

FALL 2020 ORIENTATION**NEW GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE STUDENTS (MA & PhD)****University of Arizona, School of Geography, Development, & Environment (SGDE)****August 2020****Carl Bauer, Professor & Director of Graduate Studies, cjbauer@email.arizona.edu****Introduction**

Greetings and welcome to the graduate program in geography in the University of Arizona's School of Geography, Development, and Environment (SGDE).

As the program's Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), I am the general-purpose graduate advisor. I focus especially on the procedural aspects of your passage through the program, and you'll need my signature on various forms along the way. You and your advisors will work through the more substantive aspects of your fields and career paths. I am available for general advice or strategizing, if that's useful.

This brief memo summarizes the key rules, requirements, and procedures for our graduate program. Don't panic: you do not need to master these details yet. I recommend that you scan this memo now and return to it later when you need to.

- For more detailed information, please read the [Graduate Program Handbook](#) on the SGDE webpage. Please ask me or Liz Cordova (elizabec@arizona.edu), Graduate Program Coordinator, about any questions you have (Liz in particular is the keeper of much critical and arcane knowledge).
- See also the Graduate College website (<http://grad.arizona.edu>) for UA-wide policies, requirements, deadlines, etc.

Choosing courses, fields, and advisors

As new students here, your basic goal is to define your areas of interest and specialization, with help from your mentors, advisors, teachers, and peers. You'll need to identify and take the appropriate courses, make a plan of study, and organize a committee of faculty for your theses, comprehensive exams and dissertations. Things often change along the way, of course, as people's interests and priorities evolve, and this is fine, but please make sure that your advisors, Liz Cordova, and I are kept up-to-date.

PhD students have the additional task of choosing two or more fields of specialization in the major (Geography), as well as a PhD minor. These are the fields on which you will be examined in your comprehensive exams, normally in your 2nd or 3rd year in the program. This task is not urgent for new students, but it is good to start thinking about early, particularly as some minors have specific course requirements.

There is a lot going on at SGDE and around the UA campus, including many interdisciplinary activities and programs, and it is hard to be fully informed about all the things that interest you. The best sources of information are faculty, other grad students, and staff, and of course you should explore the relevant UA websites.

UA also offers various “graduate certificates” that draw on courses taught in different departments. SGDE faculty and students have been closely involved with three of these graduate certificates in particular: [GIS, Professional GIST, and Water Policy](#). A graduate certificate generally requires about four graduate courses. If you plan it well, you can usually double-dip and get credit for some courses in your degree program as well as a grad certificate. See a list of UA certificate programs [here](#).

A final note about faculty: graduate students must take some initiative to meet and learn about different faculty who may have shared interests. We do our best to link grad students with appropriate faculty advisors, and many incoming grads have already been in contact with some faculty, but even so, you should explore possible course offerings on your own. All graduate students and faculty are expected to attend the Friday colloquium series in SGDE. There are also special lectures occurring all over campus and you should familiarize yourself with sources for announcements about them or talk to other grad students who share similar research interests.

Courses and requirements

All Geography graduate students are required to complete the Core courses:

- History of Geographic Thought, GEOG 689, in Fall (usually in Year 1);
- Research Design, GEOG 500, in Spring (usually in Year 1);
- advanced methods courses: 3 units for MA, 6 units for PhD (some may transfer from MA); methods can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed, including GIS and remote sensing, and students can learn them through regular graduate or co-convened courses, either within or outside the School as appropriate;
- Friday Colloquium, GEOG 695A: all graduate students in residence are expected to attend the Friday Colloquium, whether or not they are formally registered for GEOG 695A (one credit, which is not graded and does not count towards degree requirements). Students should register for the Colloquium each semester if their credit load permits.

A normal semester-long course at UA is 3 credits (“unit” = “credit”). A normal course load is three courses (9 units) if you are working as a TA or RA, which is usually half-time (= 20 hours/week). A normal load is four courses (12 units) if you are not working.

For all grad students, both new and continuing, we strongly recommend the year-long course in Professional Development (GEOG 695B), which consists of sessions on different topics. We also require that future instructors take the Teaching Practicum (GEOG 695C), which is offered every year.

