

Current Graduate Students' Frequently Asked Questions (Revised August 2006)

This list is prepared for graduate students' convenience, and it is not intended to supersede the regulations contained in the Departmental Graduate Handbook or the University's General Bulletin, Graduate Edition.

1. What goes on at the meeting where I defend the prospectus/proposal for my thesis/dissertation?
 2. What sort of special registration do I need to do in the semesters during which I defend my thesis, take my doctoral exams, or defend my dissertation?
 3. What goes on at a thesis/dissertation defense?
 4. As I research and write my thesis/dissertation, should I work with my entire committee or just with my advisor?
 5. How long do I have to finish my degree?
 6. Can I receive credit for a course A) offered by another department at FSU, B) that I took prior to my entry to the FSU Geography graduate program, or C) whose course number is below 5000?
 7. I am a thesis master's student. Who can be on my thesis committee?
 8. But there are only two professors in Geography who are at all relevant to my thesis, and there's this professor in another department who'd be really helpful...
 9. What are some of the rules concerning funding, tuition waivers, and assistantships
 10. I'm a doctoral student. Who can be on my committee?
 11. What is the structure of the doctoral examination?
 12. How do I pick my fields for my doctoral examination?
 13. When should I take my doctoral exams and how should I prepare?
 14. What is the residency requirement?
 15. What classes can I take if I am teaching on an assistantship and need to have a certain number of hours on my schedule to be considered full-time?
-

1. What goes on at the meeting where I defend the prospectus/proposal for my thesis/dissertation?

Think of your prospectus defense as just a big meeting with your committee. It very likely will be the one time, prior to your actual thesis/dissertation defense, when you will have all of your

committee members together in one room discussing your work. The prospectus defense is your opportunity to ensure that all of your committee members have a shared interpretation of your research agenda and that they support the work that you propose to do. Prospectus defenses are not open to the public.

By the time of your prospectus defense, your advisor should have seen and commented on several drafts of your prospectus and the other members of your committee should have at least seen (and probably commented on) it as well. The prospectus defense is a chance for your committee members to work together to help you clear up gaps that they see arising in the future. Your committee may ask you to begin the defense with an oral presentation (ascertain this with your advisor before the defense, so that you can prepare). Typically, a short written proposal is also submitted to the committee. Then, the committee members will ask you questions and discuss your prospectus. Usually at the end of a prospectus defense, your committee will ask that certain revisions be made in the prospectus, but, unless these revisions are specifically in one of your minor committee member's areas of expertise, typically you will not have to submit the revised prospectus to the entire committee. Instead, you will be asked to submit the revised prospectus to your advisor, and this will serve as a working document as you write the thesis/dissertation. Make sure to submit your prospectus form to the Office of Graduate Studies. It requires all the signatures of your committee, including your outside member if you are a PhD student. Your outside committee member should attend your prospectus presentation.

2. What sort of special registration do I need to do in the semesters during which I defend my thesis, take my doctoral exams, or defend my dissertation?

There are three special zero-credit-hour courses: GEO 8764 (Doctoral Exam), GEO 8976 (Thesis Defense), and GEO 8985 (Dissertation Defense). These courses are in addition to the standard for-credit courses that one registers for when writing one's thesis/dissertation: GEO 5791 (Thesis) and GEO 6980 (Dissertation).

At the beginning of the semester in which you intend to graduate (generally the same semester in which you intend to defend), you must go to the Office of Graduate Studies (408 Wescott), fill out a form announcing your intent to graduate that semester, and pick up the "Guidelines and Requirements for Treatise, Thesis, and Dissertation Writers" booklet which tells you important information about formatting your thesis or dissertation. Final versions of master's theses and dissertation (that is, versions reflecting revisions mandated at the defense and then approved by your committee) are due at the Graduate Studies about one month prior to the end of term. Check with the Office of Graduate Studies for the exact date in the semester in which you intend to graduate.

Thesis Master's students: You are required to take six hours of GEO 5971 (thesis hours) to graduate.

