scope And Relationship to Other Requirements	64

A11.3. Core Requirements.....64

A11.4. Examples Of Acceptable, Conditional, And Unacceptable Use.....65

A11.5. Data Privacy, Intellectual Property, And Geographic Risk67

A11.6. Disclosure and Acknowledgement.....68

A11.7. Examinations And Course Assignments68

A11.8. Accountability And Review68

WELCOME TO THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND SUSTAINABILITY!

Welcome to the graduate program in the Department of Geography and Sustainability. This handbook has been developed over the years by the Geography and Sustainability faculty, with helpful feedback from graduate students, the College of Arts & Sciences, and the Graduate School. It is an important document, as it is the primary reference for the policies, requirements, and procedures for our graduate program.

The Geography and Sustainability faculty would like every student to find this graduate program stimulating, challenging, and rewarding. As is true for most opportunities in life, those who step up with enthusiasm, engagement, and hard work stand to gain the most. We expect students to take accountability for their progress in this program, including becoming familiar with the contents of this handbook, and bearing responsibility for following rules, practices, and timelines presented here and within the Graduate Catalog. At the same time, the Geography and Sustainability Department pledges to honor the letter and spirit of this handbook as it creates a student-centered environment committed to facilitating personal and professional growth.

The department fosters an internal culture of embracing diversity, and of respecting and learning from differences. The good efforts and many achievements of our diverse graduate student body contributes to the long-standing, excellent reputation of Geography and Sustainability at the University of Tennessee. We welcome the unique set of strengths, experiences, and perspectives you bring to the program, and look forward to working with you.

You are encouraged to retain a copy of this handbook during your time as a UT graduate student and refer to it as questions or concerns arise. Of course, no one handbook can cover every conceivable issue or situation. Thus, feel free to approach the Director of Graduate Studies, the Department Head, and your own graduate advisor for assistance.



Ron Kalafsky
Department Head



Qiusheng Wu
Director of Graduate Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Graduate School

In order to serve the mission and vision of the Graduate School and preserve the integrity of Graduate Programs at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, information related to the process of graduate education in each department is to be provided for all graduate students. Based on Best Practices offered by the Council of Graduate Schools, it is important that detailed articulation of the information specific to the graduate degrees offered in each department/program be disseminated. The Department Graduate Handbook does not deviate from established Graduate School Policies (tiny.utk.edu/grad-policies) noted in the Graduate Catalog, but rather provides the specific ways in which those policies are carried out.

1.2 Purpose of this Handbook

The Handbook provides important information to graduate students to ensure they (1) know the departmental policies governing graduate education; (2) are aware of the procedures required by the Department and the Graduate School for timely progression through one's graduate program; (3) are informed of important departmental deadlines to ensure timely graduation; and (4) know where key resources are located in our department and on campus to lend support all through one's graduate program. All departmental forms required for the various stages in one's graduate career here in the Department of Geography and Sustainability are provided at the end of this handbook.

1.3 Regulations Governing Graduate Students

Graduate students are expected to be aware of and satisfy all regulations governing their work and study at the university." Students should be directed to the Graduate Catalog (tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog), to Hilltopics (hilltopics.utk.edu), and to the publications on the Appeals Procedure (gradschool.utk.edu/graduate-student-life/understanding-your-rights-and-obligations).

1.4 Graduate Administration in the Department of Geography and Sustainability

The Graduate Program in the department is overseen by the Director of Graduate Studies, assigned by the Department Head. The Director performs the following duties: (1) serves as the contact person with the Graduate School; (2) monitors department admission and policies; (3) works with program faculty on recruitment efforts; (4) updates the department's Graduate Handbook yearly; (5) tracks assistantships (types, amounts, and responsibilities for each position); (6) coordinates the departmental awards issued to graduate students; (7) assists applicants and students with Graduate School and other university awards and fellowships, working closely with the department's Fellowships and Scholarships Committee; (8) monitors student progress through the graduate program; (9) ensures that students with a background deficiency take the required coursework to remove the deficiency; (10) maintains a list of all degrees awarded during the academic year; and (11) monitors OPIc test scores and follow-up examinations.

1.4.1 Graduate Admissions Committee

The Graduate Admissions Committee (GAC) is charged with reviewing all incoming applications directed to the Department of Geography and Sustainability by the Office of Graduate and International Admissions. The committee consists of a Chair and four faculty members appointed by the Department Head. The GAC carefully reviews the required material in all applications that arrive throughout the fall and spring semesters; makes recommendations on whether to admit or not; makes recommendations on whether or not to fund through a departmental Graduate Teaching Assistantship; and makes recommendations on which applicants are to be nominated for Graduate School Fellowships and other departmental assistance (working closely with the department's Fellowships and Scholarships Committee).

1.4.2 Graduate Program Committee

The Graduate Program Committee (GPC) is charged with developing and implementing guidelines that help govern and monitor the timely progress of a graduate student towards his or her degree. The committee consists of a Chair and four faculty members appointed by the Department Head, and a graduate student representative selected by the graduate students. The GPC oversees, changes, or implements procedures and policies outlined in the Graduate Handbook; reviews Programs of Study for all first-semester graduate students; reviews changes in a student's Program Committee or Program of Study; reviews proposed changes in the graduate curriculum; and reviews appeals by graduate students to deviations to the policies outlined in this Graduate Handbook.

1.4.3 Support Staff

Graduate students, the Graduate Program Committee, and the Graduate Admissions Committee are supported by clerical help from a designated person in the Department's main office serving as the Graduate Coordinator.

2. GENERAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACULTY AND ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS

2.1 Duties and Responsibilities of Faculty

Faculty members of the Department of Geography and Sustainability are fully committed to the education and professional success of all graduate students. All faculty members therefore closely monitor the progress of the graduate students they advise to ensure all university, Graduate School, and departmental guidelines are followed to ensure timely graduation. Faculty members have important responsibilities to graduate students, which include:

- reviewing the applications of graduate students,
- teaching graduate-level courses,

- involving graduate students in research projects, and
- serving as advisers to help students plan their curriculum and their careers.

Faculty members also provide feedback on graduate student progress through the Graduate Program Committee. If students are not performing satisfactorily in their graduate studies, they will be informed of that decision and the Department Head will work with those students to help them evaluate their goals and decide on an alternative study/career path.

2.2 Duties and Responsibilities of Graduate Students

Every graduate student is expected to meet all the requirements set forth in the current Graduate Catalog and all the other requirements specified by the department. These are subject to change; graduate students will be notified of modifications in departmental rules and procedures.

Graduate students are expected to attend their classes and to successfully meet all the requirements of their courses. Graduate students are also strongly encouraged to participate in departmental activities. Graduate students serve on some department committees. Graduate students should consider participation in professionally oriented groups. These include academic and professional associations such as the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers (SEDAAG) and Association of American Geographers (AAG). Many opportunities exist for engagement with campus and local chapters of organizations such as the Graduate Student Senate (<https://gss.utk.edu/>) and the department's Graduate Association of Research Geographers.

Students with Graduate Teaching Assistant or Associate appointments bear extra responsibilities because they are also part of the teaching faculty. All GTAs are responsible for promptly contacting the faculty member with whom they will work during a semester so that they can be informed of their duties and responsibilities. Graduate Teaching Associates, who teach their own classes, are responsible for lecturing and conducting their classes as effectively as possible. Grading of quizzes and papers should be completed promptly, enabling students to learn from their mistakes and the teacher's suggestions and comments. If a Graduate Teaching Associate must miss a class lecture for some reason, they must find someone to teach the class and inform the appropriate faculty member in charge of the overall course of their absence. Graduate Teaching Assistants and Associates in Geography 101–102 and 131–132 are expected to begin their duties on the first day of meetings specified for their courses and to adhere to all university regulations.

More detailed information on the responsibilities of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Associates is given in Appendix 2 at the back of this handbook.

3. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND APPLICATION PROCEDURES

3.1 Introduction

The department offers both the Master of Science and the Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Geography. Both degrees require a sound and reasonably broad knowledge of the subject matter and concepts of geography, and of the skills required in geographical research, and both require specialization. The Ph.D. degree is primarily oriented toward research. Admission to the Ph.D. degree program is limited to those who demonstrate a particular aptitude and affinity for the originality of thought and the ability to conduct research that may lead to significant advances in geography. Applicants for the M.S program with an exceptional record of research or teaching can be considered for the Fast-track Ph.D. degree program by the Graduate Program Committee and potential advisors. To be considered, the potential advisor must submit a recommendation letter to the Graduate Program Committee for review. The final decision for approval is made by the Department Head.

3.2 Admission Requirements

General procedures for admission to graduate degree programs at the University are outlined in the *Graduate Catalog* (available online at tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog and <http://catalog.utk.edu/index.php>). Requirements for admission to a graduate degree program in geography normally include: (1) completion of a bachelor's degree; (2) an overall grade-point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale; and (3) favorable recommendations from three persons acquainted with the student's previous academic work (see <https://gradschool.utk.edu/admissions/applying-to-graduate-school/admission-requirements/>)

Students who do not meet these requirements may apply for non-degree status or may be admitted on a provisional basis for one semester (see *Graduate Catalog*). Note that admission to a degree program and admission to candidacy for the degree is not the same. Credentials of those admitted must clearly indicate the promise of the ability to conduct original scholarship. A Master's Degree in geography or in a closely related field is expected prior to admission to the Ph.D. program. Probationary admission into our Ph.D. program is possible but rare.

3.3 The Application Process

Applying for admission to a graduate degree program in geography requires that the applicant submit her/his application online to the Office of Graduate Admissions at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/admissions/>. The applicant will not be considered for admission to a graduate degree program in geography until the Graduate School certifies that the applicant meets Graduate School requirements.

To apply for admission, the following must be submitted to Graduate Admissions through the online application submission process:

1. The completed Graduate Application for Admission

2. The non-refundable processing fee is payable by credit or debit card at the time the online application is submitted.
3. One unofficial transcript (official transcripts required after being admitted) from all colleges and universities attended, except The University of Tennessee-Knoxville.
4. For applicants whose native language is not English: self-reported TOEFL or IELTS scores (official scores required prior to admission)

3.4 Admission Deadlines

Admission is for a specific semester. If you do not enter that semester, your application and materials will remain on file for one year. After that time, you must repeat the application process. Contact the Office of Graduate Admissions if you need to change the entry term.

Domestic Applicants

Domestic applicants may apply up to the desired term of entry. However, application materials must be complete to be considered for admission. It is recommended to apply at least nine months prior to the desired term of entry and allow at least 4–6 weeks for an application to reach the department.

International Applicants

International applicants are required to submit additional documentation for the issuance of the I-20. The following deadlines must be met.

Term	Application Deadline File	Completion Deadline*
Fall	February 1	May 15
Spring	June 15	October 1
Summer	October 15	February 15

* File Completion Deadline means that by the date listed, admission must be granted and copies of passport, financial documentation, and degree confirmations must be received by this date.

Fall Semester: To be assured consideration for first-round departmental funding offers (Graduate Teaching Assistantships) for Fall Semester, all application materials for domestic and international applicants must be received by **December 15th** (please note that this date precedes the deadline for the Office of Graduate Admissions of February 1st). The absolute deadline for receiving completed application packages is May 15th. Applications for funding received after that date will be considered as opportunities become available. Because funding offers are made on an annual basis, we do not normally offer initial funding to students who wish to enter the program in Spring or Summer Semesters.

Summer Semester: The Department of Geography and Sustainability does not normally admit new graduate students for Summer Semester.

3.5 Information for International Applicants

Special university deadlines apply because of Visa requirements. Consult the International Application Guide available on the Office of Graduate and International Admissions website (<https://gradschool.utk.edu/admissions/applying-to-graduate-school/admissions-for-international-students/>) for current rules. The Department of Geography and Sustainability cannot act upon the application until the Office of Graduate and International Admissions has declared that the applicant is eligible for admission to the University. The Office of Graduate Admissions will not process the application until it has received all required documentation and the required application fee. The Department cannot pay this application fee for the applicant.

3.6 Matriculation

If there is no record of an applicant's matriculation within approximately six months of the date for which they have been admitted to a graduate degree program, or if the application remains incomplete following the date of intent to matriculate, the Office of Graduate Admissions is likely to place the application on hold. If the applicant decides to change his or her matriculation date, they should inform that office prior to the date originally noted on the application form.

3.7 Accepting/Declining an Assistantship

The University of Tennessee–Knoxville adheres to the following resolution by the Council of Graduate Schools:

“Acceptance of an offer of financial support (such as a graduate scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, or assistantship) for the next academic year by a prospective or enrolled graduate student completes an agreement that both student and graduate school expect to honor. In that context, the conditions affecting such offers and their acceptance must be defined carefully and understood by all parties.

Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of this Resolution. In those instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment at any time through April 15. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15 commits the student to first inform the program that they are withdrawing or resigning from the offer of financial support that they previously had accepted. Starting in Fall 2020, applicants are no longer required to obtain a formal release from the program whose offer they accepted, either before or after the April 15 deadline. It is further agreed by the institutions and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this Resolution or a link to the URL should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer.”

3.8 International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Testing Program

The [ITA Testing Program](#) (formerly the SPEAK® Testing Program) was instituted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1983 as a response to a mandate from the Tennessee General Assembly requiring that all instructional personnel be proficient in spoken English. The program based upon the required levels of oral proficiency upon the ILR/ETS/ACTFL rating scale. The SPEAK® Test, created by ETS, has been retired, and the testing program now uses the ACTFL OPIc (Oral Proficiency Interview by Computer). All incoming graduate students whose native language is not English **must** take the OPIc test administered by the Graduate School at the beginning of their first semester at UTK. The Department will then assign them to Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) duties based on the OPIc test score they receive. The Department will monitor if these students encounter problems with their GTA duties. Throughout their assignment as a GTA, the students stay at the level of GTA duties that is consistent with their OPIc test score.

