

Geography, MA

The Master of Arts program in geography focuses on investigating the environmental consequences of human decisions, the social implications of environmental change, and the geographic information science that enables these studies. Central to the department's studies are the theories, methods, and models of environmental, social, and geographic information science. Within this broad domain, the department has strengths in environmental justice, environmental modeling, remote sensing and GIS, land use and its environmental consequences, sustainability, urban ecology, climatology, environmental hazards, development, political ecology, and health geography.

Master of Arts students are typically admitted only to the thesis track. The thesis track includes an independent research project and prepares students to enter a PhD program or for a career in consulting or government. The professional track is designed as a terminal nonthesis degree. Students interested in this track should seek approval from the department's director of graduate studies before applying.

The department provides opportunities for graduate students to gain practical experience through service as departmental teaching or research assistants. In addition, graduate students often compete successfully for intramural and extramural funding for graduate education.

Graduate students often present their research at professional conferences and publish their work in academic journals. These presentations and papers can be the product of independent research or research projects led by a faculty member.

Learning Outcomes

Nonthesis (Professional) Program

Students who successfully complete the professional MA (nonthesis) program in the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences will demonstrate:

- broad knowledge of the basic concepts, tools, and areas of study in the field of geography; and
- a basic understanding of and ability to apply tools and techniques in a particular area of geography.

Thesis Program

Students who successfully complete the MA (thesis) program in the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences will demonstrate:

- both broad knowledge of the field of geography and deep knowledge in their area of research concentration;
- an ability to communicate their research concisely and effectively to both general and specialist audiences in written and verbal formats;
- an ability to formulate research questions; select, design, and apply appropriate research methods (e.g., testable hypotheses, data collection, management, analytical techniques); and utilize critical thinking skills to build knowledge, theory, and/or practice in their area of research concentration;
- competence in teaching geography, environmental, or sustainability related courses; and
- understanding of and an ability to operate under professional standards of ethical conduct.

Requirements

The Master of Arts with a major in geography requires a minimum of 30 s.h. of graduate credit with thesis and 32 s.h. of graduate credit without thesis. Students must maintain a program grade-point average of at least 2.75. The MA is designed to be completed in four semesters.

Thesis students must earn 15 s.h. of credit in Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences courses numbered 5000 or above; they may count 6 s.h. of thesis credit and 2 s.h. earned in GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium toward the degree. Students who earn more than 30 s.h. may use the additional work to increase their breadth of knowledge in geography and to tailor their study programs to their individual interests.

Nonthesis students build skills across a range of topics in geographical and sustainability sciences during their first year and develop skills in particular application areas during their second year. They must earn 15 s.h. of credit in Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences courses numbered 5000 or above.

Students demonstrate competence by completing appropriate coursework; completing and defending an MA thesis (for thesis students) or completing a portfolio of finished work and having it reviewed (nonthesis students).

More detailed information about MA requirements is provided in the department's Manual for Graduate Degree Requirements; contact the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences.

Admission

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations on the Graduate College website.

A bachelor's degree with a major in geography is not required, but applicants must have an undergraduate background relevant to the field. Strength in social science, environmental science, or geographic information science and interest in exploring the spatial perspectives that characterize modern geography are important in admission decisions. Depending on their prior training, graduate students may be required to take courses that are prerequisites for coursework in their chosen area of graduate study; credit earned in prerequisites does not count toward the graduate degree.

Application materials should include transcripts with a grade-point average listed, three letters of recommendation, and an essay in which applicants state their reasons for wanting to study geography at the University of Iowa.

Applicants whose first language is not English must submit official test scores to verify English proficiency. Applicants can verify English proficiency by submitting official test scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or the Duolingo English Test (DET).

New graduate students whose first language is not English are required to take a speaking proficiency test when they arrive at the university; eventually they take the English Language Performance Test (ELPT). Students must be fully certified by the ELPT before they begin their fourth semester in order to be considered for funding in succeeding semesters. Students who do not pass the tests are required to take Teaching

Assistant Preparation in English (TAPE) courses until they have achieved proficiency in spoken English.

Financial Support

A number of graduate teaching and research assistantships are available. In addition, outstanding applicants are eligible for several fellowships. Underrepresented minorities are encouraged to apply. In giving awards, the department pays particular attention to performance in past undergraduate and graduate studies, letters of recommendation, and the fit of a student's objectives with department specializations.

Applications for graduate appointments and fellowships must be received by Jan. 15.

Career Advancement

Graduates hold positions in college and university faculties, private research organizations, and business and government.

Courses in geography are commonly required of students preparing to teach at the elementary and secondary school levels or to work in planning and public affairs. The degree also provides a solid background for many related professions, including law, health care, environmental engineering, and business.

The Master of Arts program provides students with the opportunity to build skills in an area of expertise. These skills include the use of GIS, computer programming, field techniques, statistical analysis, and quantitative methods. Acquiring these skills will make students more competitive in an abundance of career opportunities for geography graduates in local, state, and federal government agencies, as well as in the private sector.

The department's faculty members are committed to helping students apply to doctoral programs and future employment.

The Pomerantz Career Center offers multiple resources to help students find internships and jobs.

Academic Plans

Sample Plan of Study

Sample plans represent one way to complete a program of study. Actual course selection and sequence will vary and should be discussed with an academic advisor. For additional sample plans, see MyUI.

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Course	Title	Hours
Academic Career		
Any Semester		
32 s.h. must be graduate level coursework; graduate transfer credits allowed upon approval. More information is included in the General Catalog and on department website. ^a		
Hours		0
First Year		
Fall		
Required course ^b		3
Required course ^b		3
Required course ^b		3

GEOG:7000	Geography Colloquium ^c	1
Hours		10
Spring		
Required course ^b		3
Elective course ^d		3
Elective course ^d		2
GEOG:7000	Geography Colloquium ^c	1
Hours		9
Second Year		
Fall		
Required course ^b		3
Elective course ^d		3
Elective course ^d		2
GEOG:7000	Geography Colloquium ^c	1
Hours		9
Spring		
Elective course ^d		3
Elective course ^d		2
GEOG:7000	Geography Colloquium ^c	1
Final Exam ^e		
Hours		6
Total Hours		34

a Students must complete specific requirements in the University of Iowa Graduate College after program admission. Refer to the Graduate College website and the Manual of Rules and Regulations for more information.

b Must earn 15 s.h. of credit in Geographical and Sustainability Sciences courses numbered 5000 or above. Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate graduate level coursework and sequence.

c Required every semester; may count 2 s.h. earned in GEOG:7000 toward the degree.

d Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate elective coursework and sequence.

e Completed and approved portfolio of finished work.