Doctoral students: After you pass your comprehensive examination, you must file an Admission to Candidacy Form with the Office of the Registrar. You will not be permitted to register for dissertation hours (GEO 6980) until you are admitted to candidacy, although you may retroactively register for the semester in which you are admitted to candidacy. You must have at least 24 hours of GEO 6980, so it's generally in your interest to convert as many as possible credit hours from before admission to candidacy into dissertation hours.

3. What goes on at a thesis/dissertation defense?

Thesis/dissertation defenses are open to the public and, once you have found a room and a time where you and your committee can meet, your advisor is responsible for announcing to faculty and graduate students when it is happening. Students are encouraged to attend, both so that they can support their colleague and so they can learn about the process that they soon will be going through.

You will begin your defense with a presentation of your work (usually about 10-15 minutes), after which each member of your committee will ask you to respond to several questions. Once all committee members have had their chance, others in the room will be given an opportunity to ask questions as well. Following this, you and all visitors will be asked to leave the room and the committee will deliberate. When they call you back, you probably will be asked to make certain revisions. In most cases, the minor members of your committee will give your advisor the authority to ascertain that these revisions are made; in effect, the minor members of your committee are "passing" you, pending your advisor's certification that you make the post-defense revisions that the entire committee has agreed upon. Sometimes, however, a student is asked to resubmit the entire thesis/dissertation or sections thereof to the entire committee. If this happens, you may have to call a second meeting of your committee so that they can discuss whether your revisions meet their stated requirements and/or whether they require another round of revisions. In exceptionally rare instances, your entire committee may sign off on your thesis/dissertation right at the defense, but don't count on this happening.

4. As I research and write my thesis/dissertation, should I work with my entire committee or just with my advisor?

Typically, students try to involve all members of their committee at every stage in the thesis/dissertation research and writing process. Every thesis/dissertation committee is different, but in most cases, this is neither appreciated by the faculty nor strategically prudent for the student. When they approve your prospectus, all committee members are agreeing to broadly support the direction of your research and they shouldn't raise too many objections so long as you follow the agenda that everyone agreed to there. From this point on, you should work primarily with your advisor; if contentious issues come up, you're better off presenting them to your minor committee members as issues that you and your advisor have already discussed and worked through rather than presenting them as open issues on which one committee member can pull you one way and another committee member can pull you another way.

In some instances, you might never have occasion to consult with a minor committee member between the time when you defend your prospectus and the time when you present her/him with a complete draft of the thesis/dissertation that your advisor feels is ready for defending. In other instances, as you research and write, you may want discuss specific issues with a relevant minor committee member and/or run a chapter by her/him. In general, however, your work between the prospectus defense and distribution of a defense-ready draft should be with your advisor, with other committee members being consulted only as issues particularly relevant to their expertise emerge.

5. How long do I have to finish my degree?

Master's degrees must be completed within seven years from the time the student first registers for graduate credit. Doctoral degrees must be completed within five years from the time the student passes her/his comprehensive exams and is admitted to candidacy.

6. Can I receive credit for a course A) offered by another department at FSU, B) that I took prior to my entry to the FSU Geography graduate program, or C) whose course number is below 5000?

A. Students may take courses outside the Geography Department and count them toward the elective requirement for your Master's or Ph.D. degree as long as they are relevant to your program of study (DIS courses within or outside the Department also may count toward this requirement, note however that no more than 9 credits of DIS coursework may count towards the minimum number of elective credits necessary for the degree). Please note that while there is no necessary limit on the number of courses taken outside of the Department of Geography within the College of Social Sciences, College of Social Sciences administrators are becoming increasingly reluctant about applying tuition waivers to out-of-College courses. In addition, if approved by your advisor and the graduate program director, classes taken outside the department by doctoral students may be used to fulfill the two additional core course requirement of the Ph.D. program.

B) The University has rules regarding transfer of credits from before you were an admitted student. If you have taken graduate-level classes at FSU prior to entering the degree program you may retroactively credit up to twelve hours from these toward your degree. If you have taken graduate-level classes at another institution prior to entering the degree program at FSU, you may retroactively credit up to six hours.