The OPIc test scores range from Novice Low (lowest) to Superior (highest). There are three passing categories and one non-passing category of the OPIc scores. Students who score below an Advanced High (AH) must take the test every year until they reach an AH. All students whose native language is not English must re-take the OPIc test to improve their scores until achieving the level of Advanced High (AH) or Superior, i.e., Unconditionally Approved for Classroom Teaching. The tests are given three times a year in August, January, and April. The student cannot be promoted to a higher level of GTA duties (e.g., teaching a lab rather than assisting with lectures) unless they receive a higher OPIc test score. See the [OPIc test website](#) for more information about scheduling, requirements, and interpretation of the test scores.

Effective Fall 2025, all newly appointed Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) must achieve an Advanced High (AH) rating on the OPIc test within three attempts. Failure to do so will result in departmental probation. If a student does not achieve the AH rating after a fourth attempt, their GTA funding may be subject to termination.

For GTAs who entered the graduate program prior to Fall 2025, a transitional policy applies. These students will be placed on probation if they fail to achieve an AH rating after five attempts. If the AH level is not attained after a sixth attempt, they may become ineligible for continued GTA funding, pending a recommendation from the Graduate Program Committee.

3.9 Transfer Credits

As stated in the Graduate Catalog, "Courses taken at another institution may be considered for transfer into a master's or EdS program as determined by the committee and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. At the doctoral level, courses are not officially transferred although they may be used to meet degree requirements. Where a requirement has been met through course work in another program, the student may petition the academic unit for a waiver of the requirement at the doctoral level. Official transcripts must be sent directly to the Graduate School from all institutions previously attended before any credit will be considered." In the Department of Geography and Sustainability, M.S. level

coursework taken at another university will not count towards satisfying the minimum hour requirements (30 credit hours) for the M.S. degree program. However, certain courses will be considered for meeting other degree requirements.

3.10 Five-Year BA/BS–MS Program in Geography

The Department of Geography & Sustainability at the University of Tennessee offers a Five-Year BA/BS-MS program for highly motivated and academically outstanding students who are passionate about understanding and analyzing geographic issues. This program offers students the opportunity to earn both a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS) degree and a Master of Science (MS) degree in Geography within a five-year timeframe. The program is designed to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and advanced research experience required for a successful career in geography, sustainability, and/or GIST research and services in a wide array of governmental, NGO, and private sectors. The core component of the program is that qualified students can apply up to 9 credit hours of graduate courses toward both their undergraduate and graduate degrees. This not only accelerates their academic journey but also enhances their research and analytical capabilities.

Eligibility and Admission

- Students must have a declared major within the Department of Geography & Sustainability.
- Students must have an overall GPA of 3.0 in required coursework for admission to the program.
- Conditional admission may be granted after the completion of 60 hours of coursework fulfilling requirements for the BA in Geography or Sustainability or a BS in GIST.
- Full admission to the program may be granted after the completion of 90 hours of required coursework for the BA in Geography or Sustainability or a BS in GIST with a minimum GPA of 3.0.

Admission Process

- *Initial Consultation:* Begin a conversation with the Undergraduate Academic Advisor to discuss eligibility.
- *Meeting with the Director of Undergraduate Studies:* If eligible, meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to explore potential faculty advisors.
- *Meeting with Potential Faculty Advisor:* Once you have identified a potential faculty advisor, arrange a meeting to discuss your academic interests and research goals.
- *Meeting with Director of Graduate Studies:* Once a potential faculty advisor is identified, students will meet with the Director of Graduate Studies to discuss the graduate application process.
- *Application Submission:* Submit the graduate school application. Please note that the application will be reviewed by the Graduate Admission Committee and the student's potential faculty advisor, but there is no guarantee of admission into the graduate program.

Coursework

Students, once conditionally admitted to the program, may take up to 9 credit hours of approved graduate-level Geography & Sustainability courses that count towards both their BA or BS, and MS degrees. All courses taken for graduate credit must be approved by the student's academic advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies. Students must also request permission from the Graduate School to take approved courses for graduate credit and follow the regular admission process for the Geography & Sustainability graduate program.

Faculty Mentorship

Students are required to obtain a commitment from a faculty member in the Geography and Sustainability Department to serve as their major professor for the MS portion of the program. The major professor will act as a mentor and advisor throughout the MS degree.

Academic Advising

Students in the Five-Year BA/BS-MS program will receive specialized academic advising to ensure a smooth transition between their undergraduate and graduate studies. Students enrolled in this program are strongly encouraged to pursue the non-thesis M.S. option, which is designed to support a timely and structured path to graduation while accommodating students' professional goals and accelerated course schedules.

4. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

4.1 Graduate Assistantships

An assistantship is an appointment as a student employee, which offers a financial payment to a graduate student for part-time work in teaching, administration, or research. Appointments are normally on a one-fourth or one-half time basis. Four types of assistantships exist:

1. Graduate Assistant (GA): appointed to perform various types of duties other than those related directly to teaching or research.
2. Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA): works under the direct supervision of regular faculty members and may be assigned only to duties related directly to instruction.
3. Graduate Research Assistant (GRA): performs duties in support of university research, which may or may not relate directly to the student's thesis or dissertation.
4. Graduate Teaching Associate: an advanced graduate student who has been given primary responsibility for teaching undergraduate courses, including the assignment of final grades.

Although the department has Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) positions available each semester and may also have Graduate Teaching Associate positions, these are highly competitive. Renewal for these positions occurs on a yearly basis, but students who make satisfactory progress toward their degrees and

who make satisfactory scores on their evaluations (student and departmental) are recommended for continued funding. The Department of Geography and Sustainability will provide graduate teaching assistantship or associateship support for up to 2 years for M.S. students and 4 years for Ph.D. students admitted with funding, provided the student performs acceptably in GTA/GRA duties and makes satisfactory progress towards their degree. This consists of timely approval of the student's proposal and successfully passing the student's comprehensive examinations. The Department will not provide GTA funding past 2 years for MS students and 4 years for PhD students.

Graduate Research Assistantships depend on the availability of funds through funded research awarded to one or more members of our faculty or staff. Incoming students may be recruited to work on a specific research project by a faculty member and therefore be awarded a Graduate Research Assistantship.

According to the [Graduate School Academic Policies](#), **the maximum length of time a graduate student may hold a graduate assistantship is three years for master's students, and five years for doctoral students.** For example, if a doctoral student has already received three years of support as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA), they would be eligible for a maximum of two additional years of Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) funding. Requests to extend these limits must be submitted in writing by the department to the Dean of Graduate School. Standard degree completion timelines—six years for a master's program and eight years for a doctoral program—also apply to all graduate assistants.

4.2 Fellowships

The Graduate School at the University of Tennessee offers several fellowships to incoming graduate students, including Graduate School Fellowships, Diversity Enhancement Fellowships, and J. Wallace & Katie Dean Graduate Fellowships. Additional fellowships for returning graduate students include the UTK-ORNL Distinguished Fellowship and the Yates Dissertation Fellowships. More information on these fellowships can be obtained from the Graduate School Fellowship website, which also lists external fellowships available (<http://gradschool.utk.edu/fellowships.shtml>). Qualified graduate students are also encouraged to apply for fellowships from sources external to the University of Tennessee.

4.3 Loans Administered by the Financial Aid Office

The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships on the university campus (Student Services Building Room 115 or One Stop Student Service at Hodges Library Ground Floor) provides a wide range of services and provides information on loans available to graduate students, including Federal Stafford Loans, Federal Perkins Loans, and Graduate Student PLUS Loans. For more information, visit <https://onestop.utk.edu/loans>.

4.4 Employment

The student should recognize that being a graduate student is itself a part- or full-time job, and that considerable commitment (in time and effort) and dedication are needed if one wishes to earn a degree in the expected amount of time (2 years for M.S., 4 years for Ph.D.). Most graduate students in the Department of Geography and Sustainability are supported by 50% time (20 hours per week) Graduate

Assistantships or other campus employment. Students awarded a 50% time assistantship can only work additional hours on the University of Tennessee payroll with permission from the Dean of the Graduate School. Students on 50% appointments are strongly discouraged from additional off-campus employment because such employment could delay timely progress toward the graduate degree. Graduate students without assistantships and who hold on- or off-campus jobs should consider committing no more than 20 hours per week to the job. In general, graduate students without assistantships and who are employed in full-time jobs off-campus will find it difficult to graduate in a timely manner, and the department requires that such students stay in regular contact with the department and his or her advisor.

4.5 Travel and Travel Reimbursement

We encourage graduate students to present their research at professional meetings. Funds to defray the costs of travel to meetings as well as research travel are sometimes available from department, college, or other University sources, including grants managed by faculty advisors. All travel funds that run through the University must be spent in accordance with the University of Tennessee's official Travel Policy statement, located at the Treasurer's Office website (<https://finance.tennessee.edu/travel/>). Graduate students who plan travel for research or to meetings and have or expect to have some support from University sources should check the university's published travel policy and confer well in advance with the Accounting Specialist in our Main Office (and with their advisor if the source is a faculty grant) about the necessary forms and procedures that apply in their situation. Whether in-state or out-of-state, all travelers must file a Travel Request Form (T-18) PRIOR to traveling. The form is available at <https://finance.tennessee.edu/travel/forms/>.

The Graduate Student Senate in cooperation with the Dean of Students and the Dean of Graduate Studies awards funding for graduate and professional students to travel, present work, and participate at scholarly conferences and events. Three travel award announcements are made throughout the year, designed to roughly coincide with the academic term periods. These awards are based on merit and are given to provide partial reimbursement of certain allowable expenses such as transportation, lodging and registration expenses. Applications are considered by a committee composed of graduate students, faculty members, and university administrators. For more information and access to the Application Form, please visit: <https://gss.utk.edu/travel-awards/information/>.

5. REGISTRATION AND ADVISING

Continuous registration in the Master's or Doctoral Degree programs is required to ensure timely graduation. Students who do not enroll for fall or spring semester at any point before their graduation must seek re-admission to the Graduate School. Ph.D. students who have been advanced to candidacy are required to enroll every semester, including summer.

5.1. Registration Procedures and Timelines

5.1.1 Incoming Graduate Students

Graduate students beginning their first semester in the Department of Geography and Sustainability graduate program are expected to fulfill the necessary procedures that will ensure a smooth transition into our graduate program, including setting up a university Net ID and password (see <https://oit.utk.edu/accounts/netid/>). In mid-summer, students will receive a letter from the department that gives detailed instructions on registration procedures, and these should be followed fully.

Although the Graduate School sends a letter that recommends the incoming student contact his or her advisor concerning courses they should take in Fall Semester, the Department of Geography and Sustainability requires first-semester students to be advised by an advisory committee through the advising sessions for new graduate students before classes begin. We recommend students register in mid-summer for Geography 501 and 504, as well as 9 credit hours of other geography coursework (which can include Geography 502) to serve as a temporary placeholder for the registration system. Once the initial advising session is complete, students will register the new student for the recommended courses, which will still include Geography 501 and 504.

5.1.2 Returning Graduate Students

Graduate students develop their Programs of Study during their first semester in our program that lists specific courses to be taken every semester recommended by the student's Master's or Doctoral Committee. The student should strive to adhere to these recommended courses and register for them as early as possible, usually soon after the Timetable of Classes for the upcoming semester is made available by the Registrar's Office. This timetable is usually released just before Fall Break during Fall Semester and just before Spring Break in Spring Semester. Failure to register for classes when first made available could result in the student being unable to register for a course because the course has already been filled. Graduate students should be aware that some graduate-level courses in geography also satisfy major requirements for the department's undergraduate students.

5.2 Types of Courses and Course Credit

Graduate students enroll for graduate credit in courses in Geography and other departments that are numbered 400 and higher. Courses at the 500 and 600 level are designed for graduate students (although a few exceptional undergraduates are allowed to enroll in 500 level courses in Geography and some other UT departments). Graduate students should be aware that graduate-level courses in some other departments are offered at the 500 level and higher only, and should take this into consideration when designing his or her Program of Study. Consult the Graduate Catalog to ensure that all coursework (especially those in other departments) will count towards a graduate degree.

Program Committees may recommend to a graduate student that they enroll in a 300-level course in geography, usually to make up a background deficiency. To ensure the course counts towards the student's graduate degree, however, the student should enroll in the course at the 500 level (with the

exact course number to be determined by the student's advisor, the Student's Program Committee, or the Department Head) and perform the additional coursework required and expected at the graduate level.

5.3 Course Load

The normal course load during fall and spring is 9 or 10 hours per semester. The minimum course load for students on academic-year or one-semester teaching assistantships is 9 hours per semester. The minimum course load for students on academic-year or one-semester research assistantships is 6 hours per semester. For students without an assistantship, a minimum number of hours of coursework per semester is not specified, but students should be mindful to take courses regularly to graduate in a timely manner. Minimum course loads vary for some international students, depending on Visa requirements. Note that students must be enrolled in at least 9 hours in the fall and spring semesters to be considered full-time for federal financial aid purposes, even if the student has an assistantship.

Most students are required to register for course credits during the summer term. Students on a twelve-month teaching or research assistantship must register for at least 3 hours in the summer semester. Ph.D. students who have begun taking GEOG 600 must continuously enroll in at least 3 hours of GEOG 600 per semester until graduation, including during the summer semester. M.S. students must register for 3 hours of GEOG 500 the semester they graduate, including if they are graduating over the summer. Students who are not otherwise registered for summer credits but who will be using university facilities or services, using faculty time, and/or working as a summer research assistant must register for a course that best represents their summer activity—typically GEOG 500, 505, 506, 593, or 600—or at least 1 hour of GEOG 502.

5.4 Geography 515 (Topics in Quantitative Geography) and Geography 516 (Topics in Qualitative Geography)

Ph.D. graduate students are required to take Geography 515 (Topics in Quantitative Geography) or Geography 516 (Topics in Qualitative Geography). The selected course should be taken when first offered in the student's graduate program. Ph.D. students may waive taking 515/516 (via Form G, Petition for Exception to Departmental Policy) provided previous upper-level coursework has been taken that covers topics similar to those offered in 515/516. Ph.D. students who wish to waive taking 515/516 must provide documentation (e.g., course syllabus) that demonstrates a comprehensive background in quantitative/qualitative methods commensurate with our departmental requirements.

