

Graduate Reference Guide 2023/2024

Congratulations and welcome to the Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences! This guide has been prepared to aid you through your academic career here at the University of Alberta.

People you should know

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Responsibilities of the Graduate Student

Graduate students are responsible for their own program, i.e., you are responsible for running your program and making progress. You are expected to become aware of regulations and deadlines that affect you. You should in particular:

- communicate with your supervisor or the Associate Chair if you face a problem;
- report program progress at least yearly to your supervisory committee; and
- meet deadlines for any scholarship applications that you make and seek assistance from the Department in the application process.

Responsibilities of the Supervisor

The faculty supervisor is responsible for guidance and monitoring of a student's program. The supervisor assists in planning the program; ensures the student is aware of regulations of the Department and FGSR; provides advice in all aspects of the program; and stays informed of the student's progress. The supervisor ensures the student conducts research in a manner that is scholarly, safe, and productive. The supervisor prepares a course of study for the student; arranges for and chairs supervisory committee meetings; and reviews the thesis both in draft and final form; and arranges for the thesis defence.

Program Requirements MA and MSc TB (thesis based)

Requirements for the MA and MSc degrees include satisfactory completion of a thesis and at least ★9 of course work at the University of Alberta.

Program Requirements PhD

The essential requirement for the degree of PhD is the planning, execution, and reporting of high-quality research. A candidacy examination is taken normally within 20 months after admission to the program to ensure that a student has the necessary knowledge, background, and ability to complete a PhD thesis. At least ★9 of the required course work must be taken at the University of Alberta.

Public scholarly lecture requirement for MA, MSc TB and PhD

In order to share their knowledge with fellow students, graduate students are required to give at least one scholarly public talk in the Department during their graduate program. Talks are to be a minimum of 15 minutes in duration. The subject can be in the general area of the student's specialization, i.e., it does not have to be on the results of thesis research. The ATLAS seminar series or ATLAS symposium are acceptable venues. ATLAS will keep track of students that have fulfilled their requirement in this manner and notify the Department. Other approved venues are possible; they should involve an advertised public talk that can be attended easily by members of the scientific community, e.g., seminar in a research group, in another department or a conference. Preapproval is required. The following are not an acceptable fulfilment of the requirement: in-class presentation, poster presentation or talk of less than 15 minutes duration.

Program Requirements MSc CB (course based) Integrated Petroleum Geosciences (IPG)

As a course-based master's student at UAlberta, you need to complete several program requirements — coursework, a capstone research project defined by you and your Academic Advisor, plus any additional requirements defined by your program — within a six-year designated timeframe.

IPG Requirements

- Students must take 8 (★3) core courses and 4 (★3) optional courses.
- The optional courses will be offered by the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and the Department of Physics. The optional courses will be decided by discussion between the applicant and the Director of the IPG program.
- The program requires a minimum of ★36 (12 ★3 single-term courses or equivalent), that includes the following:
 - Eight core courses (★3)
 - Four optional courses (★3)
 - In addition, all students must complete the mandatory EAS Research Skills and Ethics training module.

Program Requirements MSc CB Urban & Regional Planning (URP)

As a course-based master's student at UAlberta, you need to complete several program requirements — coursework, a capstone research project defined by you and your Academic Advisor, plus any additional requirements defined by your program — within a six-year designated timeframe.

URP Requirements:

2 Year Program

- Completion of 13 (★42) PLAN courses, consisting of: 11 (★36) required courses and 2 (★6) optional courses. In addition, all students must complete the mandatory Ethics and Integrity in Research training.

1 Year (Accelerated) Program

- Completion of 9 (★30) PLAN courses, consisting of: 7 (★24) required courses and 2 (★6) optional courses. In addition, all students must complete the mandatory Ethics and Integrity in Research training.

The course-based MSc program in Urban and Regional Planning (Regular) is designed for completion within two calendar years beyond a completed undergraduate degree. The program must normally be completed within three years from admission. You may not transfer to an MSc (thesis-based) or PhD program while completing the MSc URP program.

Registration Status (MA, MSc TB, PhD)

For full-time status, students must be registered in ★9 or more for credit in each of the Fall and Winter Terms, and in THES 906 (★6) in every Spring and Summer Term of the program.

