

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY



WESTERN
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UNIVERSITY

GEOGRAPHY AT WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Welcome to the Western Illinois University and the Department of Geography! Western Illinois University is a comprehensive public university with over 13,000 students located in Macomb, a community of 19,000. Since the 1920s the Department of Geography has a proud tradition of producing quality graduates who serve in positions of education, industry, business, and government. Many of our graduates go on to pursue advanced degrees. In fact, among non-Ph.D. Granting institutions, our department ranks in the top 20 in the United States in the number of graduates going on to earn a Ph.D.

The requirements for the degree are highly flexible, allowing a student to arrange programs of study that will serve as a basis for further graduate study; to meet the immediate and changing needs of teachers and other educators; or to prepare for positions in industry, business, or government. It is possible for students, through internship experiences and/or specific course combinations, to enhance their career opportunities in areas such as Regional and Rural Planning or Geographic Information Systems.

The purpose of this handbook is to acquaint you with the policies and procedures of the Geography Graduate Program and of the Graduate School of Western Illinois University. Please feel free to consult with the department's graduate advisor if you have any additional questions or problems.

ADMISSION TO THE PROGRAM

Admission to the University Graduate Program. Applicants for admission to the Department of Geography must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution. Admission to the department is contingent upon successful completion of undergraduate course work specified as a prerequisite. Application for admission must be made upon forms obtained from the School of Graduate Studies or online at www.wiu.edu/grad/prospective/apply.shtml.

One copy of the application form and official transcripts of all previous collegiate study at universities or colleges must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies at least three weeks before the student's first registration. Student copies of transcripts will not be accepted. Admission to the School of Graduate Studies does not imply or constitute admission to an advanced degree program.

Geography Program Admissions Requirements. Students must have completed 24 semester hours in geography. Exceptions may be made if the student has a strong background in cognate areas or if deficiencies are removed by taking courses as required by the department.

Deficiencies. Students completing the M.A. degree must have a working knowledge of the fundamentals of Geography as a discipline. Students must take additional coursework if they enter the program without prior coursework in the following: Introductory Human (Cultural) Geography, Introductory Physical Geography, Statistics, and Cartography. *Students must complete deficiency coursework prior to starting the M.A. program or during the FIRST semester of coursework.*

Peace Corps & Community Fellows Program. The Geography Department is one of a number of departments at Western Illinois University participating in the Peace Corps & Community Fellows Program. Eligible students are returned Peace Corps Volunteers and others with successful community development volunteer experience (e.g., AmeriCorps, VISTA, etc.). Students serve an 11-month internship in a rural community providing hands-on assistance and leadership on local projects Applications are accepted for admission in the fall semester starting in August and in the spring semester starting in January. To apply, contact the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at (800) 526-9943 or visit their website at www.peacecorpsfellows.org.

Admission of International Students. International students are subject to all requirements for admission to the School of Graduate Studies. In addition, each international student must meet the following requirements. Additional requirements are detailed online at www.wiu.edu/international.

- ✓ Hold a degree comparable to a bachelor's degree from an accredited university in the United States.
- ✓ Provide evidence of English language proficiency by obtaining a satisfactory score (550 or higher) on the *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL), by successfully completing the English as a Second Language Program through the WESL Institute, or completing a bachelor's degree from an American institution with four years in residence and within two years of matriculation at WIU. If a prospective student has a TOEFL score between 500 and 550, he or she will be considered for admission in some programs on the basis of demonstrated academic ability. Only students whose native language is English are exempt from the English proficiency requirements.
- ✓ Document that financial resources are available to defray all educational and living expenses while engaged in graduate studies.
- ✓ Submit an application fee.

Re-entering Procedures. Students in good standing who have discontinued graduate work for more than one full year must file a notice of intent to re-enter the Graduate School. This notice should be filed at least three weeks prior to the beginning of the new semester in which the student expects to register. The necessary form may be obtained from the Office of the Registrar or the School of Graduate Studies. Students who re-enter the University after an absence of three or more years, excluding summer sessions, must meet the requirement of the catalog under which they re-enter.

