



**DEPARTMENT OF ECOSYSTEM SCIENCE AND
MANAGEMENT
GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

Guide to Graduate Program Requirements, Policies, and Procedures
revised August 24, 2023

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING
Laramie, Wyoming

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INTRODUCTION

This guide contains the rules, regulations, and requirements for graduate studies in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management. The guide serves as a supplement to University of Wyoming [Graduate Documents](#). These rules, regulations and requirements apply to the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Entomology, Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management, and Soil Sciences.

It is the student's responsibility to read and to adhere to all procedures and deadlines established by the University of Wyoming and the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management. In some cases, the Department has stricter standards than University guidelines; otherwise, University minimum standards apply. Should any reader find omissions of fact or process, please bring it to the attention of the ESM Department Head, Dr. Tim Collier (tcollier@uwyo.edu). If you have questions regarding departmental policy, protocols, or procedures, or if you have suggestions for enhancing any of the graduate programs, please discuss your recommendations with your major advisor or with the Department Head.

MAJOR ADVISOR AND GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The student's graduate studies are formally overseen by a major advisor, who advises the student on his/her program of study and research proposal, directs the student's research, and is chair of the student's Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC). The GAC's initial role is to offer guidance regarding coursework and to assist in formulating the student's research design and interpreting results. The GAC also approves the student's Program of Study (POS) subject to approval by the Department Head and the Registrar. Ultimately, the GAC is the authoritative entity regarding the research proposal, preliminary exam (in the case of PhD students) and final examination (defense).

A student should normally select a GAC by the end of the first full semester and no later than the end of the second semester. (Note that throughout this text, the term "full semester" refers to either the Fall or Spring Semester). The committee is generally composed of members of the University of Wyoming faculty. Occasionally, scientists who are not part of the UW faculty may be chosen to be part of the GAC. The appointment of a non-UW faculty member should be discussed with the major advisor and Department Head before an offer is made to join the committee. Students who have an off-campus member as chair must have an on-campus co-chair from the Ecosystem Science and Management Department.

Your GAC should be selected in consultation with your major advisor. While the selection is ultimately up to you, your major advisor will provide valuable input and bring his/her experience and knowledge of personalities and expertise to bear on the final selection of GAC members. Your GAC will likely be useful mentors throughout your career and important potential references in the future. Therefore, it is obviously in the best interest of the graduate student to choose GAC members wisely and keep the various members of the GAC informed regarding the progress of your program. There is a petition (requiring the signatures of the GAC and the Department Head) that may be filed if it is necessary to change the composition of the GAC.

A M.S. committee shall consist of no fewer than three members, which includes the chair or co-chairs. A minimum of two members must be from the student's home department. One member of the GAC, "the external committee member," must be a UW faculty member from a department other than Ecosystem Science and Management and cannot hold a joint or adjunct appointment in Ecosystem Science and Management. A MS committee may have co-advisors from ESM or one of the co-advisors may be either an external member, non-faculty at the university, or from outside the university. Committee members from outside the university include individuals from governmental agencies, private companies, and others. Appointments of all members should have the endorsement of the GAC major advisor or co-

advisors. There is no restriction on the number of members on an MS student's GAC, but prudence dictates that the number should be kept relatively small.

PhD committees must have at least five members, which includes the chair or co-chairs. A minimum of five members on the committee must hold a doctoral degree and a minimum of three members must be from the student's home department. At least one member must be a UW faculty member from a department other than Ecosystem Science and Management (the external committee member) and cannot hold a joint or adjunct appointment in Ecosystem Science and Management. A PhD committee may have co- advisors from ESM or one of the co-advisors may be either an external member, non-faculty at the university, or from outside of the university. Committee members from outside the university include individuals from governmental agencies, private companies, and others. Appointments of all members should have the endorsement of the GAC major advisor or co-advisors. There is no restriction on the number of members on the PhD student's GAC, but prudence dictates that the number should be kept relatively small.

