

# GEOGRAPHY, PH.D.

## Overview

The Department of Geography at the University of Alabama offers the PhD program in Geography with four areas of study: 1) Earth system science; 2) Environment and natural resources; 3) Environment and society; and 4) Geographic information science.

## Admissions

Admission into the PhD program normally requires an MS/MA degree in geography, environmental science, or a related discipline, sufficient GPA and GRE scores, three letters of recommendation, a clear statement of purpose that identifies the potential advisor and outlines why the student wishes to earn a PhD and why our program is the proper fit, and a resume or curriculum vitae. The GPA in graduate coursework should be substantially higher than the 3.0 minimum. A student must also have the approval to work with a departmental member of the graduate faculty as their program advisor. Students are not admitted without the consent of a member of the graduate faculty.

The Department of Geography at The University of Alabama offers the PhD program in Geography with four areas of study: 1) Earth system science; 2) Environment and natural resources; 3) Environment and society; and 4) Geographic information science. The first step in the application process is to identify a member of the faculty who shares your research interests and is willing to serve as your potential advisor. In addition to the Graduate School's required application materials, applicants need to submit additional materials on the following Geography Application Checklist:

1. *Curriculum Vitae (CV)/Resume.*
2. Three letters of recommendation, which discuss and evaluate the student's writing skills, analytical abilities, and potential to excel at graduate studies and research.
3. Academic/professional writing samples. These may include published research papers, conference papers, research or applied project reports, term papers, and completed Master's thesis.
4. A statement of purpose. In the statement of purpose section (up to 2 pages), applicants should explain clearly and cogently: i) why you wish to earn the PhD and what are your academic and career goals, ii) why our department is a good fit for you, iii) which faculty member has agreed to serve as your advisor, iv) what experiences and background do you have that will help you succeed in graduate studies. Note that no students will be admitted, without a potential advisor from our faculty.
5. A research plan. For the research plan section, applicants should develop a tentative research proposal/plan up to 4 pages total length. The following is a list of suggested elements to include: a title, research background (brief literature review), research gaps being addressed and/or research questions/hypotheses being posed, a general description of methodological approach(es), and some description of why the research is important and/or its implications. Note that the purpose of the research plan is to evaluate the applicant's research potential. After admission to our graduate program, students may consult with the advisor to modify, improve, or completely change the research plan.
6. GRE scores are not required by our graduate program. Submission of GRE scores is optional.

Admission with permission to continue to the PhD program is not permitted.

See the Admission Criteria section of this catalog for more information.

## Curricular Requirements

The PhD program requires a minimum 48 hours of non-dissertation coursework beyond the BS/BA, which may include up to 24 credit hours of approved graduate-level coursework transferred from a Master's program and a maximum of 12 credit hours of non-thesis or non-dissertation research.

Required courses include: 1) GY 500 Research Traditions Meth In Gy, 2) GY 523 Quantitative Methods, 3) two graduate-level geospatial techniques courses, 4) a minimum of 9 hours of 600-level seminar courses, and 5) a minimum of 24 hours of dissertation research (GY 699).

Code and Title	Hours
<b>Required Courses</b>	
GY 500      Research Traditions Meth In Gy	3
GY 523      Quantitative Methods	3
<b>Spatial Techniques</b>	
Electives	36
<b>Dissertation Research</b>	
Total Hours	72

## Transfer Credit

Up to 24 hours of credit of the required coursework may be transferred from another institution. Only courses in which a student earned a "B" grade or better may be transferred. For detailed credit transfer information, please refer to Graduate School transfer policies.

## Doctoral Plan of Study Requirement

At the start of the first semester, the student must confer with the departmental advisor to select courses and discuss a research plan. Then, a Plan of Study must be prepared and submitted to the Graduate School by the time the student has completed the second semester. The Plan of Study should be prepared in consultation with the advisor, and reviewed and approved by the graduate program director. The Plan of Study may include prior coursework necessary to strengthen a student's ability to complete their program. The PhD Plan of Study will be submitted by the department through the UA DocuSign system in myBama. A copy of the approved Plan of Study must be submitted to the Graduate School when the department submits the Admission to Candidacy for Doctoral Degree form through the UA DocuSign system in myBama.

