



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  
**Department of Geosciences™**

***Geography Master's Student Handbook***

**(August 2023)**

**Table of Contents (clickable)**

1.	Introduction .....	2
2.	Course Work .....	3
2.1.	Thesis Option.....	3
2.2.	Non-thesis Option.....	3
3.	Committee and Degree Plan .....	4
3.1.	Thesis Option.....	4
3.2.	Non-thesis Option.....	4
4.	Duration of Financial Support .....	5
5.	Geography Graduate Seminar .....	5

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6.	Thesis .....	5
7.	Project (Non-thesis Option) .....	6
8.	Graduate Certificate in GIST.....	6
9.	Responsible Conduct of Research.....	6
10.	Academic Misconduct.....	6
11.	Preparation for Graduation (Both Options) .....	7
12.	Suggested Timeline .....	7
12.1.	Timeline for MS (Thesis Option).....	7
12.2.	Timeline for MS (Non-Thesis Option).....	8

## 1. Introduction

This document describes the academic requirements and recommended timelines for completion of a MS in Geography within the Department of Geosciences at Texas Tech University. The MS in GEOG has thesis and non-thesis options. An optional graduate minor may be taken either inside or outside this department.

The Faculty in Geography are committed to helping you navigate the program. However, individual students are responsible for making timely progress in the program and being aware of the benchmarks to be met, and the timeline for their completion. Details are provided below.

Department policies for the completion of graduate degrees are generally based on general Graduate School requirements, it is therefore important that Graduate degree-seeking students familiarize themselves with the over-arching requirements of the Graduate School and remain up to date on changes in Graduate School policies and deadlines, which may vary from semester to semester. To assist you with complying with various Graduate School requirements, important links are provided below:

The Graduate School website is [www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/) and students are expected to be familiar with the contents of the “Academic Progress” tab.

Geography Graduate Advising:

[www.depts.ttu.edu/geosciences/geog/academics/grad\\_advising.php](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/geosciences/geog/academics/grad_advising.php)

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**Note: It is the student's responsibility to know all relevant deadlines.**

## 2. Course Work

A total of **thirty** credit hours are required for the MS degree in Geography.

Students entering the master's program with an undergraduate degree in a subject other than Geography may be asked to enroll and complete a selection of GEOG and/or GIST courses recommended by their supervisor and the graduate committee. Courses completed to fulfill leveling requirements will not be applied towards the MS degree unless they carry graduate credit.

Graduate students supported by the department (teaching or research assistant) are required to register for a minimum of 9 credit hours per long semester. For summer support, the requirements are three credit hours if paid for one summer session and six hours if paid for the whole summer. The same rules apply for most support from other university entities.

### 2.1. Thesis Option

Required courses are: GEOG 5303 (Advanced Human Geography), 5304 (Advanced Physical Geography), 5309 (Quantitative Methods in Geographic Research), 5342 (Qualitative Methods in Disaster Research) 5350 (Research Design in Geography). In addition, 6 hours of electives. Electives are all in the major (GEOG and GIST courses) or up to 6 hours in other disciplines (This constitutes a minor, see next paragraph). Up to 6 hours of GEOG 7000 (Research) may be used as electives. Finally, thesis students will take 6 hours of GEOG 6000 (Thesis).

For the optional minor, students should consult with their supervisor and the graduate advisor to check the appropriateness of external courses.

### 2.2. Non-thesis Option

Required courses are: GEOG 5303 (Advanced Human Geography) and 5304 (Advanced Physical Geography). The non-thesis option requires 21 hours of electives. Electives are all in the major (GEOG and GIST courses) or up to 9 hours other disciplines (see next paragraph). Finally, non-thesis students will take 3 hours of GEOG 7000 (for the project).

A maximum of 9 hours of graduate course work in related fields may be applied towards the thirty-hour course requirement. Students should consult with their supervisor and the graduate advisor to check the appropriateness of external courses.

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### 3. Committee and Degree Plan

#### 3.1. Thesis Option

**Before starting their first long semester**, incoming students must meet with the graduate advisor. A temporary committee chair can be identified at this time. (Ideally, this faculty member will continue as chair throughout the program.) A selection of courses for the first semester of study will be made at this time.

