**GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK**

**Geography & Environmental Studies**

**August 2014**

**I’ve just been admitted to grad school at UNM. What’s next?**

STEP 1: LET US KNOW WHETHER YOU ARE COMING.

Our applicants typically apply to a number of excellent programs across the nation, so we look forward to hearing from you as soon as you’ve made your decision about whether you will be joining us. If you decide not to accept our offer of admission and/or funding, we offer it quickly to another deserving candidate.

STEP 2: SET UP YOUR UNM IDENTIFICATION.

To access all basic UNM services, you need to **acquire two basic forms of identification**: a NetID and LoboCard.

1. Your UNM NetID is used for all computer-based services, like email, myUNM, and registering for classes.  You can get a NetID by going to [https://netid.unm.edu](https://netid.unm.edu/).  Click the blue 'I am new - I need a NetID' button. Follow the prompts to enter your information. When selecting your NetID, keep in mind that it will become your UNM email address (with @[unm.edu](http://unm.edu/) added to the end).
2. Your LoboCard is used for everything else, like access to the gym, riding the bus, checking out library books, etc.  To get a LoboCard, go to the LoboCard Office on the lower level of the Student Union Building, room 1077.  Bring a government-issued form of identification (like driver's license or passport) and your 9-digit UNM ID number.  Here's a link to the Lobo Card office: <http://lobocard.unm.edu/>

Note: Your 9-digit UNM ID was assigned to you when you applied to UNM, and it is different from the NetID that you choose for yourself.  If you don't know your UNM ID number (also called Banner ID), follow these instructions to find it: Go to [dss.unm.edu](http://dss.unm.edu/) and log in with your NetID; Click on Demographic Information (either the link or the tab); Listed under your NetID will be your UNM ID number.

STEP 3: REGISTER FOR CLASSES.

Once you have created a NetID, you are ready to **register for classes**.  You can enter the registration process through myUNM ([my.unm.edu](http://my.unm.edu/)), using your NetID.

* All incoming Geography students are expected to take GEOG501 in their first fall semester.  As shown in the schedule of classes, this course is "closed" (to prevent non-Geography students from registering).  This means that you need to send an email to the instructor with your 9-digit UNM ID number (not your NetID, see above), asking to be added to the roster.
* To select other courses for the fall semester, we strongly advise you to contact your assigned advisor (as stated in your offer letter) for guidance, if you haven't already.

**Grad school isn’t free. Is there any funding available?**

All departmental openings for Teaching Assistants or Research Assistants are offered to incoming students during the spring admissions process, and do not typically become available during the school year. But there are various other funding opportunities that arise from time to time, and we are very active in helping our students secure funding from other units on campus whenever possible. If you are looking for funding, please make sure the Graduate Program Director is aware of your need and keep an eye on UNMJobs and the Grad Studies website for employment and scholarship opportunities.

**I’ve arrived at the Department. What do I do next?**

Once you are admitted, you will receive information about attending our departmental orientation program, where we will introduce you to a wide range of resources available to M.S. Geography students. Here are the basics:

* Grad Student offices: We have a dedicated space for graduate students in Bandelier East, including desk with computers, a shared printer, TA/RA offices, and a lounge area. All grad students will receive keys for accessing the lounge area, and we are able to accommodate most desk requests. If you anticipate that you will do your schoolwork primarily on campus, ask the Grad Program Director to put you on the list for desk assignment. (In case of desk shortage, priority is given to full-time students who are working on a thesis.)
* Mail: All TAs and RAs have mailboxes in Bandelier West, and some of you will receive codes to use the copier and/or the computer lab alarm system, depending on your specific assignment.
* Communications: We have a listserv for graduate students, which is used for official announcements and also for graduate students to communicate with one another (re social events, etc.)  Typically, incoming students are added to the GRADGEOG-L listserv this week with the email address included in application materials.  Once you have a UNM NetID, you are welcome to update your listserv subscription with the new address, if desired.  Your original listserv confirmation email will contain instructions on how to subscribe and unsubscribe.
* Web: UNM also has a wide variety of helpful resources for students, which you can explore from the main UNM website or from the Graduate Studies homepage.
* Transportation: Please note that there is absolutely no free parking anywhere on campus! UNM encourages the use of public transportation, and all UNM students and employees can ride city buses for free. To get a bus sticker or to purchase a parking permit, contact Parking & Transportation.