5.5 Geography 502 (Use of Facilities)

All students must be registered during the semester of graduation and during any term in which they are using University facilities or working with any member of the faculty. Non-thesis students must register for Geography 502 when they are using University facilities or working with faculty members and not registered for other courses. Students may not register for 502 when registered for other courses, and 502 may not be used to satisfy the minimum credit hour enrollment for students receiving any form of financial assistance from the university. Note that 505 or 506 are often more appropriate than 502 for a student using a research lab and/or working with a professor.

5.6 Geography 500 (Thesis) and Geography 600 (Dissertation) Hours

Thesis students register for Geography 500 following approval of the thesis proposal. A thesis student may register for more than 6 hours of thesis credit, but only 6 hours count toward the 30-hour minimum requirement for the degree. A thesis student must register for 3 hours of Geography 500 during their final semester.

Ph.D. students must continuously register for Geography 600 (including Summer Semester) from the time of initial registration for dissertation credit or approval of the dissertation proposal, whichever comes first, and continuing through the semester of graduation. The first registration for dissertation credit normally occurs after the approval of the proposal.

5.7 Advising

Students should be guided by their research interests and needs in selecting advisors, committee members, and projects. Advising should occur frequently during each semester to ensure the graduate student is aware of the necessary coursework and deadlines for graduation (for example, when to submit the Admission to Candidacy Form), all to ensure timely graduation. Advisors work with their graduate students to secure the necessary space, equipment, and other resources for their research. Many graduate student projects involve travel or laboratory work that requires external funding. Advisors and graduate students work together to obtain grants, contracts, or gifts to support student work. Faculty members have sample proposals that can help students applying to such programs and every two years the department offers a seminar on grant proposal writing.

5.8 Independent Study Courses

Permission from the instructor (or tutor) and Department Head must be obtained before students enroll for independent study courses (Geography 505, 506, 509, 519, 591, 592, 593). Section numbers for these courses are normally omitted from registration timetables and must be obtained from the department office. The form for obtaining such permission is available at the back of this Handbook (Form F).

Students who enroll in independent study courses are obligated to complete the specified assignments and turn in all written work prior to the beginning of final exams in the semester for which they are registered. Failure to do so will result in a failing grade. The grade of "I" (Incomplete) is given only when a student is unable to complete the agreed-upon work because of circumstances, such as illness, beyond the student's control.

6. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The M.S. and Ph.D. programs require students to have some familiarity with key themes and approaches in both physical and human geography. Students whose undergraduate/graduate coursework did not include at least one course in physical geography can remedy this deficiency by auditing Geography 131 or 132, by taking an upper-division course in physical geography, or by guided individual study.

Students who have not taken at least one course in human geography must enroll in an appropriate course in cultural, economic, population, transportation, or urban geography. Students whose undergraduate/graduate coursework did not include at least one course in data analysis and geographic research design can remedy this deficiency by taking Geography 415 or by guided individual study. Guidelines on appropriate courses are offered during the initial advising session at the beginning of the student's first semester. The objective in all cases is to help the student satisfy this requirement with coursework that has some relevance to their intended area of specialization.

6.1 The Master's Degree

6.1.1 The Master's Committee

The student's first semester of study is arranged in consultation with a temporary faculty advising team, which appoints a temporary advisor. For students pursuing a thesis-based master's degree, a master's committee is composed of the major professor from the department and at least two other faculty members, all at the rank of assistant professor or above. For students in the five-year BA/MS accelerated program, the major professor must be at the rank of assistant professor or above or teaching assistant professor or above, and the master's committee should be composed of at least two other faculty members. At least one faculty member on the non-thesis master's committee must be at the rank of assistant professor or above. In all cases, committee members must hold a terminal degree in their field. The major professor serves as the Chair of the master's committee and acts as the student's primary advisor. While non-tenure track and adjunct faculty may serve as committee members, they are not permitted to serve as the committee chair or major professor, except in the case of the five-year BA/MS accelerated program. The master's committee is formally appointed by the Department Head after receiving recommendations and a statement of interest from the student, and on the condition that the faculty appointees are willing to serve as requested.

6.1.2 The M.S. Program of Study

The Program of Study is developed during the first semester by the student and must be approved by the Department's Graduate Program Committee. As a guideline, the Graduate Program Committee discourages any program of study that consists of more than 45 semester credits in the Master's program, except in situations such as making up deficiencies or fulfilling the requirements of a minor field.

The student's area(s) of specialization or concentration and research program must be compatible with the research interests of one or more members of the faculty. Students are not permitted to write theses in areas where there is inadequate research expertise among the faculty.

6.1.3 Changes in the Master's Committee and the Program of Study

Faculty membership on the student's Master's Committee, as well as the composition of the Program of Study, may change if the student's research and program interests change or if a faculty member requests removal from the committee. Significant changes in the Program of Study must be re-submitted for approval to the Graduate Program Committee.

Changes in the Master's Committee must be executed by completing Form A in the back of this Handbook. Members of the Master's committee must have expertise in the area of the thesis. Committee changes are not permitted during the final stages of thesis or program completion. No committee changes may be made during the last semester prior to completion of the program, except in highly unusual circumstances.

At such time as any graduate student in geography is unable to secure an advisor or major professor from among the geography faculty, that student will be terminated from further graduate enrollment in geography at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

6.1.4 Requirements for the M.S. Degree

The department offers a thesis option and a non-thesis option for the Master's degree, but strongly encourages the thesis option in most cases. The non-thesis option is primarily intended for students in the five-year BA/BS-MS accelerated program, as well as those who are self-funded or supported by external employers rather than the department or university. Both options require a minimum of 30 semester hours beyond completion of a sound undergraduate major in geography. At least 20 hours submitted to the Graduate School for the degree (via the Admission to Candidacy form) must be at or above the 500 level. Full-time students must register for Geography 501 (Colloquium) at each offering while in residence, up to a maximum of 10 hours; part-time students must register for a minimum of 4 semesters of Geography 501. Four hours of 501 are applied towards the M.S. degree. All students must take Geography 504, and at least 3 credits at the 600 level. Geography 504 must be taken at the first offering following initial matriculation into the graduate program. In the thesis option, at least 6 hours of thesis credit (500) must be taken, but no more than 6 hours of thesis credit may be counted toward the 30 credits required for the degree. In addition, the student must enroll in at least 3 hours of thesis credit during the semester in which the student intends to graduate. Non-thesis students must provide evidence of their ability to conduct, organize, and present graduate-level research of a quality commensurate with the professional stature of the degree.

Effective Fall 2025, students pursuing the non-thesis M.S. option are not eligible for Graduate Research or Teaching Assistantships offered by the department. Current students who wish to pursue the non-thesis option must submit a written request to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) no later than the end of their second semester of the program. While the policy encourages students receiving graduate assistantships to declare their intention to pursue the non-thesis option by this deadline, the department acknowledges that unforeseen circumstances may prompt a change in academic direction later in the program. In such cases, students may submit a formal petition for a late transition to the non-thesis track. Petitions must include a clear rationale for the change and a proposed timeline for completing the remaining non-thesis requirements. Late petitions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the DGS and the Graduate Committee to ensure academic integrity and timely degree completion. Students who do not submit a petition and receive approval from the Graduate Committee will not be permitted to switch to the non-thesis option.

6.1.5 Advancement to Candidacy for the M.S. Degree

At least one semester prior to graduation, and after completing all required courses (not necessarily all credit hours), students must apply to the Graduate School for Admission to Candidacy for the degree.

6.1.6 The M.S. Proposal

The thesis topic is developed by the student with the advice and approval of the major professor and members of the Master's Committee. The proposal should be completed and approved no later than the student's 3rd semester in the M.S. program. The proposal must be presented in writing to the Master's Committee, with approval following a meeting of the student with members of the committee. A copy of the thesis proposal must be presented to each member of the Master's Committee at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

The major professor and the student share responsibility for providing the Department Head two copies of the approved thesis proposal (one copy for the department file, and another copy to go into a binder of active and recent proposals for faculty and graduate students to access). Form B is the appropriate form for reporting the approved thesis topic to the Department Head, or it may be obtained from the department office. A copy of the approved proposal must be on file in the department office at least 60 days prior to the final examination.

Acceptance of a proposal is not a binding contract between the student and the committee, nor a guarantee of acceptance of a thesis based upon the proposal. If an approved topic is discarded, the new topic must undergo the same procedures for approval as those specified for the original proposal. The major professor will be the arbiter in such cases.

6.1.7 The M.S. Thesis

The MS thesis describes and discusses the primary results of the research. The contents must be original and provide the basis for at least one journal publication. A thesis may include article(s) submitted, or about to be submitted, to professional journals. The thesis format must conform to standards established by the University, which are described in the UT Knoxville *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* (available on-line at <http://web.utk.edu/~thesis/Guide.shtml>) and are, in most cases, compatible with journal publications. The Department encourages all M.S. students to consider this option for their theses. If papers that have been or will be submitted to professional journals are included in a thesis, students need to follow the specific guidelines described in Chapter IV of the *Graduate School's Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* (available online at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/03/guide-to-thesesdissertations.pdf/>).

MS students with a single "content" chapter, conceived as a journal article, should only follow the guidelines for "The Use of Journal Articles in Theses and Dissertations" (e.g., disclosure, uniformity of presentation), and not treat their document as a "multi-part" thesis. The format of Multi-Part Theses and Dissertations (or "Manuscript" Theses and Dissertations) should be used only when research has been performed in two or more areas that cannot be combined into a single presentation, or to assist in maintaining consistent format for journal articles.

The copy of the thesis the student intends to defend must be presented to each member of the Master's Committee at least two weeks prior to the final oral examination. The student bears final responsibility for the accuracy, quality, typing, proofreading, and correcting of the thesis. All members of the Master's Committee sign approval sheets when the thesis is in final form and ready for submission to the Graduate School.

The University's *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* is the guide to correct format. For correct preparation of graphic materials, the student is referred to the department's guidelines for thesis and dissertation preparation in another section of this handbook. Specifications for submission of final copies of the thesis may be obtained from the Office of Graduate Admissions and Records.

Students must furnish a hard-bound copy of the thesis to the department and to the major professor, and soft-bound copies to other members of the Master's Committee.

Intellectual Property

Prior to graduation, all original data comprising the thesis should be placed on file and a timetable should be finalized for publishing the thesis, both with the advisor. This is to protect the student from others using her/his data without permission; it also ensures that data that are often critical to the research program of a faculty member will be available for use after a mutually agreed upon amount of time has elapsed. Work completed by students as part of projects funded by NSF or other government agencies may have particular data reporting and sharing requirements.

6.1.8 Time Required to Complete the M.S. Program

The program normally involves approximately 2 years of continuous effort. The Graduate School allows 6 calendar years from first enrollment to completion of the degree. All courses applied toward the degree must have been completed during that time.

6.2 The Ph.D. Degree

Ph.D. programs are individualized to suit the needs and interests of specific students. They are developed by the student working with the major professor and members of the Doctoral Committee, who have been selected for their expertise in the specialized areas of interest of the student. Programs of Study vary in the number of credit hours, depending upon the background and interests of the student.

6.2.1 The Doctoral Committee

Although the beginning doctoral student is normally advised by a temporary advising team concerning the first semester of study, the doctoral program is developed by the student working with a Doctoral Committee after consulting with the student during the first semester of study, and approved by the Department Head. The Chair of the Doctoral Committee is the student's advisor or major professor. It is the student's responsibility to confirm the willingness of each committee member to serve. The Program of Study must be approved by the department's Graduate Program Committee.

The student's areas of specialization and the research topic selected for the doctoral dissertation must be within the research expertise of members of the faculty. Students are not permitted to write dissertations in areas where there is no research expertise among members of the faculty.

Changes in the doctoral committee are made by the Department Head at the request of the student, and with the approval of faculty members involved, when such changes can best serve the student's programmatic and research needs. Committee changes during the final semester prior to the defense of the dissertation are not permitted, except in highly unusual cases. Committee changes may be recommended to the Department Head through Form A in the back of this Handbook or obtained from the department office. When approved by the Department Head, the Revise PhD Committee Form will need to be submitted to the Graduate School. The form is available at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/revise-phd-committee-form/>.

At such time as any student in the Ph.D. program is unable to secure a major professor from among the geography faculty, that student will be terminated from further graduate enrollment in geography at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

6.2.2 The Doctoral Dissertation Committee

This committee is appointed by the Graduate School on the recommendation of the faculty, and at the request of the student and consent of the faculty members that make up the committee. It normally includes members of the faculty with whom the student has worked most closely in the special fields. The major professor must have expertise in the area of the dissertation research, and others on the committee must be competent to judge the research. The committee must consist of three members from the geography faculty and at least one from a collateral field. At least three members of the committee must have been approved by the Graduate Council to direct doctoral dissertation research.

6.2.3 Course and Residency Requirements

The program of study for the degree will be determined by the Doctoral Committee in accordance with the specific interests and needs of the student, but the student's background must include sufficient breadth in geography to provide an understanding of the discipline (including some familiarity with both human and physical geography, to be met as described under the M.S. requirements). The doctoral program must include adequate substantive and technique preparation in two special fields to equip the student for advanced research. Required courses are: Geography 501 (Colloquium); Geography 515/516; Geography 504 and 599; at least 6 hours of 600-level seminars; and 24 hours of dissertation (600). Full-time students must register for 501 every semester they are in residence, up to a maximum of 10 hours. Part-time students must take a minimum of 4 semester hours of Geography 501. Four hours of 501 are applied towards the Ph.D. degree. Geography 504 must be taken at the first opportunity following initial matriculation into the graduate program. A minimum of 9 semester hours must be earned in cognate fields, with courses selected for their relevance to the special fields. Ph.D. students whose Master's level work was in a field other than geography and for whom the Master's area remains close to their Ph.D. specialty areas may petition to substitute geography units in courses outside of their specialty areas for

up to 3 of the 9 required in collateral fields. Competency in quantitative methods and basic coursework in both human and physical geography are required. At least two consecutive semesters of full-time work (minimum of 9 hours each term, excluding audits) must be completed in residence. Most students spend at least three years of full-time work in residence.

6.2.4 Language and Techniques

Competence in quantitative techniques is required. Additional tools, including languages, will be required as appropriate to the student's areas of research specialization. The Doctoral Committee will determine these requirements and when they have been satisfied.