THES 90X Thesis Research Courses (MA, MSc TB & PhD)

The THES 90X courses represent research activity equivalent to ★3, ★6 or ★9 for registration status and fee assessment purposes. The following is an example of how the THES 90X courses work:

- If you are registered in one ★3 credit course, you must also enroll in THES 906
- If you are registered two ★3 credit courses, for a total of ★6, you must also enroll in THES 903
- If you are registered in three ★3 credit courses, for a total of ★9, you do not have to enroll in any THES 90X course
- If you have completed all your required for credit courses, you must enroll in THES 909 until you successfully defend.

Maintaining Academic Standing (MA, MSc TB, MSc CB, PhD)

As a graduate student, you have to maintain [good academic standing](#).

Time Limit for Completion of Graduate Programs

Thesis-based Master's: Candidates must complete their program within four years of the term in which they first register as candidates in the master's program. In the case of students transferring from a course-based or other program, the beginning of the program is the term of initial registration in the first program.

Course-based Master's: Course-based Master's students have six years to complete their program unless the department has opted for a shorter time limit for its course-based master's program. In the case of students transferring from a thesis-based or other program, the beginning of the program is the term of initial registration in the first program. Consult the department listing in Graduate Programs.

Doctoral degree: Candidates must complete their program within six years of the term in which they first register in a Doctoral program. In the case of Master's students who are reclassified as Doctoral students, all degree requirements must be completed within six years of the time they first register as master's candidates.

Working with a Supervisor and a Committee (MA, MSc TB & PhD)

You have one or more thesis supervisors who must meet the [University's supervisory requirements](#). Doctoral students also require a supervisory committee, thesis-based Master's students do not require a committee, but it is recommended. This committee would include all of your supervisors, ensure that your thesis research progresses satisfactorily, arrange for necessary examinations, and that your thesis is ready to be defended. You are also required to provide the committee with an annual report.

MSc CB

You have one or more [Academic Advisors](#) to work with you to plan your academic program and capstone project. If you were not assigned one at the time of admission, please consult with your department.

Note: Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for supervisors and graduate students to establish clear plans setting out how they will work together remotely. The following resource may be useful: [Guidelines for Effective Remote Supervision](#).

Preparing a Thesis (MA, MSc TB, PhD)

At the heart of every thesis-based program is the [thesis](#). A thesis is a piece of work which must embody the results of original investigations and analyses and be of such quality as to merit

publication, meet the standards of reputable scholarly publications, and constitute a substantial contribution to the knowledge in your field. See [this page](#) for information on thesis preparation, requirements and deadlines.

Thesis Proposal (MA, MSc TB)

New Master's students submit a thesis proposal to their supervisor and supervisory committee by March 15 for those admitted in the Fall term and September 15 for those admitted in the Winter term. The proposal should not exceed 3000 words, excluding references, figures or tables and it should have no more than 3 figures. Proposal guidelines can be found [here](#).

Thesis Proposal (PhD)

A thesis proposal is a Departmental requirement. It is submitted no less than two weeks before the candidacy examination and can be used as a general basis for questions at the oral examination. The proposal must be less than 4000 words, not including references, figures or tables. It should: (1) outline the problem being addressed or gap in knowledge to be filled and explain the overarching significance of that problem or knowledge gap for the discipline, (2) review previous published work, (3) describe the proposed methods for solution, and (4) provide an approximate budget for conducting the research and a timeline for completing the research program. Up to four figures and four tables can be included in the proposal. The quality of writing and presentation in the thesis proposal is expected to be of publication standards.

Candidacy Exam (PhD)

The candidacy examination is not solely an examination of the thesis proposal. Students should be prepared for questions in areas related to and wider than the proposal, and examiners shall test comprehensive knowledge in such areas. The EAS candidacy requirement is met when both criteria of (1) satisfactory thesis proposal, and (2) satisfactory performance at the examination are met. The following are the possible results of the exam:

- Pass: The proposal and the exam performance are acceptable.
- Conditional pass: The proposal or the exam performance is marginal. Specific conditions must be met by the student to pass, e.g., additional course work, directed study, or revision of the thesis proposal. In consultation with the examiners, the exam chair is required to prepare a report within five days of the candidacy indicating the conditions the student must meet to pass the candidacy exam. The report should also specify the date before which the student must fulfill these conditions and who will determine that the conditions have been met (typically the supervisory committee). Normally, the conditions should be fulfilled within six months of the candidacy exam. The report of the exam chair should be sent to the EAS Graduate Program Administrator who will forward it to FGSR.
- Failure: Either the proposal or the exam performance is inadequate.

