

**Overview of Policies and Procedures for
Department of Geosciences Graduate Students
August 2021**

Welcome to Geosciences! This Policy and Procedure overview is designed to provide new and continuing graduate students with important information for smooth navigation of your graduate student experience. The information here is both specific to our Department and reflects CSU Graduate School policies and procedures. For additional information please consult the [Graduate and Professional Bulletin](#), the [Graduate School Website](#), and the [Geosciences website](#).

Table of Contents

Residency Filing	2
Graduate Student Academic Policy and Procedures	2
<i>Registration</i>	2
<i>Professional Development for Geoscientists (GEOL 601)</i>	2
<i>Advisors and Graduate Advisory Committees</i>	3
Program of Study and Credit Requirements	5
Progress toward degree and scholastic standards	6
<i>GPA</i>	6
<i>Continuous Registration</i>	6
<i>Time to Degree</i>	7
Teaching and research assistantships	7
<i>GTA/GRA Rights and Responsibilities</i>	7
<i>Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention</i>	8
<i>Summer Tuition</i>	8
<i>Graduate-student requests for Undergraduate Research Assistants</i>	8
Completing, defending, and filing theses and dissertations	9
<i>Departmental Requirements</i>	10
Additional resources	10
<i>The Graduate School</i>	10
<i>Scholarships and Student Grants</i>	10
<i>Summary of Key Graduate School Forms</i>	11
Additional Useful Links	12

Residency Filing

Residency status has a very strong influence on tuition costs. Tuition for all GTAs (graduate teaching assistants) and many GRAs (graduate research assistants) is currently covered by the University at the non-resident rate for the first year. However, support from the University will be provided only at the resident rate in subsequent years. **This means that if a nonresident student fails to acquire Colorado resident status by their second year, the student will likely be responsible for paying the (considerable) difference between the resident and non-resident tuition rates.** International students with graduate research assistantships as of 2014-15 are also eligible for in-state tuition status throughout their assistantship.

Students who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, but are not residents of Colorado, must seek Colorado resident status during their first year to achieve residency by the beginning of their second year. The State of Colorado has a stringent set of requirements for changing residency status from non-resident to resident. These requirements are listed on the [Student Financial Services](#) website. Note that most of the actions that are necessary to acquire residency need to be performed at least one year in advance of the change in residency status. **If you are not already a Colorado resident, it is essential that you initiate this process immediately upon arriving on campus, at the latest, during the week before classes begin. As of the first day of classes, you will be too late (!)** The department office is knowledgeable in helping to negotiate the residency process. The separate process of applying for residency to begin your second year will take place during the early spring of your first year (at which time you will submit your required residency documents dated prior to the start of your first semester).

To ensure that this process goes smoothly, students planning to apply for residency should also attend a one-hour orientation session on the subject. [CSU residency orientation sessions](#) are available both online through RAMweb and in classroom presentations. These sessions provide additional insight into the process and provide tips for successfully navigating the process and avoiding pitfalls that can derail your residency status.

Graduate Student Academic Policy and Procedures

Registration

Please work with your faculty advisor to register for your first semester prior to coming to campus. For those who register after classes begin, a late registration fee will be added to your account. In order to register for classes, you will need your electronic ID (eID). Please go to the [eID set up](#) page; you will need your CSUID to complete this step.

Professional Development for Geoscientists (GEOL 601)

GEOL 601 is a one-credit course specifically designed to make the transition to graduate school at CSU go smoothly. The course is available to all graduate students and is especially strongly recommended for all new M.S. students. Topics range from writing a successful thesis proposal

to ethical issues in science. **All graduate students supported on federal grants are required by federal policy to have CSU-approved training in science ethics (unless they can document equivalent training at a prior institution). This course is also approved for that purpose.**

