

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND EARTH SCIENCES  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



January 2018

# SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND EARTH SCIENCES

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## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR GRADUATE STUDY IN THE SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND EARTH SCIENCES AT MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

When McMaster moved to its current graduate organization, the aims of graduate work were described as “the highest development of the powers of reasoning, judgment, and evaluation in intellectual concerns: specialized training in professional skills; initiation into research or scholarly work and development of a capacity for its successful and independent pursuit; the fruitful pursuit of research and scholarly work”. This description remains as valid today as it was then.

Research is central to graduate work, and McMaster’s strong research orientation has a pronounced effect on the character of its graduate programs. The numerous research achievements of McMaster faculty members have been recognized by grants, prizes, medals, and fellowships in academic societies. Such distinctions attest to the qualifications and dedication of faculty members in developing and disseminating knowledge. The education that McMaster faculty provides is valuable not only for the graduate student’s career but also for the student’s development as a person.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The School of Geography and Earth Sciences is an internationally recognized centre for graduate research and training. Its strengths lie in the discovery, application and transfer of knowledge to issues and problems in the earth, environmental and geographical sciences.

Two particular strengths are the development of interdisciplinary research programs that integrate the earth and environmental sciences with human geography, and the use of spatial analysis to investigate relationships in the environment and between the environment and society.

The School emphasizes the use of leading-edge, theoretical, field and laboratory research methods including the application of analytical and conceptual models. Areas of expertise include earth surface processes, environmental health, geochemistry, hydrological sciences, social geography and spatial analysis.

### 2.0 MISSION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

#### 2.1 Mission Statement

The members of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences will develop excellent highly qualified personnel and produce world class research through our graduate programs and by our graduate students.

Students are normally accepted on a full time basis beginning in September of each year. Applications for part time study will be considered under exceptional circumstances.

## 2.2 Objectives

To provide the intellectual, funding and infrastructure support required for graduate students to produce high quality research and to complete their program on schedule.

To recruit the best students for the Doctoral and Masters programs.

To foster a climate of mutual respect and intellectual excellence among students, faculty and staff while providing an environment for growth, individual and team development, and scientific advancement.

To provide theoretical, methodological and substantive education in the field of specialization which will equip students for graduate research and subsequent career development, including, as appropriate, professional certification.

To develop the students' ability to think independently and critically, to generate new ideas, and to translate these ideas into significant and feasible research projects.

To encourage and enable students to present their work in seminars, workshops and professional meetings, and to publish their research in peer-reviewed journals and other learned publications.

To enhance the reputation of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences and thereby of its graduates.

## 3.0 DEGREE PROGRAMS AND FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATIONS

The School of Geography and Earth Sciences offers programs leading to the degrees of M.A., M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Geography and M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Earth Sciences.

The fields that we offer graduate work in, as approved by the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS), are:

### 3.1 Earth and Environmental Sciences (M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Geography and in Earth Sciences)

Earth Surface Processes  
Geochemistry

## Hydrological Sciences

### 3.2 Human Geography (M.A. and Ph.D. in Geography)

Environment and Health

Social Geography

Spatial Analysis

## 4.0 ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

The recruitment of first class students into the Masters and Doctoral programs is vital to all aspects of the success of the Graduate Program of the School. In any one year, student recruitment targets are guided by the supervisory and funding capacity of the School and the expected degree completion of students already in the programs. The Graduate Committee will determine target levels for Masters and Doctoral programs by field of specialization in consultation with faculty members who are the potential supervisors.

A candidate for the Masters or Doctoral degree must comply with the general regulations and program requirements of the School of Graduate Studies:

<http://graduate.mcmaster.ca/>

### 4.1 Application Requirements and Checklist (for all interested potential Masters and Doctoral students)

All students interested in applying for admission in M.Sc., MA or Ph.D. programs offered by the School of Geography and Earth Sciences are required to submit a formal application using our on-line system. The applicant should submit:

a) An application using our on-line application system:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/academic-services/how-to-apply>

b) An application fee of \$110.00 CDN. This fee is non-refundable and must be paid in Canadian dollars by means of a credit card payment or an interact card (domestic students only).

c) A Statement of Research Interest(s). The statement should be up to two pages long and may include your background and past experiences along with your future career goals and interests.

- d) Two letters of recommendation are to be directly sent to SGES by two academic instructors most familiar with your work. These recommendation letters will be completed by filling an on-line 'Referee's Report' on the Graduate Application form. Hard copies of this form may be downloaded from the Graduate Studies website and sent by mail to the School at the mailing address given at the end of this section.
- e) Certified (official) copies of all post-secondary transcript(s). If the final transcript does not show that a completed degree has been conferred, an official copy of your diploma/degree is also required along with any/all official transcripts.
- f) If English is not your native language, an official copy of your TOEFL score is required. The School requires a minimum score of 580 on the paper-based test, a score of 237 on the computer based-test, and a score of 92 on the internet-based test. Alternatively, an official copy of your IELTS scores (6.5 overall with a 5.5 minimum score in each section) or MELAB score of 85 for Science is required.

NOTE: the TOEFL department code is: 46 – Environmental Sciences, 70 – Geography, and 71 – Geology.

To be accepted for study, the applicant's academic record must satisfy the Graduate Committee of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences and the University, there must also be a faculty member to supervise the student's thesis work.

The School's graduate program is strongly research oriented. The completion of a thesis is the main focus of all graduate degree programs. We encourage all prospective students to look at the School's website for the areas of current faculty member research projects and select an appropriate area of interest and potential thesis supervisor. Applicants may directly contact any faculty member in the School to find out if they are willing to supervise, and also send their resume and statement of future interests via email.

If an admission application package is submitted without contacting a potential supervisor, the School will attempt to find a potential supervisor based on the applicant's interest(s).

Although the on-line application is strongly encouraged, applicants can submit hardcopies (and related forms) of the application to the mailing address given at the end of this section.

Transcripts, letters of recommendation or any other document(s) can also be sent in addition to the online application (which requires a PDF document uploaded online) to the following mailing address:



Salomé Santos-Blaguski  
Graduate Program Assistant  
School of Geography and Earth Sciences  
McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West  
GSB 206/C  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
L8S 4K1  
Phone: 905-525-9140 Ext. 23535  
Fax: 905-546-0463  
Email: [ssantos@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ssantos@mcmaster.ca)

## 4.2 Admission Procedure

The Graduate Committee will evaluate the files of applicants with respect to three main criteria:

Strength of the academic record; assessments of referees; and a suitable fit of the student's expertise and interests with the on-going research of the School.

The Committee will seek the opinion of a potential supervisor with respect to the suitability of the student, willingness to supervise, and ability to provide financial and research support.

Recommendations for offers of admission, including level of financial support will be forwarded to the School of Graduate Studies by the Director of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. Successful applicants will be given an offer of admission letter via email by Graduate Studies. Applicants who cannot be offered a placement will be notified by letter from the Chair of the Graduate Committee.

Note: Student members of the graduate committee do not participate in the evaluation of graduate applications. However, their input may be sought on individual cases by the committee.

## 4.3 Academic Requirements for a Masters Program

For the Masters degree, an Honours Bachelor's degree with at least a B+ (79% minimum and better) average in the final 2 full time years of all courses in the discipline (or relating to the discipline) in which the applicant proposes to do graduate work.

Masters candidates for degrees in Geography or Earth Sciences whose previous degrees are not in the same or similar discipline may be required to pass additional undergraduate courses normally to be taken in the first year of graduate study, as specified by the supervisor and approved by the Director of the School.

#### 4.4 Academic Requirements for a Doctoral Program

Normally, a student is admitted to a doctoral program after the completion of a Master's degree with strong performance and a minimum of a B+ (79% minimum and better) average in their Masters program.