Immunization Policy. Illinois state law and University policy require that all newly enrolled students who were born on or after January 1, 1957 provide written evidence signed by a healthcare provider of current immune status with respect to certain communicable diseases. Currently, the diseases to which all students must show immunity are measles, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, and mumps. Students whose first enrollment at WIU was in fall 1989 or later will be required to comply with this policy.

THE MASTER OF ARTS IN GEOGRAPHY

A minimum of 32 semester hours of graduate credit is required for the degree. Up to 9 hours may be transfer credit. To successfully complete the program it is essential that you get an early start on developing a degree plan that satisfies the requirements of our program. *You need to select a thesis/planning project advisor by the end of your second semester.* Moreover, the early selection of an appropriate thesis or planning project topic is critical to complete your degree in a timely manner.

Completion of the program is contingent upon the fulfillment of specific course requirements and the completion of one of the degree options. The available graduate courses are listed in Appendix A.

The Thesis Option. A thesis seeks to answer a question that is relevant to an area of geographic inquiry. The main object of a research thesis is to help students develop skills in analysis, writing and presentation. At the same time, a thesis contributes to the body of geographical knowledge. Theses are developed in concert with the student's advisor and thesis committee. When completed, the results of the research thesis are presented to the thesis committee and to the general public.

The Applied Project. Applied projects are intended for students whose career aspirations are best served by gaining practical experience in the design and solution of a geographical problem and presentation of the results. Applied Projects originate in a real world problem and are undertaken in concert with a sponsoring agency, e.g., a planning commission or a regional council. Students pursuing this option will produce a specific product that either directly contributes to solving a real world problem or makes recommendations that will contribute to solving a real world problem. Applied projects are developed with the input and approval of the student’s advisor and committee. A presentation to the student’s committee and the general public is required upon the completion of the project.

Two-Paper Option. Student choosing this option must write and defend two papers before a committee of three faculty members. The papers typically emerge from the student’s coursework, although it must be noted that a student may not submit identical papers for both a course grade and for this degree option.

Thesis/Project Proposal & Presentation—Traditional Students. Students must have a proposal approved before commencing work on the Thesis or Applied Project. Students are to have a formal oral presentation of their proposal to the Department in the 14th week of their second semester of full-time coursework (or before the completion of 18 hrs of coursework, whichever comes first). The purpose of the presentation is to elicit feedback from Department faculty and fellow graduate students regarding the proposed research. The student will then have until the end of the third week of the following semester to secure approval of the proposal. Failure to secure approval will result in automatic assignment in the examination degree track.

Project Proposal & Presentation—Peace Corps Fellows. Like traditional students, Peace Corps & Community Fellows must have a proposal approved before commencing work on the Applied Project. However, Fellows have until the end of their third month of their internship to formally present their proposal *if the project covers their field experience (Fellows doing a research thesis must meet the same deadline as stated above)*. The student will then have until the end of the sixth month of the internship to secure approval of the proposal. Failure to secure approval will result in automatic assignment in the examination degree track.

Degree Requirements

Thesis*

GEOG 504.....	3 s.h.
GEOG 505.....	3 s.h.
One graduate seminar (GEOG 610, 630, 650, or 680).....	3 s.h.
GEOG 698.....	3 s.h.
Directed Electives	20 s.h.
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TOTAL PROGRAM.....	32 s.h.

Applied Project*

GEOG 504.....	3 s.h.
GEOG 505.....	3 s.h.
Internship GEOG 596 or 597**	3-6 s.h.
One graduate seminar (GEOG 610, 630, 650, or 680).....	3 s.h.
GEOG 697.....	3 s.h.
Directed Electives	20 s.h.
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TOTAL PROGRAM.....	32 s.h.

Two Paper Option*

GEOG 504.....	3 s.h.
GEOG 505.....	3 s.h.
One graduate seminar (GEOG 610, 630, 650, or 680).....	3 s.h.
GEOG 699.....	0 s.h.
Directed Electives	23 s.h.
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TOTAL PROGRAM.....	32 s.h.

*Theses, applied projects, and the two papers must be defended before a committee of three faculty members selected by the student and approved by the chair of the Departmental Graduate Committee. Theses and Applied Projects must be proposed by the student and approved by his or her committee before enrolling in GEOG 697 or 698.