Advisors and Graduate Advisory Committees

When students are admitted to the graduate Program, they are typically assigned an initial advisor. The initial advisor generally has research interests that appear to best mesh with the student and has agreed to accept responsibility for onboarding the student into the graduate program. In most cases a student's initial advisor becomes their permanent advisor. Please note, however, that for an initial advisor to become a permanent advisor, both the student and advisor must concur. For example, the initial advisor might decline to become the permanent advisor if the student decides to pursue a thesis topic that is outside of the initial advisor's expertise or interests. Similarly, a student may change research interests or find an otherwise more appropriate advisor. If the initial advisor does not become the permanent advisor, it is ultimately the responsibility of the student to successfully reach an agreement with another faculty member to serve as their permanent advisor. **A permanent advisor must be a faculty member with a regular or joint appointment within the Geosciences Department having a title of Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor.**

The graduate advisory committee works with the student and advisor to ensure a successful graduate program and defense. **All M.S. and Ph.D. graduate students need to have secured their advisory committee by the end of their second semester.** Some advisors prefer to form the committee during the student's first semester, and students should be sure to discuss the expected timeline with their advisor at the beginning of their first semester. Normally, the student and advisor will work together to identify likely committee members for the student to then approach with an introduction and request for service as committee members.

MS Students

For M.S. students, the graduate committee must consist of three or more individuals, including:

- a) The permanent advisor
- b) One additional member from the Department of Geosciences
- c) An outside committee member who is a regular faculty member from another CSU Department **but does not have a joint appointment with the Geosciences department**

Students should consult with their advisors on when to hold their first committee meeting, but an initial meeting is strongly recommended prior to the end of the first semester.

M.S. students should meet at least twice with their committee. At the initial meeting, the committee will summarize the student's likely thesis topics, as well as a list of courses to be taken. Some M.S. committees may not meet again until the final thesis defense, but students should generally keep committee members informed of their thesis progress.

PhD Students

For Ph.D. students, the graduate committee must consist of four or more individuals, including:

- a) The permanent advisor
- b) One additional member from the Department of Geosciences
- c) An outside committee member who is a regular faculty member from another CSU Department **but does not have a joint appointment with the Geosciences department**
- d) One additional committee member, who may be:
 - i) A faculty member from within Department of Geosciences
 - ii) A faculty member from another CSU department
 - iii) A member from outside of CSU (who must hold affiliate status with the department)

CSU faculty members on transitional appointments are eligible as advisors and committee members. Committee members a, b, and c must have 50% or greater tenure or tenure-track appointments. Please note that one (but only one) of the four mandatory Ph.D. committee members may come from outside of the university.

Above and beyond the four members described above, a Ph.D. committee may include a maximum of two optional members. Non tenure-track faculty in the department may serve in addition to the members prescribed above in a co-advisor or general capacity. An additional outside member may be added if they bring special expertise relevant to the student's research. Again, note that all outside members without primary CSU affiliation must hold affiliate status in the department (the advisor can petition the department to add new affiliates). A non-faculty member from CSU can be appointed as an extra committee member following the procedure outlined in the [Graduate and Professional Bulletin](#).

Ph.D. students should consult with their advisors about when to hold their first committee meeting, which is strongly recommended to occur prior to the end of the first semester.

Ph.D. students are strongly encouraged to meet with their committee at least once a year. Required meetings of the committee are:

- (1) Presentation of a dissertation proposal during their second year
- (2) A preliminary examination by the beginning of their sixth semester
- (3) A dissertation defense two or more semesters following the preliminary examination.

At the discretion of the committee, the deadlines in (1) and (2) may be extended, in which case the advisor must provide timely written justification to the Department Head

Advisors and/or committees may mandate coursework and proposal requirements that are not specified by either the Graduate School or the general Department. The written portion of the preliminary exam and any committee notes on the oral portion become a part of the student's permanent record. Successful completion of this exam will advance the student to Ph.D. candidacy. Additional department policies related to the preliminary exam are found at: https://warnercnr.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/07/PhD_Policies_GEO_2019.pdf

Program of Study and Credit Requirements

All graduate students should consult frequently with their advisors throughout their graduate student career on curricular and research progress. Students are required to formally submit a Program of Study, (also known as a GS6 form, which lists all courses the student plans to take as part of their degree, and therefore requires discussion with their advisor and possibly discussion with their full committee. **Per department policy, students strongly encouraged to file the GS6 form during their second semester; failure to do so could result in denial of subsequent registration. Please see graduate school website for [GS6 Program of Study](#) for more detailed information.** Note that, with the advisor's approval, it is commonly a straightforward process (at the time of filling out the GS25 Application for Graduation) to revise the GS6 Program of Study if the actual course work completed (as shown on the unofficial transcript) is different from what had been initially noted.

