

A Brief Guide to Graduate Study in Geography at the University of Connecticut

1. Introduction

This guide provides information concerning graduate study in Geography at the University of Connecticut for graduate students enrolled in our programs, and also for faculty and staff. The graduate degrees available in geography at UConn are the [M.A.](#) and the [Ph.D.](#) . There is also a Graduate Certificate Program in [GIS](#). This guide describes the policies and procedures, as established in the Geography Department and also by the UConn Graduate School, necessary to successfully complete graduate study. Students, faculty, and staff are urged to familiarize themselves with these requirements annually. While this guide reiterates many requirements found in the Graduate Catalog and on the Graduate School's web site, the current Graduate Catalog and Graduate School web site should always be consulted as well. Please keep in mind that the requirements and policies of the Graduate School, as described in the current Graduate Catalog and on the Graduate School's [web site](#) are the final authority in questions of minimum requirements for successful degree and certificate completion.

If at any time you have questions about graduate study in Geography at UConn you should contact one or more of the following:

- Cindy Zhang, Geography Department Head, (cindy.zhang@uconn.edu);
- Stephanie Beron, Geography Program Assistant, (stephanie.beron@uconn.edu)
- Anji Seth, Geography Graduate Program Coordinator (anji.seth@uconn.edu);
- Rich Mrozinski, GIS Certificate Program Coordinator (mrozinski@uconn.edu).

2. Goals of UConn Graduate Geography

The overarching goal of the UConn Geography Graduate Program is to provide both an atmosphere and the means for development of research, teaching, and other skills that comprise advanced professional development. We want the program to serve as a springboard for each student's entrance into a community of people at an advanced level of geographical skill who share interests in tackling some of the most challenging problems and questions facing the discipline and society. In achieving that overarching goal, UConn Geography strives to provide a challenging, but at the same time comfortable, intellectual environment: one that welcomes and respects all students from across a broad spectrum of diverse backgrounds, research interests, and professional goals.

In outline, the student-centered goals of UConn's graduate program are to:

- Ensure that graduate students are topically and methodologically prepared for careers in research by:
 - o providing a coherent track of courses in research methods
 - o providing a coherent track of courses in topics aligned with departmental research clusters
- Promote graduate-student centered intellectual development by:
 - o encouraging student-led topical and methodological study groups in the department
 - o encouraging student research presentations at regional and national conferences

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- encouraging student proposals for extra-mural research funding, e.g. NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants
 - encouraging the development of a student-edited working paper series
 - encouraging students to make meaningful contributions to papers submitted for publication to refereed journals, i.e. sole or first authorship.
- Promote graduate student professional development by:
- encouraging student participation in Graduate School and Center for Teaching and Learning professional development programs
 - encouraging student-designed special sessions at regional and national conferences
 - ensuring each student has a teaching or internship opportunity

3. The Role of Graduate Students in the Department

UConn Geography views graduate students as fundamentally important contributors to the research, teaching, and service activities of the department. They may be asked to serve on standing committees and search or other ad hoc committees. They have an elected representative who attends faculty meetings and acts as a point person for communication between the graduate students as a group and the faculty or the department head. In addition to courses taught in the department, Geography also sponsors colloquia and workshops that are useful in providing breadth and depth of knowledge in geographical and related topics. Graduate student attendance at these offerings is worthwhile and expected.

As much as possible the role of students in the department's activities is facilitated by financial support in the form of teaching assistantships and research assistantships both within and outside the Geography Department. All graduate student assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis subject to availability of funds and the Department tries to support as many graduate students as it can with these funds. M.A. students are typically awarded between one and four semesters of support. Ph.D. students may be awarded up to 8 semesters of support beyond the MA level. Research assistantships are most commonly funded by individual faculty members with research grants that provide funding for assistants. Some students do pay their own tuition and some receive fellowships or other financial support to attend graduate school. At the present time, we have no financial support available for students enrolled solely in our Graduate GIS Certificate Program (either online or in-person).

Graduate assistantships range from 50% (10 hours per week) to 100% (20 hours per week) of available time. It is university policy that students holding graduate assistantships are expected not to have additional employment unless they have written consent from their advisor. Teaching assistantships are funded by UConn to support its teaching mission, and are most often awarded to its graduate students by the Geography Department. All teaching assistants must have proficiency in English before having any direct instructional responsibility (see [International Teaching Assisting Services](#)). Many research assistantships and all teaching assistantships provide tuition remission.