**Internship requirement may be waived with the approval of the chair of the Departmental Graduate Committee.

Students may take a maximum of six semester hours in GEOG 598, Directed Study–Research. Students may enroll in GEOG 598 only if one of the following conditions has been met: (1) the student has an approved thesis or project proposal; (2) the student is conducting work with a member of the department’s graduate committee and the department chairperson has been informed of the nature of the work.

Assistantships. Each year a limited number of departmental assistantships are available. Assistantships are awarded at the discretion of the Department Chair and Graduate Committee. To be eligible for an assistantship a student must:

- ✓ Fill out the appropriate application forms (available from the Graduate School).
- ✓ Be enrolled in at least *nine semester hours* of coursework that applies to the degree program. Note: A student’s assistantship *will be terminated* if withdrawing from a course during a semester results in fewer than nine semester hours being actively pursued.
- ✓ Demonstrate satisfactory progress towards a degree by maintaining a B or better average.
- ✓ Demonstrate the high degree of personal integrity and responsibility required for those in graduate assistantship positions.

Second-Year Assistantships. The awarding of a second year assistantship is not automatic. The following items will be considered before a student is reappointed:

- ✓ Knowledge of the subject matter related to the assignment
- ✓ Evaluations by students and the supervisory professor(s)
- ✓ Cooperativeness and diligence in performing assignments
- ✓ Willingness to enhance the stature of the department and improve the quality of instruction which will include, but not be limited to attendance at department-sponsored events & presentations and participation in the hiring process for new faculty
- ✓ Competition for assistantships by new applicants to the program

Summer Assistantships. Assistantships for the summer session are limited and will be offered on the following priority basis:

- ✓ Qualification and background fit the need of the summer program

- ✓ Active engagement in a thesis/thesis project that will be finished by the end of the summer session
- ✓ Seniority in the graduate program
- ✓ Number of semesters without a graduate assistantship

Outside Employment. Between coursework and graduate assistantship duties, there is little time left for outside employment. The Graduate School actively discourages such practices and may, at its discretion, withdraw assistantships from students who obtain outside employment during the eight months of the assistantship. Should financial exigencies necessitate the consideration of a temporary relaxation of this policy, approval must be sought from the Department Chair. Failure to seek and obtain this approval will be grounds for termination of the assistantship. Approval will be granted if the employment, in the judgment of the Chair, does not hinder progress towards the degree or interfere with assistantship duties and graduate student responsibilities.

Offices and Keys. Subject to space limitations the department chair will assign each graduate student an office at the beginning of the semester. While we cannot guarantee that every student will have office space every attempt will be made to accommodate student needs. Once office space has been allocated, keys are requested from the University. Often it will take two to three weeks before the keys are issued. *All keys must be returned at the end of each semester.*

Department Research Presentation. Each graduate student shall enroll in Geog 598 for one semester-hour of credit during the semester the student completes 27 semester hours toward the degree (typically the third full-time semester). Successful completion of this course will involve attendance at department-scheduled research presentations as well as a presentation to the Department of research (no more than 20 minutes) on a topic not related to the student's thesis or project.

OTHER INFORMATION

Department Facilities. The Geography Department occupies most of three floors in Tillman Hall. The Geology Department and an archaeology research lab also are quartered in Tillman. Among the facilities available for student instruction and research are:

- ✓ *GIS Laboratory.* Our lab has over 20 computers that are fully networked. The lab uses ESRI GIS software, including ArcGIS and ArcView.
- ✓ *McDonough County GIS Center.* The Center is a partnership between the City of Macomb, McDonough County, and Western Illinois University. Housed on the second floor of Tillman Hall, the Center is responsible for compiling, managing and storing GIS data layers. The department offers a limited number of graduate assistantships for work in the Center.
- ✓ *Meteorology Laboratory.* The lab includes computer systems for analyzing National Weather Service Data and producing weather maps. The Meteorology Lab also has its own weather radar and access to the Internet for obtaining radar and satellite data worldwide. The Department maintains its own on-campus weather station.
- ✓ *Remote Sensing Laboratory.* The Remote Sensing Laboratory has a zoom transfer scope, Bausch and Lomb imagery interpretation system, mirror stereoscopes, and imagery light tables.