PROGRAM OF STUDY

A Program of Study (POS) lists formal course work, seminars, and research-, thesis- and dissertation - hours. The POS should be developed in conjunction with, and approved by, the student's GAC. Courses on the POS will vary among students depending upon their academic backgrounds, career objectives and research interests. The POS represents a contract between the student and the University. It is usually in the student's best interest to have the POS approved as soon as possible and no later than the end of the second full semester. Students will not be eligible to receive funds managed through the department (e.g., assistantships and travel grants) beyond the start of the third full semester until their POS is approved and on file in the department.

A student's POS should emphasize graduate-level courses, although undergraduate coursework may be required to address academic deficiencies. The number of credits for undergraduate-level (4000-level) courses that count towards the M.S. or Ph.D. degree is limited to 12 credit hours. If critical deficiencies still exist, the GAC may require a student to take additional undergraduate courses that will not contribute to the graduate degree requirements.

A student pursuing a non-thesis M.S. (Plan B) option must take at least 30 credit hours of course work. A student pursuing a research-focused M.S. (Plan A) option must take a minimum of 26 credit hours of course work and four hours of Thesis Research credits (5960). A Ph.D. program requires a minimum of 72 hours of credit from UW or another approved university. This 72-hour requirement may include graduate credits earned while working toward the M.S. degree in the same field or a related area. Credits toward the 72-hour requirement may include formal lecture course credits, Thesis or Dissertation Research credits, or Internship credits. At least 42 hours (of the 72) must be earned in formal lecture course work. It is desirable that a minimum of 12 of these credit hours be selected from the disciplinary course offerings associated with the degree title (e.g., REWM for a degree in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management, ENTO for a degree in Entomology and SOIL for a degree in Soil Science). In unique circumstances (e.g., exceptional professional academic background before arriving at UW or special targeted career objectives), the GAC may allow that fewer disciplinary courses may be taken at UW *in lieu* of other specialized coursework. Conversely, the GAC may require additional hours for the degree or additional hours within the discipline depending on the scope of the research and previous course work. The University of Wyoming [Graduate Documents](#) present further specifications regarding degree program requirements. The POS can be changed to reflect changes in course work by submitting a specific form, but this is a formal process requiring input and agreement from the major advisor(s), the GAC, and other signers of the original POS.

RETENTION

Graduate students are required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA. A student who falls below a 3.0 GPA has one semester to reestablish a satisfactory GPA or face the loss of assistantship funding and dismissal from the Department and University. Students are allowed one probationary semester where their GPA falls below the 3.0 standard. Standards for students on fellowships or scholarships may be higher. Although a 3.0 GPA is a necessary criterion for retention, steady progress toward a degree and commensurate academic accomplishments are also required. If a student earns a D, F, or U in a course on their POS, the course must be repeated with a C or better or an S. The GAC may write a provision into the POS that certain classes require at least a B.

TIME LIMITS

Master's students have six calendar years to complete their degree from the start date of the first course taken that is listed on their Program of Study. Doctoral (PhD) students have four calendar years after the successful completion of their preliminary examination to complete the degree. Students have one calendar year after the final oral exam (defense) to submit their thesis or dissertation. Students that exceed these limits must petition their GAC for an extension. Extensions may be appropriate under a diverse set of circumstances including students having full-time jobs or other obligations. Additional examination(s) may be required when receiving an extension.

MINIMUM REGISTRATION

All graduate students are required to maintain continuous registration (even those without graduate assistantships) until they complete all requirements for graduation unless a specific leave of absence is recommended by the student's major advisor(s) and Department Head and granted to a student (in writing) by the College Dean and University Registrar. Unless a formal leave of absence is approved, all students should maintain at least one hour of continuous enrollment in the semester they expect to receive the degree. Students should also maintain enrollment for two of the three academic semesters in a given year (the summer is considered a semester equivalent to a regular semester). Reactivation will be required if the student has not enrolled in classes within the previous 12 months. Any condition that requires a higher minimum registration supersedes the University minimum registration standard of one credit. For example, students with University of Wyoming graduate assistantships must be registered for 9 hours during the fall and spring semesters. Additional requirements for students with loans, fellowships, visas, etc. may exist.