**I am going to be a Teaching Assistant. What should I do?**

To get started as a TA, you need to (a) sign your contract, which will be prepared by our main office, and (b) communicate with your supervisor about preparing for your assigned duties. TA orientation is usually done individually with the faculty member who is assigned as your supervisor. For courses that have multiple TAs, you will be asked to help coordinate the schedule for teaching assignments, lab hours, and office hours. Please note that the Office of Graduate Studies has a number of resources for TAs, including workshops and courses on effective pedagogy.

**I am going to be a Research Assistant: What do I need to know?**

The duties of our Research Assistants vary widely, depending on your assigned research project and faculty member. The first step is to sign your contract, which will be prepared by our main office. The contract will include details about your how many hours you are expected to work, your pay rate, etc. To begin your work, you will meet with your Faculty supervisor to discuss responsibilities and expectations, receive training on any equipment or software, and to coordinate with other RAs who may be assigned to work with you on related projects. Please note that all research assistants at UNM are expected to adhere to strict standards of academic integrity and research ethics. You may be required to attend formal training in research ethics as part of your RA appointment, especially if your project involves human subjects.

**I’ve never been to grad school before. Is there a code of conduct?**

All graduate students in Geography are expected to adhere to UNM standards for student conduct and to maintain professional behavior in all interactions with Geography staff, faculty, and fellow students. We report all cases of plagiarism or academic dishonestly to the Dean of Students office. Please refer to the following links for more information on these topics:

UNM’S Student Code of Conduct

<http://pathfinder.unm.edu/campus-policies/student-code-of-conduct.html>

Academic Integrity and Research Ethics

<http://grad.unm.edu/aire/>

**I don’t know anyone in Albuquerque yet. Does the department have social events?**

In addition to our annual Welcome Party at the beginning of the fall semester, and our annual Convocation & Awards Ceremony at the end of the spring semester, Geography & Environmental Studies has an active schedule of outside speakers (usually every other week), with an informal social hour held afterward. These gatherings provide an opportunity for social interaction among faculty, students, staff, and professional geographers from the community. It is also rumored that graduate students organize their own social events as well.

**What does it mean to get a Masters Degree?**

The purpose of a Masters degree is to develop a set of competencies that will enable you to effectively and rigorously investigate the world. The idea is that your experiences with us should empower you to answer a much broader set of questions than you could have before your Masters program, and to do so in greater depth, nuance, and professionalism. This requires developing three core competencies:

* Acquiring a new academic body of knowledge to understand what is already the “state of the art” in your areas of interest
* Learning how to do academic research such that you may learn what the “state of the art” is in any new area of interest you pursue, and
* Learning how to conduct your own rigorous, persuasive investigations to advance the state of knowledge in any area you should pursue.

**What are the major mileposts in this program?**

All M.S. students in Geography and Environmental Studies are required to take a two-course sequence in their first year: GEOG 501 (Geographic History and Methods) and GEOG 502 (Approaches to Geographical Research). As part of the workload in these two courses, your instructors will guide you through the processes of selecting a faculty committee, designing your independent research, and completing all paperwork required by the department and university. For students who begin in the fall semester and complete the program on a full-time, four-semester schedule, this is how the mileposts unfold:

FIRST SEMESTER

* Complete GEOG 501
* Work with faculty advisor to select research topic
* Begin writing literature review for your research area(s)
* Additional coursework in your concentration

SECOND SEMESTER

* Complete GEOG 502
* Additional coursework in your concentration
* Finalize your 3-person faculty committee (departmental form required)
* Write research proposal
* Plan I: Meet with committee to approve thesis proposal
* Plan II: Meet with committee to discuss master’s project
* Complete IRB training and Human Subjects Review, if needed
* Finalize your Program of Study paperwork, submit to the Grad School

SUMMER

* Research activities
* Funding applications, if applicable

THIRD SEMESTER

* Plan I: Enroll in thesis hours and draft your thesis
* Plan II: Enroll in GEOG 597 Master’s Project, complete your project
* Plan II: Schedule presentation to full committee
* Plan II: Submit Announcement of Exam form 2 weeks before presentation
* Notify department of intent to graduate the following semester
* Additional coursework

FOURTH SEMESTER

* Enroll in final courses to complete Program of Study
* Plan I: Submit final draft of thesis to faculty advisor (early in semester)
* Plan I: Schedule presentation to full committee
* Plan I: Submit Announcement of Exam form 2 weeks before presentation
* Plan I: Complete any required thesis revisions
* Plan I: submit final thesis to the Grad School
* FInalize any revisions to Program of Study
* Graduate!