**During the first long semester** the student should identify a thesis advisor and form a preliminary thesis committee, comprising a minimum of 2 faculty members (i.e., thesis advisor and one or more additional committee members). In consultation with the thesis advisor, the student will prepare an outline of courses to be taken during their tenure in the M.S. and meet with each member of their preliminary thesis committee to discuss the suitability of their degree plan.

**During the second semester**, the student will finalize their thesis committee. In consultation with the thesis committee, the student will finalize a plan for all remaining graduate course work.

The “*Master’s Degree Plan & Admission to Candidacy*” (Degree Plan) should be submitted to the Graduate School during the **second long semester**. The form is found at: <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/academic/FormsResources.php>. Complete the form using an Acrobat text editor and e-mail as an attachment to the Graduate Advisor for signature. Degree plans must be uploaded by Department of Geosciences Faculty and Staff.

By the **end of the second long semester**, a thesis proposal should be prepared, distributed, and approved by all committee members. If the thesis proposal is not completed and approved by the beginning of the third semester, then financial support may be withdrawn by the Geosciences Department.

#### 3.2. Non-thesis Option

**Before starting their first long semester**, incoming students must meet with the graduate advisor. A selection of courses for the first semester of study will be made at this time. During the first long semester, the student should identify an advisor and one or two other faculty members to serve as the committee.

The “*Master’s Degree Plan & Admission to Candidacy*” (Degree Plan) should be submitted to the Graduate School during the **second long semester**. The form is found at: [www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/academic/FormsResources.php](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/academic/FormsResources.php). Complete the form using an Acrobat text editor and e-mail as an attachment to the Graduate Advisor for signature. Degree plans must be uploaded by Department of Geosciences Faculty and Staff.

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#### 4. Duration of Financial Support

Funding from the Department for teaching assistant positions is limited to four long semesters.

#### 5. Geography Graduate Seminar

MS and PhD students are required to attend the Graduate Seminar. This is a twice-monthly meeting that serves as a regularly scheduled opportunity for faculty and graduate students to gather. Primarily, this is designed to give students a space to practice presenting in front of a group of people. We also use this as a time to discuss ideas for projects, learn about faculty research projects, and host guest speakers.

Time, date, and location vary by semester, so please check your email for up-to-date information. This is not a class and therefore does not have any cost, fee, or credit in the degree plan. If you have schedule conflicts, please contact the Graduate Advisor.

#### 6. Thesis

It is the student's responsibility to initiate identifying a topic for the master's thesis, in consultation with the thesis advisor. The thesis involves original research by the student. The thesis topic should be chosen no later than early in the second semester.

**By the end of the second semester**, the student will give a thesis proposal to the committee. The proposal includes a detailed introduction to the topic, clearly stated research question or hypothesis, literature review, and detailed research plan to be used. Also include a timeline for completion of major steps, including writing and re-writing.

After approval of the proposal, a student may enroll in GEOG 7000 (Research).

Theses must be prepared and formatted according to the guidelines provided by the Graduate School. Information is available at:

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/academic/DefendFormatSubmit.php>

A complete draft should be provided to the advisor **four weeks before the defense date** and, after advisor issues are addressed, the thesis will be provided to the rest of the committee at least two weeks prior to the date of the defense. Note that the Graduate School sets deadlines for thesis defenses and for submission of the final version.

Announcements (including time, place, title and abstract) of the defense will be posted around the department two weeks prior to the defense date.

The thesis defense has four parts. The candidate will make a public presentation (twenty to thirty minutes) of their thesis research. Following the presentation, the audience may ask questions. Then the audience will leave and the candidate will be examined by members of the thesis committee and members of the Graduate Faculty. Finally, the

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committee will meet without the candidate and decide if the defense was passed or failed and determine what changes are necessary to finalize the thesis. The candidate has until the submission deadline to make the changes. The graduate advisor is to submit the defense approval form within twenty-four hours of the defense.

## 7. Project (Non-thesis Option)

The project gives students an opportunity to show that they are well-rounded geographers. The committee will assign a project to be done during the **final semester**. It is roughly equivalent to the workload of a three-hour graduate class. The student will enroll in three hours of GEOG 7000. Three weeks before the end of the semester, a draft of the project will be given to the advisor and, after making requested changes, the improved draft will be provided to the whole committee two weeks before the end of the semester.