Remember to also check the Graduate College rules and policies about specific questions (<http://grad.arizona.edu>).

For the MA

Total credits required to graduate = 33 units (11 courses), i.e. approx. 3 courses per semester for 2 years:

- 3 core courses (see above);
- 4 GEOG graduate-level courses (2 of which can be co-convened, i.e. 400/500-level, or some kind of independent study);
- 4 elective graduate-level courses, which can include other UA programs as well as GEOG courses;
- up to a maximum of 9 units of independent study/thesis;
- Friday colloquium, GEOG 695A (does not count towards the 33 units) but is an essential element of professionalization and learning about disciplinary breadth.

See, e.g., the table at section 2. in the Graduate Handbook.

Note that MA students who are finishing their degrees here and who want to continue at UA for their PhD must apply during the January period when SGDE is considering new grad student applications for the next Fall.

For the PhD

According to the Grad College, you need:

- 36 units of course work in your major (Geog);
- 9 or more units in your minor field (depends on the minor);
- 18 units of dissertation;
- at least 12 units of course work must be done at UA, and all 18 diss. units (= 30 units total in residence at UA);
- at least 22 units on the Doctoral Plan of Study must be in courses in which regular grades (A,B,C) have been earned;
- a maximum of 30 units of transfer coursework may be used towards the PhD requirements. Relevant coursework from your Master's degree, whether done at UA or elsewhere, can be

transferred and credited toward your UA PhD (not including your thesis, which = 6 credits at UA). If your Master's degree is from another university, you must submit a Transfer Credit form in GradPath before the end of your first year of study in order to have those courses evaluated for transfer eligibility.

According to Geography:

- continuing grad students must meet all the requirements for the MA (33 credits), plus at least 18 more credits in Geography or other relevant courses taken at UA;
- at least 12 of these credits must be grad-only courses (i.e. not co-convened);
- if your Master's degree is from another university, you must do the UA Geog core courses (GEOG 689 and 500) in Year 1, which count toward your 18 credits;
- 2 advanced methods courses (6 credits, some may be transferred from Master's);
- foreign language if needed;
- choose a PhD minor, usually in another program on campus (typically 12 units or four courses). We allow some Geography PhD students to do a minor in Geography, if they have a strong background in other fields and less background in Geography.

Thus the total to graduate with a Geog PhD = 30 units minimum of course work at UA (18 major and 12 minor), not including dissertation: i.e. 10 courses, or less than 2 years of course-work after the MA.

Your main substantive task is to choose two or more fields of specialization, as well as a PhD minor field, on which you will later take your comprehensive exams (usually in your 2nd or 3rd year).

Funding: GTAs and GRAs

Liz Cordova is the key point of contact about how Teaching Assistantships/Associateships work, administratively and financially. TAs are the most common way for SGDE to employ grad students. Liz is the central clearinghouse of information about which courses will be taught in a given semester, what their TA requirements are, and which grad students are willing and able to work as TAs. These factors are hard to coordinate and grad students should keep Liz informed over time about their needs, interests, and situations. SGDE's Director is the key decision-maker about what courses are offered and by whom in any given semester.

Research Assistantships/Associateships (RAs) are funded by grants (whether external or internal to UA) rather than SGDE resources, and they are supervised by the faculty who are the grants' PIs (principal investigators). This means that faculty PIs and grad student RAs must communicate clearly about the specific work to be performed and agree about mutual expectations, on a case-by-case basis.

A question often arises about the relationship between a grad student's RA work and her/his/their own thesis or dissertation research. Different faculty members have different views about how close this relationship should be. Some SGDE faculty strongly prefer that a student's RA work coincides with her/his/their thesis or dissertation, which typically means that the faculty PI is both employer and advisor. Other faculty consider RA work and thesis/dissertation to be separate things, although they may overlap. Faculty and grad students (both new and continuing) should be sure to discuss these mutual expectations clearly. Graduate students occasionally change advisors or thesis/dissertation topics, and in such cases it is essential that they complete any RA work for which they have been employed. Please let me know if I can help in any such situation.

