

New Mexico State University

**Department of Geography and
Environmental Studies**

**Guidelines for Graduate Study
Masters of Applied Geography**

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1. Introduction

We provide the following set of guidelines to assist you in successfully completing your Master of Applied Geography (MAG) degree at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Read these carefully and clarify any questions with Dr. Michaela Buenemann, Head of the NMSU Department of Geography and Environmental Studies (hereinafter referred to as Department), or Dr. Eric Magrane, Department Graduate Program Director. We also suggest that you consult the [Program Overview](#) webpages as well as the webpages of the [NMSU Graduate School](#) (hereinafter referred to as Graduate School).

2. Program Overview

We offer students two options for earning a Master of Applied Geography (MAG): a thesis option and a non-thesis option. The thesis option (30 credits) represents the traditional path for earning a MAG degree and entails the completion of coursework and the writing and defense of a master's thesis. The master's thesis is a piece of original scholarship developed under the direction of an advisor and typically two thesis committee members. The non-thesis option (30 credits) is an alternative path for earning a MAG degree and requires the completion of coursework, the writing of a residency report, and the passing of a final exam. The residency report is a document developed during an internship or residency under the direction of a field supervisor at an agency or firm. Both the MAG thesis and residency paths emphasize specialized, independent, and applied scholarship built on a solid foundation of general geographic knowledge and skills.

In addition to the MAG, we offer a Graduate Minor in Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIS&T).

We will work closely with you to accommodate your unique needs and career goals and to help you acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate an interconnected and pluralistic world.

3. Degree Options, Courses, Grade Requirements, and Forms

3.1 Undergraduate Preparation

An undergraduate geography degree is not required for entry into the MAG program. However, applicants who lack the equivalent of GEOG 1110G Physical Geography, GEOG 1130G Human Geography, and/or GEOG 2130 Map Use and Analysis may be required to take these or similar courses to prepare for the graduate-level work in geography. Applicants without an undergraduate geography degree are strongly encouraged to contact the GES Graduate Program Director and their Graduate Advisor to identify optimal strategies for satisfying basic course requirements.

3.2 MAG Thesis Option

Students seeking a thesis-based MAG degree will complete a thesis project, write a thesis that is approved by the student's graduate thesis committee, and successfully defend their thesis in an oral examination. To fulfill the MAG thesis requirement, ensure that you 1) follow all policies and procedures established by the Department and Graduate School and 2) meet the demands of all thesis committee members. Examples of past [MAG Thesis](#) titles are available online.

In addition to the master's thesis and thesis defense, MAG Thesis candidates are required to complete a minimum of 30 graduate credits, including 6 Master's Thesis credits (GEOG 599) and at least 15 credits from courses numbered 500 and above. No more than 9 credits of the minimum 30 may be earned outside of the Department. All candidates are moreover required to maintain an overall GPA of 3.00 or higher. Finally, all candidates must earn a grade of B- or better in the following required geography graduate courses:

- GEOG 501, Geographic Theory and Application
- GEOG 502, Integrative Research Design
- GEOG 584, Critical Methodologies OR GEOG 585, Spatial Analysis and Modeling

Note: In addition to the core geography graduate courses listed above and courses you wish to take as electives, your thesis committee may ask you to take courses in additional areas (e.g., statistics or database management) of critical relevance to your successful thesis completion.

For more information regarding the MAG Thesis Option, please see [Section 4](#) of this document.

3.3 MAG Residency Option

Students seeking a residency-based MAG degree will complete a residency project, write a residency report that is approved by both the student's sponsor and graduate residency committee, and successfully pass an oral exam. To fulfill the MAG residency requirement, ensure that you 1) follow all policies and procedures established by the Department and Graduate School 2) submit the Graduate Residency Form prior to beginning the project, and 3) meet the demands of both the sponsor and all residency committee members. Examples of past [MAG Residency](#) titles are available online.

In addition to the residency report and oral exam, MAG Residency candidates are required to complete a minimum of 30 graduate credits, including 6 Residency credits (GEOG 596) and at least 15 credits from courses numbered 500 and above. No more than 9 credits of the minimum 30 may be earned outside of the Department. All candidates are moreover required to maintain an overall GPA of 3.00 or higher. Finally, all candidates must earn a grade of B- or better in the following required geography graduate courses:

- GEOG 501, Geographic Theory and Application
- GEOG 502, Integrative Research Design
- GEOG 584, Critical Methodologies OR GEOG 585, Spatial Analysis and Modeling

Note: In addition to the core geography graduate courses listed above and courses you wish to take as electives, your residency committee may ask you to take courses in additional areas

(e.g., statistics or database management) of critical relevance to your successful residency completion.

3.4 Graduate Minor in Geographic Information Science and Technology (GIS&T)

The [GIS&T Minor](#) is available for all interested graduate students at New Mexico State University, regardless of major.

3.5 Graduate Forms

You will need to complete several forms over the course of your MAG program. Geography forms referred to in this document are available [on the Departmental Website under Degree Requirements](#). All other forms are available via the [NMSU Graduate School website](#).