The regulations of the Graduate School at McMaster make provision for the direct entry into a doctoral program of a student who holds only a first (Bachelor's) degree. In the School of Geography and Earth Sciences, direct entry is possible but only under exceptional circumstances, as follows:

The applicants must have an 'A' (89% minimum and better) average in the last two years of undergraduate studies following communication with their potential supervisor; the applicant must submit a detailed (c.1500-word) statement of research interests.

The applicant should have had prior, relevant research experience.

Ph.D. candidates for degrees in Geography or Earth Sciences whose previous degrees are not in the same or similar discipline may be required to pass additional undergraduate courses as specified by the student's supervisory committee.

NOTE: Guidelines on admission of students with first degrees in other subjects:

Students graduate from The School of Geography and Earth Sciences with a Masters in Geography or Earth Sciences (and potentially Earth or Environmental Science). Part of the requirements for these degrees is that the student has or acquires a sufficiently broad knowledge to be able to practice in the field in which they have received a graduate degree.

This requirement is normally met by the admission requirement of a degree in Geography or Earth Sciences for a doctoral student, the comprehensive examination. The practical interpretation of these requirements are that; students in SGES should be able to be a teaching assistant and eventually teach in a range of basic (e.g. Level 1) and general (e.g. 2GG3, 2HC3) courses in their area of research specialization.

#### 5.0 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR A MASTERS DEGREE

A candidate for the Masters degree must comply with the following general regulations and program requirements of the School of Graduate Studies.

## 5.1 Masters Degree in Geography or Earth Sciences (M.A. or M.Sc.)

Students must complete a minimum of two half (one-term) graduate courses with at least B- standing (or equivalent). Supervisors may prescribe courses in particular fields of specialization and/or courses beyond the minimum required.

If only two half (one-term) courses are taken, both must be at the 700 level.

If more than two courses are taken, then no more than one-third of the courses may be at the 600-level.

Only one reading course Earth Sci/Geog 715\* (Special Topics) may be taken. If this is taken during the Masters degree and the student goes on to do a Doctoral degree, the 715\* (Special Topics) course may not be taken a second time. This can show up only once on your transcript.

Students must complete a written thesis on an approved topic and defense of this thesis at an oral examination.

NOTE: If the supervisor of a Masters or Doctoral student is unable to make the oral defense because of an emergency, then the defense must be postponed. If another member of the committee is unable to make the oral defense, the defense for a Masters or Ph.D. student may proceed as planned as long as a replacement member is found for the defense

AUDITING OF COURSES – Grad students can audit grad courses but this should be done at the discretion of the supervisor. Grad students cannot “audit” undergrad courses (they can only register for credit of an undergrad course).

## 5.2 Possible Upgrading to Doctoral Program

Normally, a Masters student is admitted to doctoral studies only after the Masters degree is completed. However, outstanding students may request to be upgraded to the doctoral program without completing a Masters degree. The request should be submitted no sooner than the second term of the Masters program and no later than the end of third term. This process is usually considered at the Masters Year End Review in April.

The procedure is as follows: First, the request will be considered at the student’s year-end review. In such cases, the Review Committee will consist of a chair, the student’s supervisor, and two other members (or Associates) of the School with relevant expertise. (Normally, these three faculty members will form the Ph.D. Supervisory Committee if the request is approved.) The following documents should be submitted to the year-end review:

- a) letter from the student requesting and justifying the upgrade
- b) letter of support from the supervisor
- c) the student's grades
- d) a research proposal (approx. 1500 words) that outlines a research program appropriate for the doctoral level

If the request for upgrading is approved by the year-end Review Committee, this recommendation will be forwarded to the Graduate Committee for final approval.

NOTE: Year-end reviews are usually held in mid-March/April. Where an upgrade has been requested, the year-end review may be held as early as February. If the request for upgrade is submitted in third term, a special committee will be constituted with membership as specified above.

## 6.0 RESIDENCE

For full time Masters students, the permissible maximum time for completion is two years. For part time Masters students, the permissible maximum time is five years.

Except for the formal holiday periods specified in the Calendar (see *Sessional Dates*), all full time graduate students should be on campus (be geographically available and visit the campus regularly) while working toward their degree.

Periods of absence from campus during full time residence will not normally be allowed unless permission is granted by the supervisor, the Director of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, after reviewing the student's academic plan for the period of absence and after ensuring that the student's teaching responsibilities are covered. There is a 'Request to be Full-Time Off-Campus' form that is on the Graduate Studies website that must be used in these instances:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources>

## 7.0 SUPERVISORY ROLE

The Graduate Committee of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences will ensure that every graduate student has a supervisor who is identified in the process of student admission. The selection of the supervisor is based on the suitability of the student, willingness of the faculty member to supervise the student, and the faculty member's ability to provide financial and research support.

## 7.1 M.A. or M.Sc. Program

At the Masters level, supervisory responsibility normally lies with a single supervisor. However, with the consent of their supervisor, students may work in close consultation with at least one other faculty member whose research is related to the field of the student's thesis topic, in the course of the thesis research.

## 7.2 Adjunct Faculty Co-Supervisorship

The graduate student will have only one (1) supervisor responsible for financial and other obligations toward the student (see Section 21.0: Responsibilities of the Supervisor). From time to time however, the nature of the student's work entails significant contributions from researchers and faculty from other institutions. Under such circumstances, these individuals may be granted the status of co-supervisor. The status must be requested from the Director of the School, by the primary supervisor in consultation with the student. Granting of co-supervisor status in no way obligates the co-supervisor financially or in any other way toward the student. Further, the supervisor, in consultation with the supervisory committee (on which the co-supervisor sits), remains solely responsible and accountable for the financial and other obligations of the student including monitoring academic progress and ensuring completion of program requirements within the specified time period (as laid out in this Policies and Procedures document).

## 8.0 A MASTERS MODEL TIMETABLE

NOTE: This is only meant as a guideline. The timing of highlighted items is usually fixed.

### YEAR 1 (SEPTEMBER – AUGUST)

September – December

Coursework – The first 700\* level course and possibly the second 700\* level grad course

TA duties

Application for external awards (OGS/NSERC/SSHRC/CIHR, etc.)

January – April

Coursework – The second 700\* level course if not taken during term 1

It is recommended that if an additional graduate course is taken then that should be done in this term (sometimes an additional course is taken as an extra credit)

TA duties

Getting ready to submit poster/proposal for Research Day (held during the month of April)

Masters students who are in their first year will have a “Masters Year End Review”. A submission of a brief research proposal must be prepared to present at review. (Usually held during April once classes are completed and before students start to leave for the field.)

May – August  
Research / Field Work

## YEAR 2 (SEPTEMBER – AUGUST)

September – December  
Analysis and beginning the write-up of results  
(Note: Those who intend to apply to a Doctoral program should submit applications for external awards and get their applications ready.)  
TA duties

January – March  
Completing write-up of results  
Submission of draft chapters to supervisor

April  
Submission of complete draft of thesis to examining committee

May – July  
Submission of final draft of thesis for oral examination

August – September  
Oral examination of thesis, usually 2 – 3 weeks after submission of final draft  
(Note: Because the scheduling of oral examinations in July/August is difficult, defenses may have to be deferred until September. Grad Studies allows for a grace period up to late September where students will be able to defend and submit their thesis without a penalty of further charges being incurred (check *Sessional Dates*). Students who wish to defend earlier are advised to submit final drafts for examination no later than the end of April).

## 9.0 REVIEW PROCEDURES

### 9.1 Masters Year End (1) Program Review

All Masters students will meet with a School Review Committee appointed by the Graduate Committee at the end of the second term of their program (normally by the end of April of the first year). The review also allows for a more general discussion of the student’s experience in the program to date and expectations regarding future activities (e.g. teaching assignments).