MS students

M.S. students are normally expected to complete a thesis-based degree ("Plan A" in CSU terminology). This requires completion of a minimum of 30 credit hours. Sixteen of the 30 credit hours must be at the graduate level (500-level or higher), and at least 15 of these 500-level or higher credits must be for regular courses. Up to six of the 30 credits may be for "Thesis" (GEOL 699). With the permission of the advisor and committee, graduate students may apply 300- or 400-level course credits to their minimum 30 credit hour degree total, but only outside of the above-mentioned 15-credit-hour (500-level or higher) course requirement. Graduate students may take courses at the 100- and 200-level, but such courses cannot be applied to the credits required to earn a graduate degree.

PhD Students

Ph.D. students in Geosciences must take their preliminary (qualifying) examination prior to their sixth semester in the program. The exam format will be coordinated with the advisor and committee and will typically consist of both written and oral segments. The examination is written and administered by the student's graduate committee. The written portion of the exam and any committee notes on the oral portion become a part of the student's permanent record. Successful completion of this examination will advance the student to Ph.D. candidacy. In accordance with CSU Graduate Policies, the student may subsequently defend their dissertation after at least two subsequent semesters.

Ph.D. students must complete 72 credit hours beyond those required for the bachelor's degree or 42 credit hours beyond the M.S. degree. For students pursuing a Ph.D. after completion of an M.S. degree, a minimum of 21 credits must be earned at the 500-level or higher. For Ph.D. students without an M.S. degree, 37 credits at the 500-level or higher are required.

Courses fulfilling these (21 or 37) credit requirements include dissertation, research, group study, independent study, supervised college teaching, and seminar credits, as well as credits earned in regular courses. At least 10 credits beyond the M.S. degree must be earned in regular courses at the 500-level or above (i.e., courses numbered 500-581, 600-681, and 700-781). Ph.D. students must satisfy a breadth requirement, approved by the advisor, by taking a six-credit upper-division (300- or 400-level) or graduate-level (500-

level or higher) course sequence outside of the student's discipline. Most students will use courses from outside of the department to satisfy the breadth requirement. The advisor and Ph.D. committee may mandate additional coursework not specified by the Graduate School or general department requirements.

Ph.D. students are expected to assist in teaching during at least one semester of their graduate program. This expectation may be satisfied by preparing and presenting lectures, by serving as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, or otherwise at the discretion of the advisor and in coordination with the department.

Please note, once more, that an individual advisor or committee may impose additional course requirements above and beyond CSU and department requirements.

General department policies related to the Ph.D. program are also summarized at:

https://warnercnr.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/07/PhD_Policies_GEO_2019.pdf

Progress toward degree and scholastic standards

GPA

Graduate students are required to maintain a GPA of 3.0 or greater, calculated both for regular coursework and overall for regular and non-regular coursework combined (non-regular coursework includes credits for thesis, research, seminars, group study, and certain other activities for credit). **Failure to sustain a 3.0 GPA may result in academic probation or dismissal; additional CSU policy details are summarized in the Graduate Bulletin. Students with assistantships who go on academic probation generally also become ineligible or can otherwise lose their assistantship support.**

Graduate students may also be dismissed for failure to make adequate degree progress. This means that a student who has a GPA above 3.0 may still face dismissal if their advisor and committee determine that their thesis/dissertation progress is unsatisfactory and likely to remain so.

Continuous Registration

Once a student enrolls as a CSU graduate student, they are expected to maintain continuous registration for Fall and Spring semesters until they graduate. They may do so either by enrolling in any graduate-level course (regular or non-regular) for at least one credit or by enrolling in Continuous Registration (CR).

