

University of South Carolina

Department of Geography

Graduate Student Handbook
Academic Year 2025–2026



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GRADUATE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Department of Geography at the University of South Carolina was established in 1963 and is the only program in the state to offer undergraduate (B.A. and B.S.) and graduate (M.A., M.S. and Ph.D.) degrees in Geography. We seek to maintain a balanced program of research, undergraduate and graduate teaching, and community outreach and service. Our program covers the breadth of Geography, including:

Physical Geography/Environmental Science: Physical geographers in our department investigate patterns and processes associated with the atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere, exploring the causes and consequences of environmental variability over time and space. Specialized expertise includes climatology and meteorology, aeolian geomorphology, and biogeography and landscape ecology. Our physical geographers utilize various geospatial technologies in their work.

Human Geography. Human geography in our department emphasizes questions of identity, social difference, and inequality in diverse geographical contexts. Human geographers strive to understand how people construct social meanings and social identities through space, and how they enforce, contest, or negotiate the power relations embedded in specific places. Human geographers are also keen to explore place-based transformations stemming from conflict, immigration, economic development, and changing modes of governance.

Environment-Society Relationships. Faculty working in this area explore interactions between human societies and the natural environment and seek to understand how people shape and adapt to changing environmental conditions. Our faculty embrace an integrative perspective that considers complex interrelationships between natural systems, human behavior, and systems of governance from local to global scales. Our faculty specialize in a range of topic areas, including political ecology, human adaptation to environmental change, natural resource use and management, and environmental hazards.

Geographic Information Science. GISci in our department engages with a wide spectrum of geospatial technologies, applications, and methodologies. Our GISci faculty use geospatial techniques to address geographic questions relating to hazards, public health, population, environment, and climate change. Research focuses on photogrammetry, satellite image analysis, LiDAR, GIS modeling, geovisualization, spatial programming, and big data.

To assist in its research and educational role, the Department administers the Center for Geographic Information Science and Remote Sensing, the Hazards and Vulnerability Research Institute (HVRI), the Climate Research Laboratory, the Biogeomorphic Research Laboratory, the WINDLab, the Center for Excellence in Geographic Education, and the South Carolina Geographic Alliance (SCGA). Geographers also have a strong presence in interdisciplinary research entities, including the Critical Ecology Lab, the Migration Center @ USC, and the Walker Institute of International and Area Studies.

GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL

The Department of Geography is housed in the College of Arts and Sciences on Columbia Campus in the Callcott Building (CSSC).

The Department of Geography's faculty include:

Dr. Jerry Mitchell	mitchejt@mailbox.sc.edu	Department Chair
Dr. Jessica Barnes	jebarnes@mailbox.sc.edu	Jointly appointed with SEOE
Dr. Meredith DeBoom	deboom@mailbox.sc.edu	
Dr. Gregory Carbone	greg.carbone@sc.edu	
Dr. Susan Cutter	scutter@sc.edu	Carolina Distinguished Professor
Dr. Austin Crane	craneja@mailbox.sc.edu	Department affiliate; Instructor, Walker Inst of Int'l and Area Studies
Dr. Carl Dahlman	carl.dahlman@sc.edu	Director, Walker Institute
Dr. Shadya Davis	Shadya@mailbox.sc.edu	
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Dr. Cary Mock	mockcj@sc.edu	
Dr. Caroline Nagel	cnagel@mailbox.sc.edu	Graduate Director
Dr. Catherine Studemeyer	cottrelc@mailbox.sc.edu	Department affiliate
Dr. Susan Wang	cwang@mailbox.sc.edu	
Dr. Sicheng Wang	sichengw@mailbox.sc.edu	

* On sabbatical Spring 2026

Our administrative and support staff include:

Ms. Sarah Gottshall	Business/HR Manager	gottshas@mailbox.sc.edu
Ms. Sena Nickles	Student Services Coordinator	nickless@mailbox.sc.edu
Mr. Mike Mewborne	Geographic Alliance	Mewbornj@mailbox.sc.edu

GRADUATE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION TOPICS (in alphabetical order)

Advisement

All students should meet with their advisor (or “major professor”) prior to registering for courses. After their first semester, students should be able to enroll in courses without special clearance. However, students may still encounter holds on their registration for a variety of reasons, including lack of an approved MPOS (Master’s Program of Study) or DPOS (Doctoral Program of Study). Students should contact their advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies if they have a hold on their enrolment.

Be sure to notify the Student Services Coordinator of any independent studies you plan to register for so that a course section can be opened for you before you try to register. Students enrolling in an independent study must complete the G-ISC form, and this form must be signed by the course instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

Students should carefully track the number of credits they register for each semester and plan a course of study for the required number of degree credits. Support from the College of Arts and Sciences to cover tuition, does not include extra money for additional credits.

Awards

There are several graduate student awards related to teaching, teaching assistance, publications, research, and travel. Graduate students will receive information via email from the Graduate Director and/or the Department Chair about these opportunities throughout the year. All of the Geography awards have May 10th deadlines. The Department of Geography awards for this academic year are found in the Appendices to this document. Department awards are adjudicated by a committee of three faculty members.

We recommend that students also consult the Graduate School’s website for University-level fellowship and award opportunities:

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/tuition-funding/fellowships_awards/index.php. Please note that many Graduate School awards require that the student be nominated by the Graduate Director or advisor. If you are interested in being nominated, speak with your advisor or with the Graduate Director.

Colloquia

The Department of Geography holds colloquia throughout the academic year in which distinguished faculty from other institutions or USC departments present their research. Colloquium attendance is mandatory for all students, regardless of funding status. If you are not able to attend, please notify your advisor.

Committees

Committees of faculty members oversee and evaluate the research of master's and doctoral students. The specifics of master's and doctoral committees are described in detail below in the program descriptions.

Students are responsible for keeping their committee members informed of their progress. Once the proposal defense is completed, the student should arrange a meeting to discuss research progress with the committee chair and members during the first month of each major semester. These meetings are to ensure that any alterations made to the proposed research are reviewed and found acceptable by all committee members. Defense documents require the signatures of all committee members, so maintaining agreement about the research approach is essential. The nature of these meetings should be agreed upon by the full committee and the student at the time of the proposal defense.