For Masters students, the Review Committee will consist of the supervisor, at least two other faculty members whose work is related to the student's field of interest and a Chair (normally a member of the Graduate Committee) whose work is in an unrelated field.

NOTE: Year end reviews are usually held in middle to late April. Where an upgrade has been requested, the year end review may be held as early as February. If the request for upgrade is submitted in third term, a special committee will be constituted with membership as specified above.

The first day of the term following the upgrade to Ph.D. approval will be considered to be the entry date to the doctoral program for the student. Following the usual practice, the comprehensive exam must be completed between 12 and 20 months after entering the Doctoral program.

At least one week in advance of the review date, the student should submit to the Graduate Program coordinator a two-page summary describing the research topic and tentative plan of research activity, course taken or in progress, conference presentations, papers and any other activity related to their degree program since start in case of first meeting or since previous meeting. **Please also make sure to have clear and concise timelines and state where your research is taking place.**

The School's Review or Graduate Committee will report their evaluations on a form as shown on the following page:

SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND EARTH SCIENCES  
GRADUATE YEAR END REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT

Student Name:

Date:  
Student #:

	Grade: _____	TA/RA _____
	Grade: _____	TA/RA _____
	Grade: _____	TA/RA _____
	Grade: _____	TA/RA _____

Research Topic/Title:

Comments on research topic:

Comments on research plan:

Requirements recommended (e.g. additional courses):

Comments on strengths/weaknesses

Chair - \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor - \_\_\_\_\_

Member - \_\_\_\_\_

Member - \_\_\_\_\_

(Use back page if additional space for comments is needed)



Additional comments:

#### PROCEDURE

- 1) The student submits a two page proposal to the Grad Program Coordinator, at least one week before the review date.
  
- 2) FORMAT OF REVIEW
  - a 5-10 minute summary by the student.
  - a 10-15 minute general discussion.
  - a 5 minute discussion without the supervisor.
  - a 5 minute discussion without the student.

Attach form or page which is submitted by the student here:

Title

Name

Supervisor

Introduction

Proposed Research

Timeline

Anything else you may want to add, i.e. objectives, diagrams etc.

## 10.0 PREPARATION FOR A MASTERS DEFENSE

### 10.1 Masters Examination Committee

The Thesis Defense Examination Committee will be appointed by the Graduate Committee on behalf of the Director at the request of the student's supervisor. It will consist of:

A Chair whose research is from an unrelated field (the Graduate Program Coordinator will locate a chair for the committee)

The Supervisor

Two other examiners whose research is related to the field of the student's thesis topic.

One of these additional examiners will hold a faculty appointment in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences. The Chair is a non-voting member.

### 10.2 Masters Thesis Submission

The Masters thesis should be prepared according to the guidelines for the preparation of Masters and Ph.D. theses as described on the School of Graduate Studies website.

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources>

Graduate students are encouraged to submit their first draft of the thesis to the supervisor one chapter at a time. Other members of the Masters examining committee may also review these drafts. The procedure for review is decided by the supervisor, if necessary in consultation with the examining committee.

Normally, a graduate student may expect to receive comments from the supervisor on the draft of a single chapter within three weeks and on a complete thesis within eight weeks. To this end, students must keep supervisors informed of the progress of their work.

When the Masters thesis is ready for examination, the student must submit the required number of printed copies (normally 4; one for each member of the examining committee plus one for the Chair of the committee), each in a separate envelope, to the School's Graduate Program Coordinator (while also including a copy of the thesis via email).

If it is decided that the thesis may not proceed to a defense, then each member of the examining committee (including the supervisor) must send an email of this decision to the Grad Program Coordinator.

Members of the examining committee would have two weeks to determine whether the thesis may proceed to an oral defense: examiners should return the Approval for Defense form to the Graduate Program Coordinator within 2 weeks from the date on which they receive the thesis. If no emails are sent to the Graduate Program Coordinator, it is taken as an approval of the thesis.

When a majority of the examiners are satisfied, the Graduate Program Coordinator will schedule an oral defense which will normally take place no earlier than two weeks and no later than four weeks from the date when

a majority of the examiners have approved the thesis for defense.

NOTE: Because the scheduling of oral examinations in July/August are difficult, defenses may have to be deferred until September. Students who wish to defend earlier are advised to submit final drafts for examination no later than the end of April.

### 10.3 Masters Thesis Defense

The defense is a public examination which should last no more than two hours. It consists of a short (maximum 15 minutes) presentation by the student of the rationale, findings and broader contributions of the research. This is followed by questions on the thesis research from all members of the committee. Questions from the public audience may be allowed, time permitting.

The committee makes separate judgments on the written thesis and the oral defense by majority vote. Possible judgments on the written thesis are:

Pass (as submitted or subject to minor revision only).  
Resubmit after major revision (possibly requiring a second defense),  
and Fail.

On the oral defense, the possible judgments are:

Pass or  
Fail (requiring a second oral defense within one month).

In the event that either the re-submitted thesis or the second oral defense is judged unsatisfactory, the student fails.

Detailed examination procedure is given on the following page:

Masters Defense Detailed Procedures  
School of Geography and Earth Sciences

Candidate \_\_\_\_\_  
Date / Time \_\_\_\_\_

Degree: M.A.\_\_\_\_M.Sc. \_\_\_\_  
Location\_\_\_\_\_

1. The defense committee chairperson welcomes the candidate, other committee members, and audience to the defense; and states that this is a public examination which will not exceed two hours in length.
2. The chairperson asks the candidate and audience to leave the examining room; the committee then decides the order of questioning or any other matter arising prior to the defense. The candidate and audience are then invited back into the examining room and informed of the order of questioning.
3. The candidate is asked to give a short (maximum 15 minutes) presentation outlining the rationale, findings, and contributions of the thesis.
4. Round One of questioning: each examiner is given 15 minutes for her/his questions.
5. Round Two of questioning (following the same order as in Round One); this is usually shorter in duration than Round One.
6. The chairperson asks if there are any questions from members of the audience. Questioner should be asked to introduce him/her and affiliation.
7. The chairperson may, if desired, ask questions.
8. The chairperson asks the candidate and audience to leave the examining room while the committee judges the written thesis and oral defense (separately). Once a decision has been made, the necessary paper work is completed.
9. The chairperson invites the candidate back into the examining room and informs her/him of the committee's decision.
10. The members of the Defense committee sign the following necessary paperwork:
  - (i) Report of Examining Committee Masters Thesis Defense
  - (ii) Final Thesis Submission Sheet (submitted to Grad Studies)

The chairperson signs the following paperwork:

- (i) Copy Rights or License form (this is also signed by the student)
  - (ii) Chair Defense Letter
  - (iii) Professional Certification forms, if relevant
11. The chairperson returns all the completed paperwork to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

## 11.0 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR A DOCTORAL DEGREE

Students must complete a minimum of three half (one-term) graduate courses (or equivalent) with at least B- standing, as suggested and approved by the supervisory committee.

If a student has taken more than two half-courses at the Masters level, the supervisory committee has the discretion to lower the Ph.D. minimum course requirement from three to two half-courses.

The student's supervisory committee has the discretion to prescribe courses in addition to the Ph.D. minimum course requirement, to be taken in particular fields of specialization.

No more than one-third of the program minimum course requirements may be at the 600-level. In other words, if you need three half courses, two must be at the 700 level, the third may be at the 600 or 700 level.

Only one reading course Earth Sci/Geog 715\* (Special Topics) course may be taken, if it has not already been taken in the Masters program. If it has been taken at the Masters level, it may not be taken again at the Ph.D. level. Special Topics 715\* may only show on your transcript once as a graduate student.

Following the regulations in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences full-time students must complete a comprehensive examination between 12 and 20 months after the student has begun Ph.D. work at McMaster University, with an upper limit of 24 months (see Ph.D. comprehensive examination section 15.2).

