

## Graduate Program Guide

### Admission:

Applicants should follow the admissions process described in the Graduate Catalog, or at the Graduate Admissions website: <http://www.marshall.edu/graduate/admissionsrequirements.asp>. In addition, applicants must:

1. Submit GRE (Graduate Record Examination) scores with the graduate application;
2. Have completed nine semester hours of undergraduate coursework in geography for full admission to the program.

Provisional admission for applicants who have not yet completed the GRE or nine hours of undergraduate coursework in geography may be granted with consent of the faculty.

### Degree requirements:

A Plan of Study approved by the department and graduate dean must be filed in the Graduate College office before a student registers for the 12th semester hour.

Candidates for the master's degree (M.A. or M.S.) must complete not fewer than 24 hours of graduate coursework in geography and complete either a thesis with a minimum of 30 total credits or comprehensive exams with a minimum of 36 total credits.

1. Non-thesis option – You must complete 36 credit hours  $\approx$  12 classes (18 credit hours of coursework must be at the 600-level). You must also pass Comprehensive Written and Oral Finals which count for 3 credit hours (GEO679 Applied Project).
2. Thesis option – You must complete 30 credit hours  $\approx$  8 classes (12 credit hours of coursework must be at the 600-level) plus 6 thesis credit hours (GEO585-588 Independent Study and GEO681 Thesis).

### Required courses:

1. Every student must take GEO609 Geographical Research I in the first fall of enrollment.
2. Every student must take GEO615 Geographical Research II when it is offered or risk delaying graduation. GEO615 is offered every other year.
3. Every student must take GEO540 Quantitative Methods in Geography when it is offered or risk delaying graduation. GEO540 is offered every third semester.
4. Every student must take one Geographic Information Systems/Remote Sensing course in the Geography Department. A variety of GIS/RS courses are offered every semester except summer, so you should be able to meet this requirement easily. The introductory GIS course GEO526 Principles of GIS is offered in fall and spring every year.

### 600-level requirement:

At least one-half of your required credits must be from the 600-level. This is a Marshall University Graduate College requirement. You should take all 600-level electives offered in the department in order to fulfill this requirement, even if they don't fit your interests exactly. You may take a limited number of 600-level courses outside the department with your advisor's consent and if you meet the

prerequisites. Internships can count for up to 6 hours of 600-level credit for either Thesis or Non-thesis students. Thesis students will receive 3 credit hours at the 500-level and 3 credit hours at the 600-level for the thesis. Non-thesis students will receive 3 credit hours at the 600-level for the Comprehensive Written and Oral Finals.

### **Bad grades:**

The Marshall University Graduate College permits only two grades of C to count toward graduation. The Marshall University Graduate College permits only two grades of F before dismissal from the program.

### **Comprehensive Written and Oral Finals**

Non-thesis students must take Comprehensive Written and Oral Finals and a minimum of 36 hours of graduate coursework. The Comprehensive Finals count for three credits (GEO679 Applied Project) toward the 36 required hours. They test a broader range of topics in less depth than a Master's Thesis. The Finals ask you to synthesize material from several courses to demonstrate that you can apply knowledge of the discipline of geography to solve short projects. The Finals offer flexibility for students who may not have the time or desire to write a Master's Thesis.

The Comprehensive Finals consist of three short Written projects and an Oral Final. The Written projects may be completed in your final semester or you may spread them over your last two semesters. In consultation with your advisor, register for one to three credits of GEO679 Applied Project. Each credit hour represents roughly one short Written project. The Oral Final follows the short Written projects. During the first week of the semester when you register for GEO679, you will ask three Geography faculty members to comprise your Finals Committee and one of them to be your Finals Chair. Each will submit a pair of short Written projects to the Finals Chair based on coursework you have completed. For example, if you had completed the core requirements and GEO504 Geography of Europe, a short project might consist of research about a current topic in Europe to produce a written document based on scholarly sources and a map created using GIS. This project would demonstrate mastery of material covered in GEO609, GEO615, GEO504, and GEO526.

The Finals Chair will give you two weeks to complete your choice of one of the first pair of short projects. Your project will be evaluated by the Finals Committee over a period of two weeks. If your project is satisfactory, you may move to the second pair of short projects from which you will choose one to complete. If your first short project is unsatisfactory, you will be asked to amend your work. The process continues until all three short Written projects have been completed satisfactorily.

The Oral Final may only be scheduled after satisfactory completion of all three short Written projects and must be scheduled at least two weeks before graduation. Your Finals Committee professors may alert you in advance to weaknesses in your short Written projects that you must address during the Oral Finals. The Oral Final usually lasts one hour. During the Oral Final, professors will ask you questions about your short Written projects. Other material may also be introduced.