Gamma Theta Upsilon & the Student Society of Geography. Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU) is the international honor society in geography. Membership is earned through superior scholarship; it is an honor and a professional distinction. The Student Society of Geography was established as a

campus organization to promote student awareness of geography and provide for student involvement in a variety of activities related to the discipline.

Fryzek Award. Each year, the Department awards one graduate the Robert Fryzek Outstanding Graduate Student Award. This award recognizes a graduate student who distinguishes himself or herself among the departmental graduate student body and best exemplifies outstanding leadership, service and scholarship.

GUIDELINES FOR TIMELY COMPLETION OF THE DEGREE

1. When you enter the program the Graduate Chair will initially serve as your advisor.
2. You must meet with the Graduate Chair each semester to have your selection of courses approved.
3. When you have completed between nine and fifteen semester hours of coursework you must file a ***degree plan***. Your advisor and the Graduate Chair must approve the degree plan. You obtain a copy of the degree plan form in the lunchroom or you can print a copy of the form from the graduate school website (www.wiu.edu/grad).
4. Thesis and Project students must have a formal presentation of their proposal to the Department in the 14th week of their second semester of full-time coursework (after the third month in the field for Peace Corps and Community Development Fellows).

GENERAL GRADUATE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Students are responsible for knowing degree requirements and enrolling in courses that will enable them to complete their degree programs. It is also their responsibility to know the University regulations for the standard of work required to continue in the Graduate School. Refer to the University's Graduate Catalog if necessary.

Time to Complete Degree/Revalidation of Courses. The work required for a graduate degree must be completed within six consecutive calendar years. Students may petition the Graduate Council for an extension of time for outdated courses. Evidence must show that such courses have been revalidated by examination or some other means as determined by the department. Graduate courses with grades of C or lower may not be revalidated. With the approval of the Departmental Graduate Committee, courses which are outdated, that is, are more than six years old and not revalidated, will not be included in the calculation of grade point average once an extension of time has been granted.

Transfer and Extension Credit. The School of Graduate Studies (or the Graduate Council) approves transfer credits only after the student has been admitted to candidacy for a degree. Petitions for transfer of graduate credit must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, and official transcripts recording the transfer courses must be sent directly from the registrar of that institution to the School of Graduate Studies. No course credit may be transferred unless the grade received was at least a B. If approved by his or her department, a student may transfer a maximum of six semester hours of approved graduate credit from an accredited institution in a 30-hour degree program or nine semester hours in a 32-hour degree program. Students may petition to the Graduate Council, with the approval of the adviser and the Departmental Graduate Committee, for additional hours to be accepted from other accredited institutions.

Admission to Candidacy. After at least nine semester hours of graduate work at the University have been completed and before the completion of 15 semester hours, the student must apply for candidacy for the graduate degree. Application forms can be obtained from the School of Graduate

Studies. The completed Graduate Degree Plan should be filed with the chair of the Departmental Graduate Committee who will then forward the application for approval to the School of Graduate Studies. All academic deficiencies must be removed before the student is admitted to candidacy and the student must have at least a 3.0 grade point average on all *graduate* course work (grades received for deficiency coursework do not apply).

Once the Graduate Council has approved a student's Graduate Degree Plan, changes in this degree program can only be made by petition. Petition forms may be obtained in the School of Graduate Studies, and upon completion they are submitted to that office. A student who re-enters the University after an absence of three or more years, excluding summer sessions, must re-submit his or her Graduate Degree Plan based on the current catalog unless permission is obtained from the School of Graduate Studies to use the original Graduate Degree Plan.

Graduate Policy Concerning Catalog Use. A student who re-enters the University after an absence of three or more years, excluding summer session, must meet the requirements of the current catalog unless he or she receives written approval from the dean of the college in which he or she is enrolled to continue under an earlier catalog. This written permission must be filed in the Office of Graduate Studies prior to the submission of a graduate degree plan.