- If the result is a failure, the committee adds one of the following recommendations to FGSR: (1) permission to repeat the exam within six months, (2) change of category to a master's program, or (3) termination of the program.

Thesis and Oral Examination (MSc TB, MA)

The final draft of your thesis is submitted to the examining committee at least four weeks before the oral examination. It is the supervisor's responsibility to constitute an examination committee and provide the information on the make-up of that committee to the EAS Graduate Program Administrator at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the exam.

PhD

The final draft of your thesis is submitted to the examining committee at least four weeks before the oral examination. It is the supervisor's responsibility to constitute an examination committee and provide the information on the make-up of that committee to the EAS Graduate Program Administrator at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the exam.

External Examiners (PhD)

Every final doctoral examining committee must have an external i.e., an arm's length examiner from outside the University of Alberta. The term external examiner refers to an external who attends the examination, whereas the term external reader refers to an external who provides a written evaluation of the thesis and questions to be asked during the examination. External readers are deemed to be in attendance at the examination.

It is the responsibility of the department to recommend an external examiner or reader and to submit the name to the Dean of the department's Faculty for approval. Normally, this should be done at least two months (8 weeks) in advance of the examination date. The submission must follow the procedures established by the Dean of the department's Faculty.

The External:

- will be a recognized authority in the specific field of research of the student's thesis;
- will be experienced in evaluating doctoral area work; and
- must be in a position to review the thesis objectively and to provide a critical analysis of the work and the presentation.

It is essential that the external not have an association with the student, the supervisor, or the department within the last six years as this could hinder objective analysis. For example, a proposed external who has within the last six years been associated with the student as a research collaborator or coauthor would not be eligible. Also, a proposed external must not have had an association within the last six years with the doctoral student's supervisor (as a former student, supervisor, or close collaborator, for instance).

Under normal circumstances the same person will not be used as an external at the University of Alberta if that external has served in the same capacity in the same department at this University within the preceding two years; this does not preclude an external serving in another department.

External readers do not attend the examination. Instead, the external reader is asked in the letter of invitation to prepare a written report consisting of:

- an evaluation of the scope, structure, methodology, and findings of the thesis,
- a list of minor errors (if any), and
- either a list of clear, direct, contextualized questions to be posed to the candidate during the examination, or a brief written commentary of the thesis which can be read to the candidate for response during the examination.

The external reader must include a statement that the thesis falls into one of the following two categories:

- Acceptable with minor or no revisions: In this case, the External Reader submits the report to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week before the examination. If the External Reader considers the thesis to be of a calibre worthy of consideration for an award, the External Reader comments on this in the written evaluation; or
- Unacceptable without major revisions: In this case, the External Reader contacts the Dean of the FGSR immediately by email as the examination may need to be postponed.

The questions or commentary will be made available to the student for the first time during the examination and the committee will evaluate the student's answers as part of the examination.

External examiners attend the examination in person. In the letter of invitation, the external examiner is requested to prepare and send to the Graduate Coordinator, at least one week in advance of the examination, an evaluation of the thesis placing it temporarily in one of the following categories:

- the thesis is acceptable with minor or no revisions,
- the External Examiner wishes to reserve judgment until after the examination, or
- the thesis is unacceptable without major revisions.

In the first two cases, the external examiner is asked to provide a brief written commentary (approximately two to three pages) on the structure, methodology, quality, significance and findings of the thesis for the reference of both the student and supervisor. The commentary should not be given to the student prior to the examination. If the thesis is judged by the external examiner to fall into the "Unacceptable" category, then the external examiner is asked to contact the Dean of the FGSR immediately, since the final examination may need to be postponed.