6.2.5 The Dissertation Proposal

The general content of a dissertation proposal is outlined in a later section of this handbook. Students are encouraged to develop the dissertation topic as early as possible. The proposal should be completed and approved by the student's Doctoral Committee no later than the 5th semester in the Ph.D. program. When approved by the major professor, the proposal is distributed to the other members of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee. Two copies of the proposal, as approved by the Doctoral Dissertation Committee (see Form C) must be submitted to the Department Head to be placed in the student's permanent file and in the proposal binder.

Acceptance of a dissertation proposal is not a binding contract between the student and the Doctoral Dissertation Committee, nor a guarantee of acceptance of a dissertation based upon the stated proposal. If an approved proposal is discarded, the new proposal must undergo the same procedures for approval as those specified for the original proposal. The student's major professor will make determinations in such matters.

6.2.6 The Doctoral Dissertation

The dissertation is the culmination of original major research. The dissertation must make a substantial original contribution to the subfield in which it is written. Choice of topic, research methods, collection and interpretation of data, and organization and writing of the dissertation are primarily the responsibility of the candidate. The direction of the dissertation is the substantial responsibility of the major professor, who chairs the Doctoral Dissertation Committee.

Because publications are a benchmark for the quality of a dissertation and are imperative for getting a job or postdoc, the Department strongly encourages students to write each chapter of the dissertation in the format of a publication. Usually, three or more publications should result from the research. Students should be the first or sole author of those publications. Indeed, the dissertation work may be based on material published prior to the dissertation defense. Chapters based on published material must still be defended. Students should ask members of the dissertation committee to review manuscripts for publication prior to submission to a journal or other avenues of publication. This will ensure that the committee is aware of general research progress and that details of the work to be included in the dissertation are acceptable. Furthermore, the committee has the right to suggest revisions even in published papers. Dissertations based on work in collaboration with other researchers must include an

explanation of the student's specific role in the research relative to the coauthors. Research in which the student's involvement was minor is not considered fully independent research for the purposes of the dissertation, and other chapters that clearly indicate primary authorship by the student are required. If papers that have been or will be submitted to professional journals are included in a thesis, students need to follow the specific guidelines described in Chapter IV of the Graduate School's Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations (available online at <http://web.utk.edu/~thesis/thesisresources.shtml>). Ph.D. students with multiple "content" chapters, conceived as journal articles that are closely related to each other (e.g., different analyses/parts of a single research project), also should only follow the guidelines for "The Use of Journal Articles in Theses and Dissertations" (e.g., disclosure, uniformity of presentation), and not treat their document as a "multi-part" thesis or dissertation. The format of Multi-Part Theses and Dissertations (or "Manuscript" Theses and Dissertations) should be used only when research has been performed in two or more areas that cannot be combined into a single presentation, or to assist in maintaining consistent format for journal articles.

Reproductions of the defense copy, when approved for distribution by the major professor, must be provided to each member of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee at least two weeks prior to the final oral examination. Changes in the defense copy of the dissertation may be required by the Doctoral Dissertation Committee following the defense and prior to its submission to the Graduate School.

The final format of the dissertation must be approved by The Graduate School and conform to standards established by the University which are described in the University's *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* (available online at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/03/guide-to-thesesdissertations.pdf/>). A dissertation consultant is available to review the material and assure that the dissertation is clearly presented, free of technical errors in the format, and reflects the quality and rigor of UTK and the Graduate School.

A minimum of 24 semester hours of dissertation credit (Geography 600) is required. A student who will not be using faculty services and/or university facilities for a period of time may request leaves of absence from dissertation research up to a maximum of six terms (including summer terms). The request, approved by the major professor and the Department Head, will be submitted by the student and filed in the Graduate School.

Intellectual Property

Prior to graduation, all original data comprising the dissertation should be placed on file and a timetable should be finalized for publishing the dissertation, both with the advisor. This is to protect the student from others using her/his data without permission; it also ensures that data that are often critical to the research program of a faculty member, will be available for use after a mutually agreed upon amount of time has elapsed. Work completed by students as part of projects funded by NSF or other government agencies may have particular data reporting and sharing requirements.

6.2.7 Time Limitations for Completion of the Ph.D. Degree

All requirements must be completed within 8 years of first enrollment in a doctoral program, and within 5 calendar years of advancement to candidacy for the degree.

6.2.8 Candidacy for the Ph.D. Degree

The student must apply for Admission to Candidacy (see Appendix A9.1 and A9.3) for the degree following completion of the required program of study, fulfillment of the tool requirements (see the section on “Languages and Techniques” above), and passage of all parts of the comprehensive examination (forms may be obtained from the department office). The Doctoral Dissertation Committee certifies passage of the comprehensive examination to the Graduate School, and the student is notified by the Graduate School when admission to candidacy is approved. Admission to candidacy must be secured at least one semester prior to the date the degree is to be conferred.

7. EXAMINATIONS

7.1 M.S. Students

Masters students must pass an oral examination on all work offered for the degree (and reported on Form E). When passed the final oral examination, student must submit the form “Report of Final Examination/Defense of Thesis/Project/Capstone” to the Graduate School. The Form is available at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/02/report-of-final-examinationdefense-of-thesisprojectcapstone-masters-or-specialist-degree.pdf/>.

7.1.1 Oral Examination, M.S. Thesis

The final oral examination, covering the thesis and course program, is taken when the student’s major professor and Master’s Committee have given tentative approval of the thesis, and the thesis is considered ready to submit to the Graduate School (including final preparation of all graphic presentations).

7.1.2 Oral Examinations, M.S. Non-Thesis

The oral examination is over a research paper written by the student during the program of study. A copy of the paper must be given to each member of the Master’s Committee at least two weeks prior to the date of the oral examination. If the paper is not of acceptable quality, the student fails the examination. The student’s major professor is responsible for providing the department office with a copy of each non-thesis research paper that is successfully defended. Each part of the examination may be retaken only once, and then only if the student is in good standing in all aspects of graduate study in both the University and in the department.

7.2 Ph.D. Students

Advancement to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree requires successful completion of a “Comprehensive Examination”. In the Department, the Comprehensive Examination consists of a written general examination and an oral examination over the Ph.D. Program and dissertation proposal, as described

below. The written examination must be passed before the oral examination is given. The Comprehensive Examination must be passed within a time not to exceed 6 consecutive months (excluding the summer term).

7.2.1 Ph.D. Written General Examination

In the Department of Geography and Sustainability, the written general examination is a two-part exam covering the student's two special fields. The student selects his or her special fields in consultation with the major professor and Doctoral Committee. No more than one special field may be a regional specialty or a techniques specialty. The topic and scope of the specialty exam should be determined in close consultation with the advisor and each specialty exam committee member. The two special field examinations should be taken no later than the student's 5th semester in the Ph.D. program. The two special field examinations should be taken within the same semester. Successful passing of the general written examination consists of passing both special field examinations. Students may fail at most one attempt in total across all special field examinations. Students failing a second field exam, regardless of field topic, are considered to have failed the written general examination.

Each special field examination shall be administered by the chair of the special field examination committee, who must be a faculty member in the Department of Geography and Sustainability. The special field examination committee consists of at least one committee member in addition to the chair. Committee members must be a member of the student's dissertation committee or a faculty member in the Department of Geography and Sustainability. The student's advisor proposes the composition of the examination committees, which are then appointed following approval by the Department Head. Members of examination committees must sign the "Agreement to Serve as Special Field Examiners" form (Form D) indicating their willingness to serve.

Faculty composition for the two field committees must differ. Up to one member may serve on both of the two special field examination committees, but they may not chair both committees. The dates upon which the special field examinations will be taken are to be arranged by the student in consultation with the examination committees. The special field examinations can be either open or closed book at the discretion of the advisor and the student's examination committee. Each special field examination will be a one-day (24 hours or less, at the discretion of the advisor and the student's examination committee) written exam that tests the student's knowledge of concepts, history, methods, subject matter, techniques, literature, and external relationships of the special field. Each special field examination is evaluated by at least two members of the examination committee, with results being reviewed and placed on file by the student's major professor. The major professor is responsible for informing the faculty of the student's progress on each field examination and certifies the examination results using the "Report of Examination Results" form (Form E) placed in the student's permanent file. If the report confirms non-pass of the special field exam, the student's advisor should provide the Director of Graduate Studies with a memo of the assessment for "non-pass". Students not passing a special field examination may retake the examination only once, and then, only if the student is in good standing in all aspects of graduate study

in both the university and in the department. Students not in good standing or having failed any two field exams, regardless of topic, are considered to have failed the Ph.D. written general examination.

The student's answers on both special field examinations must reflect a high degree of professional motivation, ability to communicate, and potential for creative scholarship within the field, including knowledge of literature, concepts, theory, content, and skills, so as to leave no doubt about the student's qualifications to hold the title of "Doctor of Philosophy" in geography. Performance on the special field examinations must demonstrate sufficient creativity, mastery of skills, and depth of knowledge of all aspects of the subfields in question to demonstrate the student's ability to do high-quality publishable research in the special fields. Additionally, students may fail an exam for failing to submit the exam by the specified deadline or for failing to abide by any other restrictions clearly placed on the exam.

7.2.2 Ph.D. Comprehensive Oral Examination over the Ph.D. Program and Dissertation Proposal

As soon as possible after passing the second special field examination, the student will be orally examined over the Ph.D. program and the dissertation proposal. The examination committee consists of members of the student's Doctoral Dissertation Committee. The date, time, and place of the examination are to be advertised, and the exam is to be open to all graduate majors and to all members of the University faculty. The major professor announces the results of the examination to the department faculty and certifies the examination results using the "Report of Examination Results" form (Form E) placed in the student's permanent file. Students not passing the comprehensive oral examination may retake the exam only once, and then, only if the student is in good standing in all aspects of graduate study in both the university and in the department. Students not in good standing or having failed two attempts are considered to have failed the Comprehensive Oral Examination.

7.2.3 Ph.D. Final Oral Examination

The student must pass a final oral examination that covers the dissertation and any parts of the program of study specified for examination by the Doctoral Dissertation Committee. The examination is based largely upon the final (but unbound) copy of the dissertation. It must be formally scheduled with the Graduate School. The Form "Schedule of Dissertation Defense" (see the link in A9.4) will need to be submitted to the Graduate School. The date of the examination is announced publicly by the chair of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee, and the examination is open to all faculty members and students. When passed, the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form of the Graduate School (see the link in A9.5) must submit to the Graduate School to receive the final approval. It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that the form has been delivered to the Graduate School by the deadline date. Students not passing the final oral examination may retake the final oral exam only once, and then, only if the student is in good standing in all aspects of graduate study in both the university and in the department. Students not in good standing or having failed two attempts are considered to have failed the Final Oral Examination.

7.3 Examinations During the Summer Semester

It is normally impossible to schedule examinations during the summer. Students who wish to take an oral examination (thesis or non-thesis) during the summer must have completed arrangements for the examination, including written agreements with all members of the faculty who will be involved, prior to the last day of regularly scheduled classes during the preceding spring semester. No changes in committee composition or responsibilities will be approved for the purpose of scheduling examinations during the summer.

7.4 Failure of an Examination

A failure on the written general examination, comprehensive oral examination, or final oral examination (as described in sections 7.2.1-7.2.3) shall result in termination from the graduate program. The Department Head shall notify the student of their termination from the graduate program and inform the student of the Students Rights and Responsibilities and Appeals Procedures as outlined in the next section.

8. STANDARDS, PROBLEMS, AND APPEALS

8.1 Student Rights and Responsibilities

Graduate students should be familiar with rights and responsibilities as specified in the University of Tennessee's student handbook *Hilltopics* (available at <https://hilltopics.utk.edu/>) and in the *Graduate School Catalog* (<http://catalog.utk.edu/index.php>), and with the regulations of the Graduate School and the Department of Geography and Sustainability. Changes in overall policy are the responsibility of the Graduate Council.

8.2 Grades

Graduate students are graded on course and seminar work, utilizing A, A-, B+, B, C+, C, D, and F grades. "P" (Progress) and "NP" (No Progress) are used for thesis and dissertation credit. "S" (Satisfactory) and "NC" (No Credit) may be used for selected courses. A grade of "I" (Incomplete) is given only when unavoidable and unusual circumstances prevent a student from completing the work of a course and is not to be awarded in cases of procrastination or poor performance. Courses may not be retaken to raise a grade. Grades of "C" or below are considered unsatisfactory for graduate work, but count toward the student's GPA and graduate degree. Courses with grades lower than a "C" do not count toward the graduate degree.

8.3 Minimum GPA Requirements for Retention

Graduate students in geography must maintain a 3.2 (M.S.) or 3.3 (Ph.D.) average GPA after their second semester and each semester thereafter to remain in good standing in the department and to receive a graduate degree. Doctoral students should be aware that satisfying minimum grade-point requirements will not, alone, meet the department's standards for retention. Clear evidence of advanced potential as a research scholar, and exemplary professional character, responsibility, and promise are also required.

8.4 Evaluations

Once per semester, the Graduate Program Committee will request from faculty members written evaluations of students taking their courses and serving as their Graduate Teaching or Research Assistants. The evaluations are read by the Graduate Program Committee and each student's major professor. Failure to meet expectations as a student or Graduate Assistant could result in probation and/or loss of funding.

Graduate Teaching Associates will be observed once per year by a member of the Graduate Program Committee. The purpose of this observation is to provide meaningful feedback to the student on their instruction, not to evaluate the student's teaching. All evaluations are maintained in student files in the department office. Students have the right of access to their own files, but may not remove them from the department office.

Once per year, the student submits a progress report to their major professor, who provides an overall recommendation and a comprehensive review of the student's research, coursework, and teaching. These reports are then submitted to the Graduate Program Committee and used to determine the allocation of future Graduate Assistantships.

8.5 Progress in Degree Programs

Students are expected to make regular and consistent progress toward the completion of degree requirements. It is the responsibility of the student to provide the major professor with evidence of such progress during each semester following initial registration (except during summer). If absent from campus while enrolled for Geography 500, Geography 502, or Geography 600 for five or more weeks, the student must provide the major professor with written evidence, not less than one week prior to the end of the semester during which the absence occurs, of the progress that has been made. In the absence of written evidence of progress on a thesis or dissertation, a grade of "NP" (No Progress) will be assigned. Two consecutive grades of "NP" (No Progress) for students enrolled for Thesis or Dissertation credit is evidence of failure to maintain satisfactory progress and may result in termination from the program.