Academic Guidelines. The passing grades in graduate courses are A, B, C, and S (satisfactory). Courses with the grades of D, F, U (unsatisfactory), I (incomplete), or W (withdrawal), X (audit), or XU (unsatisfactory audit) cannot be used to satisfy any of the requirements of a graduate degree. Students may not enroll in graduate courses on a pass/fail basis. Grade points are determined by equating the grade for each semester hour as follows: A with 4, B with 3, C with 2, D with 1, and F with 0. The average is computed by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of graduate credits attempted. Hours for grades of S and U are not considered in calculating a GPA. (Grades of S and U are only awarded in a limited number of courses; courses for which S and U grades apply are noted in departmental course offerings.) An audited course may not be repeated for credit. Courses taken for undergraduate credit may not be repeated for graduate credit.

Admission to candidacy for a degree and the awarding of such a degree depends upon the maintenance of a grade point average of B or higher in all *graduate work* attempted. ***No substitutions*** may be made on the degree plan for courses in which the student earns grades below B. No course for which a student has received a grade of C or better may be repeated for credit unless the course is more than six years old. No course for which a student has received a grade of D or less may be used to satisfy degree requirements.

Satisfactory Progress Policy. A graduate degree in Geography will not be awarded to a student who earns grades of ***C or lower in more than six semester hours of graduate-level work***. With the approval of the Departmental Graduate Committee, courses which are outdated (more than six years old and not revalidated), will not be counted against the maximum allowable hours of grades of C or lower once an extension of time has been granted.

Variable Credit Courses. Courses with a variable credit designation may be taken for a different number of credit hours. Students should consult the course instructor or the graduate chair to determine the number of semester hours for which they may register. A variable credit course cannot be taken again unless it is clearly designated as repeatable.

Repeatable Courses. Courses may not be repeated for credit unless the catalog course description specifies that the course is repeatable. This is not to be confused with retaking a previously passed course.

Repeating Failed Courses. A student may repeat any credit course in which a failing grade (F) was received. Both the failing grade and the grade earned by repeating the course will appear on the transcript and will be used to calculate the student's grade point average.

Retaking Passed Courses. A student retaking a previously-passed course may be subject to the following conditions:

- ✓ All grades received for each course retaken will appear separately on the transcript in addition to the original grade.
- ✓ No honor points or credit toward graduation may be received for retaking a previously passed course.
- ✓ Fees must be paid for all courses retaken.
- ✓ The student must properly register to retake a course during registration or pre-registration.
- ✓ Previously passed courses are those for which any of the following grades have been received: A, B, C, D, S. If a course graded S is retaken, the second grade (assuming successful completion) will also be an S since only S and U grades can be given for such courses. For all other previously passed courses, the grade on the transcript will reflect what the student has achieved by taking the course a second time.

Incomplete Grade Policy. A temporary grade of I (incomplete) indicates that the student has been unable to complete course work due to circumstances beyond his or her control. With the assignment of a grade of I, the student and faculty member will agree, *in writing*, upon the criteria and deadline for completion of course work.

Change of Grade. When an error has been made in computing the student's final grade, the instructor may change the reported grade. The student may initiate the procedure for the change by contacting the instructor. The change should be reported to the Office of the Registrar not later than the end of the third week of the next semester. The form for requesting a change of grade can be obtained from the department chair. The department chair and academic dean countersign the form for information purposes only and forward it to the School of Graduate Studies. After the School of Graduate Studies has approved the change of grade, copies will be sent to the Office of the Registrar.

Appeal of Grade by Student. A graduate student who has reason to believe that he/she did not receive the grade that was deserved in a course must submit a written request for a grade appeal by the third week of the next semester in which the student is enrolled. The chair of the department in which the course was taken should be contacted to determine the correct appeal procedure to be followed.

WIU Academic Dishonesty Policy. Western Illinois University is dedicated to the discovery and communication of knowledge. The University can best function and accomplish its objectives in an atmosphere where high ethical standards prevail. For this reason, and to insure that the academic work of all students will be fairly evaluated, the University strongly condemns academic dishonesty. The most prevalent forms of academic dishonesty are cheating and plagiarism. Dishonesty of any kind with respect to examinations, course assignments, alteration of records, or illegal possession of examinations shall be considered cheating. It is the responsibility of the student not only to abstain from cheating, but also to avoid making it possible for others to cheat. Any student who knowingly helps another student cheat is as guilty of cheating as the student he or she assists.