If a graduate student holding a graduate assistantship drops one or more courses in a given semester, which results in the student being registered for less than the required minimum number of hours (i.e., 9 hours in Fall and Spring Semesters), the student is not required to add additional hours to replace the dropped hours so long as the student drops after the 12th day of class. A student can maintain their graduate assistant position with a letter supporting the dropped classes signed by the Department Head. The student should, however, consider the implications of dropping below the minimum hour requirements for full-time classification (e.g., some insurance programs have special enrollment considerations). International students should be aware that registering for fewer than full-time credits during the Spring and Fall Semesters may cause problems with some types of student visa requirements. Foreign nationals should be certain to never allow the time indicated on their IAP-66 or I-20 to lapse! It is usually a fairly straightforward procedure to get the time period indicated on the form extended by working with International Student Services so long as the paperwork is started months before the time period expires. However, it may be very difficult to get the forms re-issued if the time period has expired. Contact the Office of the Registrar with questions.

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

A formal preliminary examination is required for all Ph.D. students. A student will not be eligible to take the exam if their cumulative program GPA is less than 3.0. The preliminary examination must be held at least 15 weeks prior to the final oral examination (defense). The preliminary examination may also not be given before (a) at least 30 hours of coursework have been completed and (b) the doctoral POS has been approved. The GAC will determine the readiness of the student to proceed with the preliminary examination. The format of the examination shall be the responsibility of the student's GAC, in line with departmental policies. Preliminary examinations should cover all areas within the scope of the student's doctoral program. They usually involve one or two written questions from each GAC member, possibly followed by an oral exam administered by the committee as a whole depending on the GAC's wishes. A majority affirmative vote by the GAC is required for a student to pass the preliminary examination. Students who do not graduate within four years after their preliminary exam will be required to petition to remain in the program and may be required to retake the exam at the discretion of their GAC. A student's GAC and the University may grant permission for one re-examination to a student who has failed the preliminary exam. A period of at least one semester, but no more than four semesters, must elapse before the retest may take place. A student that fails the preliminary exam twice will no longer be permitted in the graduate program.

THESIS/DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The research proposal represents a formal agreement between the student and the University. The student should work with his/her major advisor to develop the research proposal and should submit it to the GAC for approval during their second full semester of study. The proposal should be approved prior to the start of research activities leading to the degree, the end of the second full semester and prior to preliminary exams for PhD students. The proposal's title page must be signed by the student, all members of the GAC, and the Department Head. The final signed proposal must be submitted to the Department. Copies should also be given to members of the GAC. Research involving Human (Institutional Review Board), or Animal (Institutional Animal Use and Care Committee) subjects requires additional approval forms. Students will not be eligible to receive funds managed through the department (e.g., assistantships or travel grants) beyond the start of their third semester of study until their research proposal is approved and on file in the department.

For MS students, the proposal is expected to be approximately five pages in length, although the GAC may require a different length. For PhD students, the proposal is expected to follow the format of a standard proposal to NSF, USDA AFRI, EPA, or another appropriate national grant agency as determined by the student's committee. The narrative of the MS or PhD research proposal should contain the following:

- A. Justification and Rationale: Summary of previous research on the subject, with specific literature citations, and particular scientific issues that the study will help resolve, i.e., "knowledge gaps."
- B. Statement of hypotheses or questions that the study is designed to address.
- C. Methods: Description of the methods of data collection, experimental design, and statistical analyses to be used to definitively answer research questions or evaluate hypotheses.
- D. Timeline: Description of target dates when different components of the data collection, analysis and presentation of the findings will be accomplished.