8.6 Changing Advisors

While advisor-student relationships are intended to be constructive and supportive, there may be situations in which a student wishes to change advisors. Students considering such a change are encouraged to first, where appropriate, discuss their concerns with their current advisor. They should then consult with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) to explore available options and receive guidance on the process. To formally initiate a change, the student must submit a written request to the DGS, identifying the proposed new advisor and providing a brief rationale for the change. It is recommended that the proposed advisor confer with the student's current advisor before agreeing to the change. The proposed advisor must confirm in writing their willingness to serve in this role. Final approval of the advisor change rests with the Department Head to ensure continuity in the student's academic progress and alignment with departmental policies. All parties involved should be notified once the change is officially approved.

In the event that a student's current advisor holds a departmental leadership position (e.g., DGS, Department Head, or Associate Head), the student may submit a written request to another member of the leadership team who is not their current advisor to initiate the advisor change process. Both students and faculty are encouraged to contact the Office of Ombuds Services if they feel the need for a neutral, third-party resource to help navigate these changes.

8.7 Exceptions to Requirements and Policies

Students may petition the department for exceptions to certain requirements and policies through Form G in the back of this Handbook, also obtainable through the department office.

8.8 Probation

A student may be placed on probation if at any time during their program if they fail to meet programmatic milestones or other expectations for graduate students set forth by the Department, including those related to their performance as a GTA or GRA, research progress, or course performance. A student may also be placed on probation for violating the University's [Student Code of Conduct](#). A student will be notified of their probationary status through a letter from the Department Head and Director of Graduate Studies, which will be sent to the student and their major professor and stored in the student's file. The letter will outline the reason for the probation and a timeline of the terms that must be met to return to good standing. The student will be terminated from the program if they do not meet the terms outlined in the letter or if they fail to meet other program expectations while on probation. Egregious acts or failure to meet key program milestones may lead directly to student termination. The Graduate School has its own set of policies that may lead to probation and termination as outlined in the [Graduate Catalog](#).

8.9 Student Termination

The Department assumes that each student will maintain appropriate standards of academic integrity and responsibility. Violations of these standards will be handled on an individual basis, with the student informed of appropriate appeals procedures. A student may be dismissed from a graduate program in this department for any of the following reasons:

1. Failure to fulfill conditions of admission.
2. Failure to meet minimum academic requirements.
3. Failure to meet terms specified in the letter of probation or failure to meet other program expectations while on probation.
4. Failure to secure and maintain a major professor and a graduate committee following completion of the first semester.

5. Failure to adequately fulfill minimum requirements and responsibilities related to any forms of financial aid received, including those involved in graduate teaching assistantships, research assistantships, fellowships, and others.
6. Failure to follow written policies and procedures of the department, the Graduate School, and the University.
7. After commencing registration for thesis or dissertation, two consecutive grades of NP (No Progress).
8. Consistent evaluations by the major professor and instructors of courses, including but not limited to graded work, critical/scientific thinking skills, ability to work independently, etc., that reflect unfavorably upon the student's ability to perform graduate-level research.
9. Failure to maintain regular contact with the major professor during lengthy absences from campus (a progress report to the major professor is required during each semester in which the student is absent from campus).
10. Failure of written and/or oral examinations as described in Section 7.2.
11. Unprofessional, illegal, and/or unethical conduct or behavior.
12. Noncompliance with legal requirements for research (departmental and university institutional review board (IRB))
13. Academic dishonesty.

8.10 Appeals Procedures

The following procedures have been established for conducting reviews of student grievances. The procedures will be initiated only at the request of a graduate student who is facing disciplinary action, suspension or termination, or who alleges that unfairness, bias, lack of clarity of applicable policies, or procedural irregularities were involved in the specific situation leading to the appeal. Regarding the information on the University appeals procedure, see the web-page at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/graduate-student-life/understanding-your-rights-and-obligations/>.

1. The student must discuss the grievance with his or her faculty advisor and the Department Head in an attempt to resolve the grievance informally. If the faculty advisor or the Department Head is a party to the allegations, the Associate Department Head or the chair of the Graduate Program Committee (if the associate head is a party to the allegations), or a member of the Graduate Program Committee (if both persons named above are parties to the allegations), may replace the advisor or head.
2. Within 90 days of the occurrence of the alleged act leading to the grievance, and on failure to resolve the matter through Step 1, a written request for a formal review (which includes a detailed description of the student's grievances and the bases for them) is submitted to the Department Head. The Department Head will, in turn, submit the grievance to a Review Committee.

The Review Committee shall consist of the department's Graduate Program Committee members and two graduate student representatives (and an alternate) elected at the beginning of the academic year. The Chair of the Graduate Program Committee (or the most senior member of the committee if the Chair is a party to the allegations) shall chair the Review Committee. Members of the Graduate Program Committee who are specified in the allegations made by the student shall be replaced on the Review Committee by other members of the faculty in order of length of service to the department.

3. The Chair of the Review Committee shall convene the committee as soon as possible. Normally, it is expected that the review process will be completed within two weeks of its formal initiation by the student. The Review Committee shall obtain information deemed necessary to complete the review. The student shall have the opportunity to discuss his/her grievance directly with the committee and provide supporting material relevant to the review. The party or parties against whom allegations have been made by the student shall be provided with copies of the allegations and all supporting materials at least 3 days prior to any formal hearings convened by the Review Committee, and shall also be interviewed by the Review Committee and invited to submit supporting materials.

The "burden of proof" for establishing unfairness, bias, procedural irregularities, etc., shall be on the party requesting the review.

The Review Committee, by a majority vote, shall reach a decision and shall submit the decision, in writing, to the student, the student's advisor, and the Department Head. Two decisions are possible: (1) The student's allegations have been established. In such a case, the Review Committee shall recommend a course of action to the Department Head. If the Department Head is a party to the allegations, the Review Committee shall recommend to the associate Department Head or, if appropriate, to the dean of the college. (2) The allegations have not been established.

4. The recommendations of the Review Committee in the event the allegations are established shall be brought to the department faculty as a whole by the Department Head, the associate head, or the college dean, where they shall be discussed and voted on by all tenured and tenure track members of the faculty with the exception of those who are a party to the allegations.

5. The Department Head or Dean shall take such action as approved by the faculty as a whole, or, if the allegations were not established shall declare that no basis has been found for the allegations. In either case, the action shall be reported in writing to the student filing the grievance. The decision by the Review Committee and/or departmental faculty is final at the department.

6. Students unwilling to accept a decision made at the departmental level may appeal the decision to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and from there to the Graduate Council through the Dean of the Graduate School, and ultimately to the President of the University. Students should consult the Dean of Arts & Sciences and the Dean of the Graduate School for details concerning how to file an appeal beyond the level of the department.

8.11 Early Termination/Withdrawal

If a student is terminated or withdraws from a program prior to the end of the semester, the student will be responsible for payment of tuition and other fees from the termination/withdrawal date until the end of the semester. The responsibility for paying tuition and fees will apply to all students, including those who have tuition waivers during the semester in which they are terminated/withdraw early. If you are considering early withdrawal, you should contact the Bursar's office to inquire about the financial ramifications for early withdrawal. Please see the graduate catalog for additional information about early termination/withdrawal at: http://catalog.utk.edu/content.php?catoid=23&navoid=2827#fees_fina_assi and <https://onestop.utk.edu/withdraw/>.

APPENDIX 1: THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

A1.1 Introduction

Thesis or dissertation work can be divided into seven stages:

1. Defining the topic.
2. Preparation of the proposal.
3. Conducting the research.
4. Writing the manuscript.
5. Compilation of figures and tables.
6. Editing the manuscript.
7. Preparation of final copy, including text and graphics.

Faculty members bring diverse research interests, experiences, and approaches to guide graduate students in their M.S. and Ph.D. work. In general, student projects should be in line with the research strengths of the faculty; often, they are a part of a larger program of research directed by the student's advisor. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about thesis and dissertation projects at the moment of application to the department and to devote considerable time to this task during their first semester in residence. Geography 504, Introduction to Geographic Research (taken during a student's first year in the program), provides an opportunity for students to get to know faculty members and to find out about the research that they and their students pursue.

A1.2 Editorial Assistance

Professional editorial assistance in the preparation of Master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations in geography should be limited to text editing, i.e. checking for proper spelling, punctuation, and basic grammatical usage (tense and subject-verb agreement, for example). Students with writing weaknesses that extend beyond occasional lapses in the above matters are urged to seek the assistance of the university's Writing Center (located in the Humanities and Social Services (HSS) Building, Room 212, <https://writingcenter.utk.edu/>) in improving their writing skills. This position conforms with Graduate School practice.

Most questions and problems that arise during the stages of thesis or dissertation development and writing must be worked out by the student with his/her major professor. For the preparation of graphic materials, it is good practice to consult with Mr. Michael Camponovo, who directs the department's GIS Outreach and Engagement Laboratory.

A1.3 The Proposal

Preparation of a good proposal is a necessary second step to the successful development of a thesis or dissertation. Through the proposal, the student demonstrates to his/her committee members that an appropriate problem has been defined, that a thorough search has been made of literature related to the topic, that a research design has been developed, and that the student has the necessary skills to carry out the research.

A1.4 Contents of the Proposal

The proposal should contain the information and answer the questions listed below:

1. What is the problem the study will address?
2. Of what significance is the problem?
3. What relevant literature exists, and how will the research extend the frontiers of previous research on the topic?
4. How does the study fit into the framework of both its appropriate subfield and the discipline of geography?
5. How is the research to be conducted?
6. How will data or information be obtained or collected and how will it be analyzed?
7. How is the study to be organized and presented (develop an outline)?
8. What is the time frame for completing the several stages of the study?

A1.5 Graphics

Students should consult the *Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations* available online at <http://web.utk.edu/~thesis/Guide.shtml> and a recent book in cartography prior to preparation of graphic materials for the thesis or dissertation.

APPENDIX 2: GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND ASSOCIATES

A2.1 Definitions of Titles

Assistant – A Graduate Teaching Assistant (one who instructs laboratories or who serves as an assistant to a faculty member in the conduct of a course).

Associate – A Graduate Teaching Associate (one who has lecturing responsibilities in a course).

Instructor – Member of faculty who has responsibility for teaching a particular section of a course. The course may have Graduate Teaching Assistants assigned to it.

Course Coordinator – Faculty member who has responsibility for coordinating the content and developing the syllabus for a multiple-section course in which Graduate Teaching Associates may be involved as lecturers.

A2.2 Office Hours

Teaching Assistants and Associates must hold office hours weekly and are responsible for providing the department office with a schedule of office and class hours.

A2.3 Duration of Assistantships

The Graduate School limits the duration that a student may hold an assistantship to 3 years for M.S. students and 5 years for Ph.D. students. “Assistantship” refers to a teaching, research, or other graduate assistantship supported by the Department of Geography and Sustainability or another department, or grant or other funds administered through Geography or another department or campus unit.

The Department of Geography and Sustainability will provide teaching or graduate assistantship support for 2 years for M.S. students and 4 years for Ph.D. students for students admitted with funding, provided the student performs acceptably in GTA/GRA duties, maintains good standing in the program, and makes satisfactory progress towards his or her degree, which includes timely approval of the student’s proposal and successfully passing the student’s comprehensive examinations (see Section 4.1 in detail). Research assistantships are not counted against years of departmental funding if the research grant or contract provides the tuition waiver. Ph.D. students who are needed as instructors in 101–102 or 131–132, or who have already taught as a Graduate Teaching Associate for 3 semesters or more during 3 years of departmental funding, are given priority for an additional year of funding.

A2.4 Teaching Responsibilities

Following is a set of basic guidelines concerning the responsibilities of graduate teaching assistants and graduate teaching associates in the Department of Geography and Sustainability at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Before departing from these guidelines in any substantial way, a teaching assistant

or associate must secure permission from the course instructor or the faculty member who has responsibility for coordinating the course in question.

- 1) Prior to the first scheduled meeting of the course or laboratory, the Assistant or Associate must arrange a conference with the primary instructor or course coordinator. Thereafter, the Assistant or Associate must meet weekly, or as requested, with the instructor or coordinator. Teaching Assistants in physical geography must prepare for and attend weekly lab meetings.
- 2) Teaching Assistants are required to sit in on all lectures of courses in which they are assisting, and be available to serve as audiovisual assistants, proctors, graders, and in other ways determined by the primary instructor.
- 3) Assistants and Associates are required to conduct themselves according to generally accepted professional and academic standards. These standards include reasonable efforts to be courteous, even-handed, fair, discreet, and prompt in dealing with students. Unprofessional behavior will result in termination of financial aid and may lead to dismissal from the program. Under no circumstances should an Assistant or Associate become personally involved ("dating," for example) with students in their classes or laboratory sections, nor encourage any kind of relationship that may lead to appearances of preferential treatment. In cases of questions about appropriate conduct, Assistants and Associates should confer with their advisors or the Department Head, or both.
- 4) Syllabi for all courses are the responsibility of a member of the permanent faculty who serves as coordinator for the course in question. Although Teaching Associates may make minor changes in a course syllabus to reflect their particular skills or competencies, such changes must have the approval of the faculty member who serves as course coordinator.
- 5) Assistants and Associates must be prompt in grading and returning homework, tests, and other materials to students. In most cases, no more than one week should elapse between receiving and returning materials. Grades for labs and tests should be promptly posted on the course website via *Canvas*.
- 6) Assistants and Associates are responsible for making certain that they fully comprehend materials assigned to students and for which they have instructional responsibilities. Questions that Assistants and Associates cannot resolve on their own should be discussed prior to class or lab with the faculty instructor or course coordinator.
- 7) Assistants and Associates are to maintain complete records of all factors entering into the determination of course and laboratory grades. Such information includes absences, test scores, penalties for late work, and any behavioral characteristics that affected the grade.
- 8) (A) Prior to leaving town toward the end of a semester, Graduate Assistants and Associates must turn in all grades (including explanations for grades and exams that weren't returned to students) to the course instructor or course coordinator, return all items borrowed from the department office, and clear

the date of departure with the faculty instructor or course coordinator. Explanations of grades should include information that may be needed in the coming years when the Assistant or Associate may no longer be in the Knoxville area.