**Can I go to school part-time and still graduate in this century?**

Yes, some of our students do the M.S. Geography program while maintaining their full-time jobs in geography-related fields. It is extremely difficult to finish the program in 4 semesters unless you devote 100% of your attention to it, however, so you should be prepared to spend 5-6 semesters in residence (plus additional time for independent research) if you need to spend time at a job outside the department. Please note that most of our courses are offered on a traditional daytime schedule, which requires logistical flexibility for students who work full-time. To make things easier, our graduate seminar courses are typically offered in 3-hour blocks once per week in the mid-to-late afternoon and sometimes in the evenings.

**I heard that writing a thesis is optional. Please explain.**

The M.S. in Geography offers two different paths to graduation: Plan I requires completion of a thesis (which constitutes 6 credit hours) and 24 additional credit hours, or 8 classes. Plan II requires completion of a one-semester Master’s Project (which constitutes 3 credit hours) and 30 additional hours, or 10 classes.

* *What’s the difference between a thesis and a master’s project?*

A thesis is a sophisticated document that describes the results of an original research project that was designed and implemented independently by the student, usually over the course of a year or more. A well-designed thesis contributes new knowledge to the discipline of geography and is typically published in an academic journal. A master’s project is an applied project that is designed by the student’s faculty committee, focusing on a specific area of expertise or inquiry that the student has identified as professionally relevant. The master’s project is completed in a single semester, with faculty feedback at several points before the final presentation. Similarities: In both cases, the student must implement legitimate geographic methods, write a document describing project results, and present the research orally as part of the “master’s exam.” Differences: The Master’s project is designed by faculty, not by the student, and is completed on a much shorter timeline.

* *How do these degree paths affect my transcript?*

Under both plans, you will graduate with an M.S. in Geography. Only your degree and concentration appear on your transcript; your degree path does not.

* *How should I decide which plan to choose?*

Plan I is best for students who: want to engage in a sustained intellectual inquiry of considerable depth, have a strong interest in presenting their work at a conference and/or publishing their work, or are considering further graduate study to earn a PhD. Plan II is best for students who: view the M.S. degree mostly as a stepping stone towards a professional career, already know they are not going to pursue a Ph.D., or would like to spend most of their graduate program focused on coursework rather than on independent research.

* *What if I’m not sure what I want to do next?*

The Plan I degree path provides the most flexibility if you are unsure of your post-M.S. plans. If you apply to a Ph.D. program, the school to which you are applying will likely want to know whether you did a thesis or not. A successful M.S. thesis provides evidence that you can complete a large, independent research project, which is a necessary skill for Ph.D. study. If you complete a non-thesis Master's degree, your future PhD applications will need to show your research capabilities in some other way, such as professional experience following your Master's degree. Completing a Plan I definitely provides an advantage if your career plans include research, whether this is part of a Ph.D. program or not.

* *When should I decide?*

You should decide on your degree path by the end of your second full-time semester or around the time you have completed 18 credits of coursework, including GEOG 501 and 502. The experience of preparing a research proposal in GEOG 502 provides important training for all students, and the pressure of completing a proposal during one semester usually helps students determine if they have sufficient interest in a single topic to complete a thesis during the following year. After completing GEOG 502, Plan I students typically begin taking thesis hours, which cannot be applied towards a Plan II. Don’t plan on taking thesis hours if you are still undecided.

* *Can I change my mind?*

Yes. Even if you have already submitted a Program of Study, you can submit an updated version with a different degree path. All regular GEOG graduate courses can be counted towards either Plan I or Plan II. The only exception to this is thesis hours, so if you switch from Plan I to Plan II you will lose credit for those hours.