Upon completion of both Finals, one of four grades will be given:

1. Pass with distinction – awarded to the best and most complete Finals; a grade of A will be recorded for GEO679 Applied Project.
2. Pass – satisfactory work on the Finals; a grade of B will be recorded for GEO679 Applied Project.
3. Pass with corrections – some parts of the short Written projects or Oral Final were unsatisfactory; a grade of I or C will be recorded for GEO679 Applied Project at the discretion of the Finals Chair. Only two grades of C are permitted by the Marshall University Graduate College to count toward your 36 required hours.

4. Fail – unsatisfactory; a grade of F will be recorded for GEO679 Applied Project. You may retake the Comprehensive Exams next semester. Only two grades of F are permitted by the Marshall University Graduate College before dismissal from the program.

### **Master's Thesis**

Students who are considering advanced work in Geography at the doctoral level are encouraged to write a Master's Thesis. A Master's Thesis is a work of original research that will demonstrate knowledge of geographic theory, competence as a researcher, the ability to gather source data, the skill necessary to analyze (quantitatively, qualitatively, spatially) the data, and the ability to produce a well-written, logically sound document. The advantages of writing a Thesis are significant:

- A Thesis may count for up to 6 hours of graduate credit (3 credits for GEO585-588 Independent Study and 3 credits for GEO681 Thesis Research).
- Students who write a Thesis are required to complete only 30 hours of graduate study.
- Students who write a Thesis do not have to complete the Comprehensive Written and Oral Finals.
- Students who write a Thesis will produce a document of which to be proud, which they will present to professors and peers, and which will complement the Ph.D. application.

Entrance into the Thesis option track requires the consent of the potential Thesis Advisor. This initial decision will be largely based on the Thesis Proposal produced by students in GEO609 Geographic Research I and discussions with their potential Thesis Advisor. Faculty members in the Geography Department are interesting in research in the following areas and will only oversee Master's Thesis research that matches their areas of interest:

- Joshua Hagen – human geography, historical geography, political geography, Europe
- Kevin Law – meteorology, climatology
- James Leonard – human geography topics including economics, religions, culture, education, GIS, quantitative methods, North America, West Virginia
- Anita Walz – physical geography, environmental geography

After you have presented a thesis proposal acceptable to your Thesis Advisor (no later than when you complete your 12<sup>th</sup> graduate credit hour), you will work with this professor to draft a formal Graduate College Plan of Study. The Plan of Study must include:

- Research proposal
- Schedule of completion dates for each phase of the research
- Graduate College Plan of Study form signed by your Thesis Advisor and two additional committee members. This form asks you to list your degree program (M.A. or M.S.), completed courses, whether you will be writing a thesis, and courses you will need to complete in order to graduate.

Only when the Plan of Study has been written by you and approved by your Thesis Advisor and your other Committee Members may you register for Independent Study (GEO585-588), the first phase of thesis research. Students who fail to make satisfactory progress toward the completion of their Thesis while enrolled in GEO585-588 Independent Study will not be allowed to enroll in GEO 681 Thesis Research. These students will instead have to complete the non-thesis option. Changes to the original Plan of Study must be acceptable to your Thesis Advisor and will likely delay your graduation. You should work closely with your Thesis Advisor when registering for Independent Study (GEO585-588) or

Thesis Research (GEO681) hours and you must meet your Thesis Advisor's requirements to receive passing grades. You may register for several Independent Study (GEO585-588) courses and as many Thesis Research hours as appropriate for your research, but only 3 hours of Thesis Research (GEO681) hours can count toward the graduation requirement of 30 hours.

Your coursework will provide you with extensive guidance for the crafting of your thesis. In particular,

- GEO609 Geographical Research I will prepare you to research and write your thesis. In that course, you will learn what research is, create a problem statement, find appropriate journal articles and books for your thesis, and explore methods of analysis. You will leave GEO609 with a thesis proposal, literature review, and schedule of completion dates for each phase of the research. During the semester when you take GEO609 Geographical Research I, you should choose a Thesis Advisor based on mutual research interests and the willingness of the professor to serve as your advisor. You should also choose your other two Thesis Committee Members as soon as possible in the process. One Committee Member may be from outside the Geography Department. Your GEO609 instructor will provide further details and guidance.
- GEO615 Geographical Research II will introduce you to research in the discipline of geography, including the variety of research concepts and techniques and how geographers conduct research—both qualitative and quantitative. You will learn the history of geographic thought and the breadth of the discipline—physical and human geography. Material generated in this course should lead to better conceived research and an informed decision as to which research method(s) will work for your thesis.