All required course work must be completed prior to the comprehensive examination being taken.

Following the regulations in the School of Geography and Earth Sciences part time students must complete a comprehensive examination by the end of 36 months after the student has begun Ph.D. work at McMaster University (see Ph.D. comprehensive examination section 15.2).

Students must complete a written thesis on an approved topic and defense of this thesis at an oral examination.

NOTE: If the supervisor of a Masters or Ph.D. student is unable to make the oral defense because of an emergency, then the defense must be postponed. If another member of the committee is unable to make the oral defense, the defense for a Masters or Ph.D. student may proceed as planned as long as a replacement member is found for the defense.

AUDITING OF COURSES – Grad students can audit grad courses but this should be done at the discretion of the supervisor. Grad students cannot “audit” undergrad courses (they can only register for credit of an undergrad course).

## 12.0 RESIDENCE

For full time Ph.D. students, completion of the degree is normally limited to four years. For part time Ph.D. students, the normal limit is eight years.

Except for the formal holiday periods specified in the Calendar (see *Sessional Dates*), all full time graduate students should be on campus (be geographically available and visit the campus regularly) while working toward their degree.

Periods of absence from campus during full time residence will not normally be allowed unless permission is granted by the supervisor, both the Director of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, after reviewing the student’s academic plan for the period of absence and after ensuring that the student’s teaching responsibilities are covered. There is an ‘Request to be Full-Time Off-Campus’ form that is on the Grad Studies website that must be used in these instances.

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources>

## 13.0 SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

The Graduate Committee of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences will ensure that every graduate student has a supervisor who is identified in the process of student admission. The selection of the supervisor is based on the suitability of the student, willingness of the faculty member to supervise the student, and the faculty member’s ability to provide financial and research support.

### 13.1 Doctoral Program

In accordance with the School of Graduate Studies regulations, supervision at the Ph.D. level is the responsibility of a supervisory committee consisting of:

At least three faculty members, including the supervisor, approved by the Director or Associate Director on behalf of the Graduate Committee of the School.

At least two members, including the supervisor, would be from academia, including adjunct professors.

The non-academia member(s) of the committee and those who are not from McMaster University would require approval from the School of Graduate Studies. The supervisor must submit a letter outlining why this person would be valuable to the student’s committee along with the person’s CV.

The supervisory committee is to be established within the first six months of the student's doctoral program and is to meet and report on student progress at least once on an annual basis. Report of the student's progress must be forwarded by the Director of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences to the School of Graduate Studies. This must be done on an annual basis (sometimes twice a year depending on the supervisor). This report can be found on the Grad website at:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources>

### 13.2 Adjunct Faculty Co-Supervisorship

The graduate student will have only one (1) supervisor responsible for the financial and other obligations toward the student (see Section 21.0: Responsibilities of the Supervisor). From time to time however, the nature of the students work entails significant contributions from researchers and faculty from other institutions. Under such circumstances, these individuals may be granted the status of co-supervisor. The status must be requested from the Director of the School, by the primary supervisor in consultation with the student. Granting of co-supervisor status in no way obligates the co-supervisor financially or in any other way toward the student. Further, the supervisor, in consultation with the supervisory committee (on which the co-supervisor sits), remains solely responsible and accountable for the financial and other obligations of the student including monitoring academic progress and ensuring completion of program requirements within the specified time period (as laid out in this Policies and Procedures document). All Ph.D. students will meet with their supervisory committees at a similar time as per School of Graduate Studies regulations. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that good progress has been made in course work and that research plans for the thesis project are in place.

Note: In exceptional circumstances, it is possible to change supervisors or the membership of a supervisory committee, although this is not the norm. If the direction of the research changes, membership of the supervisory committee may be changed. This requires mutual consent of the parties involved and approval by the Director or Associate Director on behalf of the Graduate Committee of the School. A change of supervisor must be approved by the Director on recommendation of the Graduate Committee, based on:

mutual consent of the student and the new supervisor

presentation of a plan of the new program including a research proposal and any additional course(s) to be taken

agreement by the new supervisor to take financial responsibilities for the student and his/her research

Students who are not satisfied with the conduct of their supervisory committee should discuss the matter with the Director or the Chair of the Graduate Committee of the School of Geography and Earth Sciences (see Appeal Procedure, section 17.0).

#### 14.0 A DOCTORAL MODEL TIMETABLE

NOTE: The following timeline assumes that students are constrained to undertake most research during the summer. Those whose research can be undertaken at other times of year may follow a slightly different timeline, especially in third year (This is only meant as a guideline. The timing of highlighted items is usually fixed.)

##### YEAR 1 (SEPTEMBER – AUGUST)

###### September – December

Coursework – The first 700\*- level course and possibly the second 700\* level grad course

TA duties

Application for external awards (OGS/NSERC/SSHRC/CIHR, etc.) (This is only meant as a guideline. The timing of highlighted items is usually fixed.)

###### January – April

Coursework: The second 700\*-level course and possible the third 700\* or a 600 level course (It is recommended that if an additional graduate course is taken then that should be done in this term)

###### January – February

The members of the student's supervisory committee should be determined meet no later than the end of February. (i.e. six months from beginning of program).

###### March – April

The supervisory committee should try to meet by April and before the busy research field season begins in May (May – August).

###### May – August

Preparation of draft reading list, through consultation between student and supervisor

Earth scientists: field season

###### July – September

Meeting of student with the examining committee for the comprehensive exam to approve the reading list and subfields

This meeting may happen earlier or later depending on when the student



will be completing the comprehensive exam.

NOTE: The comprehensive committee meeting is not the same as a supervisory committee meeting. The student must continue to have a yearly supervisory committee meeting.

## YEAR 2 (SEPTEMBER – AUGUST)

September – December

Discussions with supervisor regarding research proposal and setting TA duties

Application for external awards (OGS, NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR etc.)

November

At least 10 weeks from when the reading list for comps was finalized

Comprehensives: written exam

Two weeks earlier: submission of research proposal  
One week later: Oral defense of comprehensive exam

January

Meeting of supervisory committee. (Note: there is no fixed time when the supervisory committee should meet, but it is normally useful to do so soon after the comprehensive exam. Subsequent meetings must occur at least once a year.)

January – April

Preparation of research: e.g. further literature review survey instruments; etc.

May – August

Research / field season / lab work

## YEAR 3 (SEPTEMBER – AUGUST)

September – December

Application for external awards (OGS, NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR etc.)

October – December

Meeting of supervisory committee

September – April

Preliminary analysis of results. Write-up of as much as possible (literature review, methodology). With drafts submitted to supervisor. Possible preparation of a publishable paper.

May – August: Research/field season/lab work

## YEAR 4 (SEPTEMBER – AUGUST)

### September – December

Application for jobs/post docs. Meeting of supervisory committee. Completion of analysis. Write-up, with revisions, of most of dissertation, with chapters submitted for review to supervisor.

### January – February

Write-up, with revisions, of remainder of dissertation, with chapters submitted for review to supervisor.

### End of February

Submission of complete draft of dissertation to supervisory committee early March  
Submission of final draft of dissertation for oral examination

### May

Oral examination of dissertation (Note: The scheduling of oral examinations between June and August is often difficult. Those who hope to have employment that starts July 1 should keep within the timeline as indicated above. Those applying in their fourth year for a postdoctoral fellowship are advised to follow a timeline that is somewhat in advance of that indicated above.)

## 15.0 PREPARATION FOR A DOCTORAL DEFENSE

### 15.1 Ph.D. Thesis Defense

All Ph.D. defenses are conducted through the School of Graduate Studies. Ph.D. students can initiate the online defense process at the following website:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/doctoral-degree>

Information on the defense process along with the sessional dates which include the pre-defense and post-defense thesis submission deadlines for convocation dates can be found at the following website:

<http://gs.mcmaster.ca/resourcess>

NOTE: The Ph.D. defense presentation should be a maximum of 20 minutes in duration.