Students should be able to demonstrate that they have followed the advice and recommendations specified by committee members in these update meetings. A written record of committee discussions is highly recommended.

Conference Support

The Department of Geography and USC Graduate School encourages graduate student participation in professional conferences through travel grants. Conference travel and fieldwork can be expensive, so students should not expect departmental and/or Graduate School funds to cover all expenses. Students are strongly encouraged to apply for funding and to seek out opportunities to reduce conference expenses, such as volunteering at AAG meetings and applying for specialty group travel grants. Students presenting research funded by faculty grants should also discuss opportunities for travel funding with the grant's principal investigator.

Graduate School Conference Travel Support: The Graduate School usually offers grants of up to \$500 for domestic conference travel and up to \$800 for foreign conference travel for doctoral students only. The process for requesting travel support from the Graduate School is described on their web page https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/tuition-funding/travel_grants/index.php. There are four funding cycles, and students who apply early in the award cycle will have a significant advantage. To receive funds, doctoral students must be presenting a paper or poster. The student must be sole or first author on the paper or poster being presented. Doctoral students may only receive two travel grants during their tenure in graduate school. The Graduate School gives priority to students who will be receiving funds for the first time.

Note: All recipients of travel funds to attend the AAG annual meeting are *required* to present their conference paper or poster to the department at a pre-conference practice session in March. Students who do not participate in the AAG practice session may have their funds revoked.

Enrollment

Full-time status for graduate assistants (teaching, research, or instructional assistants) is 6 credit hours (CH) and 9 CH for all other students during regular (fall and spring) semesters. During the summer, it is 6 and 3 CH, RA/GA and others, respectively.

Students who have defended their proposal and completed all their coursework can be eligible for full-time status while taking fewer than a full load of classes. This is done by applying for Special Enrollment or “Z-Status”. DPOS must be on file for z-status approval. Information and the necessary form (GS-ZS), which must be signed by the Graduate Director, can be found in the Graduate School Forms Library:

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/forms_library/index.php.

During the preparation of the thesis or dissertation, any student who wishes to use University facilities or to confer with the faculty must be enrolled in at least one credit hour of GEOG 799 (MS/MA) or GEOG 899 (PhD). Students must also be enrolled in 1 credit during the semester they plan to graduate (e.g., if a student plans to graduate in the summer, they must be enrolled in the summer).

Fieldwork

The department encourages both domestic and international fieldwork. The department does offer limited support for fieldwork (see Awards), but students who wish to undertake extensive fieldwork should consult with advisors about external grant opportunities (e.g. through Fulbright, NSF, etc.). Students undertaking fieldwork abroad must receive University approval for travel to high-risk destinations. For a list of high risk locations and instructions on submitting a travel plan, please consult the Education Abroad Office website:

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/education_abroad/plan_your_experience_abroad/apply/higher_risk_travel/. Information about budgeting for domestic or international travel on a research grant proposal can be found here:

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/sponsored_awards_management/proposal_preparation/budget_preparation/travel.php. Students should consult with the department Business Manager (Ms. Sarah Gottshall) for guidance on keeping track of fieldwork expenses and submitting reimbursement requests.

Graduate Geography Student Association (GGSA)

The Graduate Geography Student Association (GGSA) is a student-led volunteer organization that offers academic and personal support for Geography students. The GGSA President represents students at faculty meetings. The GGSA connects students with Geography faculty members and the University as a whole, and it publicizes and organizes opportunities relating to employment, internships, and professional development. The GGSA also provides various opportunities for service during the year relating to colloquium planning and the recruitment of undergraduate and graduate Geography students. Finally, the GGSA plans social events

throughout the year, including picnics and potlucks. Descriptions of the GGSA officers and the constitution are found at <https://carolinaggsa.wordpress.com/ggsa-constitution-and-officer-descriptions/>.

Graduation Application

Students must apply for graduation through Self Service Carolina (SSC). The deadlines can be found at:

https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/registrar/graduation/deadline_dates/index.php.

There are no negative repercussions for not graduating after you have applied to graduate. But you cannot graduate unless you have applied. In short, if there is any possibility that you will graduate in a given semester, you should apply for graduation.

All dissertations are supposed to be submitted through ProQuest before the graduation ceremony. Missing this step can disrupt graduation.

Independent Study Courses

Graduate students are eligible to enroll in Directed Independent Studies (GEOG 705, 706, or 805). The total number of independent study credit hours that students can apply towards their degree (and include in their MPOS or DPOS) is specific to the degree—please see below. All independent studies courses require a contract that specifies reading and writing requirements. The independent study contract (G-ISC) can be found in the Graduate School Forms Library: https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/forms_library/index.php. The contract requires the signature of the instructor and the Graduate Director. Students should notify the Student Services Coordinator of their intention to register for an independent study at least a week before they plan to register. The Coordinator will create a course section with the appropriate instructor. That section number (CRN) must appear on the contract form. The student will only be able to register after the form has been submitted to the Graduate Director and approved by the Graduate School. If the form is not complete with CRN, USC ID and other information requested, it will be returned to you.

Professional Development Plans (PDPs)

Professional development plans (PDPs) are the mechanism our department uses to evaluate graduate student performance at the end of each academic year. Towards the end of the Spring semester, graduate students will receive a PDP template and will record their yearly accomplishments and goals. The Graduate Director then pastes faculty evaluations of the student's performance in Geography courses and TA/RA assignments (as applicable) into the PDP. The PDP is reviewed at the end of the academic year in a meeting between the advisor and the student. Non-completion of the PDP may threaten a student's 'good standing' in the department. Please note that there are specific PDP forms for MA/MS and PhD students.

Scheduling Defenses

Defenses of proposals, theses, and dissertations are open to the public. In scheduling a defense of any kind, students should be mindful of their committee members' availability to attend either virtually or in-person, especially if the defense is scheduled to take place between semesters or during the summer semester. Students should avoid scheduling anything the first or last week of classes. Students are expected to submit a complete draft of the relevant document to the committee at least 2 weeks prior to the scheduled defense date. Students wishing to enroll in thesis or dissertation credit hours in an upcoming semester must leave adequate time not only for the proposal defense, but also for any remediation of the proposal that might be required by committee members (up to two weeks for master's students and one month for doctoral students).