The GAC should approve the proposal before the student begins significant work on his/her research. In some cases, the nature of the study may require that the research begin before the proposal is approved. It is in the best interest of the student to understand the subtleties of the research objectives and methods so that misunderstandings between the student, major advisor and CAC are less likely. In any case, the student should report regularly to the major advisor and to the GAC regarding research progress in order

to avoid last-minute surprises or misunderstandings and to gain approval of any changes to the proposed research.

THESIS/DISSERTATION SUBMISSION PROTOCOL

Deadline dates for filing the thesis/dissertation are announced each semester by the Registrar. The research project should be designed to produce one or more publishable articles for refereed journals. Students are encouraged to organize the document into chapters that represent stand-alone publications. A polished draft of the thesis/dissertation in proper format should be delivered to the GAC for review only after the student and the major advisor have agreed upon technical and editorial content at least three weeks before the defense. Committee members have the right to reject documents with substantial grammatical errors or that fail to meet the standards of scientific style. Signatures should be obtained on the thesis/dissertation only when changes recommended by the committee have been incorporated.

FINAL EXAMINATION

The final examination may not be held until after the start of the semester in which coursework is to be completed. Although the final oral exam (defense) tends to focus on the thesis, dissertation, or M.S. non-thesis professional paper, questions may follow up on the preliminary exams (Ph.D. candidates) or the student's coursework or professional activities. The final exam should be scheduled only after the GAC agrees that the thesis, dissertation, or professional paper is ready for defense. All students must schedule a defense seminar in conjunction with the final oral exam (see Defense Seminar section below). The seminar is open to the public while the final oral examination is limited to the student and the GAC. At its discretion, the GAC may require a written component to the final examination.

A student must file the Anticipated Graduation Date Form to the Office of the Registrar before the final oral exam can be scheduled. The degree application and fee must be submitted within the time frame indicated by the Graduate School. A student must be registered in the semester in which the final examination is taken. A student's GPA must be at least 3.00, and there must be no unacceptable grade for any course on the program of study (e.g., D, F, X or perhaps C; see the program of study section for more explanation). Notice of the final defense seminar must be publicly advertised at least two weeks in advance, only after all GAC members issue approval of the scheduled date and time. Requests for scheduling that include a petition for changes to the degree plan or to the members of the GAC must be submitted at least five weeks prior to the final defense date. A majority affirmative vote by the GAC is required for a student to pass the final examination. The Report of Final Examination Results Form must be signed by the student, all members of the GAC, the Department Head and the Dean of the College and submitted to the Office of the Registrar.

DEFENSE SEMINAR

All students will present a final Thesis or Dissertation Research Seminar prior to the final examination. The defense seminar must be announced at least two weeks prior to the scheduled date. The student should post flyers with the date and time of the seminar and a summary/abstract in the Agriculture Building and should have the ESM office email the seminar announcement to all Ecosystem Science and Management faculty, graduate students, staff, and other interested parties at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled date. The GAC will administer the final oral examination after the seminar audience has been excused. Generally, the defense seminar is scheduled immediately ahead of the oral exam/defense. Extenuating circumstances may modify this, but any exceptions should be considered by the student's GAC in consultation with the department head.

SUBMISSION OF THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

To meet deadlines for graduation, students should begin the final defense process several months in advance. It is the student's responsibility to initiate and to coordinate this process. Due to the size of the department, faculty members normally serve on a number of graduate committees, both as advisors and as committee members. Thus, faculty members often have multiple research proposals, theses, and dissertations to review each semester, typically near the end of the semester. The student should allow adequate time for review of these documents and sufficient time for corrections to be made. The GAC should have a final defense draft in hand at least three weeks prior to the defense. Students should be in close contact with GAC members so that schedules can be accommodated, and planning adjusted accordingly. Professional courtesy dictates that ample time be allowed for each step in the process. Impending graduation deadlines are never a justification to accelerate the timeline. The student is responsible to know all deadlines and for scheduling sufficient time for the following sequence of steps.