### 15.2 Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to determine the student's theoretical and methodological knowledge in the student's area of research and her/his preparedness to conduct doctoral level research. This examination will be completed between 12 and 20 months after beginning the Doctoral program (assuming full time status) including part time upgrades. It is expected that all

course work is completed by the time the student is writing the comprehensive examination.

The examination will consist of:

a written examination, an oral examination,  
a research proposal and reading list (which is also evaluated during the oral examination)

### 15.3 Comprehensive Examination Committee

The Comprehensive Examination Committee will consist of:

Chair (whose work is an unrelated field)

Supervisor

Three members from the SGES faculty. A maximum of one committee member can be from an outside academic or research institution.

The Graduate Committee will approve the Comprehensive Examination Committee.

### 15.4 Pre-examination Meeting

Normally, at least three months but in no case less than 10 weeks in advance of the intended date of writing the examination. The Examination Committee will have its first meeting with the student to:

- (i) Approve the field/subfields to be examined
- (ii) Review a proposed reading list and
- (iii) Schedule various components of the examination

Research Proposal Guidelines:

Due Dates – A first draft is due one week prior to the first meeting of the comprehensive examining committee. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that both the student and the examining committee have a clear idea of the nature and scope of the research that you are proposing to undertake, and therefore of the published research that is likely to be most relevant.

A final draft of the proposal is due two weeks before the written comprehensive exam. After completion of the oral exam the student has two weeks to submit a final version of proposal after consideration the input and feedback from the examining committee.

### 15.5 Reading List:

The reading list should be prepared in consultation with the supervisor. Candidate and examination committee members should make sure it covers broader understanding and knowledge of the subject. In the first meeting, examination committee members will provide their suggestions and feedback on the reading list. Reading list should include journal articles, books and book-chapters (one book chapter is equivalent to one journal article). Final reading list will be circulated to examination committee members for their approval.

NOTE: The final reading list should include approximately 100 articles and books/book-chapters, but is subject to the approval of the examination committee.

## 15.6 Written Examination Guidelines

The written examination will consist of eight questions of which the student will answer any four. The questions are derived from a pool of 15-20 questions submitted by committee members. It will be an open book examination to be written on campus in a room provided by the School within a single eight-hour period. Access to internet sources is prohibited during the written examination. Students are not allowed to use any text that they may have written or prepared prior to the exam on USB keys and/or other electronic storage devices, for example by ‘cutting-and-pasting’ text. However, candidates are allowed to bring paper/electronic copies (PDF format) of journal articles and books listed in their reading list to the examination room. The School will provide a computer and USB key. The student is expected to obtain the written examination, laptop, and USB key by 8:30 a.m. from the Schools’ main office and save and return their answers on the USB key provided to the Graduate Program Coordinator at/or before 4:30 p.m. before the closure of the main office at the end of the day (see below for additional guidelines). The Graduate Program Coordinator will then send an electronic copy of the answers to the Ph.D. Comprehensive Committee including the Chair and graduate student on the following day after the comprehensive exam has been written.

According to the handbook prepared by the School of Graduate Studies, the following ‘requirements’ and ‘suggestions’ provide general guidance. Fellow students, especially those who have recently taken the comprehensive exam may offer additional advice. If you require clarification, ask the Graduate Program Coordinator, or your supervisor, as appropriate.

- (i) **Timing:** The exam is approximately eight hours long (including set up time). Candidates are expected to hand in the USB key of their answers before the main office closes at 4:30 pm. The student should normally plan to start writing their exam at about 8:30 a.m., unless a different arrangement has been agreed upon with the Graduate Program Coordinator beforehand.
- (ii) **Length:** It should normally be possible to provide a perfectly satisfactory answer to each question in 1250 words. Concentrate on stating clearly your main points.

More is not necessarily better. For that reason, candidates must not write more than 2,000 words in answer to any question.

Less is not necessarily better. Answers that are shorter than 750 words per question are very likely to be inadequate.

Do not hand in any rough work, outlines, and so forth.

- (iii) **Format/Style:** Answers should be written in full; the use of point-form should be kept to a minimum.

- (iv) References, notes and prepared summaries: Although, in your written answer, you will usually need to refer by name to some authors/researchers (e.g. Black et al., 2007), and perhaps to specific publications (influential books or articles), there is no need to provide full citations to material that is on your comps, reading list at the end of your answers. If you refer to a specific item that is not on the reading list you may either provide the full citation at the end of your answer OR be prepared to identify the source later, during the oral.

Students are not allowed to use material that they have prepared prior to the exam, for the purposes of 'cutting-and-pasting'.

Candidates are discouraged from quoting at length the work of other researchers. (The use of key terms or phrases is of course acceptable.) Any quotation should be properly attributed.

- (v) Interaction with others: For the duration of the exam the candidate must not discuss (verbally, via e-mail, or in any other way) the content of the exam with any other person.
- (vi) Suggestions while writing the exam:

Give roughly equal time to each question.

Take at least 5 minutes to decide which questions you will answer.

Take at least 5 minutes to plan your answer to each question.

Take a break after each question, to stretch, think...

Although the examination is open-book, normally you should not need to consult any notes that you may have on specific readings.

#### 15.7 Research Proposal Guidelines:

- (i) Due Dates: A first draft is due one week prior to the first meeting of the comprehensive examining committee. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that both the student and the examining committee have a clear idea of the nature and scope of the research that you are proposing to undertake, and therefore, of the published research that is likely to be most relevant. It is important that the first four sections of the proposal (see below) be as fully developed as possible; sections 5 and 6 may be only briefly outlined.

A second draft of the fully developed proposal is due two weeks before the written comprehensive exam.

The candidate will incorporate feedback and comments given by the Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination Committee members in the final proposal and submit it to the School two weeks after the written comprehensive exam.

- (ii) Purpose: The purpose of a research proposal is to outline a feasible project that promises to make a significant, but necessarily limited, contribution to knowledge. It should clearly demonstrate the understanding and scope of the research plan. The writing of a good proposal takes time. It is, however, an invaluable way for you to:

Organize your thoughts in a systematic way.

Obtain feedback before committing extensive time and resources to your project.

- (iii) Elements of the proposal:

As far as is possible your proposal should:

Identify a viable research question (along with two or more specific objectives). There should always be a research question and usually several subsidiary questions. These may be framed as one or more research hypotheses.

Make it clear in what way(s) (intellectual and/or practical) the question is significant: why should we care about the results?

Identify the published work that is relevant to the proposed research, indicating how the proposed research will fill a gap, or otherwise add to this body of work. Do not cite every relevant piece of work; aim to cite all key works.

List the source(s) of evidence that will be used in order to answer this question. Discuss any foreseeable problems (of access, measurement, accuracy, bias, interpretation, etc.) and how you intend to address them.

Identify the methods that will be used to summarize and analyze those sources. The methods may be precise and quantitative (e.g. logistic regression), or qualitative (e.g. historical synthesis), or some combination.

Show/explain how the sources and methods will make it possible to answer the research question(s) and, if relevant, hypotheses.

Indicate a tentative time line, from the present to the anticipated date of defense.

Include a list of references. This should normally include 20-30 items.

The proposal may sometimes contain an appendix. If this is necessary it is most likely to contain detailed methodological material (e.g. a draft survey instrument). If you are in any doubt as to whether an appendix is required consult your supervisor.

- (iv) Structure: The structure of the proposal may vary somewhat but should normally conform to the following outline, where the approximate length of each section is indicated (assuming a proposal of 30 pages, double spaced, excluding any figures and appendices.)