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Both teaching assistants and research assistants at UConn are not just emerging scholars, but also [employees of UConn](#). As such, they are represented by [GEU-UAW](#). Unlike the anti-labor reactionaries at Yale, the University of Chicago, and some other colleges and universities, the faculty at UConn is highly supportive of the graduate students in their struggle for their rights as workers.



[Image source](#)

Each semester every graduate assistant receives an appointment contract, developed by the supervisor of the duties it entails, as part of the agreement between UConn and the GEU-UAW. Graduate assistants are responsible for being available to work during the full length of their contract. The Department has established a way to record personal days and approved days away from work.

The department also provides some financial assistance to graduate students in its allocation of fellowship money to be used as small grants to support research activity including field work and travel to conferences. Applications for fellowship funds are typically made in the spring following a request from the department that contains information about the specific types of activities that will qualify for potential awards. The department also occasionally supports graduate student travel to conferences from separate funds that have been squirreled away from one source or another. There's no budget transparency at UConn, so who knows where this money comes from, but we don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

General information about graduate assistantships and fellowships is available in the [UCONN Graduate Catalog](#). Further [general information about other financial support](#) for graduate students at UConn, as well as [specific sources of funding](#), is available online. Travel assistance for doctoral students is also available [online](#).

As stated on the [Graduate School website](#), in order to retain an appointment, or to be reappointed to a graduate assistantship, a student must meet the following criteria:

- Must hold Regular (not Provisional) status
- Must maintain a cumulative average of at least B (3.00) in any course work taken
- Must be eligible to register (i.e., must not have more than three viable grades of Incomplete on his or her academic record)
- Must be enrolled in a graduate degree program scheduled to extend through the entire period of the appointment or reappointment
- Must be a full-time student.
- Must be in compliance with their appointment contracts in order to continue as a graduate assistant.

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4. Students, Advisors, and Advisory Committees

Almost all entering graduate students have a major advisor designated before matriculation. In the case of GIS Certificate students, that advisor is Rich Mrozinski, Coordinator of the GIS Certificate Program, or Cindy Zhang, the Department Head. In the cases of M.A. and Ph.D. students, major advisors are typically established during the time of application to the program. All degree students must have a major advisor before the end of their first semester in the program.

Timely and productive progress to the graduate degree is highly dependent upon a good working relationship between the student and the major advisor. Major advisors should be viewed as facilitators of degree progress and mentors in scholarly and professional development. Students and advisors should meet frequently to form, develop, and modify specific programmatic goals, research plans, and intellectual growth in general. Advisor and student conduct in their working relationship should always be ethical and respectful, and always be in full compliance with [UConn codes of behavior](#).

On occasion, a student's professional goals or research interests may evolve to such a degree that it is helpful to [change the major advisor](#). The student should consult with the Geography Department Head and The Graduate Program Coordinator before changing major advisors.

In addition to major advisors, M.A and Ph.D. students also have advisory committees that consist of a minimum of three faculty members, including the major advisor. The major advisor and at least one associate advisor on the committee must be members of the graduate faculty in Geography as a field of study as specified in the [Graduate Catalog Advisory System](#). The names of eligible committee members in Geography can be found on the [Geography Department Faculty Page](#). Most Ph.D. advisory committees in Geography have five members, and must include a qualified graduate faculty member from UConn from outside the Geography Department, or an additional geographer or other academic expert from outside of UConn. For example, faculty members from UConn's Departments of Finance, Civil Engineering, and Natural Resources and the Environment have served on advisory committees, as have geographers from Arizona State University and Clark University. Advisory committee members are selected and invited to serve after close consultation between the student and major advisor. Students typically take at least one course from each advisory committee member who is member of the UConn faculty.

5. Plans of Study

GIS Certificate students design their coursework in compliance with the requirements stated in the [catalog](#). Both M.A. and Ph.D. students design their plans of study in close consultation with their advisory committees. The relevant forms for [M.A](#) and [Ph.D](#) plans of study are available online. It is important to remember that not all courses listed in the Graduate Catalog are offered on a regular basis. Actual [course scheduling](#) should be consulted in planning all coursework.

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M.A. students can pursue either general Plan A or general Plan B. Plan A is the thesis option and requires at least twenty four credits of appropriate course work, as well as a minimum of nine credits of GRAD 5950/5960 (formerly GRAD 395) Master's Thesis Research. The advisory committee may require more than the minimum twenty four credits of course work depending on the scope and quality of a student's preparation and objectives. All Plan A master's students must write and successfully defend a thesis that demonstrates mastery of a geographical topic to the satisfaction of their advisory committees. That defense usually takes the form of a public presentation of the thesis' major points, followed immediately by an oral examination by the advisory committee that focuses on the contents of the thesis. Plan B is the non-thesis option that requires a minimum of thirty credits of appropriate course work. An advisory committee may require more than the minimum twenty four credits depending on the scope and quality of a student's preparation and objectives. In addition to successful completion of the coursework in the plan of study, all Plan B masters students must pass a comprehensive examination in geography administered by the advisory committee in order to demonstrate general mastery of the geographical and related topics covered in the plan of study.