Students intending to graduate in a given semester must be aware of various deadlines before scheduling a thesis or dissertation defense. The defense deadline is about two weeks before the final submission date, and the final submission date is around a month before commencement. As well, students must leave adequate time after the defense to undertake remediation/revision (master's students may be given up to 2 weeks to remediate theses, while doctoral students may be given up to one month to remediate dissertations). This means that students should think in terms of scheduling the thesis or dissertation defense a **minimum of 8-10 weeks before the date of commencement**.

The proposal or thesis/dissertation defense should be announced by the advisor to the Geography faculty and graduate students via email at least one week before the defense. That email must include a PDF attachment of the document being defended. Students may also elect to place a hard copy of the document in the main office.

There are department-level forms to complete for defenses. Proposal defense forms are available in the My Geography section of the department website. All other paperwork relating to defenses and thesis/dissertation completion can be found in the Graduate School Forms Library (described below).

Student Employment

Students with assistantships will be paid twice per month during the academic year (August 15-May 15). New students should be aware that there is a delay in the first paycheck of the academic year— the first paycheck does not come until mid-September.

There are rules limiting the number of hours that students can work on campus. Work hours for graduate assistants are capped at 20 hours per week during the academic year; however graduate students may submit an Appeal to the Graduate School to request increased hours during the Fall and Spring semesters, for a maximum of 25 hours total per week. Graduate assistants must be enrolled in at least 6 credit hours unless they have been approved for z-status, which allows students to under-enroll (minimum 1 credit hour).

Graduate students without assistantships may work up to 40 hours per week in multiple positions on campus. Graduate students without assistantships do not have a minimum enrollment requirement.

Students who work on campus during the summer may be paid on an hourly basis or through an assistantship. Doctoral students may also have the opportunity to teach summer courses in person or online, though course offerings depend on undergraduate demand. Hourly employees must complete an electronic timesheet each week (students will receive instructions from the department business manager). Students hired on a summer assistantship must be enrolled in at least one credit hour.

Student Health Services

All enrolled graduate students can take advantage of the many health and wellness services provided at USC's Student Health Services. Services include primary and routine care, travel, immunizations, physical and sports therapy, women's health, and in-person and on-line counseling and psychiatry services. Please navigate to: <http://www.sa.sc.edu/shs/cp> or call 803.777.5223.

Students' Rights and Recourse

All students are assigned an advisor upon admission to the graduate program. The first meeting between student and advisor should include a thorough review of graduate program requirements and a discussion of student and advisor expectations. All students from the start of their program should be aware of their rights vis-a-vis their advisor and other faculty members.

The rights of graduate students in the Department of Geography include:

- The right to meet face-to-face with their advisor at least once a month during the regular semesters to discuss the student's progress;
- The right to timely (within 2 weeks under normal circumstances) feedback from their advisor and course instructors on written work, including seminar papers, proposal drafts, thesis/dissertation drafts, and written comprehensive exams;
- The right to professional advice relating to conferences, grant opportunities, publication activities, and other aspects of academic life;
- The right to confidentiality and privacy (i.e., faculty members should not share the details of a student's academic record or personal matters with other students);
- The right to be treated in a professional manner and not to be harassed or bullied by any faculty member (see <http://sc.edu/policies/policiesbysubject.php#H>);
- The right to request a different advisor.

Students have avenues of recourse if they feel that they have been evaluated unfairly or if their progress in the program has been hindered by the actions or inactions of faculty members. Students who feel that their rights have not been respected by a faculty member and who are not able to resolve the problem directly with the faculty member should consult with the

Graduate Director or the Department Chair. Grievance policies and procedures are included in the Appendices.

Student Conduct

The Geography Department is a workplace setting where you are developing professional relationships that are likely to last your entire career. Graduate students are expected to conduct themselves with professionalism and to treat faculty, staff, undergraduates, and fellow graduate students with respect at all times. This includes prompt responses to all university and department requests.

The Department of Students should familiarize themselves with the [Carolina Creed, the Honor Code, and the Code of Conduct](#) which set campus standards. Students should also be aware that the consumption of alcohol is forbidden in the Callcott Building and most other buildings on campus. Students should not come to the department if they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. In-person or digital harassment will not be tolerated.

Students are encouraged to build professional networks with faculty and others on sites such as LinkedIn or ResearchGate. It is **strongly recommended** that personal social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, etc., be kept for personal relationships, **not** those with faculty. Students should also be respectful of others' privacy and not post photos of their fellow students on social media without permission.

Submission of Theses and Dissertations

Master's and Doctoral students must submit their thesis or dissertations to format check before the final submission. You do not have to submit the final document, so the format check can be done well before your defense. This can be an arduous process, so students should begin the process well in advance of the final submission date and before the defense. There is one format-check office for the entire university, and they are not receptive to last-minute requests due to poor planning.

All deadlines relating to the format check, the scheduled defense, and final submission for each semester (including summer term) can be found here: https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/dates-deadlines/index.php. Familiarize yourself with these dates and be mindful of the fact that the defense deadline is about two weeks before the final submission date, and the final submission date is around a month before commencement.

Final approval of your thesis/dissertation is confirmed when the Graduate School receives either the Thesis Signature and Approval form (G-TSF) or the Dissertation Signature and Approval Form (G-DSF). This form requires signatures from all committee members and the Graduate Director.

Teacher Training

Upon their entry to the program, all full-time graduate students must complete the TA (teaching

assistant) training workshops and orientations offered by the University. Currently, this includes a four-part training workshop held before the start of the academic year, plus a zero-credit GRAD 701 course. International students must also attend an International Teaching Assistant (ITA) orientation at the start of the academic year, regardless of how long they have lived in the United States. This ITA orientation involves a language assessment exercise. Students who do not pass this assessment will not be permitted to serve as teaching assistants or instructors of record until they have completed language training and have passed the assessment. In addition to the ITA language assessment, all international students must complete a language assessment administered by the ENFS (English for Foreign Students) program at USC. ENFS language assessment takes place before the start of the semester via Blackboard.