Abstract (less than 1 page)

Introductory material: scope, general purpose, significance of proposed research (2 pages)

Specific objectives and contribution of proposed research (3 pages)

Review of key works (10 pages)

Sources and methods, including a discussion of the research location and expected problems (10 pages)

Timeline (1 page)

References (3-4 pages)

Appendix, safety sheet; figures/illustrations (optional – as necessary)

- (v) Length: 30 pages is suggested, double spaced and with a 12-point font size. Normally, proposals that are under 25 pages will contain insufficient information; those over 35 pages are likely to be too ambitious, too detailed, or to be too loosely organized.

- (vi) Preparation of the proposal: Start early. The first day of your enrolment in the graduate program is not too soon to start. At the latest you should begin to frame a short (2-page) proposal two months prior to your first supervisory committee meeting. The longer (30 page) proposal for the Ph.D. comprehensive exam should be begun soon after the year end review, and certainly no later than ten weeks prior to the comprehensive exam.

Share drafts of your proposal early and often. Trusted graduate student colleagues are often a useful source of input, especially those who are NOT working in the same field. The proposal should always be prepared in close and regular dialogue with your supervisor, other members of the supervisory committee may also comment on drafts of the proposal. It is normal for first drafts to receive substantial (and hopefully constructive!) criticism. You should seek out as much commentary as possible: it is better to locate problems now rather than in three years' time. Proposals commonly go through at least three fairly major revisions, and often more.

- (vii) Perfection and other uncertainties: The research proposal is no more than an important stage in the research process. It is signpost and sketch map of where you plan to go, pointing to a terra incognita. You cannot know all problems you will face, or exactly what you will discover. The members of your supervisory committee know this, and do not expect you to

have all the answers – yet! Try to make it clear in your proposal where there are significant uncertainties. Your committee is there to help you plan for, and if necessary, negotiate, any problems that might arise.

NOTE: It is recommended that students visit the NSERC and SSHRC website links:

[www.nserc-rsng.gc.ca](http://www.nserc-rsng.gc.ca)

[www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca)

## 15.8 Oral Examination

Within one week of the written examination, there will be an oral comprehensive examination in which the Committee will ask the student questions related to both the written examination questions and the proposal. The questioning period will last for a MAXIMUM of three hours. Approximately equal time will be spent on:

questions related to the field/subfields approved at the pre-examination meeting and the proposal.

The examining committee should meet at the start of the examination to confirm that they wish to spend equal time on these two parts. Should there be any change in the time allocation; the student must be informed at the start of the examination.

Comprehensive examination committee members who may belong to an external institution can participate in the oral examination through telecom or video link. However, in-person participation is preferred by the School.

At the conclusion of the oral comprehensive examination, the Committee will make one of the following two judgments by majority vote, taking into account the student's performance on the written and oral components separately

Pass; or

Fail

The decision is recorded and signed by the committee including the Chair, who then returns the forms back to the Graduate Program Coordinator.

In the event of failing the examination, the student has a single opportunity to repeat one or more components within a prescribed time period (not exceeding three months) or as determined by the Committee.



## INFORMATION REGARDING ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF MASTERS AND DOCTORAL THESIS TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Please note that the School of Graduate Studies degree requirements are considered complete when one electronic copy of the thesis, revised as directed by your defense examining committee, is submitted to the School of Graduate Studies through the E-Thesis Submission module in MacSphere.

The following forms must be completed and submitted with your thesis:

1. Final Thesis Submission Sheet – Masters and Ph.D. Thesis – this form will be initiated by the Chair of the Defense committee. The Chair of the Defense is required to initial the form and then hand it to the student. After all corrections/revisions have been made to the thesis, the student is required to obtain the signatures from the supervisory committee.
2. Copyright Permission Form (if applicable)
3. Library and Archives Canada Licence (Ph.D. only)
4. McMaster University Licence

Submit your electronic thesis online via MacSphere.

If you have any questions regarding the submission of your thesis, contact the Graduate Thesis Coordinator at extension 20834 or email: [gthesis@mcmaster.ca](mailto:gthesis@mcmaster.ca)

For more information about thesis submission please visit:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/academic-services/degree-completion>

### 16.0 THE GRADUATE COMMITTEE

The Graduate Committee will be responsible for the administrative oversight of the graduate programs of the School. It will meet at least monthly during the main academic terms (September – April) and as needed during the summer term. The Chair of the Committee will report on activities at the regular monthly meetings of the School. Minutes are taken and distributed to all graduate committee meeting members.

## 16.1 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference and membership of the Committee are:

To develop and implement effective methods of graduate student recruitment.

To evaluate applications for admission to the graduate programs and make recommendations for admission.

To annually review the graduate curriculum and calendar and make recommendations for revision.

To review graduate students progress; to schedule Masters defenses and Ph.D. comprehensive examinations; to make recommendations on scholarships.

To set up committees to review student upgrades from Masters to the Doctoral program.

To review as needed, policies and procedures pertaining to the review of graduate student progress.

To liaise with the School of Graduate Studies and other graduate programs on issues affecting the graduate programs of the School.

To deal with other issues as they arise affecting the effective operation of the graduate programs.

## 16.2 Committee Membership

The Director or Associate Director of the School (Chair)

Four Members of SGEs Faculty appointed by the Director to reflect the fields of specialization, and to represent a balance between Human Geography and Earth and Environmental Sciences sides of the school.

Three graduate representatives to represent a balance between Human Geography and Earth and Environmental Sciences sides of the school (for example: 1 Human Geography, 1 Physical Geography and 1 Geology) nominated from the graduate student body.

Graduate Program Coordinator will provide administrative support as needed.

NOTE: Student members of the Graduate Committee will not evaluate graduate admission, applications and scholarship ranking. However, their input may be sought on individual cases as advised by the committee.

## 17.0 APPEAL PROCEDURE

Students have a right to a fair and equitable procedure for lodging complaints arising out of University regulations, policies and actions that might affect them directly. The Graduate Calendar describes avenues of appeal (Section 6.3). The student should consult with the Chair of his/her Supervisory Committee or, the Chair of the Schools' Graduate Committee or the Director of the School or the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies before seeking a formal review of any allegation of injustice.

## 18.0 NORMAL COMPLETION TIMES

The expected duration of a Masters program is six terms (2 years) and for a Doctoral program it is twelve terms (4 years). The suggested courses of study and normal financial support are based on this expectation.

## 19.0 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The School will provide financial support from the University to full-time students through a combination of teaching and/or research assistantship through student's supervisor and a graduate scholarship. Holders of prestigious external scholarships (e.g., NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR and OGS) will not be offered a graduate scholarship, however, because of the external scholarship, will normally receive more funding.

After paying tuition and all other fees, graduate students receive funding towards living expenses.

For more information you can view current tuition and incidental fees listed at:

[http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/pdf/fees\\_grad/pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/pdf/fees_grad/pdf)

### 19.1 Teaching and Research Assistantships

The terms and conditions of Teaching Assistantships are governed by the union contract. The School will offer a full teaching assistantship (or at the Schools' discretion, its financial equivalent through a research assistantship/RA in Lieu) to full time students for a maximum of four terms within the first six terms of a Masters program and for a maximum of eight terms within the first twelve terms for Doctoral programs.

In instances where the student is not prepared or the School is uncertain of a potential student's teaching ability, the School may share the cost of a research assistantship with the supervisor until the uncertainty is resolved.

The rationale for this policy is threefold: to ensure continuity of salary (and benefits) to students to offset the real and increasing costs of the graduate program; to ensure adequate teaching support for the undergraduate programs; and to provide students with the opportunity for extensive and varied teaching experience in the interests of their career development.

NOTE: As part of your Teaching Assistantship you will be scheduled to attend a paid training session in September. The training session will provide you with helpful information addressing topics relevant to your role of being employed as a Teaching Assistant. Please note that this training session is part of the TA (i.e. employment, not student) role.