The submission of the work of someone else as one's own constitutes plagiarism. Academic honesty requires that ideas or materials taken from another course for use as a course paper or project be fully acknowledged. Plagiarism is a very serious offense in whatever form it may appear -

be it submission of an entire article falsely represented as the student's own, the inclusion within a piece of the student's writing of an idea for which the student does not provide sufficient documentation, or the inclusion of a documented idea not sufficiently assimilated into the student's language and style. Contact the School of Graduate Studies for information on penalties for academic dishonesty and the University's appeal procedure for students charged with academic dishonesty.

Withdrawal Policy. During the first nine weeks of a semester, a graduate student may withdraw from a course in the Office of the Registrar without academic penalty. After the ninth week of the term, no withdrawals will be permitted except for total withdrawal from the University or by petition to the Graduate Council. At this time, a student who is passing will receive a W and a student who is failing will receive an F.

Courses and Credit Requirements. Courses numbered 500 and above are graduate courses. Only those advanced undergraduate courses on the 300- and 400-level listed in the catalog may be taken for graduate credit. In order that graduate credit may be earned for these 300- or 400-level courses, work in addition to that done for undergraduate credit must be completed. **No more than one-half of the semester hours counted for the graduate degree may be earned in courses below the 500 level.** No more than six semester hours of credit earned in a combination of 475G and 675 may be used in any graduate degree program.

The maximum load for a student during a regular semester is 15 semester hours. Nine hours is considered full-time enrollment for holding a graduate assistantship and for loan deferment purposes. During the eight-week summer session, nine semester hours may be taken; a full-time load in the summer session is six hours. Exceptions may be permitted by the School of Graduate Studies.

Application for Graduation. Candidates for graduation must complete the Application for Graduation form and submit it to the School of Graduate Studies at least eight weeks before the end of the student's final term. The Departmental Clearance form is due the day final grade reports are turned in. Both forms are available from the School of Graduate Studies.

Conferring of Degrees. Degrees are conferred at the semiannually in May and December.

CHECKLIST FOR DEGREE-SEEKING STUDENTS

As you progress through the program, use this checklist to help ensure the timely completion of all requirements.

Before You Arrive:

- The student submits application to Graduate School for admission to degree program.
- The student receives a letter of admission from the Graduate Office. The student may be accepted as a **degree graduate student**, admitted **conditionally** (with deficiencies), as a **probationary graduate student** (students who do not meet the graduate school and departmental grade point requirements for regular admission).

Your First Semester:

- The department assigns the Graduate Chair as your initial faculty advisor.
- The student meets with the advisor for pre-program planning and obtains specific departmental degree requirements.
- The student takes deficiency course work.

Your Second Semester:

- After the first semester of course work, the student selects a **degree track** (thesis, project, examination) and chooses a thesis or project **advisor** (not required for the examination option).
- Application for Candidacy:** After completing **nine** semester hours, but before completion of **fifteen** semester hours of course work, the student must apply to candidacy for the graduate degree by filing a **Graduate Degree Plan** (see the Department Graduate Program Coordinator). To be accepted for candidacy, the student must remove all deficiencies and the student must have at least a 3.0 grade point average on *all graduate course work*.
- The student receives approval of Degree Plan from the Graduate Office.
- By the end of the second semester (or 18 hours) of course work, the student formally presents his or her proposal. **Written** approval is required before the student can begin work on the thesis or project.

Before You Graduate

- The student applies for graduation six weeks prior to the end of semester in which the candidate plans to graduate.
- The student gives Departmental Clearance form to the advisor for completion.
- The student completes course work.
- The student completes comprehensive exams **or** the student completes a thesis or applied thesis project.
- The Department Chair signs student's Departmental Clearance form and returns it to the Graduate Office.
- All course re-validations, final grades, verification of thesis completion from Archives, departmental academic clearance forms, official transcript for transfer work are completed and submitted to the Graduate Office by the last day of the student's last semester.