Funding Eligibility

For MA students admitted with the promise of funding, SGDE's policy is to offer two years of financial support. For PhD students admitted with the promise of funding, who have a master's degree either from UA or another university, SGDE's policy is to offer four years of financial support. As a general rule, the School's expectation is that MA (and PhD) students will make use of their promised funding during their first two (or four) years in the program. For MA/PhD students who succeed in getting at least one year of funding from sources outside UA for their studies and research, the School will extend the period of promised support by deferring one year of funding.

Financial support may take the form of a Graduate Teaching Assistantship/Associateship (GTA), Graduate Research Assistantship/Associateship (GRA), or Graduate Outreach Assistantship/Associateship (GOA), and typically consists of half-time employment (0.5 FTE). (Graduate Associateships are for advanced PhD students.) GTAs are allocated by the School according to needs for teaching, while GRAs and GOAs are allocated by faculty Principal Investigators (PIs) according to needs for research and outreach. Each semester of employment, whether as GTA, GRA, or GOA, counts towards a student's promised funding.

Note that GTA funding is the only source of funding that SGDE controls (subject to other constraints). Faculty PIs control GRAs and GOAs. Grad students may apply for numerous fellowships that are external to SGD or to UA. Most SGD grad students work as both GTAs and GRAs at some point in their graduate careers, and SGD encourages this diversity of experience.

MA and PhD students who have used up their 2-year or 4-year periods of promised support, respectively, as well as students to whom the School has not promised funding, may request additional GA support and employment. The School may offer support if it is available, and will pass on information about opportunities for employment through other units on campus.

Some key mileposts / deadlines / typical timelines

Annual reports: All Geography graduate students, MA and PhD, submit a progress report every February which covers the previous calendar year, and indicates plans for the coming year. At the same time, faculty advisors submit annual evaluations of each of their advisees' progress.

Most of the steps described below must be carried out in [GradPath](#). See also the table in section 11 (Graduate Degree Timeline) in the Graduate Handbook.

For MA studentsYear 1

- File Plan of Study (POS), which is a list of all courses taken and planned, by end of Year 1. Your POS can be revised over time but the final version is an official document that must be submitted to the Grad College;
- Choose advisors and form committee; note rules about which combinations of faculty can be members (i.e. regular, affiliate, or adjunct), which can be found in the Geography Graduate Program Handbook;
- Decide on thesis vs. professional option; most students choose thesis, which Geography favors (see Geography Graduate Program Handbook, sections 2.3-2.4). Students choosing the thesis option should present a thesis proposal to their committee by the end of the second semester, especially for those planning summer fieldwork.

Year 2

- If thesis option: present thesis proposal to your committee by end of the second semester, especially for those planning summer fieldwork;
- Write thesis by end of Year 2; this is not a rigid deadline but it does reflect the program's expectations about the scope of an MA thesis as well as the limits on our firm commitment of TA funding;
- If professional option: pass final exam by end of Year 2;
- Remember that MA students who want to continue for PhD must apply in January in the annual admissions process.

For PhD students

Remember that the composition of your committees and the dates of comprehensive exams and dissertation defenses must all be registered in GradPath.

Year 1-2

- File Plan of Study (POS), which is a list of all courses taken and planned, by end of semester 3. Your POS can be revised over time but the final version is an official document that must be submitted to the Grad College;

- Form advisory committee for your comprehensive exams (comps); the rules about which faculty can be members are especially key for PhD students;
- Choose two or more fields of specialization in geography, in consultation with your advisors, on which you will be examined during your comps, as well as a PhD minor, which is effectively another field in your comps;
 - ◆ note that choosing a PhD minor means adding non-SGDE faculty to your committee;
 - ◆ a PhD minor in Geog is possible for people who have strong background in other fields and less background in Geog.

Year 2-3

- Take comprehensive exams (both written and oral) after completing course-work;
- Form dissertation committee and develop dissertation proposal, usually parallel to comps;
- Advance to doctoral candidacy after passing comps and getting proposal approved.

Year 3+

Dissertation research/fieldwork and writing...culminating in dissertation defense.