- **Failure to maintain continuous registration will necessitate applying for readmission to the University, which requires department approval.**
- **Graduate students are *not* required to register during summer semester unless they are graduating that semester.**
- **Students must be enrolled for credit or continuous registration during their official semester of graduation.**
- **Students on a GTA or GRA contract must register for at least one credit each semester and cannot retain an assistantship under continuous (CR) registration.**

Time to Degree

Completion of the standard M.S. and Ph.D. programs in Geoscience require successfully writing and defending a thesis or dissertation, respectively. A thesis or dissertation represents original research completed to the standards of the university, department, advisor, and graduate advisory committee, and the amount of time required to completion is variable. The time to degree is also sometimes lengthened by a summer internship or other external commitments. Nonetheless, students should strive to complete their degrees efficiently. The standard time to completion for an M.S. student is regarded as two years and many students do complete in this time. Completion in two years, however, requires that the student work continuously and efficiently, and some successful students, especially those who have other responsibilities, do take somewhat over two years to complete. Similarly, some Ph.D. students are able to complete their degree in as little as three years, but most take four years or longer.

There is a ten-year time limit for completion of CSU M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. Specifically, courses that will be applied toward fulfilling the degree (including any transferred from another institution) must have been registered for and completed within the ten years that immediately precede the date of degree completion.

Petitions to the graduate school to continue beyond the ten-year time limit can be made. In this case, the advisor, committee, and student will meet and review coursework that falls out of the 10-year time limit. If the committee concludes that the coursework is relevant and that the student retains a functional understanding, then the advisor and committee may submit a report to the Graduate School that attests to that conclusion. This report must indicate the revised plan to complete the degree (which must be accomplished within a two-year time frame).

Teaching and research assistantships

GTA/GRA Rights and Responsibilities

GTA contracts are awarded at the discretion of the department and are typically for one academic year (during August to May for 9 months), although they may be shorter or longer in special circumstances. These contracts are renewable, and the department may provide GTA funding for up to two academic years, although it is commonplace for the advisor to transfer support to a GRA for the second year. Be aware that the department's ability to offer GTA support can change should college or university funding levels or policies change. GRA support is typically at the discretion of the faculty member holding the associated research grant or contract, who will thus determine the contract length and level of funding. GTA/GRA support can be terminated partway through a contract period or at the renewal point for failure to meet expectations or because of unanticipated budget shortfalls. Fundamental expectations include satisfactory thesis progress, performance of GRA or GTA duties, and coursework.

GTAs and GRAs are employees of the University. They are essential to the operation of the department's educational and research mission, and high professional standards must be maintained in all areas of responsibility. Students with GTA awards report both to their advisor and to the instructor of the course(s) to which they are assigned. GTAs are typically paid from

mid-August through mid-May and can expect to be accountable to the department throughout the this 9-month period. GRAs commonly are supported on advisor-administered research funds and report to them. In cases where someone other than the advisor supplies GRA funding, the student may be expected to report to both the advisor and funder. **University breaks such as Fall break (Thanksgiving), the interval between Fall and Spring semesters, and Spring break are mostly not paid holidays, and you should not automatically expect to take these breaks off, with the exception of designated University holidays** (e.g., Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday are University holidays, but the preceding three days are not). However, graduate assistants may be absent on days when the University is officially open as negotiated with both the advisor and the faculty member supervising the GTA or GRA. GTAs should not plan to leave campus before final grades are submitted, which is usually by the Tuesday following finals week unless agreed upon with the relevant faculty and/or instructor(s).

GTAs are expected to satisfy the research and coursework progress expectations of their advisor for degree progress and to meet the expectations set forth by the instructor of the course(s) to which they are assigned. Failure to satisfy either of these expectations may result in loss of funding during the semester. **Teaching assistants should average no more than 20 hours of GTA work per week during the semester. If a GTA finds they are routinely spending more than 20 hours per week on GTA duties, they should first discuss this with the supervising faculty member. If a workload problem remains after that discussion, they should discuss the situation with their advisor (if this is not the supervising faculty member) and/or with the Department Head.**

Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention

All university employees, including GTAs and GRAs, are required to complete [on-line sexual harassment prevention training](#), and will be contacted with an email from *Workplace Answers* with accompanying instructions. More information about what constitutes sexual harassment and about university policies and procedures related to sexual harassment can be found on the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#) website.