Transcripts

All students must submit the final, official transcripts from their previous institution to the Graduate School before the end of their first semester. Any student who does not submit an official transcript will not be permitted to enroll in classes for the following semester and may be at risk of dismissal from the program.

VPN – How to connect to the College Network from home

In order to access the university network from an external Internet connection, you will need to set up a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection on your computer. VPN software is available for free [here](#).

MA / MS DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Students completing a majority of their coursework credit hours in physical/environmental and/or GIScience courses will earn the MS degree. Students completing the majority of their coursework credit hours in human geography or environment-society courses will earn the MA degree.

Please note that all forms described below and highlighted with **red text** can be found in the Graduate School Forms Library:

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/forms_library/index.php. Forms should be completed and submitted electronically.

The **Master's Program of Study (MPOS)** must list all the courses the student plans to take in order to graduate with the master's degree. Students must submit this paperwork via email to their advisor for approval within 12 months of matriculation in the master's program. The form then goes to the Graduate Director and to the Graduate School. If changes need to be made to the MPOS, the student should complete the **Program of Study Adjustment (POSA)** form which needs to be signed by the advisor and then emailed to the Graduate Director. Courses more than six years old require revalidation, but revalidation is not guaranteed.

Students must be enrolled in at least one credit hour during the semester they graduate. **Please be aware of the financial implications of summer rather than spring defense.**

Graduate Bulletin Requirements, Geography Master's Degree Programs

Thesis option (30 credit hours total)

1. Coursework
 - a. GEOG 801 (3 credit hours). This course must be passed with a grade of B or better.
 - b. A graduate-level (500-level or above) techniques or methods course with GEOG designator selected with advisor approval (3 credit hours). This course must be passed with a grade of B or better.
 - c. Twenty-four (24) additional credit hours with the following stipulations:
 - Half the coursework (not including GEOG 799) listed on the MPOS must be at the 700- or 800-level.
 - No more than six credit hours of independent study with any designator may be included on the MPOS.
 - A minimum of one and maximum of six credit hours of GEOG 799 must be included on the MPOS. Students cannot enroll in GEOG 799 until they have an approved thesis proposal.

- A maximum of six (6) credit hours with non-GEOG designators may be included on the MPOS.

2. Thesis

a. Thesis committee

The thesis committee is composed of three faculty members, all from the Columbia campus; one of the three committee members may come from a unit outside of Geography (note: Geography Department affiliates/adjuncts whose tenure home or instructorship is in another academic unit will be considered external to Geography for the purpose of the master's committee) The committee chair must be a regular or associate member of the Graduate Faculty (the Graduate Faculty includes all tenure-track faculty members and full-time professional track faculty who have been approved by the Graduate School for associate membership on the Graduate Faculty). The other two committee members may be regular, associate, or term members of the Graduate Faculty. More information about Graduate Faculty designations can be found [here](#).

b. Thesis Proposal and Proposal Defense

The thesis proposal outlines the topic of investigation, the purpose and context of the study, and the research design. It must be approved by the committee prior to the completion of the third regular semester for full-time students (part-time students should consult with advisors and the Graduate Director for proposal timeline). At the proposal defense, which is open to the public, the student and committee will confirm the format of the thesis (manuscript or traditional). If the proposal defense is successful, the students and faculty should complete the Thesis Proposal Defense Form found in the My Geography section of the department website. Be sure to read the "Scheduling Defenses" section at the beginning of this handbook. Master's students have up to two weeks to revise and remediate the thesis proposal in response to committee members' comments. Students have only one opportunity to remediate. To reiterate, a student may not enroll in thesis credit hours until that student has successfully defended the proposal, which includes completion of required revisions.

c. Thesis Format

Theses must follow the formats defined by the Graduate School. The manuscript-style thesis will consist of at least one manuscript plus appendices deemed necessary for the Committee to evaluate the work (e.g., expanded literature review or methods section). The student must be sole or first author on any manuscript(s) included in the thesis. The manuscript does not have to be submitted to or accepted by a journal to be approved by the Department of Geography or the Graduate School for the thesis. For more information about formatting, see section above on thesis/dissertation submission.

d. Thesis Defense

The thesis defense serves as the Master's comprehensive exam. Following the successful defense of the thesis, the student must complete the [Master's Comprehensive Exam Verification form](#) and submit it to the Graduate Director. The student will have 2 weeks to complete any remediation to the thesis requested by committee members. Students have only one opportunity to remediate. Following the completion of any remediation to the satisfaction of the committee, students must circulate the [Master's Thesis Signature and Approval Form \(G-TSF\)](#). The signed form should be returned to the Graduate Director as soon as possible.

Non-Thesis Option (36 credit hours total)

Students must declare their intention to pursue the non-thesis option no later than the end of the third regular semester for full-time students (part-time students should consult with the advisor and the Graduate Director for an adjusted timeline). Students choosing this option should have an advisor and a second reader for the research paper. The advisor and second reader must be faculty within the Geography Department. Either may be a regular, associate, or term graduate faculty member.

1. Coursework

- a. GEOG 801 (3 credit hours).
- b. A graduate-level (500-level or above) techniques or methods course with GEOG designator selected with advisor approval (3 credit hours).
- c. Thirty (30) additional credit hours with the following stipulations:
 - Half the coursework listed on the MPOS must be at the 700- or 800-level. GEOG 799 does not count towards this requirement.
 - No more than six (6) credit hours of independent study with any designator may be included on the MPOS.
 - A maximum of six (6) credit hours with non-GEOG designators may be included on the MPOS.

2. Research Paper

Non-thesis students are required to write an extended research paper under the guidance their advisor. The student must orally present the research paper to the advisor and the second reader. The advisor and second reader will evaluate the research paper as Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. The student will have two weeks to complete remediation if a Conditional Pass or Fail is given. The remediated work will be evaluated as Pass or Fail within two weeks. Students only have one opportunity to remediate. Students should allow themselves plenty of time to complete revisions prior to the end of

the term, taking into consideration time for the advisor and reader to review any required remediation. The research paper serves as the master's degree comprehensive exam. The advisor and second reader must assign a Pass to the paper for the student to pass the master's comprehensive exam. When the advisor and second reader finalize their assessment and assign a Pass, the following paperwork should be completed:

- 1) Department of Geography MA/MS Research Paper Completion form (in the My Geography section of the department website) and
- 2) the [Master's Comprehensive Exam form](#). The exam pass date is the date on which the advisor assigns a Pass to the research paper.