The Ph.D. in Geography requires a minimum 30 credits of advanced content coursework beyond a bachelor's degree or 15 credits of advanced content coursework beyond the master's degree in Geography. In addition to their coursework in Geography, all Ph.D. students must also take 15 credits of GRAD 6950/6960 and either demonstrate mastery of a foreign language or earn [six credits in a related field](#) (outside of Geography).

All Ph.D. student must also pass a General Examination administered by the advisory committee and complete and successfully defend a dissertation. The purpose of the general examination is twofold: it is used to determine if a student has developed a thorough working knowledge of the relevant published literature and also to determine whether a student has the necessary skills to conceptualize and plan the solution of a significant research question pertinent to the chosen area of inquiry in geography. The [general examination](#) is administered by at least five faculty members, including the advisory committee.

The purpose of the dissertation is to provide a significant and original contribution to the body of knowledge in Geography as an advanced academic discipline. In order to be approved a dissertation must demonstrate a very high level of proficiency in geographical research, from planning to execution. Initially, doctoral students must present publicly, and successfully defend (through a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session) a [dissertation proposal](#) as determined by the advisory committee and two additional reviewers. Successfully defended proposals must be transmitted to the Graduate School for its approval. The completed dissertation must also be presented publicly, and successfully defended in a question-and-answer format determined by the advisory committee and two additional reviewers. The date, time, and place of the dissertation presentation must be placed on the University Events Calendar at least two weeks prior to its occurrence. Detailed information on the dissertation procedure can be found [here](#).

For many students the prospect of completing a thesis or dissertation is unsettling, to put it mildly, and each is truly a significant task. Major advisors and advisory committees are the primary resources for students as they plan and conduct their research, and also in the writing of

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theses and dissertations. Additional resources for graduate students are available for [assistance in writing](#) and in [data analysis](#).

Details for both M.A. and Ph.D. programs can be found in the Graduate Catalog under [standards and degree requirements](#) and under the Geography Department's Graduate Catalog overview page. Changing circumstances such as course schedule modifications or evolving research directions can sometimes require alteration to original plans of study with respect to courses listed or changes in the members of the advisory committee. Such changes are accomplished by filing the [form](#), available online.

Other circumstances may cause a student to take a leave of absence from the program and university, or perhaps even permanently withdraw. Those actions can be accomplished by filing the relevant forms from the graduate program website for a "[request for leave of absence](#)", or "[withdrawal](#)" forms, respectively.

6. Schedule for Completion of the Certificate in GIS

The GIS Certificate Program requires the successful completion of 12 credits as designated in the [UConn catalog](#). The program may be completed in one semester of full-time study, or two semesters or more when studying part time. Certificate students often decide to apply for admission to one of the Geography graduate degree programs. Given advisory committee approval, any graduate course (or all courses) taken toward the GIS Certificate may be used to fulfill M.A. or Ph.D. program requirements in Geography as long as it was taken after formal admission to the Certificate Program. Only six credits of GIS Certificate courses may be used in fulfilling M.A. or Ph.D. course requirements if the courses were taken as a non-matriculated student.

There are two steps to completing the GIS Certificate Program:

1. Complete 12 credits of relevant course work toward the GIS Certificate.
2. Inform the GIS Certificate Program Coordinator, Rich Mrozinski, (mrozinski@uconn.edu) that all coursework is completed.

The Graduate School then notifies the student that the GIS Certificate has been awarded by letter and email, and completion of the GIS Certificate Program will be designated on the student's official transcript.

7. Schedule for Completion of the M.A. in Geography

M.A. programs are typically completed in four semesters, but occasionally in three when the Plan B option is taken (see above).

- For the M.A. Plan A: [Geography Timelines - MA \(Plan A\)](#)
- For the M.A. Plan B: [Geography Timelines - MA \(Plan B\)](#)

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8. Schedule for Completion of the Ph.D. in Geography

Ph.D. programs may take from three to six years, depending upon preparation.

- For students with the B.A.: [Geography Timelines - PhD \(with BA/BS\)](#)
- For students with the M.A.: [Geography Timelines - PhD \(with MA/MS\)](#)