1. Submit a draft of the document to the major advisor(s). The student should allow at least two weeks for review, and the process often takes much longer.
2. The major advisor(s) returns the draft to the student for revision. Normally, several drafts will be required to produce a document acceptable to the GAC.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until the major advisor(s) agrees that the written document is ready to defend.
4. Send the approved thesis or dissertation to GAC members, as paper and/or electronic copies. Three weeks (15 working days) should be allowed for GAC review.
5. File the Anticipated Graduation Date form with the Office of the Registrar and pay any applicable fees within the first week of the semester in which the final examination is to be taken.
6. After each member of the GAC has approved the document's general form and content, schedule the final examination. The student must accommodate the schedules of the GAC as noted above.
7. Announce the defense seminar date at least two weeks in advance of the proposed final oral exam date.
8. Present the thesis/dissertation seminar and hold the final defense.
9. Students passing the final oral exam will likely be required to make additional changes to the thesis/dissertation document before the GAC gives final approval. A student who fails the final defense may request permission to redo the defense after six months.
10. Submit the thesis/dissertation complete with GAC and Department Head approval signatures. Various rules, including some formatting specifications, are required by the Office of the Registrar. Students are advised to speak with the appropriate official in the Registrar's Office well before submitting the thesis.
11. A final bound copy of the thesis/dissertation should be submitted to the department for use in the departmental library. It is also good form to give a bound copy to each member of the GAC.

PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH

Students are encouraged to submit results from their research to refereed journals and should discuss the order of authorship with their major advisor(s) and with other relevant parties early in their program. Scientific publications greatly enhance a student's career opportunities and are an important return on the investment of time and funding to faculty, the Department, and University. In many cases, the grants and contracts that support a student's project stipulate timely publication of research results. Faculty members responsible for acquiring these funds may, therefore, have professional and/or legal obligations to publish. Data collected from research sponsored by grants, assistantships, and departmental projects are the property of the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management. The major advisor(s) may assume control of research data and make a final decision on re-directing authorship for students who do not make a reasonable attempt to publish within six months of their defense. Students are encouraged to publish portions of their thesis/dissertation prior to the final oral exam.

OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Copy and fax machines are for Ecosystem Science and Management department business only; they are not for any student's class work or personal use. Use of University mail services or long-distance phone calls for personal matters are prohibited. Use of administrative professional staff or office equipment for work related to degree plans, proposals, dissertations, theses, or professional papers is also prohibited. There are exceptions to some of these prohibitions, but they are specific to particular accounts held by particular faculty members.

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with rules pertaining to the use of university vehicles and equipment. Personal use of university vehicles is strictly prohibited and is a violation of State Law. Any student driving on university business, whether in state or personal vehicles, must submit a request for authorization to the Office of Risk Management. This entails giving permission for a motor vehicle record (MVR) check.

All faculty, staff and graduate students have assigned mailboxes. If you are going to be out of town for several days, please arrange for someone to retrieve the mail from your box and store it. If you will be gone for an extended time period, please leave a forwarding address with your major advisor and with the Department so that your mail can be forwarded to you.

Parking regulations are strictly enforced on campus. Failure to pay fines can result in registration blocks, denial of permission to conduct the preliminary exam and defense, withholding of transcripts and diplomas, etc. Be sure to familiarize yourself with current rules.

If you want to get UW business cards with the official UW logo, please go to order them online through the UW Copy Center – [HERE](#). They will be able to do a mock-up, showing exactly what they will look like when you make the order. You must pay them at the time of your order. Please do not have the bill sent to the ESM accounting office and do not use the online ordering system on the UW website.

SUPPORT TO ATTEND PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

The Ecosystem Science and Management Department will contribute up to \$300/academic year to defray costs associated with students attending professional meetings to give research presentations or posters. The Office of Academic Affairs will also usually contribute up to \$250 one time during your graduate program for this purpose as long as funds are available.

EXPECTATIONS

Graduate Student Expectations

While we recognize that each student and each student's program is unique, there are common expectations for all. These are outlined below.