These forms should be returned to the Director of Graduate Studies.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

All master's students must demonstrate satisfactory academic progress at the end of each semester. At the time of graduation, a student's overall cumulative grade point average must be at least 3.0; a student must also have a minimum 3.0 grade point average in courses at the 700-level and above, and a minimum 3.0 grade point average on all courses appearing on the MPOS. A student whose grade point average in any single semester drops below 3.0, whose cumulative grade point average drops below 3.0, and/or who receives a grade lower than a B in any graduate course, may be placed on probation the following semester. Students placed on probation may have their assistantships revoked. Students who are on probation for any reason for more than 2 semesters may be terminated from the program. Other causes for termination may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Failure to complete all requirements for previous degree by the end of the first semester;
2. Failure to have an academic advisor at all times;
3. Failure to earn a minimum grade of B in GEOG 801 or required GEOG-designated methods/techniques course;
4. Failure to have an approved thesis proposal or research paper topic by the end of the fourth semester (for full-time students);
5. Failure to produce a defensible thesis (for thesis students) or a passable research paper (for non-thesis students);
6. Acts of academic dishonesty

A student will be notified of termination, in writing, before classes begin for the semester.

DOCTORAL DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Please note that all forms described below and highlighted with **red text** can be found in the Graduate School Forms Library:

https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/forms_library/index.php. Forms should be completed and submitted electronically.

The Doctoral Plan of Study, or DPOS, lists the 33 post-master's degree credit hours (CH) the student will take to earn a doctoral degree and the courses that will satisfy the residency requirement. If changes need to be made to an approved DPOS, students may complete the **Program of Study Adjustment (POSA)** form. The DPOS and all other forms should be submitted via email to the Graduate Director. The DPOS should be submitted within 24 months of the student's matriculation in the doctoral program for full-time students (part-time students should consult with the advisor and the Graduate Director for a modified timeline). (Note: students may not apply for z-status if a POS is not on file with the Graduate School).

The doctoral residency requirement (referring to time spent on campus as an in-person student) is satisfied with 18 CH of coursework taken in consecutive major (fall and spring) semesters. Enrollment in a summer term is not required to maintain continuity, but credits earned during summer terms (including May Session) will count toward the 18 CH required for residency. The maximum course load in each summer session is 6 credit hours.

Typically, PhD students with assistantships will receive support for 33 post-Master's degree credit hours. The department will consider granting up to 3 additional credit hours under limited circumstances, including when summer enrollment is required of instructors.

Doctoral students must request revalidation for USC graduate courses that are over 10 years old for inclusion in the Doctoral Program of Study (coursework taken at other institutions may not be revalidated). Approval of the revalidation request is at the discretion of the Graduate Director. Students who do not complete the program within a 10-year period become subject to changes in degree requirements adopted after that 10-year period.

Students must be enrolled in at least one credit hour during the semester they graduate. Please be aware of the financial implications of a summer rather than spring defense.

Graduate Bulletin Requirements, Geography Doctoral Degree

1. Coursework

The doctoral degree requires a minimum of 21 credit hours of coursework plus a minimum of 12 credit hours of dissertation preparation (GEOG 899). The specific course requirements include:

- a. GEOG 801 (3 credit hours). This course must be completed with a grade of B or better for the student to advance to candidacy.
- b. A techniques or methods course at the 700-level or above that is appropriate to the student's specialization and selected with advisor approval (3 credit hours). Courses taken at the Master's level cannot be applied toward this requirement. This course must be completed with a grade of B or better for the student to advance to candidacy.
- c. A graduate-level statistics course (3 credit hours). This course must be completed with a grade of B or better for the student to advance to candidacy. If an equivalent course was taken at the master's level with a grade of B or better, this requirement will be waived, but the credit hours will not count toward the doctoral degree.
- d. Twelve credit hours of Dissertation Preparation (GEOG 899). Students cannot enroll in GEOG 899 until their dissertation has been approved by their doctoral dissertation committee.

The following stipulations apply to doctoral coursework:

- a. At least half the coursework (not including GEOG 899) listed on the DPOS must be at the 700- or 800-level.
- b. No more than 3 credit hours of independent study (e.g., GEOG 705, 706, 805) with any designator may be included on the DPOS.
- c. A maximum of 6 credit hours with non-GEOG designators (or 9 credit hours if students take techniques/methods or graduate-level statistics outside of Geography) may appear on the DPOS.
- d. During preparation of the dissertation, any student who wishes to use University facilities or to confer with faculty must be enrolled in at least one credit hour of GEOG 899.

2. Admission to Candidacy

Doctoral students must complete the following to be admitted into candidacy:

- a. Full admission into the doctoral program;
- b. Approval of DPOS;
- c. Successful completion, with a grade of B or better, of the following courses (listed above under "Coursework"):
 - GEOG 801
 - a techniques or methods course at the 700-level or above (3 credit hours)
 - a graduate-level statistics course (3 credit hours)

- d. Completion of the [Qualifying Exam Verification Form](#). The signed form should be sent via email to the Graduate Director. The qualifying exam date is the last day of the last semester the course requirements were completed.

Note: Students must be admitted to candidacy at least one year prior to earning the doctoral degree.

3. Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive examination consists of (a) the oral defense of the dissertation proposal and (b) a written exam. The proposal defense and the written exam must take place within one regular semester (or the equivalent) of each other, in either order. Both elements of the comprehensive examination (including all remediation) should be completed before the start of the fifth regular semester (part-time doctoral students should consult with the Graduate Director and advisor for a modified timeline). Graduate School regulations specify that the written comprehensive examination may not be given fewer than 60 days before the student receives the degree. Certification of the comprehensive examination for doctoral students remains valid for five years, after which it must be revalidated. Revalidation is not guaranteed.