(B) On leaving the department and the University, Assistants and Associates must turn in to the department office copies of all records related to student grades and grading procedures.

- 9) Assistants and Associates who find it necessary to miss a scheduled lecture or laboratory must make every reasonable effort to inform the teaching associate or faculty member responsible for the course, or the course coordinator (or both), and to arrange for a substitute. If the lecturer and coordinator are not reachable, the Assistant or Associate must notify the department office.

APPENDIX 3: DEPARTMENTAL AWARDS

Each spring, the department chooses recipients for Graduate Student Awards. The awards, their eligibility requirements, and the selection process are given below.

A3.1 The Robert G. Long Outstanding Graduate Student Award

The conditions for eligibility for this award are as follows:

1. Any student who has been in the graduate program for one academic year (two consecutive semesters, including the semester the award is given) is eligible.
2. The recipient must have high academic standing, including a GPA in the graduate program of 3.5 or above.
3. The recipient must have demonstrated exceptional professional promise.
4. The recipient must have demonstrated leadership and the ability to cooperate with others who are in non-leadership roles.
5. Students are eligible for this award only once during their graduate study in the Department.

In March, the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee solicits nominations for the award. The nominations will be considered by the Graduate Program Committee, which makes a recommendation to the faculty. The faculty will vote on the recommendation of the Graduate Program Committee to select a recipient. The Robert G. Long Award consists of a certificate and a cash prize in an amount to be determined by the Department Head.

A3.2 Primary Lead Publication Award

The conditions for eligibility for this award are as follows:

1. Students who are the first author on a paper receive a certificate.
2. The award will be given for first-authored peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that are accepted, in press, or published in the academic year when the award is given.
3. The recipient must have a GPA of 3.0 or above in the graduate program.
4. A copy of the accepted, in press, or published article must be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies for verification.
5. Students are eligible for this award more than once during their graduate study in the Department, but can only receive the award once for the same article.

6. In exceptional cases, a student can make a case to the Director of Graduate Studies when the student is the second author.

The award consists of a certificate naming the student as the recipient of the Student Publication Award. The selection process is the same as that for the Robert G. Long Award.

A3.3 Exceptional Professional Accomplishment Award

The conditions for eligibility for this award are as follows:

1. Any student who has been a graduate student in the Department of Geography and Sustainability during the academic year the award is given.
2. Any student currently employed and working on geography-related projects. Students eligible for this award include those employed by agencies such as TVA, ORNL, the EERC, the Transportation Center, the Cartographic Services Laboratory, and those students working on sponsored research.
3. The recipient must have a GPA of 3.3 or above in the graduate program.
4. Students are eligible for this award more than once during their graduate study in the Department, but subsequent awards must be for different projects.

The award consists of a certificate naming the student as the recipient of the Exceptional Professional Accomplishment Award. The selection process is the same as that for the Robert G. Long Award.

A3.4 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award

The conditions for eligibility for this award are as follows:

1. Any student who has been a graduate student in the Department of Geography and Sustainability during the academic year the award is given.
2. Any student who works as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Geography and Sustainability at least one semester during the academic year the award is given.
3. The recipient must have a GPA of 3.3 or above in the graduate program.
4. Students are eligible for this award more than once during their graduate study in the Department.

The award consists of a certificate naming the student as the recipient of the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award. The selection process is the same as that for the Robert G. Long Award.

A3.5 Outstanding Teaching Associate Award

The conditions for the eligibility for this award are as follows:

1. Any student who has been a graduate student in the Department of Geography and Sustainability during the academic year the award is given.

2. Any student who works as a Teaching Associate in the Department of Geography and Sustainability at least one semester during the academic year the award is given.
3. The recipient must have a GPA of 3.3 or above in the graduate program.
4. Students are eligible for this award more than once during their graduate study in the Department.

The award consists of a certificate naming the student as the recipient of the Outstanding Teaching Associate Award. The selection process is the same as that for the Robert G. Long Award.

A3.6 Bruce Ralston Geospatial Achievement Award

The conditions for the eligibility for this award are as follows:

Graduate:

1. Who shows meaningful and significant contribution either theoretically or practically to GIScience (e.g., develop new geospatial model/method, apply geospatial model/method in a clever way to a human or physical geography problem). The work needs to be proven via peer-reviewed publications and/or thesis/dissertation in the final phase and approved by the committee. AND/OR,
2. Who participates in and contributes meaningfully to GIS-related research projects; AND/OR,
3. Who promotes the use of geospatial science to others via GIS outreach activities, tutoring/helping others in understanding/using GIS, etc.

Undergraduate:

1. Who performs outstandingly in GIScience-related courses (e.g., 411, 413, 414, 415, 454, 510, 512, 513, 515, etc.) (e.g., good grade, good project, good participation), AND/OR,
2. Who actively participates in GIS-related research projects; AND/OR,
3. Who promotes the use of geospatial science to others via GIS outreach activities, tutoring/helping others in understanding/using GIS, etc.

APPENDIX 4: DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES

A4.1 The Department Office

The department office and staff provide clerical and administrative support for the program and are under the direct supervision of the Department Head. Services available to graduate students are:

- 1) Maintenance of personnel records.
- 2) Handling of mail and assignment of mailboxes.
- 3) Maintenance of expendable supplies for use by teaching assistants.
- 4) Maintenance of selected reference materials.

Research materials may be duplicated for graduate students at cost. Work should be left with the clerical staff and will be placed in the mailbox when completed.

A4.2 Departmental Communications

Whether in residence or living and working off campus, the student is responsible for providing the department office with a current address and telephone number. Students on campus must have a department mailbox, which should be checked daily. Email with UT NetID accounts is an official departmental communication avenue. Students should check their UTK email accounts daily.

A4.3 Office Space

Desk space is provided for graduate students in the following order of priority: 1) teaching assistants; 2) other assistants; and 3) students not supported by assistantships or fellowships. Office assignments are made by the department secretary, who also orders keys for offices and other areas to which students must have access. Office space must receive frequent use or it will be assigned to someone else.

A4.4 Telephones

Telephones are provided for local business calls. Long distance calls to be charged to the department account may be made only with the prior permission of the Department Head.

A4.5 Instructional and Research Laboratories

The Burchfiel Geography Building (BGB) houses laboratories for instruction and research in geographic information science (GIS, GPS, remote sensing, cartography) and introductory and advanced physical geography. Several special projects research labs are also located in BGB and in the Walters Academic Building (WAB). Access to labs is with the permission of the faculty member in charge.

APPENDIX 5: GLOSSARY

A5.1 Doctoral Committee

Although the beginning doctoral student is normally advised by a temporary advising team concerning the first semester of study, the doctoral program is developed by the student working with a Doctoral Committee appointed by the Department Head after consulting with the student during the first semester of study. The Chair of the Doctoral Committee is the student's advisor or major professor. It is the student's responsibility to ascertain the willingness of each committee member to serve. The Doctoral Committee may include a member from a collateral field.

A5.2 Doctoral Dissertation Committee

The Doctoral Dissertation Committee is formally appointed by the Graduate School on recommendation of the faculty, and at the request of the student and consent of the faculty members comprising the committee. It normally includes members of the faculty with whom the student has worked most closely in the special fields. The major professor must have expertise in the area of the dissertation research, and others on the committee must be competent to judge the research. The committee must consist of three members from the geography faculty and at least one from a collateral field. Three members of the committee must have been approved by the Graduate Council to direct doctoral dissertation research.

A5.3 Examination Committee

Ph.D. students and their major professors propose examination committees which are then approved by the Department Head for the two special field examinations of their written general examination. The examination committee must consist of at least two faculty members for each of the two special field examinations. Faculty composition for the two committees must differ. One member may serve on each of the two examination committees, but may not chair both committees. The dates upon which the examinations will be taken are to be arranged by the student in consultation with the examination committees. Each examination will be a one day written exam that tests the student's knowledge of concepts, history, methods, subject matter, techniques, literature, and external relationships of the specialty field. Each exam is evaluated by the two members of the examination committee, with results being reviewed by members of the student's Doctoral Committee and placed on file by the major professor.

A5.5 Graduate Program Committee (GPC)

The Graduate Program Committee consists of a chair and a few faculty members, appointed by the Department Head. The committee's main responsibilities include approval of the program of study, making recommendations to the Department Head regarding graduate students' petitions, and dealing with the policies and other matters related to the graduate program in the department.

A5.6 Master's Committee

The first semester of study for beginning master's students is arranged in consultation with a temporary faculty advising team, which appoints a temporary advisor. The full program of study is developed during the first semester by the student and a Master's Committee appointed by the Department Head after receiving recommendations and a statement of interest from the student, and on the condition that the faculty appointees are willing to serve as requested. The Chair of the Master's Committee is the student's advisor or major professor. It is the student's responsibility to ascertain the willingness of each committee member to serve.

A5.7 Review Committee

The Review Committee reviews the grievance cases initiated by students in the department. The Review Committee shall consist of the department's Graduate Program Committee members and two graduate student representatives (and an alternate) elected at the beginning of the academic year. The Chair of the Graduate Program Committee (or the most senior member of the committee if the Chair is a party to the allegations) shall chair the Review Committee. Members of the Graduate Program Committee who are specified in the allegations made by the student shall be replaced on the Review Committee by other members of the faculty in order of length of service to the department.

APPENDIX 6: MASTER'S PROGRAM CHECKLIST

- ☐ 1. Attend the assigned **advising session** with the advising team, which will help arrange the first semester of study and assign a temporary advisor.
- ☐ 2. During the first semester, develop a **Program of Study** in consultation with the temporary advisor. Specify choices of major professor, Master's Committee members, expected coursework, and area of intended specialization.

THESIS OPTION

- ☐ 3. Develop thesis proposal. If thesis topic requires changes in one's M.S. Committee composition, fill out form in Appendix A.
- ☐ 4. **Present proposal** to and obtain approval of thesis proposal by Master's Committee no later than the 3rd semester in the M.S. program. Results are to be reported using **Appendix Form B**.
- ☐ 5. Apply for **Admission to Candidacy** using Graduate School form by deadline given by the Graduate School.
- ☐ 6. **Submit draft** of thesis to thesis consultant in the Graduate School by deadline given by the Graduate School.
- ☐ 7. Submit final draft of thesis to Master's Committee at least two weeks prior to final oral examination. This "**defense draft**" needs to have been approved by the major professor prior to distribution.
- ☐ 8. Take **final oral exam** by the Graduate School deadline. Report the results to the

NON-THESIS OPTION

- ☐ 3. Develop research paper for final oral examination.
- ☐ 4. Apply for **Admission to Candidacy** using Graduate School form by deadline given by the Graduate School.
- ☐ 5. Submit research paper to M.S. Committee at least two weeks prior to deadline.
- ☐ 6. Take **final oral exam** by deadline given by the Graduate School. Report the results to the Graduate School using the **Report of Final Examination/Defense form**, and to the department using Appendix **Form E**.

Graduate School using the Graduate School **Report of Final Examination/Defense form**, and to the department using departmental form, Appendix **Form E**.

- ☐ 9. After making committee's edits to the thesis, run the completed thesis through university-approved plagiarism detection software. Send the dissertation and plagiarism report to the committee members and gather signatures on the Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Approval form.
- ☐ 10. Turn in thesis and **Thesis/Dissertation Approval** form by deadline given by the Graduate School. The final version must reflect the suggestions made by the committee before and during the final oral exam and must be approved by all committee members.

APPENDIX 7: PH.D. PROGRAM CHECKLIST

- ☐ 1. Attend the assigned **advising session** with the advising team, which will help arrange the first semester of study and assign a temporary advisor.
- ☐ 2. During the first semester, develop the **Program of Study** in consultation with the temporary advisor. Specify choices of major professor, Doctoral Committee members, expected coursework, and two areas of intended specialization. Gain approval of Program of Study by Graduate Program Committee.
- ☐ 3. Secure appropriate preparation in content and methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed) in consultation with your major professor and Doctoral Committee.
- ☐ 4. Develop a dissertation topic with your major professor and Doctoral Committee.
- ☐ 5. Secure a Dissertation Committee, to include your major professor, two departmental faculty members, and one faculty member from a collateral department. Request official appointment of the Dissertation Committee by the Graduate School using **Doctoral Committee Form**.
- ☐ 6. **Organize specialty field examination committees** in consultation with major professor at least one semester prior to the examinations, and submit **Form D**. Work with each committee to develop a plan for preparing for the examinations, *which may include completion of the dissertation proposal*, developing a reading list, or other forms of preparation.
- ☐ 7. **Schedule and take special field examinations** no later than the 5th semester. Both exams should be taken within the same semester. Results are to be reported using Appendix **Form E**.
- ☐ 8. Soon after passage of the second field examination, and after your proposal has been approved by your major professor, schedule the **Comprehensive Oral Examination** over Dissertation Proposal and Program, to take place no later than the 5th semester. At least two weeks prior to the oral examination, distribute the dissertation proposal to the Dissertation Committee. Results are to be reported using Appendix **Form E**.
- ☐ 9. Within one month of passing oral examination, submit the **proposal in its final form** along with Appendix **Form C**, which signifies approval of the Dissertation Committee.
- ☐ 10. Apply for **Admission to Candidacy** through Graduate School at least one full semester prior to graduation. If the Dissertation Committee has changed since appointment through the Graduate School, a Revise PhD Committee form must also be submitted.
- ☐ 11. **Apply for graduation** by the Graduate School deadline, typically prior to the start of the final semester.