- * Graduate students should prepare a solid research proposal that is reviewed and accepted formally by their graduate committee. This proposal should be finalized before the student begins collecting data.
- * Graduate students should present their work at least once at an appropriate professional meeting.
- * PhD students should have at least one manuscript in review prior to graduation. MS students are expected to publish their research.
- * PhD students should have teaching experience prior to graduation. MS students are encouraged to have teaching experience prior to graduation. For students on state funded assistantships, being a teaching assistant is a requirement.

Expectations of Major Advisors and Committee Members

- * Provide sound and timely advice and guidance to graduate students. It is expected that there will be more advice and guidance given to MS students and that PhD students are expected to be more independent.
- * Provide sound advice to graduate students on the makeup of their graduate committee, but do not dictate who should be on it.
- * Ensure that new graduate students have the appropriate background for their field of study.
- * Ensure that students take courses appropriate to their field of study. This includes courses within and outside the department. There should be a minimal need for special topics or similar one-on-one types of courses.
- * Graduate faculty should teach graduate-level courses. Expectations for graduate students in combined courses should be significantly higher than that for undergraduate students.
- * Ensure that there is appropriate financial support for any graduate student.
- * Ensure that incoming graduate students know that writing a paper and submitting it for publication in a refereed journal is an expectation.
- * Ensure that proper credit is given to fellow faculty members and other graduate students on any paper or presentation.
- * Be willing to serve on graduate committees and participate in the assessment of graduate programs. It is incumbent upon each faculty member and the Department to do so as to ensure that we are providing quality programs.

Expected Timelines to Complete a Graduate Degree

Most of the research conducted in Ecosystem Science and Management is field based. If you select a research project with field work, you can expect that it will take 2.5 years for an MS degree and 3.5 years for a PhD degree (assuming you enter with a completed MS degree). This will vary based on research requirements, coursework, other commitments the student may have, and other factors. If a faculty member takes you on as a graduate student and provides a graduate assistantship, you should expect to be supported for your time. The faculty member is expected to let you know of any funding issues prior to your acceptance and during your program.

SUMMARY OF DEADLINES

The following is a general outline of steps a student must follow to be awarded a graduate degree.

1. Select a GAC and submit the Program of Study before the end of the second semester.
2. Finalize a research proposal with major advisor's assistance during the second full semester and have it approved by the GAC, ideally before research activities occur.
3. Begin research after GAC approves the research proposal.
4. Develop a timeline with your major professor for submitting journal article(s) resulting from your research. It is highly desirable that the manuscripts resulting from your research be submitted before or within 6 months of the defense.
5. Ph.D. students should take the preliminary examination after completing at least 30 coursework hours listed in the Program of Study, or within one semester thereafter. Submit the Report on Preliminary Exam for Admission to Candidacy form to the Office of the Registrar after the exam.
6. File the Anticipated Graduation Date Form with the Office of the Registrar and pay any applicable fees.
7. Submit your draft of the thesis/dissertation document to major advisor(s) for evaluation and input.
8. Present polished draft of thesis/dissertation to GAC only after major advisor(s) agrees the document is ready and three weeks prior to the defense.

9. Schedule the final defense after the GAC has approved the document for the semester in which graduation is planned. The defense must occur no later than 10 days before the end of the semester for graduation that semester.
10. Advertise the defense seminar at least two weeks in advance.
11. Pass final oral exam. The GAC will fill out a separate assessment form.
12. Revise thesis/dissertation if necessary.
13. Submit thesis/dissertation to the Office of the Registrar.
14. Schedule an exit meeting with the Department Head.

You must also sign the form on the next page.

It is necessary that each graduate student sign and turn in this form to Kelli DeCora (kdecora@uwyo) in AG 2013, before the end of their first semester.

I have read, understand, and agree to conform to the Graduate Studies Program Requirements, Policies and Procedures as outlined in the Graduate Student Regulations and Policies in the University Catalog and the Ecosystem Science and Management Department Graduate Student Handbook.

Signature:

Date:

Printed Name: