Geography, PhD

The Doctor of Philosophy 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, geographic information science, remote sensing, land use and its environmental consequences, urban ecology, sustainability, climatology, environmental hazards, development, political ecology, and health geography.

The department provides opportunities for graduate students to gain practical experience through service as departmental teaching or research assistants. Graduate students present their research at professional conferences and publish their work in academic journals. These presentations and papers are the product of independent research or research projects led by a faculty member.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete the doctoral 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 Doctor of Philosophy with a major in geography requires 72 s.h. of graduate credit and is designed to be completed in four or five years. Students must maintain a program grade-point average of at least 3.00.

The degree prepares students for advanced research and college and university teaching. It provides study programs that lead to broad knowledge of a field of geography and its literature and to special expertise in a subfield.

Students may enter the PhD program upon completing an undergraduate degree or with advanced standing corresponding to previous graduate education.

All PhD students take the following courses. They take GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium (1 s.h.) each semester they are in residence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course #</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEOG:5010</td>
<td>Fundamentals of Geography</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOG:5050</td>
<td>Research and Writing in Geography</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOG:7000</td>
<td>Geography Colloquium (taken each semester)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two courses in geography numbered above GEOG:5001</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two research seminars chosen from GEOG:6500 through GEOG:6900; each course for 3 s.h.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Students complete a set of research milestones, including a research paper, an area of concentration bibliography, and a written qualifying examination in the discipline. With the approval of the dissertation advisor, each student submits a dissertation proposal to the dissertation committee for critical comments, oral questioning, and approval. Once the dissertation is completed, an oral defense of the dissertation is held.

More detailed information about PhD 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, geographic information science, or another relevant field 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 undergraduate and graduate 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

The Doctor of Philosophy program prepares students to carry on creative and productive research in selected areas of geography. University of Iowa graduates hold positions in college and university faculties, private research organizations, and business and government.

The department’s faculty members help students navigate the academic and non-academic job market. The department offers numerous opportunities for mentoring and professional development annually to prepare students to locate, apply for, and obtain employment following graduation.

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.

Geography, PhD

Course Title  Hours
Academic Career

Any Semester
72 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

First Year
Fall
GEOG:5010 Fundamentals of Geography  3
Geography course b  3
Elective course c  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  10

Spring
GEOG:5050 Research and Writing in Geography  3
Geography course b  3
Elective course c  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  10

Second Year
Fall
Elective course c  3
Elective course c  3
Elective course c  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  10

Spring
Elective course c  3
Elective course c  3
Elective course c  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  10

Third Year
Fall
Qualifying Exam e  3
Elective course c  3
Elective course c  3
Geography research seminar f  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  10

Spring
Oral Comprehensive Exam and Dissertation Prospectus g  3
Elective course c  3
Elective course c  3
Geography research seminar f  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  10

Fourth Year
Fall
Elective course c  1
GEOG:7999 Thesis  3
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Hours  5

Spring
GEOG:7999 Thesis  6
GEOG:7000 Geography Colloquium d  1
Final Exam h  1
Hours  7

Total Hours  72

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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 be numbered above GEOG:5001.
c Work with faculty advisor to determine appropriate elective coursework and sequence.
d Required every semester.
e Written exam typically taken by the end of the fifth semester; refer to the Graduate Handbook for specifics.
f Choose from courses numbered 6500 through 6900.
g Typically completed by the end of the sixth semester.
h Dissertation defense.