NOTE: Grad students are employed for a total of 260 hours as a TA (or RA in lieu of TA hours) in an academic year. Grad students can also work extra hours on campus but can not exceed a total of 505 per academic year. If the student is close to 505 hours than the student will have to decide if they want to continue as a part time student or give up their current employment.

## 19.2 Scholarship Support

Students without external scholarships will be offered an annual graduate scholarship. Funds for graduate scholarship support come from two sources: from university funds through the School of Graduate Studies and from contribution by supervisors. The policy of the School to combine the funds from these two sources to meet the amount required to provide a scholarship for six terms to a Masters student and for twelve terms to a Ph.D. student. The amount of the scholarship, revised on a yearly basis, is determined by the School.

NOTE: All students are required to apply for all scholarships for which they are eligible!

## 19.3 Graduate Scholarships

Graduate students are encouraged to enquire about scholarships (in their first term of study) and what is available to them in their area of study/research. Achieving a scholarship is a great source of financial support and reflects well on the student both academically and professionally!

The most common external scholarships are: NSERC, SHHRC, CIHR and OGS.

For a description of all available graduate scholarships please visit:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/awards-funding>

## 20.0 FACILITIES

The School will provide certain facilities for graduate students within the expected time limits and may provide them for students beyond those limits at the discretion of the Director. These facilities include space (subject to university norms), and access to internet and telephone services if the student is located in the Schools graduate rooms (these facilities for students located in their supervisors' research space are provided by the supervisor).

The School has lounges in BSB-322/330. There is also a little kitchen located at the west end of the hall on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of GSB.

You may see the staff in the main office, GSB-206 or send an email to [sges@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sges@mcmaster.ca) to book a meeting room, data projector or laptop.

There are photocopiers in GSB-206 and BSB-330. To use the photocopiers you must be set up with a number code. Please also email [sges@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sges@mcmaster.ca) to request a copy code.

NOTE: The McMaster Weather Station web site is:

<http://geomedia.mcmaster.ca/muws/weatherstation.html>

## 21.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPERVISOR

The Supervisor provides funding for RA'ships and other support responsibilities beyond contribution towards the scholarship amount for full time graduate students. Part time graduate students are not normally offered financial support. These additional obligations include but may not be limited to:

### 21.1 Research Support

Research support will typically consist of providing appropriate research infrastructure which may include laboratory space and equipment, field work and equipment or archival data or access, and meeting the thesis and dissertations project costs for data collection and analysis. These costs include the cost of necessary computing facilities. These costs will ordinarily be met from the supervisor's research grants.

### 21.2 Conference Support

Conference support is mutually agreed between the student and the supervisor. Limited funding is also available on a competitive basis from the Graduate Students Association (GSA) and the School of Graduate Studies. The School may from time to time offer limited support.

## 22.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GRADUATE STUDENT

Following is a list of the main responsibilities that graduate students have in relation to their supervisor, their supervisory committee, and to the School in general. There may also be other responsibilities associated with employment as a Teaching or Research Assistant.

Try to communicate well...

Do not hand in work (term papers, draft thesis chapters) that are incomplete, poorly-written, or inadequately referenced. Supervisory committee members should be able to concentrate on the content of what you are saying and not be distracted or confused by poor writing style. If your English is poor, seek assistance.

Effective communication is even more a responsibility that you have to yourself, and your research, than it is to your supervisor.

... and often:

Keep your supervisor up to date about the progress of your work and any potential problems. If he/she does not set regular meeting times, make sure that you check in (in-person or via email) at least every two or three weeks. (It is usually a good idea to set up a time in advance rather than just dropping by, though this varies by supervisor!). If you have an academic question or problem, speak to the appropriate person (often your supervisor.) Don't let it fester. If you know that you are going to be giving your supervisor some work to do, whether minor (a letter of reference) or major (commenting on a research proposal or draft chapter) give him/her plenty of time to accomplish this task. Supervisors are responsible for providing students with timely feedback, but their other responsibilities (teaching, service and attendance of conferences, etc.) may make this difficult. Give them plenty of advance warning. Good communication is an important skill to have!!!

Show initiative....

You may, or may not, be working closely on a research project with your supervisor, but there is always the opportunity for you to show initiative. Think whether there is other data that you might obtain and use, whether there is another way of using the evidence that you have. Keep monitoring what is being published in your field, and keep up to date with the research aids that are available. Watch for upcoming conferences, and possible funding sources. In the end, it is only you that writes your thesis/dissertation, and only you that can make your career. Both depend on your willingness to take initiative.

Be tenacious....

To complete a major piece of research involves one-tenth inspiration and nine-tenths perspiration. It will take a long time, involve some boring tasks, and may lead to several periods of frustration. To complete a masters thesis or doctoral dissertation you do not have to be brilliant (though it helps); but you must be persistent. On the days that you feel uninspired, do a routine task that you have been postponing. But do something!

Create, and follow, a structure/ routine to your work....

Depending on their other responsibilities, the life of a graduate student is relatively unstructured. Senior academics and professional writers know that in order to get their work done they need to establish, and stick, to a workable routine. It does not matter what the routine is: some people are night owls, others are up before dawn. Your responsibility is to find a routine that works for you, and to stick to it: act as if you had a full 40 hour/week job. Work steadily, not in short bursts. Set realistic deadlines for yourself; don't depend on your supervisor to set deadlines, but respect the ones that are set. Don't leave tasks until the last minute!

Participate in the life of the Department (a.k.a. School)...

You should be involved in the activities of the department, whether formal or informal, whether academic (e.g. seminars), professional (e.g. being a rep. on committees) or social (e.g. Christmas party, sports teams). This is both a responsibility, in the sense that it gives something back to your colleagues, and also

a privilege, in that it broadens your professional experience in ways that should be useful in the future working world.

Stay sane....

For the most part, act as if you had only a 40 hour/week job. Even when preparing for your comprehensive exams and perhaps especially then take time out. Your research is important but it's only one aspect of your life. You will work better, and certainly more efficiently, if you participate in the life of the department and take regular breaks. You will also be better prepared for those times when you will need to work more than 40 hours in a week to deal with an unforeseen issue.

Be constructively critical....

You are being trained to be a critical thinker. It would be unnatural if you did not turn your critical abilities upon the School, your supervisory committee, and (even!) your supervisor. Indeed, you may regard it as your responsibility to offer constructively critical comments, for example by pointing to a flawed argument, or by suggesting how a research design might be improved. You will need to exercise judgment in deciding how, and how frequently, to offer such suggestions, but it is a judgment that should be exercised.

## 23.0 VISITING GRADUATE STUDENTS

These individuals are currently registered in a graduate degree program in another university, and who have made arrangements through both their home university and a graduate program at McMaster to spend some time at McMaster as part of their degree program at the home university. They are not (and will not be) enrolled in a degree program at McMaster. They may be at McMaster to take particular courses, or they may be here to engage in research relevant for their degree under the supervision of a McMaster faculty member. Visiting students pay no tuition, and a special rate of supplemental fees. These students are required to visit the Grad Studies office (GH 212) on their arrival and present their proof of ID (passport) and proof of enrollment at their home institution. Students who stay longer than six months are required to present a valid permit on their arrival at the Grad Studies office and confirm their length of stay.

If the stay extends more than one academic year, then the student will be required to complete enrollment and pay fees for all academic years covering their stay.

If the visiting student decides to take any course, they will be required to pay tuition on the same basis as post degree students.

For more information please refer to section 2.1.10 of the Graduate Calendar.