Exam procedure

At the start of the examination, with the candidate absent, the supervisor outlines the candidate's academic background, courses taken for the degree, grades, and information relevant to program progress. The order of questioning is established by the chair. The candidate then makes a presentation (not more than 20 minutes) of the research results. One or more rounds of questions take place. Questioning should take no longer than two hours, or until all examiners are satisfied that they can make a decision. A discussion by the committee without the student present follows the questioning. Each examiner states a decision. If all members except one agree, the final decision is that of the majority. If two or more dissenting votes are recorded, the matter is referred to FGSR. Note that the exam chair does not vote on the outcome of the exam. The chair recalls the candidate and informs them of the decision. This is done with the committee present. There are four possible decisions:

- Pass: The defence is satisfactory and no changes are required to the thesis. All examining committee members sign the thesis signature page.
- Pass subject to revisions: The student has satisfactorily defended the thesis but the revisions to the thesis are sufficiently minor that it will not require a reconvening of the examining committee. The department shall complete a Thesis Approval/Program Completion form and submit it to the FGSR indicating "pass subject to revisions". In consultation with the examiners, the exam chair is required to prepare a report within 5 days of the thesis defence summarizing the main changes the student must make to the thesis in order to make it acceptable. The report should be submitted to the EAS Graduate Program Administrator who will forward it to FGSR. It is expected the student will make the changes in time to submit the thesis to the FGSR on or before the deadline for the next convocation. For this exam outcome, the exam chair and all examiners other than the supervisor typically sign the Thesis Approval/Program Completion form at the end of exam. The supervisor does not sign the form until the student satisfactorily completes the required changes. Other committee members may also wish to withhold their signature until they can verify that their required revisions have been made to their satisfaction.
- Adjourned: The examination is adjourned in the following situations:
 - further research is needed
 - required revisions of the thesis are substantial
 - the general presentation of the thesis is unsatisfactory
 - the defence is unsatisfactory, even if the thesis itself is acceptable with revisions
 - an emergency situation occurs during the examination, e.g., medical, fire alarm.

When an examination is adjourned, the examination committee reconvenes at a later date. The committee chair follows the procedures outlined by FGSR and communicates these in writing to the student (specify deficiencies and revisions required, decide on date to reconvene the exam committee not later than 6 months, make clear what approval or conditions are needed to reconvene exam, state what assistance is available to the student, notify FGSR of arrangements).

- *Fail*: If the committee decides the examination has been failed, the chair provides the reasons for the decision and the department's recommendation for the student's program to FGSR and to the student, e.g., required to withdraw. FGSR meets with the candidate and the department before making a final decision.

Professional Development and IDP (MSc TB, MSc IPG, MA and PhD)

All graduate students must complete eight hours of professional development as part of their program. The eight hours of professional development must be completed by the time of degree completion for Master's students and within the first 3 years for Doctoral students. In addition to the 8 hours, students must also complete the [Individual Development Plan](#) (IDP). To help you take advantage of internships and other great professional opportunities available on campus, your IDP must be finalized and reviewed by your supervisor or career mentor: The deadlines for the IDP are:

- Within 12 months of your program's commencement for full-time Master's students
- Within 24 months of your program's commencement for part-time Master's students
- Within 18 months of your program's commencement for full-time Doctoral students
- Within 36 months of your program's commencement for part-time Doctoral students

Ethics and Academic Citizenship (MSc TB, MSc IPG, MA and PhD)

Ethics and Academic Citizenship is mandatory for **all newly admitted UAlberta graduate students**. Each student is expected to complete the eight (8) hours of structured Ethics and Academic Citizenship activity to meet this requirement.

Beginning in Fall 2022, the NEW [Ethics and Academic Citizenship Requirement](#) will replace the current Academic Integrity and Ethics Training Requirement. The Ethics and Academic Citizenship Requirement consists of two zero-credit, self-paced online courses: [INT D 710: Ethics and Academic Citizenship](#) (for both Master's and Doctoral students) and [INT D 720: Advanced Ethics and Academic Citizenship](#) (for Doctoral students only). There are no instructional fees associated with these courses and they cannot be used towards your program requirements.