4. MAG Thesis Option

4.1 Timeline and Milestones

The following timeline is a guide within which MAG Thesis Option students should be working. We realize that you may deviate from this timeline due to various factors beyond your control, but we expect that you diligently attempt to meet the milestones set below. Evaluation of whether or not you are making adequate progress on the thesis research depends upon the degree to which you are meeting these milestones.

Graduate timeline and milestones

1st semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful completion of GEOG 501 and GEOG 584 or GEOG 585 with a grade of B- or higher - Selection of Thesis Advisor and filing of partial “Thesis Committee Form” - Preliminary topic area established
2nd semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful completion of GEOG 502 and GEOG 584 or GEOG 585, each with a grade of B- or higher - Final thesis topic established - Full Thesis Committee membership finalized and filing of complete “Thesis Committee Form” - Thesis proposal completed and filing of “Thesis Proposal Form” - Filing of “Program of Study for Masters Students Form”
Summer after 1st year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field, archival, and other data collection work underway

3rd semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data collection complete - Data analysis and drafting of thesis well underway
4th semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Filing of “Application for Degree (Diploma)” - Draft of thesis document to Thesis Advisor early in 4th semester - Revised draft completed, based on Thesis Advisor’s comments - Revised draft to Thesis Committee, with Thesis Advisor’s approval - Scheduling of thesis defense and filing of “Masters Final Examination Form” - Successful thesis defense - Thesis revisions finalized, consistent with Graduate School requirements - Final thesis as well as thesis data and metadata to the Thesis Advisor for final thesis approval - Submission of final approved thesis to NMSU following Grad School Requirements

4.2 Selection of MAG Thesis Advisor and Committee

Success in the MAG program is greatly enhanced by a timely and logical selection of both a Thesis Advisor, who will serve as the Chair of the Thesis Committee, as well as additional Thesis Committee Members.

4.2.1 Thesis Advisor

You are encouraged to select a Thesis Advisor by the end of the first semester in the program. Selecting a Thesis Advisor (and subsequent Thesis Committee Members) is an important process that should be carefully and thoughtfully undertaken. The Thesis Advisor must be the Geography faculty member that is best able to competently advise you on your research. This person is fundamentally a mentor of scholarship and should be selected accordingly. Traditionally, the selection of the Thesis Advisor involves a face-to-face request by the master’s candidate, followed by the student and chair signing and filing the Thesis Committee Form [available on the Departmental Website under Degree Requirements](#).

The advisor-advisee relationship is similar to any other professional relationship, and clear communication concerning expectations, responsibilities, and obligations is key. The role of the Thesis Advisor is to direct the thesis research. If you require clarification of general expectations, responsibilities, and obligations, or direction on specific technical issues, you should consult directly and promptly with the Thesis Advisor. If these discussions do not clarify the issues, you need to discuss the matter further with the Department Graduate Program Director. If the issue still cannot be resolved, you should contact the Department Head. Our preference is that these issues are resolved at the departmental level, but if you are not able to resolve issues at this level, an appeals process exists within the Graduate School; details on this are provided in the [Regulation and Procedures](#) section of the NMSU Graduate Catalog.

4.2.2 Thesis Committee

Once the Thesis Advisor is established, you will work closely with this person to form a Thesis Committee, which consists, at a minimum, of the Thesis Advisor as Thesis Committee Chair, one other Geography faculty member, and an outside member that also acts as the Dean of the Graduate School's Representative. Identification of the full thesis committee membership should be completed by the end of the second semester. Selection of thesis committee members should be based on guidance from the Thesis Advisor, with the intention of developing the best thesis committee possible to guide your research. The Dean's Representative will read and critique the thesis, participate in the thesis defense, ensure that all [policies and procedures](#) are followed.

Additional thesis committee members may also be added if needed. For example, one of the thesis committee members can be from outside the university in certain circumstances, but you must consult with the Thesis Advisor before asking anyone else to serve on the Thesis Committee. These outside members must also be approved by the Graduate Dean as [Graduate Faculty](#). This process requires a formal request for Graduate Faculty status to the Graduate Dean. This must happen as the thesis committee is initially formed, not at the time of the defense planning. On occasion, circumstances arise where a student and/or Thesis Advisor can no longer work together. If a Thesis Advisor or Committee Member must be changed, you must file an updated version of the Thesis Committee Form with new signatures. Any changes in the Thesis Committee must be preceded by consultation with the Thesis Advisor and the Department Graduate Program Director.

4.3 MAG Thesis Proposal

The Thesis Advisor and Committee guide the specifics of your research approach and strategy. However, you must first develop, refine, and base the research on a formal, written thesis proposal, which must be approved by the Thesis Committee. The goal of our core required courses are to aid students in developing such a proposal. We strongly urge you to use these classes, in conjunction with your Thesis Advisor's input, to develop a logical and defensible research proposal that will further guide your thesis research. Once your thesis proposal is completed, you will present it to your Thesis Committee. Once all Thesis Committee Members approve your proposed research, you need to file the Graduate Thesis Proposal Form, which is available on the [Departmental Website under Degree Requirements](#).