C) We encourage a student who wishes to take a 4000-level course to take it as a 5000-level DIS, which typically will involve the student performing the undergraduate-level coursework plus extra assignments. Students may not earn graduate credit for a course at or below the 4000-level (unless, of course, they take it as a 5000-level DIS). Students may not apply credit earned in Spatial Data Analysis (GEO 4162C) towards the minimum number of course credit hours necessary for their degree.

7. I am a thesis master's student. Who can be on my thesis committee?

A master's committee must consist of at least three faculty members. These three "required" faculty members must all have master's directive status (normally, a full-time, Ph.D.-holding faculty-member will have master's directive status, although it's not automatic) and all must be within the Geography Department. Beyond these three "required" faculty members, you are free to bring on one or more additional committee members. These additional committee members may be from outside the Department and they need not hold master's directive status. Usually, however, a master's committee consists of just three Geography faculty members.

8. But there are only two professors in Geography who are at all relevant to my thesis, and there's this professor in another department who'd be really helpful...

There is a way to have only two Geography faculty-members on your master's committee and to bring in an outsider. You do this by adding a minor in another department to your Geography major. If you take nine or more credit hours in another department, this can be counted as a minor. Since Geography allows for an unlimited number of your elective hours to be taken outside of Geography, these nine hours can also count toward your Geography major. Check with people from your intended minor department, however, to make sure that they don't have specific requirements for declaring a minor in their department. If you choose a minor department, then your committee will consist of a major professor from Geography, a minor

professor from your minor department, and one or more additional professors from Geography. Again, the major professor, the minor professor, and at least one of the additional professors must have master's directive status.

8. What are some of the rules concerning funding, tuition waivers, and assistantships?

University rules require that during any semester in which a student receives a tuition waiver (s)he must be registered for at least nine hours. In special circumstances, it may be possible to award a partial tuition waiver (8 credit hours) without a stipend. According to university rules, it is not possible to award a full tuition waiver without a stipend.

Generally, the Department makes funding offers for three years for doctoral students. The assumption is that by the end of three years a full-time doctoral student should be well into her/his dissertation and able to find other sources of funding to support her/his dissertation work. That said, funding offers may be extended should the funds exist and should the Department need the student's teaching or research services. Historically, we have been able to provide doctoral students on teaching assistantships with a fourth year of funding.

The Department reserves the right to terminate its multi-year offers due to unforeseen funding reductions or due to a student's negligence in performance of assistantship duties. Additionally, a student may on occasion receive a one-semester or one-year waiver and stipend from non-recurring funds (e.g. a "signing bonus" for new students offered by the Provost's office or the Dean). Students receiving such offers may apply for continued funding once their non-recurring funds are exhausted, however they will be placed in a competition with newly entering students. Students who receive College or University Fellowships for their first year, however, generally will be guaranteed assistantships for their remaining years of funding.

Doctoral students on Department assistantships generally teach one course per semester (these half-time assistantships generally require up to 20 hours a week). It is the student's responsibility to monitor her/his hours.

After living in Florida for 12 months, a student who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident should apply for in-state status. It is in every student's interest to do this because 1) it results in substantial reductions in a student's fees (which are not covered by a tuition waiver), and 2) the College of Social Sciences and the Department of Geography will not provide more than one year of out-of-state tuition waivers to U.S. students. Applications for in-state status can be obtained from the Registrar's Office in University Center A3900.

9. I'm a doctoral student. Who can be on my committee?

A doctoral student has two committees: one that supervises the comprehensive exams and another that supervises the dissertation. Generally, the personnel of these two committees is identical, although there is no requirement that this be the case.

The examination committee consists of three members of the Geography Department. There are no requirements beyond this, although it is in everyone's interest for the student to designate one of these committee members as the committee chair at some point before the exams are taken. Additionally, if the student intends for the committee chair to be her/his dissertation advisor (which generally is the case), the student should make sure that this

professor has doctoral directive status (many assistant professors do not have doctoral directive status, so the student should check on this with the committee member in question).