Summer Tuition

GTAs who enroll in classes during the summer will generally be responsible for their own summer tuition, unless a summer appointment is arranged with their advisors or the department. This also may apply to GRAs, depending on the support that their advisor is able to offer.

Graduate-student requests for Undergraduate Research Assistants

The Department maintains a database of undergraduate student seeking additional mentoring and experience. Students within the database may apply for positions that include volunteer research or field assistantships. If you are interested in engaging undergraduate students as research or field assistants (paid or unpaid) in your work, we encourage you and/or your advisor to access the database to seek appropriately qualified candidates. The [Undergraduate Research Database](#) is updated regularly with copies of students' resumes, and transcripts are stored in the Department Office.

Completing, defending, and filing theses and dissertations

Forms associated with completing, defending and filing your thesis or dissertation are available through [RAMweb](#). Descriptions and samples of each form are also available on the [GS forms website](#).

Prior to completion, students must identify which term they intend to graduate. The **GS25 Application for Graduation** form is due early during the anticipated last semester and should be completed prior to scheduling the defense. Should the defense be subsequently delayed, the GS25 may be re-submitted during the following semester.

Many students find that writing the thesis or dissertation takes longer than they first expected. Try to take this into account by starting your writing early and when planning for graduation and starting post-graduation jobs, especially given that the document often goes through multiple rewrites after review by the advisor and, subsequently, by the committee. You may schedule your defense once your committee confirms your readiness and their availability. You and your advisor, in consultation with your committee, will designate a date when the thesis will be available to the committee prior to the defense. A copy of your thesis or dissertation should also be available for the general faculty to examine a minimum of two weeks prior to your defense date.

Defenses are publicly advertised and attended presentations of a student's research followed by questions from members of the audience. This public phase is followed by a closed-door session with the student's committee. A good way to learn about defense procedures (as well as learning more about research within the department) is to attend the defenses of your student colleagues.

Immediately following the defense, the student must complete the **GS24 Report of Final Examination Results**. This form must be signed by their committee (in-person or electronically) and submitted to the Graduate School Office **within two working days** after their defense. Please work with the Department Office to ensure that it is successfully signed and delivered to the Graduate School.

A defense is complete when all members of the committee have signed the thesis/dissertation, the student must then obtain the signature of the Department Head on their **GA30 Thesis/Dissertation Submission** form. Please note that the Department Head needs an opportunity to at least briefly review the thesis or dissertation before signing for its submittal. The final document will then be electronically submitted to the Graduate School by the student. The [instructions for electronic submission](#) are available on the [GS form website](#). Theses and dissertations are permanently archived in the CSU library system. If the thesis or dissertation contains restricted information you may petition for an embargo using the [GS31 ETD Embargo Restriction Request form](#).

Graduation Forms

[Graduate School deadlines](#) should be monitored for forms to be submitted during the final semester. If forms are not filed on time, you will be eligible to attend commencement and your official graduation date will be the end of the following semester. In this circumstance, you must

register for CR credits during the semester of your official graduation semester (because you must be registered in the graduating semester).

Form

GS25 – Application for Graduation
GS24 – Report of Final Examination Results
GS30 – Thesis/Dissertation Submission
GS25B – Departmental Requirements Clearance
GS52 – Graduation Clearance Response

When to File

Before you defend (early in semester)
After defense (within 2 working days)
When you submit your thesis/dissertation
Before last semester deadline
(if applicable) Before last semester deadline

Departmental Requirements

Please complete **GS25B Departmental Requirements Clearance** form prior to graduation (and before final semester graduation deadline). To obtain the departmental sign-off on completion of degree requirements, students must:

1. Clean out their office space, and remove samples and/or arrange an appropriate sample archival solution with your advisor
2. Turn in their keys
3. Send a pdf copy of their dissertation/thesis to the department office
4. Leave a forwarding email address
5. Complete the online Graduate Student Exit Survey

Deadlines for filing theses and dissertations are normally more than a month before classes end if the student is to graduate that semester. If students complete their core degree requirements after the Grad School filing deadline for that semester, their official graduation date will be the following semester. Department sign-off requirements, however, can be finalized any time before the last day of the semester. If a student who has completed all requirements, but has not yet officially graduated, or needs evidence of completion for employment or other purposes, the Graduate School or Department Head can be approached to supply a supporting letter.