## 8. Graduate Certificate in GIST

Texas Tech offers a Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Science and Technology. Many, but not all, Geography graduate students will pursue this optional program which requires four GIST courses beyond GIST 5300. Courses can apply to both the MS and Certificate. This requires separate application to the Graduate School, Degree Plan, and Intent to Graduate form. See the Graduate Advisor for more information.

## 9. Responsible Conduct of Research

All MS students must complete the Responsible Conduct of Research training before graduation. You are encouraged to complete the training early in your program. See <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/training/responsible-academic-conduct-training.php>

Early in the final semester, students will inform the Graduate School of their intent to graduate in accordance with the Graduate School defined deadlines for that semester (see <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/academic/FormsResources.php> )

## 10. Academic Misconduct

If a student is shown to have committed academic misconduct in course work or research, some of which is outlined in Section B of <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/handbook/> , that student likely will be expelled from the program. Also included in misconduct are such topics as: 1) Plagiarism, both directly copying from another source or failing to cite the source of information. 2) Falsification, or inappropriately selecting data used in a study. And 3) Fabrication, making up data used in a study. More information is found in Section V of: <https://www.agu.org/-/media/Files/Learn-About->

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[AGU/AGU Scientific Integrity and Professional Ethics Policy document.pdf](#) (This document is just for information.)

## 11. Preparation for Graduation (Both Options)

Upon submission of an Intent to Graduate Form the Graduate School will initiate a degree audit, and a series of forms becomes due, including defense notification (see list of semester specific deadlines for graduation for full details). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the degree audit is successful and other required forms are successfully submitted.

## 12. Suggested Timeline

Try to follow this schedule but realize that exceptions are common. Much of the items below are discussed previously in this document.

### 12.1. Timeline for MS (Thesis Option)

Familiarize yourself with the Graduate School's list of major steps for the Master's degree, found at <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/gradschool/academic/MastersPrograms.php>

Note: The Graduate Advisor can assist with all forms submitted to the Graduate School

#### **Before first semester**

Register for classes after consulting graduate advisor and thesis advisor (if identified).

#### **First semester**

Identify a thesis advisor and provisional thesis committee.

Complete course work.

#### **Second semester**

Working with Graduate Advisor and thesis advisor, submit a "Master's Degree Plan and Admission to Candidacy" (otherwise known as "Degree Plan").

Finalize thesis topic and committee.

Write thesis proposal. After committee approval, send proposal to Graduate Advisor.

In consultation with thesis advisor, develop plan for summer thesis work.

Take Responsible Conduct of Research training (any semester but must be completed before graduation).

Complete course work.

#### **Summer**

Work on thesis.

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**Third Semester**

Work on thesis.

Check “Expected Semester of Graduation” in Degree Works and update, if needed.

Complete course work.

**Fourth Semester**

Enroll in GEOG 6000 (Thesis) for 6 hours.

Schedule thesis defense and file Defense Notification Form. (Check deadline on Graduate School website.)

Send draft of thesis to advisor.

Two weeks prior to defense, provide updated draft (approved by your advisor) to rest of thesis committee.

Defense

Submit Thesis Oral Defense form with committee signatures.

Revise Thesis based on committee feedback and send back to committee.

Submit Electronic Thesis Final Copy Approval Form.

Complete course work.

## 12.2. Timeline for MS (Non-Thesis Option)

**First Semester**

Enroll in courses after consulting with Graduate Advisor.

Complete Course Work.

**Second Semester**

Working with Graduate Advisor, submit a “Master’s Degree Plan and Admission to Candidacy” (otherwise known as “Degree Plan”).

Take Responsible Conduct of Research training (any semester but must be completed before graduation).

Complete Course Work.

**Summer**

Courses may be taken, but not required.

**Third Semester**

Check “Expected Semester of Graduation” in Degree Works and update, if needed.

Complete course work.

**Final Semester (might be Third semester)**

Enroll in GEOG 7000 (Research) for project.

Submit Comprehensive Evaluation Report.

Complete course work.

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