Once the dissertation is completed, it must be defended before the dissertation committee (officially called the supervisory committee). At minimum, this committee consists of the advisor (who must be a Geography Department faculty member with doctoral directive status), two additional members of the Geography Department with doctoral directive status, and a fourth faculty member who is on staff at FSU but is not affiliated with the Geography Department. It is possible for your "outside" faculty member to be from an institution other than FSU, although this involves some extra paperwork.

10: What is the structure of the doctoral examination?

For each field on which you will be examined, you will be asked a set of questions, and you will have 24 hours to produce written responses to all the questions for that field. During those 24 hours, you are free to consult your notes, library materials, etc. You have nine days from when you pick up the questions for your first field until you return your answers for your third field. Thus, a student will typically pick up the questions for Field #1, work on this field for 24 hours, return her/his Field #1 answers, take a 2 to 3 day break, pick up the Field #2 questions, work on these for 24 hours, return the Field #2 answers, take a 2 to 3 day break, pick up the Field #3 questions, work on these for 24 hours, and return the Field #3 answers.

After the examination committee has had a chance to review the student's responses to the questions for the three fields, the student will be called on to orally defend her/his answers (generally this happens a few weeks after the written exam is taken). Questions at the oral examination center on defense and clarification of the responses that the student wrote when taking the examination. The Committee will give the student an evaluation on each of the three fields of pass, fail, or conditional pass (after an evaluation of conditional pass, the student will be required to revise and resubmit one or more answers in that field). If a student fails one field, (s)he will be offered a chance to retake it, although (s)he is allowed only one retake. If a student fails more than one field (or if (s)he fails the retake), (s)he will be dismissed from the program.

11. How do I pick my fields for my doctoral examination?

The first field is predetermined and it essentially consists of aspects covered in Doctoral core courses as interpreted by the examination committee. The other two fields are to be determined by the student in consultation with her/his committee. The second field should cover the scope of a specialty group in the Association of American Geographers and the third field should be more narrow than the scope of an AAG specialty group but broader than the topic of the student's intended dissertation. Additionally, the third field should not solely be a subfield of the second field. Thus, for instance, a student who went on to write his dissertation on how countries represent themselves on the Web made his second field Political Geography and his third field Geography of Information and Communications Issues.

It is generally in a student's interest to insure that for each field there are at least two members of the committee competent to write questions and evaluate responses.

12. When should I take my doctoral exams and how should I prepare?

This needs to be determined with one's advisor. In general, a full-time doctoral student will take

exams near the end of the second year or the beginning of the third year. To prepare, we recommend that a student develop an outline for each field, with a number of representative books or articles for each item in the outline. The student should then seek out the relevant members of her/his committee and achieve agreement that the material covered in the outline adequately covers the scope of the field on which the student will be examined. This outline is beneficial to the student because it a) defines the boundaries within which the committee may ask questions on a given field; b) serves as a study guide for the student preparing for the exam (indeed, the very act of (re-)reading and categorizing material on a topic is perhaps the best form of preparation); and c) provides a rapid reference source for the student when (s)he is taking the comprehensive exam.

Bear in mind that every doctoral exam is unique and it is neither possible nor desirable to completely standardize their procedure or substantive content. Nonetheless, the faculty has made policy in a number of areas (and unwritten understandings exist in others) around some general procedures.

The following is an ideal-type procedure for doctoral exams. Each case is different and rarely, if ever, will this ideal-type be entirely appropriate, but it provides a useful set of guidelines. All comprehensive exams should meet the general intent of this ideal-type even if they do not follow it in all its details:

Under normal circumstances, a full-time doctoral student will take her/his exams toward the end of the second year or beginning of the third year.

Several months before the planned exam date, the student meets with the committee chair to determine fields and committee members and to develop a reading list for each field. Ideally, reading lists are arranged in outline form with headings for sub-areas within each field, as this will assist committee members in identifying gaps in the student's preparation. Students are encouraged to derive most of the material on their reading lists from readings that they already have conducted for courses, DISes, and independent readings. Students are responsible for developing their own reading lists; it is not the responsibility of committee members to "give" lists to the student (indeed, the act of choosing what readings are important and grouping them into topics is perhaps the most helpful aspect of exam preparation).