* *Does my choice of Plan influence my graduation timeline?*

Plan II requires more coursework than Plan I, but a thesis typically requires more time and energy than the 6 credit hours it counts for. As a result, the total amount of work is comparable, and both Plan I and II degree paths can be completed in 2 years of full-time study. A thesis requires a certain amount of planning, as well as dedication and focus, to implement the research design and construct the actual thesis document. Most students doing a thesis therefore take a lower course-load during their final semesters, leaving time to focus on their research and writing. In general, there is no relationship between doing Plan I or II and time to graduation. Students who devote themselves to one plan for a year but then switch to the other, however, will find it very difficult to finish within their originally planned timeline.

**Why do I need to do a final project for my degree?**

Your masters degree serves as a form of guarantee, underwritten by your committee and the Department as a whole, that you have developed the three competencies listed above. Thus, your masters thesis/final professional project is not simply intended as a formality, a trial by fire, or a mere hurdle for you to clear. Rather, it serves as an opportunity to simultaneously develop and test the three core competencies with the support, input, and guidance of three mentors that you choose. That said, your committee and the Department as a whole cannot give others the guarantee provided by your degree until you truly demonstrate all three of these competencies.

**Why is my committee requiring me to do a Prospectus/Proposal and a Defense of that Prospectus/Proposal?**

Developing all three competencies listed above (knowledge of state of the art literature, ability to conduct literature research, ability to conduct own research investigation) is not a straightforward matter. What you need to learn and how you need to learn it is really dependent upon you. It depends on your interests, your strengths, what you know already, what you want to be able to do with your life and career after your degree, and the resources available to you through the Department and the University. And, as we guarantee when we award a Masters degree, the level of competency we expect in each of these three areas is high. So, rather than simply sending you out to sink or swim, we ask you to lay out exactly how you intend to exhibit your three competencies with your Masters thesis/final professional project. Again, this is not simply intended as a formality, a trial by fire, or a mere hurdle for you to clear. Rather it is to PROTECT and SERVE you as you move forward on your Masters thesis/final professional project. It does so in three ways:

1. It allows your committee to give you the benefit of their knowledge and experience in all three competencies. We do this not to make your life harder, but to help anticipate and prevent major mistakes before you have the misfortune of making them.
2. It is a chance to negotiate with your committee regarding their expectations and your expectations for what it means to exhibit all three competencies, what your project should be trying to do, and how it should be trying to do it. It is a chance to communicate openly about what you are trying to achieve and how your committee thinks you can and should try to achieve it.
3. Thus, it also serves to protect you from shifting expectations on the part of your committee. The more you can get “nailed down” during your proposal, the less uncertainty you will have about whether or not your final project will ultimately meet your committee’s expectations.

For all of these reasons, you are best served by doing the best possible job with your prospectus so that: 1) you make the best use of your committee going forward, 2) you negotiate expectations as fully as possible, and 3) you minimize possible areas for surprise during your final project defense.

**What are the main components of a Masters Thesis proposal?**

1. Introduction and Research Questions
2. Introduction to your research site
3. Literature review - This section should really lay out what knowledge has already been created that is relevant to your SPECIFIC research questions and interests. It is best to start more generally regarding the area of knowledge you are engaging with, and progressively get more narrow and specific as to what has been done and not been done in your area of interest. That said, the lit review is to really explain how you are not reinventing the wheel, and to set up your argument for why YOUR research matters, in light of what has already been done.
4. Research design – a methodological plan for answering the research question in a rigorous and legitimate manner.

**Does it really matter whether I do my citations correctly?**

Proper citations are an important part of academic integrity. We expect all students to learn how proper and consistent habits of scholarly attribution. Although there are many different citation styles in use across the various journals in our discipline, our departmental standard is the citation style for the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers.* Please use this style for all research papers submitted for class and for master’s projects and master’s thesis documents.

**I am way behind in a class. Should I ask for an incomplete?**

It is up to each individual instructor to decide whether circumstances warrant giving a grade of “Incomplete” for any of their students. In general, incompletes are NOT used to allow an underperforming student to revise work or to complete additional work in hopes of improving the grade. Incompletes are typically considered appropriate in cases where extenuating circumstances in a student’s life make it difficult or impossible for the student to continuing attending class, completing assignments, or engaging in other academic activities. If you are worried about your ability to finish a course, speak with your instructor at the earliest opportunity. If the instructor does not consider that your situation warrants a grade of incomplete, it would be better for you to drop the class. If you simply stop attending class or completing classwork without talking to the instructor, you risk receiving failing grades on all remaining coursework, resulting in an overall failing course grade. If you receive any incomplete grades in a course, you will automatically be put on academic probation until you complete the coursework to the satisfaction of the instructor and receive a letter grade. Any incompletes that are not resolved within one year are converted automatically on your transcript to a grade of “F.”