4.4 Completion and Defense of the Thesis

As you near completion of the research and the final defense of the thesis, it is important that there is close coordination with the Thesis Advisor. Several important milestones of this process are detailed below.

4.4.1 Prior to the Defense

It is your responsibility to be sure that the [Masters Final Examination Form](#) for scheduling this examination is submitted to the Graduate School at least ten working days prior to the

proposed date for the examination. Follow the [schedule provided by the Graduate School](#). This form also acts as the formal paperwork in support of your Thesis Committee. All NMSU graduate forms can be accessed [here](#).

You will present the results of the thesis in a public seminar. Once you have scheduled an agreed date and time amongst all of the Thesis Committee Members, the defense date, time, and location must be advertised in a flyer posted by you and the Thesis Advisor throughout the Department and distributed to the faculty.

Completion and distribution of the final draft of the thesis document to the Thesis Committee prior to the defense is solely your responsibility. You must ensure that each Thesis Committee Member receives a digital copy of the final draft of the thesis no later than ten working days before the date of the final examination. The format of the thesis must comply with the [NMSU Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines](#). These guidelines also contain detailed information on the thesis approval process and final electronic thesis filing. You must also file an [Application for Degree \(Diploma\)](#).

According to Graduate School policy, you and your Thesis Committee is wholly responsible for the content of the thesis. The thesis editor/reviewer in the Graduate School is responsible solely for formatting issues.

4.4.2 Thesis Defense and Final Oral Examination

Your graduate degree will culminate with a [final oral examination](#), which consists of a public presentation of your thesis and a closed-door defense of your thesis and general questioning by the Thesis Committee. All Thesis Committee Members must be present for the examination, which reflects not only on your accomplishments but also on the quality of the MAG program. It is thus a critical component of your graduate experience.

4.4.3 Thesis Submission to the Graduate School and Department

The final thesis document must meet the required [NMSU Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines](#) and be approved by your Thesis Advisor. [Submission of the final approved thesis](#) is solely your responsibility. You must also submit a PDF version of your final thesis to the Department Program Director, along with all of the data and metadata used in the thesis research.

5. Information for Graduate Assistants

5.1 Assistantship-Related Policies and Procedures

The granting of either a [Teaching Assistantship \(TA\) and or a Research Assistantship \(RA\)](#) is based on the applicant's qualifications, departmental needs, and available resources. The Department's intent is to provide four semesters of funding to MAG students in the Department, subject to funding availability. The allocation of a TA or RA is based primarily on departmental teaching or research project needs, not on a student's desire for the type of work

they wish to do. Continuation of funding is contingent upon students adequately fulfilling their TA or RA duties, making adequate progress in their coursework (i.e., maintaining a 3.0 grade point average, passing GEOG 501, GEOG 502, and GEOG 584 or GEOG 585 with grades of B- or better, and completing 9 credit hours per semester), and making sufficient progress on thesis/residency research (as defined by the Thesis/Residency Committee). The Department will withdraw funding if these criteria are not met. Students working as TAs are primarily responsible to the faculty member with whom they are working. Students working as RAs are primarily responsible to the faculty member who is funding the research on which the students are working. In either case, the supervising faculty member evaluates whether or not the TA or RA is adequately fulfilling assigned duties. For NMSU graduate assistant policies and procedures, please refer to the [section of the Catalog that covers the Graduate School](#).

5.2 Application Process for Departmental Funding

To apply for assistantships from the Department please clearly indicate your interest in financial support in both your application letter and online application form. The priority date for review of requests for financial support is 15 January. Funding requests submitted after this date will be considered only if the Department has not yet allocated all of its TA or RA lines. If you are not already a MAG student and would like to be considered for funding through the Department, your program application must also be submitted by 15 January. More detailed information regarding Geography Graduate Assistantships can be found [here](#).

Graduate students may apply for need-based loans and work-study awards through [NMSU Financial Aid and Scholarship Services](#).

Fellowships and grants are intended to support highly qualified students during their graduate program. At NMSU, both the Graduate School and the different colleges offer [a series of awards, assistantships, and fellowships](#). External funding is also available, for example, through the [Association of American Geographers \(AAG\)](#).

Health Insurance information for NMSU graduate students can be accessed [here](#).

6. Integrity and Safety in Research and Creative Activities

Integrity in research and creative activities is based on sound disciplinary practices as well as on a commitment to basic values such as fairness, honesty, and respect. The Department's expectations for the responsible conduct of scholarly and creative activities of graduate students are the same as those applied throughout NMSU. Violation of those rules are grounds for dismissal from the MAG Graduate Program and NMSU. Information on what is considered research misconduct, dishonesty with respect to grades or academic records and scholarships, and violations of professional standards is available from several sources, including:

- [NMSU Graduate Ethics and Standards](#)
- [NMSU Student Academic Code of Conduct](#)
- [NMSU Research Policies](#)
- [NMSU Environmental Health and Safety Office](#)