New students will automatically be registered in their respective courses at the start of each term. Students starting in Fall who wish to begin the courses early (August) will need to self register in Bear Tracks. Students who began their graduate programs prior to Fall 2022 also will need to self register for the relevant courses if they have not yet met their ethics requirement.

Applying for a Leave of Absence or Requesting a Change to Part Time Status (MA, MSc TB, PhD)

Sometimes, medical issues, parental responsibilities, or other emergencies mean that you may wish to take some time off from your studies. As a graduate student you may apply for an approved leave of absence that keeps your program in good standing. For information, see [this page](#); access application forms for regular leaves of absence [here](#) and for maternity and/or parental, exceptional and professional leaves [here](#). Students cannot request a leave from the first term of the program. They may request a deferred admission or withdraw and

While on an approved leave of absence, the student is not to work on their program of study or engage in thesis research/activities. In instances where a student is found to be working on their program while on approved leave, FGSR may rescind the leave, add appropriate registration and fees, and update time in program to include this period. This would result in the student having to pay full fees and would cost time in program.

The student's place in the program of studies is maintained during an approved leave of absence. Readmission to the program will not be required. The exceptional, professional, and maternal/parental leave period will not be included in the time period allowed for the completion of the student's program of study.

Under certain circumstances, students who have begun their programs may request a change from full-time status to part-time status. For information on this option, please see [this page](#). Application forms are available [here](#).

Applying for a Leave of Absence (MSc CB)

Sometimes, medical issues, parental responsibilities, or other emergencies mean that you may need to take some time off from your studies. As a graduate student, you may apply for an approved leave of absence that keeps your program in good standing without the need for registration and can be awarded for up to one year at a time. An approved leave of absence does not count against your six years in the program. For information, see this page; access application forms for regular leaves of absence here and for maternity and/or parental, exceptional and professional leaves here.

Seeking a Program Extension (MA, MSc TB, PhD)

Occasionally, circumstances arise that mean that you need more than four years for MSc students or six years for PhD students to complete your degree. In such cases, your department may support a [program extension](#). See [this page](#) for information; forms are available [here](#).

Seeking a Program Extension (MSc CB)

Occasionally, circumstances arise that mean that you need more than six years to complete your degree, unless your department has opted for a shorter time-limit. In such cases, your department may support a [program extension](#). See [this page](#) for information; forms are available [here](#).

Undertaking a Capstone Project (MSc CB)

This project will be defined by you and your academic advisor within the guidelines defined by your program. It is normally carried out at the end of your studies, usually over one or two academic terms.

Change of Program

Within a graduate program, students may change program category to a different degree or change to a different department(s). All changes of program are subject to recommendation by the Department and approval by the Dean of FGSR. In the event of a change of program, all applicable coursework, credit granted, residence, fee requirements and time spent from the initial term of admission to the graduate program will apply to the subsequent program. Coursework that is not applicable must be declared as extra to degree at the time of the change of program category. A change in program category may result in a change in fee requirements.

Departments submit requests to FGSR for approval of these changes of student classification:

- From qualifying student to master's or doctoral degree student
- From doctoral degree student to master's degree student
- From a thesis-based master's to a course-based master's program or vice versa
- Master's bypass to a doctoral program
- From a degree program to a postgraduate diploma program or vice versa

The department submits the Recommendation for Change of Category or Academic Probation form. The forms must be submitted before the add/delete deadline for the term in which the change of program will be effective. Students who are starting a new graduate degree program after completion of another degree must complete a new Application for Admission.

Teaching and Research Assistantships

A graduate assistant is a registered student in a graduate program that is paid to carry out teaching or research duties. The purpose of assistantships is:

- To assist the Department in its teaching and research responsibilities; and
- To provide training to graduate students through experience in teaching or research.

A full teaching assistantship carries teaching-related duties of twelve hours per week for a 4-month term. TAs are normally held for the eight-month teaching year, September 1 to April 30. The salary amounts are adjusted regularly following contract negotiations with the university's Graduate Students Association (GSA).

Duties and Responsibilities

Teaching duties include preparation of assignments, demonstrating in laboratories and/or seminars, marking assignments, and teaching on field trips under the supervision of the course instructor. Research assistantships involve primarily research supervised by a faculty member, i.e., thesis work.