**How do I know whether I’m getting graduate credit when I take a course?**

All courses listed with a number of 500 or higher automatically generate graduate credit. There are a few courses at the 400-level that generate graduate credit when taken by graduate students (although undergraduates who enroll in these courses receive only undergraduate credit). These special classes are as follows: any course listed with the number 499, and any 400-level course marked in the catalog with an asterisk. All other courses are available ONLY for undergraduate credit. Please note that several of our courses are dual-numbered (e.g. 483/583), which means that either graduate or undergraduate students can enroll. If you enroll as a graduate student in a dual-numbered course, you will be expected to complete the graduate-level expectations of the course, and you will be graded according to graduate-level standards.

**How do I form a graduate committee?**

When we admit students to the M.S. program, we automatically assign you to a faculty advisor, based on your research interests and our faculty expertise and availability. If your interests change, however, or if a faculty member’s availability changes (due to sabbatical leave or research travel, etc.), you are free to select a new advisor at any time. Once your advisor is set, you will work closely with this person to form your graduate committee, which consists of your advisor as committee chair and two other faculty members. One of your committee members can be from outside the department or even outside the university, but you should consult with your chair before asking anyone else to serve on the committee. Once you have asked faculty to serve on your committee and received affirmative responses, you get everyone’s signature on the committee form for our departmental file. If you need to change a committee member after the fact, you’ll need to get new signatures and file an updated version of the committee form.

**What if I change my mind about everything when I’m already halfway through the program?**

Graduate students are notorious for changing plans, changing subfields, or changing research projects at exactly the point when all paperwork and signatures have just been submitted. If this happens to you, you’ll need to contact the Graduate Program Director to plan a new path to degree completion. Sometimes this is as simple as changing from one concentration to another without changing advisor or thesis topic. In other cases, you might be undergoing a wholesale reconsideration of your career plans, which could require significant changes to your Program of Study. No matter where you fall on this spectrum, you should consult with the Grad Director and your advisor to determine the best approach to revising paperwork, getting signatures, and meeting deadlines in an efficient and effective way. The Director of the Grad Program is responsible for approving any requests for deviation from the normal degree path, including substitution of required courses.

**I’ve started working on my graduate research. Where do I find money to travel?**

Some of you will design research projects that include fieldwork outside of Albuquerque, sometimes even outside the United States. Others of you might complete your research here in Albuquerque but then need to travel to academic or professional conferences where you can present your results to a broader scholarly community. Either way, you’ll need to travel! The department sometimes has money to support research and conference travel for graduate students, but this money is not guaranteed from year to year. Other good sources to pursue: your faculty research supervisor (if you are an RA) who might have grant funds, the Office of Graduate Studies, the Graduate and Professional Students Association, the New Mexico Geographic Information Council (NMGIC), or the Association of American Geographers.

**What is a master’s exam and how do I take it?**

The master’s “exam” is simply an oral presentation of your graduate research, followed by a Q&A session with your graduate committee. It must be scheduled and announced (via signed form) at least two weeks before the actual presentation, and it is considered a public presentation. (Typical attendance at a master’s presentation often includes faculty members, fellow students, friends or family members, etc.) At the end of the exam, your committee will meet behind closed doors to determine whether your research meets departmental standards for awarding the degree. If so, you have “passed” the exam and are cleared to graduate! In many cases, the committee requires revisions to the thesis document before they will sign the exam paperwork. Such revisions typically can be done in a week or two, which doesn’t usually impact the student’s plans for graduation. In rare cases, the committee determines that extensive revisions are required, and the student receives an official result of “conditional pass” for the exam. The committee then details the conditions that must be met for the student to pass, and the student must meet these conditions before the end of the subsequent term. In extremely rare cases, the committee determines that the thesis or master’s project does not (and cannot) meet departmental standards and that the student has not passed the exam.