Both elements of the comprehensive examination are overseen and evaluated by the comprehensive examination committee. This committee consists of four members, one (but no more than one) of which must come from outside USC Geography. The external member can be from another academic unit at USC or from another institution. USC-based committee members (internal or external) may be regular or associate members of the Graduate Faculty; USC faculty members with term appointments on the Graduate Faculty may also serve on doctoral committees but may not chair committees. Appointment of a non-USC individual to a doctoral committee requires submission of that individual's CV for approval by the Graduate School. Once the comprehensive examination committee members have been selected, the student completes the [Doctoral Committee Appointment Request form \(G-DCA\)](#) and submits the form electronically to the Graduate Director.

a. Oral defense of the dissertation proposal

The dissertation proposal should be of a quality commensurate with a funding proposal to a nationally recognized funding agency and should include a clear set of research questions, a thorough literature review, an explanation of methods and data sources, and an explanation of how the dissertation research will make a meaningful contribution to relevant fields of study. Proposal lengths vary significantly between subdisciplines but typically range between 20 and 40 double-spaced pages, plus references.

The student will have up to one month after the oral proposal defense to complete remediation requested by committee members. Students have only one opportunity to complete the remediation. Students may not enroll in 899 (dissertation credits) until the proposal has received final approval from the committee. The student should complete the Dissertation Proposal Defense Form following the successful defense. This is a department form that is available in the My Geography section of the department website. Please see the "Scheduling Defenses" above for additional information.

b. Written comprehensive exam

The purpose of the written exam is to test students' preparedness to execute independent research and teach in their disciplinary fields. The examination committee and the student compile reading lists corresponding to each disciplinary field to be examined. Example fields of study include, but are not limited to:

- Well established systematic areas of study within Geography, like fluvial geomorphology, cultural geography, economic geography, hazards, biogeography, microclimatology, cartography, and remote sensing;
- Regional specialties like Latin America, the Middle East, or Europe;
- Methods, techniques, applications, and methodological approaches, like spatial statistics, quantitative methods, or qualitative GIS;
- Philosophical/theoretical approaches, like feminist geography, Marxist geography, humanism, time-space theory, or post-colonial theory;
- Broad disciplinary themes, like the history of geographic thought or space and place;
- Broad interdisciplinary fields of study, such as, climate-change adaptation, social movements, food systems, gender and sexuality, aeolian processes, environmental history, youth studies, migration studies, and development studies.

The reading lists must be finalized at least three months prior to the exam. Each reading list should include classic and contemporary references appropriate to the disciplinary field being tested. The advisor compiles exam questions with the assistance of each committee member. Students should not expect that their written exam will be the same as other students' written exams. Written exam formats and requirements, as well as the length of reading lists, will vary across the department reflecting different disciplinary norms and traditions.

All written exams must follow these basic guidelines: 1) Students will be required to answer no more than 3 questions for each designated disciplinary field/faculty member; 2) Students must have between 5 and 8 hours to complete the exam for each designated disciplinary field/faculty member; and 3) The examination committee must inform the student of the exam format and requirements at least three weeks prior to the exam. The student's advisor may allow committee members in terms of exam format (i.e.

different committee members can require the student to answer a different number of questions), provided committee members follow the rules above. The advisor may request that committee members revise/edit questions for the sake of clarity.

Each committee member is responsible for evaluating written exam responses corresponding with that member's area of expertise within two weeks of the student's completion of the written exam. Each committee member will assign a grade of Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. A Conditional Pass or Fail indicates that a student must undertake remedial work on the exam response. Committee members should consult with the student's advisor to determine the scope and nature of remediation. The committee may allow up to one month for the student to complete any required remediation. Students have one opportunity to complete remedial work and must pass every section of the written comprehensive exam to pass the exam as a whole.

4. Dissertation

a. Dissertation Committee

The dissertation is completed under the direction of a dissertation committee. The dissertation committee may or may not consist of the same members as the comprehensive examination committee. The dissertation committee has a minimum of four members and a maximum of five members. The dissertation committee must have at least three members from the USC Geography faculty, and at least one member from outside USC Geography. Once dissertation committee members have been selected, the student must complete a [Doctoral Committee Appointment Request form \(G-DCA\)](#). Even if the composition of the comprehensive exam and dissertation committees are the same, the student must fill out and submit separate forms.

b. Dissertation Format

Dissertations may be traditional or manuscript style. Manuscript style dissertations must include at least three manuscripts prepared and suitable for, but not necessarily accepted for, publication. Each manuscript should be well developed and carefully reasoned and substantially distinctive from the others. The three manuscripts should be accompanied by additional material as requested by the advisor and committee members—for instance, a full methodology chapter, an introductory chapter, and/or a conclusion. The student must be sole or lead author on all three manuscripts. All dissertations must follow the formatting guidelines defined by the Graduate School (available here: https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/thesis_and_dissertation/index.php).

Note: If a student has already published a manuscript they intend to include in their thesis/dissertation, they must produce proof that they have permission from the publisher to do so. Many publishers automate the permission process through the

Copyright Clearance Center/Rightslink, but permission can also come in the form of a email or a screenshot of the publisher's website that describes the rights retained by the author. Students should reach out to publishers as soon as possible to clarify and to secure reproduction rights.

5. Defense

The defense of the dissertation involves a 25-30 minute public presentation of the dissertation research followed by a closed session before the dissertation committee. The committee may allow up to one month for a student to complete any required remediation. Students have only one opportunity to complete the remediation. The student should consider this remediation period when scheduling the defense date. See information above on "Scheduling Defenses". Following the dissertation defense and the completion of all remediation, the student must submit the [Dissertation Signature and Approval Form \(G-DSF\)](#) to the Graduate Director.

6. Teaching Experience

All students must have at least one semester's worth of experience as an instructor of record or as a laboratory instructor.