Additional resources

The Graduate School

The student resources section of the [Graduate School Website](#), has comprehensive general information about policies, grad school forms to file, various deadlines, and information about how to submit your thesis. An associated link that is valuable to consult before you get very far into writing is the [Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Guide](#). Following these guidelines from the onset of writing will greatly smooth the process of producing an acceptably formatted final draft.

Scholarships and Student Grants

The department and college have various scholarships available for graduate students. Applications are typically due around March 1 for the following academic year, and the

application process is online. Several professional organizations, as well as federal agencies, for example the Geological Society of America and National Science Foundation, respectively, also provide grants to graduate students to fully or partially fund their research. Students should consult with their advisors regarding strategies to best fund their particular work and for associated deadlines. These are commonly highly competitive, so significant advanced planning and consideration are typically necessary to compete successfully.

Career Services. In partnership with the CSU Career Center, the Warner College of Natural Resources (WCNR) career liaison provides career support to all WCNR students, and Career Center events are open to graduate students. The Career Center also maintains a job listserv for WCNR graduate students. To join this listserv, visit the [Academic Computing and Networking Services](#) page to subscribe to the “Non-Course Mailing Lists” (look for the NRCC_GRAD list).

Summary of Key Graduate School Forms

The Graduate School uses a variety of official forms to mark a student’s progress through the degree program; these are available at the [Graduate School Forms](#) webpage. Note that Ph.D. program students have elements of coursework requirements (detailed above) that are specific to the Department and are not listed in the Graduate Bulletin.

- **GS6 Program of Study.**
This form lists the coursework completed and planned for the M.S. or Ph.D. degree and the members of the graduate committee. It must be submitted online with the Graduate School by the end of the second semester. Once submitted you will print it, **bring it to the office for the Geosciences graduate coordinator to make sure it is completed correctly**, get advisor(s) signatures, and return it to the office for the Department Head’s signature. Office staff will deliver it to the Grad School and will retain a copy for your file.
- **GS16 Report of Preliminary Examination.**
Ph.D. students must turn in this form **within two working days** of taking their preliminary examination. Once your committee has signed it, bring it to the office for copying and delivery to the Grad School.
- **GS24 Report of Final Examination Results.**
M.S. and Ph.D. students must turn in this form to the Graduate School Office **within two working days** after their defense. Again, once your committee has signed it, bring it to the office for copying and delivery to the Grad School.
- **GS25 Application for Graduation.**
This form must be submitted at the beginning of the semester in which graduation is planned. Student, advisor, co-advisor (if applicable), and Department Head signatures are required. This, too, must be reviewed by the Geosciences graduate coordinator before the Department Head will sign it and office staff will deliver it to the Grad School.
- **GS30 Thesis/Dissertation Submission.**

All Master's Plan A students and Ph.D. students submit this form after your final thesis or dissertation has been reviewed and approved by your committee.

Additional Useful Links

[Geosciences Department Ph.D. Policies](#)

[CSU Geosciences library website](#)

[Campus safety and Closures](#)

[Grad Resources](#) - This is a nonprofit organization set up to “serve the practical and emotional needs of graduate students.” This website has a variety of articles and links to an array of resources that may be of interest. This group also has a 24-hour crisis hotline set up specifically for distressed graduate students: 1-877-GRAD-HLP. The hotline is confidential and is staffed by counselors who are specifically prepared to work with graduate students.

[NAGPS](#) is the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students. This page has several links to various resources, including scholarships and grants, stress relief, life in graduate school, how to get started writing your thesis, looking for a job, etc.