Through the School of Graduate Studies: please ask the student to initiate an on-line application at:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/academic-services/how-apply>

We require the student to provide supporting documentation for our student file (transcripts, letters of reference and a statement of research interest) as with other applicants. To facilitate the process, we would be open to receiving scanned copies of the information electronically via email, on the understanding that original transcripts and documentation would be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies upon the student's arrival. The graduate program would then issue a recommendation for admission (visit) on line. Once the signed 'Recommendation for Admission' form, accompanied by the supporting information is received at the School of Graduate Studies, a formal offer of admission will be prepared for the student to present to the embassy officials in order to secure a Study Permit (not required if the student is registered for less than 6 months), however the student will already have received the letter of invitation from the Director of the School. The student is assigned a student number and barcode and the student's information is uploaded on the University Person system at the University. We will have the student registered online using the Mosaic PeopleSoft system and clear fees through the online payment agreement form. Once fully registered, the student will receive an ID card from grad studies on the understanding that the student has presented his/her valid Study Permit to SGS (upon arrival at McMaster). Both UHIP fees and incidental fees will be assessed (from September 1<sup>st</sup> through to December 31<sup>st</sup>). The School of Graduate Studies will waive all tuition fees for this Visiting Student (provided that he/she is not taking any courses).

#### 24.0 HELPFUL THINGS TO KNOW AND REMEMBER

1. If and when you are looking for forms (i.e. – request to be full-time off campus, special permission etc.) please go to:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/resources>

2. Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) which offers various supports for students with disabilities. SAS assists full time and part time students with academic and disability-related needs. Please go to the SAS website for more information: <http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>

3. Travel Expenses:

Field work and conference attendance is part of the grad student experience. It is important that the graduate student learn the process of travel reimbursement in order to get covered for travel expenses. The staff in GSB 206 can answer student questions about travel policies and procedures. For more information, please visit:

[http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/BMS\\_PR\\_Travel\\_Info.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/BMS_PR_Travel_Info.htm)



4. For more detailed and updated information on all graduate student matters please visit:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/>

5. All new and current grad TA's and RA's in Lieu must complete the Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) forms. This is MANDATORY and must be done each term:

<http://jhaweb.mcmaster.ca/>

Please consult with your supervisor to identify which forms and training you need to review and complete.

Mandatory training and testing is only done once online through Avenue to Learn and is offered through EOHSS.

Training Website: <http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/training/matrix/>

Mandatory training is listed here:

Asbestos Awareness  
Slips, Trips and Falls  
Ergonomics  
Fire Safety  
WHMIS Office (or WHMIS Core-Lab Training)  
Health and Safety Orientation

And any other courses identified by your review of the Job Hazard Analysis forms.

It is important to note there are several informational seminars and workshops available to all graduate students on campus through the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and the McMaster Institute for Innovation & Excellence in Teaching & Learning (MacPherson Institute, formerly MIETL). SGES graduate students are encouraged to attend these seminars and workshops:

<https://graduate.mcmaster.ca/>

Yearly graduate events include:

Research Week Seminars  
Careers Job Fair  
IMPROV-ing Your Presentation Skills  
Thesis Information Session  
Thesis Writing Workshop and Circle  
Research Skills Workshop

Leadership and Teamwork Skills  
McMaster 3 Minutes-3MT competition

<https://mi.mcmaster.ca>

MIETL events include:

Active Learning Strategies Graduate  
Student Day for teaching assistants  
Building a Teacher Dossier  
Accessibility and Teaching at McMaster

6. All graduate students should refer to their CUPE Collective Agreement found here at:

<http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/elrlcollective-agreements/cupe-unit1/>

## 25.0 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Is there a deadline for graduate application?

A. January 15<sup>th</sup> is the normal annual deadline (although this can be changed when needed). Under special circumstances we will consider applications from students after the deadline. Given that we have a limited number of resources (TA positions, entrance awards, etc. to allocate to incoming students, please know that a prompt submission of applications will increase the likelihood of a successful application).

Q. I would like to apply to your program, where can I obtain the application?

A. The on- line application may be found at:

<https://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/graduate/prospective-graduate-students.html>

Q. Where do I send all the supporting documents to my application?

A. McMaster University  
Graduate Chair  
School of Geography and Earth Sciences  
General Science Building, Room 206  
1280 Main Street West  
Hamilton, ON, Canada  
L8S 4L8

Q. Do I need to have a faculty supervisor?

A. Each applicant should seek a faculty member who agrees to assume advisory responsibilities for the applicant. The best way to find a supervisor is to contact the departmental faculty member directly via email. Please refer to our website for more information about faculty areas of research:

<http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/people/faculty.html>

By opening a dialogue with a potential supervisor the applicant and the potential supervisor can find out more about one another and work towards a fit with the student's wishes and the faculty member's research profile in mind. No applicant is offered admission until a faculty member agrees to supervise him or her.

Q. What are the minimum admission requirements?

A. In accordance with the School of Graduate Studies calendar, we require a minimum of average of a B+ (9.0) standing, or equivalent, in your previous studies. For those considering the MSc/MA program, please note that we also pay particular attention to your last two years of undergraduate marks.

Q. What is the Statement of Interest?

A. A one to two page summary describing the area of geography, earth sciences in which you wish to study. S G E S also asks that you include a resume/CV with your supporting documents. Please note though that a statement of interest is not your resume/CV.

Q. What are your School's fields of research?

A. Graduate training offered by the School of Geography and Earth Sciences offers several areas of research which can be found at the following website:

<http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/research.html>

Q. Is there any financial aid?

A. Yes, students accepted to our program are guaranteed an annual salary which is included in the offer of admission letter provided by Graduate Studies.

For further information regarding external awards for outstanding students, please look through the graduate calendar and at the websites for NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR. For information on internal awards, please also visit the website for the School of Graduate Studies:

<http://gs.mcmaster.ca/awards-funding>

Q. How many applicants do you accept each year?

A. This number varies each year dependent on how many first class applications we receive, which research areas are looking to expand, which research teams are already at full complement, how many of the current and prospective students have external funding and the degree of research funding the various faculty members have been awarded. (approximately ¼ of our applicant pool)

Q. How long is the M.A./M.Sc. program?

A. Expected completion for MA and MSc students is two years. Masters students are guaranteed salary support for up to two years

Q. How long is the Ph.D. program?

A. Expected completion for Ph.D. students is four years. Doctoral students are guaranteed salary support up to four years.

Q. What are the tuition fees?

A. Tuition fees for the most current academic year may be found at:

[http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/SAC\\_fees\\_grad.html](http://www.mcmaster.ca/bms/student/SAC_fees_grad.html)

Q. Do you have additional scholarships?

A. Applicants and current grad students are encouraged to apply for external scholarship funding, such as the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR external scholarships. Students must apply for an OGS award at the institution where they intend to hold it. Each University will have its own process and due dates.

Additional Information:

\*Applicants are urged to declare any disabilities, as well as to provide details concerning accommodations provided by their previous education institutions at the time of application. Such declaration is encouraged particularly in cases where it is felt that the disability may have affected past academic performance, and/or where accommodation may be required in order for the student to be successful in his/her graduate program. The School of Graduate Studies policy with regard to students with disabilities may be found in section 6.5 of the School of Graduate Studies calendar. The full policy and further information may be obtained from the School of Graduate Studies. Please also refer to the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) website: <http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>

NOTE: All students interested in applying for admission in M.Sc., M.A. or Ph.D. programs offered by the School of Geography and Earth Sciences, must first contact faculty members relevant to their research interests. We suggest that the potential student submit a formal application using the on-line system, when a faculty member is willing to supervise the applicant and the faculty member has informed the School about it.

We encourage you to provide a resume/CV or a list on a separate page of any research.

If you would like more information about our graduate programs, contact our Graduate Program Assistant: Salomé Santos-Blaguski at: [geograd@mcmaster.ca](mailto:geograd@mcmaster.ca)

For further Graduate level admission and general information, please visit the School of Graduate Studies website at: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/>

**NOTES:**