- ☐ 12. Complete the **Survey of Earned Doctorates** and submit certificate of completion to the Graduate School during the final semester.
- ☐ 13. **Submit dissertation draft** to thesis consultant in Graduate School by the deadline, typically a couple of months before the end of the final semester.
- ☐ 14. Following approval of the major professor, provide the Dissertation Committee members with **defense copies** of the dissertation at least two weeks prior to the Final Oral Examination.
- ☐ 15. **Schedule the Final Oral Examination** to take place before the Graduate School deadline. The defense must be officially scheduled through the Graduate School at least one week prior to the defense date.
- ☐ 16. Take **Final Oral Examination**. The exam must be passed within five years of advancement to candidacy and within eight years of the first enrollment in the doctoral program. Report the results to the Graduate School using the **Report of Final Examination/Defense of Dissertation form**, and to the department using **Appendix Form E**.
- ☐ 17. After making committee's edits to the dissertation, run the completed dissertation through university-approved plagiarism detection software. **Send the dissertation and plagiarism report** to the committee members and gather signatures on the **Graduate School's Thesis/Dissertation Approval form**.
- ☐ 18. Submit the completed dissertation, Thesis/Dissertation Approval form, and Embargo Form to the Graduate School by the deadline.

APPENDIX 8: DEPARTMENTAL FORMS

Note: The latest forms are available at UTK Department web-page (<https://geography.utk.edu/graduates/forms/>).

Form A: Request for Change in Master's or Doctoral Committee

Form B: Certification of Approval of a Proposal for a Thesis for the Master of Science Degree

Form C: Certification of Approval of a Doctoral Dissertation Proposal for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Form D: Agreement to Serve as Special Field Examiners for the Ph.D. Degree

Form E: Report of Examination Results

Form F: Application for Permission to Register for Independent Study Courses

Form G: Petition for Exception to Department Policy

FORM A: Request For Change In Master's Or Doctoral Committee

Changes in the composition of Master's or Doctoral committees may be requested by supplying the following information to the Department Head. Please note that appointment of the doctoral dissertation committee, and changes in that committee, require the completion of a special form supplied by the Graduate School. Copies are available in the department office.

PART 1. CURRENT COMMITTEE COMPOSITION:

Faculty member from collateral field who you expect to serve on your Doctoral Dissertation Committee, if known: _____

PART 2. REQUESTED CHANGE:

Add: _____ Remove: _____
Replace: _____ With: _____
Replace: _____ With: _____

PART 3. REASON FOR REQUESTING CHANGE:

I have discussed the proposed changes with the faculty members involved.

Student Name (Typed or Printed)

Date

Student Signature

PART 4. ACTION BY DEPARTMENT HEAD:

☐ Request Approved ☐ Request Denied
Comments:

Date

Department Head Signature

Distribution: Departmental File, Student, Faculty Members Involved, Chair of the Graduate Program Committee

FORM B: Certification Of Approval Of A Proposal For A Thesis For The Master Of Science Degree In Geography

Name of Student: _____ Date: _____

Title of Proposed Thesis: _____

Brief Abstract of Thesis Proposal:

Statement of Understanding. I have submitted a copy of a thesis proposal to the committee members listed below. I understand that approval of this proposal is not a binding contract nor a guarantee of acceptance of a thesis based upon the proposal.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Master's Committee Approval:

Signature of Major Professor

Date

Signature of Committee Member	Date
-------------------------------	------

Signature of Committee Member	Date
-------------------------------	------

Signature of Committee Member	Date
-------------------------------	------

Distribution by major professor: Student, Department Head, Master's Committee Members, Departmental File, Department Binder, Chair of Graduate Program Committee. Major Professor must append copy of accepted proposal to certificate submitted for student's departmental office file.

FORM C: Certification Of Approval Of A Proposal For A Dissertation For The Doctor Of Philosophy Degree In Geography

Name of Student: _____ Date: _____

Title of Proposed Dissertation:

Brief Abstract of Dissertation Proposal:

Statement of Understanding. I have submitted a copy of a thesis proposal to the committee members listed below. I understand that approval of this proposal is not a binding contract nor a guarantee of acceptance of a thesis based upon the proposal.

Signature of Applicant	Date
------------------------	------

Doctoral Committee Approval:

Signature of Major Professor	Date
------------------------------	------

Signature of Committee Member	Date
-------------------------------	------

Signature of Committee Member	Date
-------------------------------	------

Signature of Committee Member	Date
-------------------------------	------

Distribution: Student, Department Head, Doctoral Committee Members, Departmental File, Department Binder, Chair of Graduate Program Committee. Major Professor must append copy of accepted proposal to certificate submitted for student's departmental office file.

FORM D: Agreement To Serve As Special Field Examiners For The Ph.D. Degree

Date: _____

Name of Student: _____

Special Field #1 _____

Proposed Examination Date _____

Proposed Examination Committee:
(Printed or Typed)

Signatures of Examiners,
Confirming Willingness to Serve

Date

Date

Special Field #2 _____

Proposed Examination Date _____

Proposed Examination Committee:
(Printed or Typed)

Signatures of Examiners,
Confirming Willingness to Serve

Date

Date

Department Head Signature

Date

Comments:

This form must be signed by all appropriate parties and placed on file in the department office at least 30 days prior to the date on which the first examination is to be administered.

Distribution: Student, Departmental File, Department Head, Committee Members.

FORM E: Report Of Examination Results

This is to certify that on the following date: _____

☐ M.S. Student ☐ Ph.D. Student

was given the following examination:

☐ Final Oral Examination over Master's Thesis and Degree Program

☐ Final Oral Examination over Non-Thesis Master's Degree

☐ First Special Field Examination for the PH.D. Degree, in

(Area of special field)

☐ Second Special Field Examination

(Area of special field)

☐ Comprehensive Oral Examination over Dissertation Proposal and Program

☐ Final Oral Examination for the Ph.D. Degree

RESULTS

The appropriate Master's/Doctoral committee has concluded that the examination was ☐ passed ☐ failed.

Signature, Chair of Examination Committee

Signature, Major Professor

Distribution: Student, Departmental File, Department Head, Chair of Graduate Program Committee.

FORM F: Application For Permission To Register For Independent Study Courses

This form must be completed and placed on file with the department head prior to registration for any independent study course in Geography. Students who fail to comply with this requirement may be dropped from the registration roll. Retroactive registration is not permitted. The student is responsible for regularly informing the tutor (instructor) of progress and, or, problems associated with the study. The course must be completed and all required work submitted to the tutor no later than the last day of regular classes during the term of enrollment.

Student Name:

Student ID #:

Course #:

Section #:

Hours of Credit:

Please check one: ☐ Grade A-F ☐ S/NC

Semester:

Year:

E-mail Address:

Phone #:

Descriptive Title (Optional, maximum 21 characters including spaces):

In the space below, and on back of this page if necessary, the student must provide a description of the proposed independent work. Research projects should include a problem statement and an estimated timetable for completion of work.

Signatures:

Student

Tutor (Instructor)

Department Head

Copies: Student, Tutor, Departmental File, Department Head

FORM G: Petition For Exception To Department Policy

Petitions may be submitted by graduate students who wish to gain exceptions to course requirements or to department policies which affect their graduate status or program responsibilities. To petition waiving a required course, the student should provide documentation (e.g. course syllabus) that demonstrates sufficient background commensurate with departmental course requirements.

DATE: _____

TO: Chair, Graduate Program Committee, Department of Geography and Sustainability

FROM: _____

Subject of the Petition (Please type)

Justification for the Petition (please type)

Signature of Petitioner

Recommendation of Advisor

Signature of Advisor

Recommendation of Graduate Program Committee

Signature, Chair of Graduate Program Committee

Signature, Department Head

Copies to: Student Petitioner, major Advisor, Departmental File, Chair of Graduate Program Committee

APPENDIX 9: GRADUATE SCHOOL FORMS

Graduate student forms are available at the Graduate School's website: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/>. Most of the forms are in interactive PDF. Students should go to the website for the most current forms. The forms are periodically updated by the Graduate School. Thus, Graduate student forms listed in this handbook are for reference purpose only. The first page of the Graduate School's Central Form webpage displays the forms available and their links that detail instruction. See the captured picture below (as of August 2018).

The screenshot shows the 'Forms Central' webpage of The University of Tennessee Graduate School. The browser address bar displays 'https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/'. The page features a left sidebar with the university logo and a navigation menu including 'Home', 'About Us', 'Admissions', 'Graduate Student Life', 'Training & Mentorship', 'Theses & Dissertations', 'Graduation', 'Forms Central' (highlighted), and 'Give to the Graduate School'. The main content area is titled 'The Graduate School' and 'Forms Central'. It lists several categories of forms with their respective links:

- Master's or Specialist Degree**
 - [Admission to Candidacy](#)
 - [Revised Admission to Candidacy](#)
 - [Report of Final Examination/Defense of Thesis/Project/Capstone](#)
- Thesis/Dissertation**
 - [Thesis/Dissertation Approval](#)
- Second Deadline**
 - [Second Deadline Graduation Application](#)
- Registration**
 - [Change of Registration](#)
 - [Late Change of Registration](#)
- Doctoral Degree**
 - [Admission to Candidacy](#)
 - [Revised Admission to Candidacy](#)
 - [Doctoral Committee Form](#)
 - [Schedule of Dissertation Defense](#)
 - [Request for Concurrent Master's Degree](#)
- Graduate Certificate**
 - [Admission to a Graduate Certificate Program](#)
 - [Graduate Certificate Course Verification](#)
- Other Graduate School Forms**
 - [Permission to Repeat a Graduate Course](#)
 - [Graduate Student Leave of Absence](#)
 - [Reinstatement Request](#)
 - [600 Continuous Enrollment Exemption](#)
 - [Request for Letter of Degree Completion](#)
 - [Request for Time Extension](#)
 - [Senior Requesting Graduate Credit](#)
 - [Remote Participation at Oral Defense Notification](#)
 - [Permission to Take a Graduate Course Overload](#)
 - [Change of Program](#)

A9.1 Admission to Candidacy Application: Master's Degree

The Admission to Candidacy application, when approved, is a contract between a student and the university, establishing the coursework required to graduate with a degree in their chosen program. You must submit the application no later than the last day of classes preceding the term in which you expect to graduate.

Link: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/admission-to-candidacy-masters-or-specialist-degree/>

Sample:



Submit all forms to:
The Graduate School
111 Student Services Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996-0211

Admission to Candidacy Masters or Specialist Degree

Name:			
	<i>Last</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Middle</i>
Student ID #:			
Email:			
Major:			
Degree:			
Concentration:		Choose One:	☐ Thesis ☐ Non-Thesis
Campus (Choose One):	☐ Knoxville (on-campus)	☐ Distance Education (online only)	☐ Nashville ☐ UTSI
Student Signature:			

In chronological order, list only graduate level courses that count towards the degree

Year/Term	Course Name Prefix	Course #	Course Title	Hours	Grade

A9.2 Doctoral Committee Form

You may submit the Doctoral Admission to Candidacy application after admission as a potential candidate to the doctoral program, having passed the comprehensive exams. In addition, your doctoral committee must be officially established through the Graduation Specialist by submitting a Doctoral Committee Form before your Admission to Candidacy will be approved.

Link: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/doctoral-committee-form/>

Sample:



Submit all forms to:
111 Student Services Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996-0211
gradspec@utk.edu

Doctoral Committee Form

Name:			
	<i>Last</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Middle</i>
Student ID #:		Email:	
Degree:		Program:	
	<i>PhD, DNP, DrPH, DSW</i>		

Proposed Doctoral Committee

Faculty Signature confirms acknowledgement of the request, and willingness to serve.

Name (Please Print)	Department	Signature
<i>Major Professor</i>		

A9.3 Admission to Candidacy Application: Doctoral Degree

The Admission to Candidacy application, when approved, is a contract between a student and the university, establishing the coursework required to graduate with a degree in their chosen program. Once the application has been submitted and approved, any later changes to the degree requirements for a program will not apply to the candidate. If for any reason (class unavailability, etc.), a course listed on this application cannot be completed, the candidate may submit a Revision to Admission to Candidacy form. These revisions will need to be approved by the candidate's major professor.

Link: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/admission-to-candidacy-doctoral-degree/>

Sample:

Admission to Candidacy Doctoral Degree

Name:			
	<i>Last</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Middle</i>
Student ID #:			
Email:			
Major:			
Degree:			
Concentration:			

To be Completed by the Graduate School

<i>Date Admitted</i>	<i>Term for Degree</i>
Met Residence Requirements? ☐ Yes ☐ No	
<i>Dean of the Graduate School</i>	

Campus (Choose One): ☐ *Knoxville*
(on-campus) ☐ *Distance Education*
(online only) ☐ *Nashville* ☐ *UTSI*

Student Signature

Date

Residence Requirement

Residence is defined as a minimum of two consecutive semesters of full-time (9 hours) enrollment or three consecutive semesters of part-time (6 hours) enrollment. Individual programs may have additional residence requirements. If using 6-hours enrollment per semester while holding a half-time graduate assistantship, attach a letter of appointment from the department.

List the two terms of full-time enrollment or three terms of part-time enrollment used to meet the residence requirement:

A9.4 Scheduling Defense of Dissertation Form

This form is used by doctoral candidates who are preparing to schedule their dissertation defense, as part of the requirements for graduation. Remember that doctoral candidates must schedule their dissertation defense no later than one week prior to their defense. Check the graduation deadlines at <https://gradschool.utk.edu/graduation/graduation-deadlines/> for the specific deadline for the term in which you intend to graduate.

Link: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central/schedule-of-dissertation-defense/>

Sample:



Submit all forms to:
111 Student Services Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996-0211
gradspec@utk.edu

Schedule of Dissertation Defense

Name: Student ID #:
Last First Middle

Phone: Email:

Major: Graduation:
Semester/Year

Date of Defense: Time of Defense:

Location:

Dissertation Title:

Dissertation Committee

No Signatures Required

Printed Name (Major Professor) Department

Printed Name Department

A9.5 Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form

This form is used by Doctoral candidates and Master's candidates in a thesis program to receive approval of their thesis or dissertation, as a requirement for graduation. Candidates should have already submitted a thesis to Trace (trace.utk.edu) electronically.

Link: <https://gradschool.utk.edu/documents/2016/02/thesisdissertation-approval.pdf/>

Sample:



GRADUATE SCHOOL

Submit all forms to:
111 Student Services Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996-0211
thesis@utk.edu

Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form

Name:
Last First Middle

Student ID #: Email:

Degree: Major:
Ex. MS, MA, PhD, EdS

Title of Thesis/
Dissertation:

As major professor for the student named above, I certify by signing below that I have read this student's defended thesis or dissertation, have approved changes required by the final examiners, have confirmed that the document has been checked for plagiarism, and recommend the thesis or dissertation to the Graduate School for acceptance.