7. Full-Length Research Presentation

All doctoral students must present a 35 to 45-minute public presentation based on their research prior to graduation. This talk is not the same as the dissertation defense and it can be conducted well in advance of the completion of the dissertation. The event should be scheduled and announced to all faculty and students at least one week ahead of time by the student and the advisor. This presentation can be used as a practice job talk. At the conclusion of the research talk, the student should complete the [Doctoral Research Talk form](#) and submit it to the Graduate Director. This is a departmental form and can be found in the My Geography section of the department website.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

All doctoral students must demonstrate satisfactory academic progress at the end of each semester. At the time of graduation, a student's overall cumulative grade point average must be at least 3.0; a student must also have a minimum 3.0 grade point average in courses at the 700-level and above, and a minimum 3.0 grade point average on all courses appearing on the DPOS. A student whose grade point average in any single semester drops below 3.0, whose cumulative grade point average drops below 3.0, and/or who receives a grade lower than a B in any graduate course, may be placed on probation the following semester. Students placed on probation may have their assistantships revoked. Students who are on probation for any reason for more than 2 semesters may be terminated from the program. Other causes for termination may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Failure to complete all requirements for previous degree by the end of the first semester;
2. Failure to have an academic advisor at all times;
3. Failure to earn a minimum grade of B in any of the three courses included in the qualifying exam;
4. Failure to have a dissertation proposal approved by the end of the fifth semester (for full-time students);
5. Failure to pass the written comprehensive exam;
6. Failure to produce a defensible dissertation;
7. Acts of academic dishonesty.

A student will be notified of termination, in writing, before classes begin for the semester.

HOUSEKEEPING

1. Office Space: All students in residence are provided office space. Students are expected to keep their office space clean. Students are encouraged to confine their food consumption to the Will Graf Lunchroom on the first floor. Students are welcome to store food in the lunchroom fridge, but they should dispose of any food before it spoils. Food items should not be stored in offices.
2. Cardboard clutter: Cardboard in the halls is a fire hazard so it must be recycled or taken to cardboard recycling dumpsters. Cardboard boxes should not be left in the mail room or hallways.
3. Old exams: Student instructors-of-record should keep graded papers and exams in a secure location and should dispose of these items after one full year. You will be notified of periodic opportunities to shred old papers and exams.
4. Copier use: The department budget for paper and toner is limited so we are trying to conserve. GTAs/GIAs may use the copy machine judiciously for teaching-related photocopying. Please use these resources sparingly. The department Administrative Assistant will set up codes for use.
5. Furniture: Students should use the furniture and equipment provided in their offices. Moving furniture between offices is not permitted, but we can help you find items you might need. Please do not bring old sofas or other furniture items to Callcott. Disposing of abandoned items is very costly to the department.
6. Keys: You will receive keys to the building and to your office, and possibly to other rooms in Callcott. You must return all keys to the Student Services Coordinator when you complete your graduate program.
7. Mailboxes: All students have mailboxes in Room 118.
8. Information Technology: The DoIT Service Desk is your single point of contact for computer, technology and IT-related questions and support. Here are the ways you can get support:
 - Submit a request online through our Self-Service Portal
 - Search the online [Knowledge Base](#)
 - [Chat](#) online with a Service Desk technician. Available Monday-Friday, 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
 - Call the Service Desk at 803-777-1800. Available Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

APPENDICES

1. Summary list of key forms and documents
2. Graduate student grievance, appeal, and petition policies
3. Department of Geography graduate student awards

Appendix 1: Summary list of key forms and documents

Master's Program Forms

*all forms available in Graduate School forms library unless otherwise indicated (https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/forms_library/index.php). All paperwork goes to the Graduate Director.

For thesis students:

- Master's Program of Study (MPOS): complete by end of second semester
- Master's Thesis Proposal Defense Form (department form available in My Geography section of department website)
- Master's Thesis Signature and Approval (G-TSF): all committee members sign after final revisions completed
- Comprehensive Exam Verification: the master's comprehensive exam is the thesis defense; this form should be signed after thesis defense

For non-thesis students:

- MPOS
- MA/MS Research Paper Completion Form (department form)
- Comprehensive Exam Verification: the comprehensive exam for non-thesis students is the research paper.

Doctoral Program Forms

*All forms available in Graduate School forms library unless otherwise indicated (https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/graduate-studies/forms_library/index.php). All paperwork goes to the Graduate Director.

- Doctoral Program of Study (DPOS): complete by end of fourth semester, if not sooner; required for z-status
- Qualifying Exam Verification: required for admission to candidacy; confirms successful completion of 801, statistical methods, and advanced methods, plus approval of DPOS
- Doctoral Committee Appointment Request (G-DCA): one for comprehensive exam committee and one for the dissertation committee (you can use one form if your committees are the same)
- Dissertation Proposal Defense Form (department form—available in My Geography section of department website)
- Comprehensive Exam Verification

- Dissertation Signature and Approval (G-DSF): all committee members sign after final revisions completed
- Doctoral Research Talk Form (department form)

Other common forms:

*forms available in Graduate School forms library unless otherwise indicated
(https://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/graduate_school/forms_library/index.php).

- Independent Study Contract (G-ISC): required for enrollment in independent study (GEOG 705, 706, 805); submit completed form to Graduate Director.
- Request for Special Enrollment Status (Z-status, GS-ZS): Z-status allows students to maintain full-time status while enrolled in fewer than 6 credit hours; mainly relevant to doctoral students enrolled in dissertation credit hours; DPOS must be on file for z-status approval. Submit completed form to Graduate Director.
- Application to Graduate: (Self-Service Carolina): you can complete this early in the semester you intend to graduate; please check Registrar website for deadlines and details:
https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/registrar/graduation/graduation_application/index.php

Appendix 2: Graduate student grievance, appeal, and petition policies

The University of South Carolina, the Graduate School, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Geography have policies and regulations in place to address a wide variety of circumstances that might arise. There may be instances when a student believes that a situation warrants a submission of a grievance, appeal, or petition to these policies and/or regulations.

The three major categories of academic grievances, appeals, and petitions are:

- 1) Student petitions for waiver of, or exception to, Graduate School or program regulations and/or requirements;
- 2) Student appeals of decisions or actions taken within the academic unit, in this case the Department of Geography (not, however, appeals for change of grade originated by the student); and
- 3) Requests for change of grade in courses taken for graduate credit originated by faculty, usually the course instructor.