**Where can I find the deadlines for all this paperwork?**

The Office of Graduate Studies (<http://grad.unm.edu>) maintains a complete list of deadlines for all aspects of degree completion on their website. Please note that our departmental deadline for scheduling a thesis defense is always 15 days BEFORE the Grad Studies deadline for submitting all graduation documents, e.g. if you want to graduate in spring, you must submit all materials to Grad Studies by April 15, which means that you must schedule your thesis defense no later than April 1st. Your instructors for GEOG 501 and GEOG 502 will help keep you are aware of all bureaucratic hurdles, as will the Grad Program Director. Just make sure you check your email from the GRADGEOG-L listserv regularly.

**What happens if I miss an important deadline?**

If you miss a deadline for getting on the graduation list, submitting a Program of Study, or submitting a final thesis, it is possible that your official graduation date will be a semester later than you had intended. Some deadlines can be petitioned, and others are a bit more “flexible” than others. If you are in danger of missing a deadline, consult with the Director of the Graduate Program as soon as possible to determine what options you may have. Please note that the official Program of Study paperwork can be amended up until the very last day of the graduation requirements submission deadline. So it’s better to submit it “on time” with a few errors (assuming you can revise it later) than to miss the deadline.

**I’m almost done with this degree. How do I get a job?**

It is our expectation that your experience in the M.S. Geography program will include significant networking with professional and academic geographers through: interactions with visitors to our department, participation in conferences and workshops, and your own research activities. Our faculty members notify students of employment opportunities that are sent to the department or announced in our own professional networks (another good reason to check the listserv regularly), and we encourage students to consider their employment options and goals when designing their plans for coursework and research. The Office of Graduate Studies also hosts workshops for grad students on career planning, and the UNM Alumni association maintains a database of alumni willing to serve as professional mentors or to network with current UNM students.

**How do I stay in touch with UNM after I graduate?**

Before you leave our program, the Graduate Director will ask about your career plans and get your contact information. We try to stay in touch with everyone on LinkedIn, and we encourage you to keep UNM Alumni updated with your most current contact information as well, just in case we ever want to send you some snail mail. If you stay in Albuquerque, you should plan to attend our Welcome Party every fall, where you can maintain contact with other alumni who are also working in town. And don’t be surprised if we pester you to come give a guest lecture in a class or to present in our colloquium series. UNM Geography grads are working all over New Mexico and the Southwest, so we love to hear what you all are up to.

**Please save me some time. What lessons have already been learned by past students?**

We ask graduating students to write down advice for the incoming class. Here are the latest comments:

* Come prepared with some ideas for your graduate research. While you can certainly change your focus, it will definitely help to have some general direction.
* Know your research topic as soon as possible.
* Make sure that you don’t have to do anything twice.
* Try to have a good idea of what you want your thesis to be prior to entering GEOG502.
* Use citation software & write a quick note every time you read an article on what it is about. Seriously, it takes two seconds.
* Don’t procrastinate – it saves a lot of stress!
* I recommend that you not forget about physical and emotional health in addition to being ready in academic terms. Practicing some kind of art (music in my case) as a complement during grad school was crucial, and it was also a very effective way to handle stress.

**Thanks for all this info, but aren’t there any other resources for grad students on campus?**

UNM is chock full of support services for graduate students, from travel funding to research ethics training to writing assistance, thesis boot camps, and more. Almost all of these services are accessible from the main page of the Office of Graduate Studies, so please get familiar with <http://grad.unm.edu>. You should also consider joining the OGSNET-L listserv, which contains regular announcements of services, resources, and funding as they become available to graduate students.

**What about resources for international grad students?**

UNM has a one-stop shop for international students, with numerous resources available to help with admissions, moving, English language competency, finding housing, registering for classes, and more. Please explore the services available at the Global Education Office: <http://geo.unm.edu>.

**I have a question that isn’t answered here. Whom should I pester?**

The Department Administrator (main office) can help with most basic questions about facilities, contracts, campus resources, etc. The Graduate Program Director can answer all questions about program requirements, deadlines, how to get signatures on official paperwork, etc. Your assigned faculty advisor can give advice on course selection, research direction, and career planning. The Department Chair should be contacted with grievances or for assistance with any issue that you can’t otherwise resolve.