From the start of term until 5 days after final exams in both terms, assistants remain on campus and assign first priority to their assistantship duties unless released by their supervisor. After the examination period, teaching assistants are expected to store appropriately all teaching materials

used during the term. Any absence during the teaching term requires the advance approval of the course instructor and the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies using an "Absence from Campus" form (available online in the EAS Forms Cabinet).

Students must perform satisfactorily in their own program and as graduate assistants to have their TAs renewed. Graduate assistantship funding is not terminated without warning. If after discussion between the student, the Associate Chair, and the supervising faculty member, a student's assistantship is terminated for unsatisfactory performance, one month's notice is provided.

Criteria for Allocation of Teaching Assistantships

- Teaching needs in the area of the student's expertise.
- Academic quality and teaching potential or ability of the student.
- Appropriate distribution of teaching support among research areas within the Department.

Payroll Deductions

The University's payroll system automatically deducts outstanding tuition and fees from the paycheques of all graduate students covered under the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement:

- Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) (including Principal Instructors): primarily in support of teaching and teaching related duties. Such duties may include, preparing and conducting seminars, discussion groups and lab sessions, and assisting in the preparation and administering exams and grading. The GTA duties are to help the student further their academic and professional opportunities.
- Graduate Research Assistants (GRA): primarily in support of a faculty member's academic research. Duties may include collecting/coding/analyzing data, literature reviews, library research, writing reports, designing conference presentations and preparing materials for submission to funding agencies. A student receiving a GRA support is not being paid to work on their thesis.
- Graduate Research Assistant Fellowships (GRAF): is financial assistance provided to a graduate student to allow them to focus on their education and training, as it relates to their own thesis or directed research project.

In EAS, all supervisors of thesis based international students are required to provide support sufficient to cover their international differential fee.

Automatic deductions are offered only to students covered by the aforementioned agreement and are not available to students employed through any other form of university employment or external scholarship holders.

Please note: Students cannot exempt themselves from this payroll deduction. Full tuition for the Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer terms must be paid by the respective term deadlines in order to have no fees deducted from their paycheque.

Information on fee payment deadlines and payment options can be found on [this page](#). Students will receive notifications from Financial Services regarding the tuition balance. In most cases, this is for information only. However, if an outstanding balance should exist at the end of the term, the student is responsible for paying it.

Deductions will consist of 1/6 of the outstanding amount, but no more than 80% of your salary. Potential increases or decreases in fees are split evenly across the remaining number of deductions.

How it Works

Tuition payroll deductions start from the second paycheque of each term in which the graduate student is covered by the collective agreement. That is, any Fall tuition owing as of October 1 will be deducted from the student's October, November and December semi-monthly paycheques in six installments. The first deduction for the Fall term will be on the first October paycheque which will reflect pay from work earned from September 15 to September 30.

Winter tuition owing as of February 1 will be automatically deducted from the student's February, March, and April paycheques in six installments. The first deduction for Winter term will be on the first February paycheque which will reflect pay from work earned from January 15 to January 31.

For Spring, students will have three automatic deductions from their paycheques, from the end of May to the end of June.

For Summer, students will have three automatic deductions from their paycheques, from the end of July to the end of August.

Graduate Students' Association

The Graduate Students' Association's mission is to advocate for all graduate students to the University of Alberta and all levels of government in pursuit of a safe, supportive, respectful, accessible, and inclusive community that fosters the multi-faceted roles played by graduate students.

The GSA offers a wealth of benefits to its members, including:

- Over \$950,000 in grants, awards, and bursaries,
- Various services, including the GSA Health and Dental Plan, the Graduate Student Assistance Program, group rate home and auto insurance through TDIMM, and the U-Pass,
- A multitude of social events throughout the year to connect graduate students,

- Funding to support the activities of the Campus Food Bank, and
- Subsidies to the Career Centre and Writing Resources to help them offer targeted programming to graduate students.

Under Section 58.4(1)(c) of the Labour Relations Code, the GSA is "the bargaining agent for academically-employed graduate students" and is to act with "exclusive authority" in representing graduate students in negotiating a Collective Agreement. For more information about the Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement, please click [here](#).