The student obtains further input on the reading lists from other committee members and obtains approval of the lists from each committee member.

Shortly before the exams take place, the committee chair solicits questions on each field from the other two committee members. The chair then edits the question list for each field, eliminating or combining as necessary to avoid duplication, and expanding as necessary to ensure that the breadth of each field is covered. This then becomes the official set of exam questions. (Again, in some cases, it does not make sense for all committee members to provide questions for all fields, but in general the committee chair should strive to have at least two of three committee members contribute questions for each field.)

Following the written exam, the committee chair arranges for photocopies to be made of answers for all three fields, and these are distributed to the two other committee members so that they may prepare follow-up questions for the oral defense. (Even if a committee member does not feel qualified to participate in reading list preparation or question development for a given field, (s)he may still feel qualified to ask follow-up questions to the student's response, so under all circumstances all committee members should receive copies of the student's

responses prior to the oral defense.)

Typically, the oral defense takes place within two weeks of the completion of the written examination.

13. What exactly are the required courses for doctoral students?

Students are required to take five core courses (fifteen credit hours) in geographic philosophy and methodology. Students must earn at least a "B" in each core course.

Three of these core courses are as follows:

GEO 5058 Survey of Geographic Thought
GEO 5118 Geographic Research
GEO 5165 Quantitative Geography

Students who do not have adequate preparation for GEO 5165 (Quantitative Geography) will take GEO 4162C (Spatial Data Analysis) as a remedial course prior to taking Quantitative Geography. Graduate students taking Spatial Data Analysis must take the course as a regular 4000 level class and have it graded on an S/U basis. Credits earned from Spatial Data Analysis may not be applied to the minimum number of coursework credits needed for the Doctoral degree.

In addition to these three core courses, doctoral students must take two additional core courses in advanced studies of research methods relevant to their proposed dissertation research. Students should identify the courses most appropriate for them in meeting this requirement, and their selections must be approved by their advisor. The subject matter of these two courses should include advanced study in techniques for:

1. the gathering of data (e.g. through surveys, focus groups, interviews, reading of documents [with or without the assistance of computer-based content analysis software], participant observation, ethnography, etc.);
2. the processing of data into usable form (e.g. through transcription, coding, classification, etc.); and/or
3. the analysis of data (e.g. through semiotic analysis, quantitative content analysis, inferential grounded theory, literary deconstruction, time-series analysis, spatial modeling, techniques using remote sensing and/or geographic information systems, etc.)

These requirements may be met by courses offered both within and outside of the Geography Department. Please note that Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (GEO 5159) may not be used to fulfill one of the additional core course requirements. On the other hand, Intermediate Geographic Information Systems may be used to fulfill one of the additional core course requirements. Other Geography courses frequently used to meet this requirement include Advanced Quantitative Geography, Advanced Geographic Information Systems, Remote Sensing, and Qualitative Methods. Beyond these courses, most students meet this requirement from courses outside the Geography Department.

Students who have taken courses similar to the core courses at the master's level may petition for exemption. Requests for required core course exemptions are considered by the graduate program director, in consultation with the student's advisor and those teaching the pertinent

required core course. Students who are exempted from one or more core courses do not need to make up the lost credits in additional elective courses.

14. What is the residency requirement?

At some point during your doctoral studies, you must register for 24 credit-hours within a 12-month period. These credit hours may include dissertation hours (GEO 6980), DIS hours (GEO 5908), regular class hours, or any combination of the three.

15. What classes can I take if I am teaching on an assistantship and need to have a certain number of hours on my schedule to be considered full-time?

If there are no courses that a student wishes to take for credit, students should sign up for Supervised Teaching GEO-5947. If the student is a thesis or PhD student, they may sign up thesis hours (GEO 5971) or dissertation hours (GEO 6980) if credits are needed in these areas.