Proper Course of Action — All steps in the process will be documented in writing for the student's file.

1. The proper course of action for students is first to seek resolution with the instructor, faculty member, or staff member.
2. If resolution cannot be made, the student will speak with the Department Chair.
3. If the Chair cannot find resolution, the department formal procedure for reporting and resolving grievances should be followed:
 - A. Student will document and submit the grievance to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) in writing. The grievance will include:
 - i. Student name
 - ii. Department
 - iii. Position (if applicable)
 - iv. Faculty advisor
 - v. Statement of grievance
 - vi. Resolution requested
 - B. DGS will review grievance and will consult with Chair. The Chair will suggest a resolution to the student.
4. If the proposed solution is not acceptable to the student, the issue will be brought to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.
5. If the issue remains unresolved, it will be brought to the Graduate School by submitting a **Graduate Grievances, Appeals, and Petitions (G-GAP)** form, available in the Graduate School Forms Library. If the grievance is against the DGS, then the Undergraduate Director will replace the DGS in the process outlined above. If the grievance is against the Chair, then the grievance will go directly to the College of Arts and Sciences.

The Graduate School will not consider a G-GAP submission unless or until the student has exhausted departmental and college-level appeal options. A student with a concern that has not

been resolved first at the department or college level should consult the [Appeal of Academic Decisions](#) section of the Graduate Bulletin. Students may also refer to [STAF 6.27](#) (Student Grievance Policy).

Appendix 3: Department of Geography graduate student awards

Awards Calendar

Awards are considered on the university's fiscal year, not calendar year. Submission deadlines for nominations or applications are:

May 10 Graduate Instructor Award
 Teaching Assistant Award
 Lovingood Graduate Research Award

December 15 Grace and Allan Davis Scholarship

No Deadline Cynthia MacCharles-Medina Memorial Award
 Bennett S. Masaschi Graduate Award
 Richard G. Silvernail Scholarship for Geographic Education

Department of Geography Graduate Instructor Award

This award recognizes outstanding graduate student instructors. Graduate students who are serving as instructor of record for a course may nominate themselves for the award. Applicants should submit a course syllabus, course evaluations, and a brief (1-2 page) teaching statement that describes their general teaching philosophy and teaching methods and approaches.

Award: \$100

Number: Up to two awards annually

Application Deadline: May 10

Contact/Submission: Director of Graduate Studies

Department of Geography Teaching Assistant Award

This award recognizes outstanding TAs (i.e. graduate students who lead lab sections or who have a significant role in classroom teaching; graders do not qualify). Faculty members whose courses require a teaching assistant may nominate students for this award. The faculty member should compose a brief letter (1 page) to the Awards Committee explaining why the student should be considered for the award. If teaching evaluations are available, those should be attached to the application.

Award: \$100

Number: Up to two awards annually

Application Deadline: May 10

Contact/Submission: Director of Graduate Studies

Lovingood Graduate Research Award

Awarded annually to recognize the most outstanding peer-reviewed paper authored or co-authored by a geography graduate student. The competition is available to graduate students in good standing in the Department of Geography. Multi-authored papers are acceptable, but the

graduate student must be the first author and must be responsible for 75 percent or more of the paper's content. The manuscript must be designated as 'in press' (have a DOI) between May 1 of the previous year and April 30 of the current year. Students may win the Lovingood Graduate Research Award multiple times during their graduate career. The application package, prepared by the student, comprises a cover letter and the manuscript submitted by May 10. The cover letter should include information about the publication status of the manuscript (e.g., accepted to Professional Geographer on January 1), and should indicate if the Lovingood Graduate Research Award has been previously won. If the paper has multiple authors, the cover letter should also provide a detailed statement of each author's contributions.

Award: \$500

Number: One award annually

Application Deadline: May 10

Contact/Submission: Director of Graduate Studies

Cynthia MacCharles-Medina Memorial Award

Awarded annually to a graduate student emphasizing the business application of GIS in their research. The fund was established in memory of a USC Geography graduate student, Cynthia MacCharles-Medina, who was passionate about GIScience and business-related applications of GIS. Students applying for the award should submit a one-page (single-spaced) statement describing their use of GIS for a business-related application.

Award: \$200

Number: Up to two awards annually

Application Deadline: No Deadline

Contact/Submission: Director of Graduate Studies

Bennett S. Masaschi Graduate Award

Awarded annually to graduate students with financial need to conduct fieldwork. A maximum of three awards will be given annually. Students may only receive one award per degree, and doctoral students have priority. To apply, students should write a 500-word description of their fieldwork that includes how this money will be used. Students should also indicate additional support received for their master's or doctoral research (not included in the word count). Students must be in good standing. There is no specific deadline for this award; applications will be considered on a rolling basis.

Award: \$500

Number: Up to three awards annually

Application Deadline: No Deadline

Contact/Submission: Director of Graduate Studies

Richard G. Silvernail Scholarship for Geographic Education

Awarded to a graduate student pursuing research in geographic education. Students may only receive this award once per graduate degree. Students must be nominated by a faculty member. The nomination consists of a one-page letter from the faculty member and a CV from the student.

Award: \$500

Number: One award annually

Application Deadline: No Deadline

Contact/Submission: Director of Graduate Studies

Grace and Allan Davis Scholarship

Awarded annually to a graduate or undergraduate student majoring in geography with a focus on geographic information science, remote sensing, and/or cartography and having a financial need (preference is given to graduate students). In addition to financial need, the award prioritizes students who are: 1) married with children; 2) married; or 3) single. All students applying must have a 3.0 GPA and be in good academic standing. Students apply for the award by composing a brief letter (1-2 pages) outlining their interest in geographic information science, remote sensing, and/or cartography. Applicants should also provide a very brief, general statement describing their financial need. By submitting an application for this award, the applicant gives permission to the Department of Geography to access FAFSA information through the Registrar. Winner should contact Bruce and Kathy Davis with a thank you note (badavis504@gmail.com).

Award: \$750

Number: One award annually

Application Deadline: December 15

Contact/Submission: Director of Undergraduate Studies or Director of Graduate Studies