Printed Name (Major Professor) Signature (Major Professor) Date

The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis/dissertation approval form and content and recommend that it be accepted by the Graduate School.

Printed Name (Committee Member) Signature (Committee Member) Date

A9.6 Graduate Student Travel Award Form

The Graduate Student Travel Award is administered by the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) and the Dean of the Graduate School. Allocations from this fund are utilized to provide travel awards for UT graduate students presenting research at professional meetings. The awards are made on the basis of merit, not need, and allow for partial reimbursement of transportation, lodging and registration expenses. Travel award requests must be filed using the current Graduate Student Travel Fund application. Visit the Graduate Student Senate Travel Awards, <https://gss.utk.edu/travel-awards/information/> to review the process, application, and deadline dates. Applications must be submitted online.

Online Application Link: <https://gss.utk.edu/travel-awards/travel-awards-application/>

Sample:



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

- Home
- About
- Meetings
- Legislation & Initiatives
- Graduate Student Resources
- Travel Awards
- Events
- Give to UT

Graduate Student Senate

Travel Awards Application

1 Instructions 2 Application

APPLICANT INFORMATION

First Name *	Last Name *
Address *	
Street Address	
Address Line 2	
City	State / Province / Region
	United States
ZIP / Postal Code	Country
UTK Email *	
College *	

APPENDIX 10: IMPORTANT WEB SITES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

- International students
 - Center for International Education (international.utk.edu)
 - International House (ihouse.utk.edu)
 - ITA Testing Program (tiny.utk.edu/ita-testing)
- Professional development & training
 - Office of Graduate Training and Mentoring (gradschool.utk.edu/training-and-mentorship)
 - Best Practices in Teaching Program (tiny.utk.edu/bpit)
 - UT Libraries Information for Graduate Students (libguides.utk.edu/graduate)
 - Center for Career Development (career.utk.edu)
 - Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center (tenntlc.utk.edu)
 - UT CIRTl: Center for Integration of Research and Teaching (tlc.utk.edu/cirtl-program-center-for-integration-of-research-and-teaching/)
 - Experience Learning (experiencelearning.utk.edu)
- Funding
 - costs and funding opportunities (tiny.utk.edu/grad-funding)
 - Graduate Student Senate Travel Awards (gss.utk.edu/travel-awards)
 - Financial Aid and Scholarships (onestop.utk.edu/financial-aid)
- Student resources
 - Counseling Center (counselingcenter.utk.edu)
 - departments and college websites
 - Graduate School (gradschool.utk.edu)
 - Graduation Deadlines (tiny.utk.edu/grad-deadlines)
 - Graduate School Forms (gradschool.utk.edu/forms-central)
 - Graduate Catalog (tiny.utk.edu/grad-catalog)
 - Student obligations and appeals process (tiny.utk.edu/rights-obligations)
 - Graduate Student Senate (gss.utk.edu)
 - Office of Graduate Admissions (gradschool.utk.edu/admissions)
 - Student Conduct and Community Standards (studentconduct.utk.edu)
 - Office of Equity and Diversity (oed.utk.edu)
 - Sexual Misconduct, Relationship Violence, and Stalking (sexualassault.utk.edu)
 - Office of Multicultural Student Life (multicultural.utk.edu)
 - Office of Research Integrity (research.utk.edu/compliance)
 - Thesis/Dissertation Consultant (gradschool.utk.edu/thesesdissertations)
 - Office of Information Technology (oit.utk.edu)

APPENDIX 11: GENERATIVE AI POLICY

A11.1. Purpose And Guiding Principles

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems synthesize information and produce text, code, images, maps, audio, and other outputs. These tools are increasingly embedded in academic and professional work. This handbook policy explains how graduate students in the Department of Geography & Sustainability may use them responsibly in coursework, research, examinations, assistantships, and teaching duties.

Graduate education and scholarly work depend on individual creative thought, methodological competence, accurate evidence, and transparent authorship. Official graduate documents, including course assignments, comprehensive or candidacy examinations, proposals, theses, dissertations, maps, code, and manuscripts, must represent the student's own intellectual contribution, with appropriate input from advisors and collaborators.

Generative AI may assist your scholarly work, but it must not replace the thinking, disciplinary judgment, analysis, or communication that an assignment, examination, research project, or professional task is intended to demonstrate. You remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, legality, accessibility, and consequences of all work you submit or distribute.

A11.2. Scope And Relationship to Other Requirements

This policy applies to all Geography & Sustainability graduate students in their coursework, examinations, research, departmental employment, assistantships, and teaching responsibilities. It supplements, rather than replaces, University of Tennessee policies, the Student Code of Conduct, research-integrity and human-subjects requirements, sponsor or data-use agreements, journal policies, and course-specific instructions. When requirements conflict, follow the more restrictive rule.

Your instructors, examination committee, principal investigator, advisor, publisher, or research partners may prohibit or further limit AI use. Ask the appropriate person before using AI whenever permission is uncertain.

A11.3. Core Requirements

Never upload confidential material. Confidential committee, personnel, or student documents; approval, compliance, or contract documents; anything requiring a signature; unpublished research data, code, or manuscripts; and other non-public material must never be uploaded to, pasted into, or discussed with an AI tool without prior authorization. If you are unsure whether something is confidential, do not upload it — ask first. This is the single most important requirement in this policy; the requirements below apply to all other use of generative AI.

- **Preserve authorship.** Do not submit AI-generated expression, reasoning, analysis, or design as your own. Routine spelling and grammar correction is generally permissible, subject to course or publisher rules.
- **Verify every output.** AI can fabricate citations, misstate facts, introduce code errors, obscure uncertainty, and reproduce bias. Confirm claims against authoritative sources; read every work you cite; and test code, calculations, maps, and analyses.

- **Protect information.** Do not enter confidential, restricted, proprietary, export-controlled, personally identifiable, location-sensitive, unpublished, or third-party material into an AI service unless its use is expressly authorized and the service is approved for that data. This is particularly important for confidential committee, personnel, or student records; approval, compliance, or contract documents; anything requiring a signature; and unpublished data, code, or manuscripts.
- **Disclose material use.** Document AI assistance that affects content, analysis, code, images, maps, organization, or interpretation. Follow the acknowledgement template in Section 6 and any stricter instructor, sponsor, or publisher requirement.
- **Maintain reproducibility.** Retain prompts, relevant outputs, model/tool name and version when available, dates of use, and a record of verification when AI materially contributes to research or teaching products.
- **Respect people and places.** Consider harms from inaccurate, biased, or overly precise representations, especially for Indigenous communities, vulnerable populations, human participants, culturally sensitive sites, and protected species or resources.

A11.4. Examples Of Acceptable, Conditional, And Unacceptable Use

These examples are defaults, not blanket permissions. Always follow the instructions for your course, examination, research project, assistantship, or publication. “Conditional” means you may need prior authorization, must carefully review inputs and outputs, must protect sensitive information, and must disclose material use.

Area	Generally acceptable	Conditional / use caution	Generally unacceptable
Administrative work	Summarize your own nonconfidential meeting notes; reformat verified references; draft routine email.	Summarize authorized collaborative notes after checking privacy and accuracy.	Upload confidential committee, personnel, student, or unpublished research materials without authorization.
Literature and coursework	Use AI to suggest search terms; locate possible sources, then you must independently find, read, and verify them.	Summarize a publication for private orientation when allowed; compare your interpretation with the original.	Generate literature-review prose, fabricate or cite unread sources, complete assignments contrary to instructor rules, or answer examination questions.
Writing and official documents	Correct spelling and grammar in your own text when permitted.	Suggest revisions, counterarguments, or organization for your own draft if authorized, verified, and disclosed.	Generate substantive prose, arguments, outlines, hypotheses, interpretations, or conclusions and present them as your own.

Coding, GIS, and spatial analysis	Explain syntax; generate a small routine for a known method; help debug code you understand and can test, including your own coursework or practice scripts that contain no research data or confidential information.	Refactor scripts, suggest visualization options, or assist with documented workflows after validation against known results.	Choose an unknown method, conduct an analysis you cannot explain, invent geoprocessing steps, submit untested code/output as evidence, or upload lab, project, sponsored, or unpublished research code, scripts, research data, or project documents — including material you authored yourself — to an AI tool without prior consultation and approval from your advisor or principal investigator.
Cartography, imagery, and remote sensing	Brainstorm color palettes, accessibility checks, or map-layout alternatives using nonsensitive inputs.	Generate or alter illustrative imagery when clearly labeled and when licensing, provenance, and representational impacts are addressed.	Present synthetic or materially altered imagery, maps, field observations, or remote-sensing products as authentic evidence; remove provenance; or create deceptive geographic representations.
Qualitative and community-engaged research	Generate nonsensitive interview-practice questions or administrative templates before human review.	Assist with authorized transcription, coding, or translation only under IRB, consent, data-security, and research-team requirements, with validation.	Upload identifiable or sensitive participant/community data to an unapproved service; replace researcher interpretation; fabricate quotations, participants, or field notes.
Research design	Explain established concepts or help format a researcher-developed protocol.	Critique an existing design or identify possible gaps when the researcher independently evaluates each suggestion.	Generate the central research question, conceptual contribution, methodology, or interpretation in place of

			the researcher's own intellectual work.
Teaching assistantships and assessment	Brainstorm active-learning ideas; draft a rubric or practice item for review by the supervising instructor.	Draft lesson materials or accessibility alternatives when authorized, verified by you and the supervising instructor, and disclosed as appropriate.	Upload protected student work; delegate grading or consequential feedback; generate course material without expert review; or present AI-created material as verified scholarship.

A11.5. Data Privacy, Intellectual Property, And Geographic Risk

Information you enter into an external AI system may be retained, reviewed, reused, or exposed under the provider's terms. Never assume a consumer AI service is private. Before using any AI tool for graduate work, confirm that your planned use complies with the relevant data classification, consent, contract, license, IRB protocol, sponsor terms, and university guidance.

- Do not upload another person's work, student work, lab or project materials, manuscripts under review, proposals, examination content, peer-review materials, or unpublished data without explicit authorization.
- Do not upload your own or your research group's code, scripts, research data, project documents, or other non-public materials without prior consultation and approval from your advisor, principal investigator, or the appropriate research or teaching supervisor. Having written or collected the material yourself does not make it yours alone to disclose. This requirement applies to lab, project, sponsored, and unpublished research work. It does not apply to code you wrote yourself for coursework or personal practice, provided it contains no research data, no confidential or restricted information, no credentials or API keys, and no material belonging to a lab, sponsor, collaborator, or another person; such code may be used with a university-approved tool, subject to your instructor's rules. If you are unsure which category your code falls into, treat it as project code and ask first.
- Do not upload precise locations of vulnerable people, culturally sensitive places, critical infrastructure, archaeological resources, protected species, or other sensitive geographic features unless expressly authorized and appropriately safeguarded.
- Do not use AI-generated citations, datasets, coordinates, images, quotations, or factual claims without tracing them to reliable original sources.
- Use university-approved tools and the minimum necessary data whenever AI use is authorized. De-identification may not be sufficient for fine-scale spatial or qualitative data because people and places can sometimes be re-identified through combination with other information.
- **Which tools are approved?** The University of Tennessee provides UT Verse (<https://oit.utk.edu/ai/utverse/>), a set of UT-built and UT-hosted AI tools, including the UT Verse AI Assistant, that is available to all UT students, faculty, and staff and was created specifically because

third-party AI applications posed unacceptable data-privacy and security risks. Use UT Verse, or another tool the University has licensed and vetted, for any work involving university data. Personal or free accounts on public services such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, or Copilot are not university-approved; use them only for information that is already public and non-sensitive. Approved status is not blanket permission: before entering anything sensitive, confirm with your advisor, and with the Office of Innovative Technologies (<https://oit.utk.edu/ai/>), that the tool is cleared for your specific data classification, IRB protocol, or sponsor terms. Because the approved list changes, check the OIT AI pages for the current one rather than relying on this handbook.

A11.6. Disclosure And Acknowledgement

You must disclose material AI use in official documents, proposals, theses, dissertations, publications, permitted course products, maps, visualizations, code repositories, and teaching materials. Your disclosure must be specific enough for a reader to understand what the tool contributed and how you verified it.

Suggested acknowledgement template

I used [tool/model and version, if known] on [date(s)] to [specific purpose]. The tool contributed [describe content, code, analysis, image, map, or revision]. I verified the output by [methods/sources/tests] and revised it as follows: [brief description]. No confidential, restricted, or third-party material was entered without authorization. I take responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final work.

Brief example: “I used [tool] to identify a syntax error in an R function and to suggest alternative legend layouts. I tested the corrected function against a hand-calculated subset, checked the map against the source data, and selected and revised the final layout.”

A11.7. Examinations And Course Assignments

Unless your instructor or examination committee explicitly authorizes a particular use in writing, you may not use generative AI to answer, interpret, outline, revise, or otherwise assist with comprehensive, candidacy, qualifying, or course examinations. Your instructor determines permitted uses for course assignments. You are responsible for asking before use when instructions are silent or ambiguous.

A11.8. Accountability And Review

Undisclosed or prohibited AI use may constitute academic misconduct, plagiarism, research misconduct, a privacy or data-security violation, or a breach of professional obligations, depending on the circumstances. Concerns will be addressed through applicable university and departmental procedures.

Because tools and standards change rapidly, discuss planned AI use with your advisor, principal investigator, committee, instructor, and collaborators early in a project. Consult the current graduate handbook and university guidance, since requirements may change as policy, disciplinary practice, and technology evolve.

Practical rule: Use AI to support accountable human thinking, not to replace intellectual work, disciplinary expertise, or ethical judgment that your research, teaching, and education are meant to develop and demonstrate.

Source: This policy is adapted, with modifications for the Department of Geography & Sustainability, from the generative AI policy in the [Graduate Student Handbook of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology](#), University of Tennessee, Knoxville (August 2025), pp. 38–40.