The student may request the Graduate Program Director's assistance in the assignment or change in assignment of a program advisor. If a program advisor reassignment is not approved, the graduate student may be terminated from the program.

## Comprehensive Exams

A comprehensive qualifying examination is required of all doctoral candidates. The purpose of the examinations is to determine students' preparation and competence for independent dissertation research in the field. Students should pass candidacy examinations for admission to doctoral candidacy by the end of the fifth semester in residence (not

including summer), and at least nine months before the degree is to be awarded.

The comprehensive exam consists of the written exam and the oral exam. The written exam typically includes two parts: Part A and Part B. Part A consist of a series of questions about broad and foundational aspects of the discipline of geography, which may include history, philosophy, theory, methods, and techniques. Part B includes questions directly related to individual students' subfield and specific topics of the intended dissertation research. Questions for the exams are submitted by a candidacy committee, which will consist of the geography faculty members of the student's doctoral dissertation committee. The candidacy committee may choose to include questions from external committee members, although external member participation is not required for comprehensive exam. Although the format and content of the exam is at the discretion of the candidacy committee, the typical exam will be open-book, occurring within a week (e.g. from Monday to Friday). Subsequent to the written exam, the student must also successfully pass an oral exam given by the candidacy committee on the student's program of study and related areas. The oral exam may be conducted in conjunction with the dissertation proposal defense.

A student may take the oral or written examination only twice. Failing the examination twice results in dismissal from the degree program and the Graduate School.

## **Admission to Candidacy Requirements**

Admission to Graduate School does not imply a student's candidacy for a PhD degree. The requirements for advancing to candidacy include: 1) completion of all coursework as listed on the approved program of study; 2) passing the comprehensive qualifying examination; 3) passing the dissertation proposal defense; and 4) having the dissertation committee's recommendation for Admission to Candidacy to continue work toward the completion of the Doctoral Degree. The completed candidacy form must be submitted to the Graduate School well in advance of the final semester.

## **Continuous Enrollment Policy**

Once a student has met the requirements for admission to candidacy, the student must pursue completion of the dissertation without interruption by enrolling each fall and spring semester of the academic year. PhD students are required to register for a minimum of 3 hours each semester. The only time summer registration is required for dissertation research is when a doctoral student is graduating in August or defending the dissertation during the summer semester.

For more detailed information, please refer to Graduate School continuous enrollment policy.

## **Dissertation Requirements**

### **1) Dissertation Committee**

The dissertation committee supervises the preparation of the dissertation and should be established by the end of the first semester in residence. The student's dissertation committee must consist of a minimum of five members, and all members of the dissertation committee must hold Graduate Faculty status at The University of Alabama and must represent at least two academic departments. The committee will be chaired by the student's advisor. It is expected that the relationship with the advisor will be one of apprenticeship, as the student moves toward a mastery of the craft of original research and publication, while gaining familiarity with the role of a colleague. The majority of the committee must be faculty within the department. For a 5-member committee,

it usually includes three faculty members from the UA Department of Geography, and two external members. The external member(s) can be from another UA department, or someone not affiliated with UA. The external member(s) must be listed as UA graduate faculty. The dissertation committee must be approved by the UA Graduate School Dean and any changes after the committee has been approved will require a change of committee form to be approved by the UA Graduate School Dean.

### **2) Dissertation Proposal**

By the end of the sixth semester in residence (not including summer), the student must publicly defend the dissertation research proposal. The dissertation proposal aims to show the appropriateness, manageability, and significance of the proposed research project. The student must publicly present the proposal and then defend it in a meeting with the dissertation committee. A successful pass is indicated by the majority vote of the dissertation committee. The student has two chances to successfully defend the proposal. The student who fails to pass the proposal defense on the second attempt will be expelled from the program.

### **3) Dissertation Style and Requirements**

A dissertation shows the ability to conduct independent research and skill in organization, writing, and presentation. It must constitute an original contribution to the knowledge in the major field. The dissertation can be either in traditional or article style. Both traditional and article-style dissertations must comply with the guidelines in A Student Guide to Preparing Electronic Theses and Dissertations. The dissertation deadlines for each semester are available at the Graduate School's homepage.

#### **Traditional style dissertation**

A traditional dissertation is a coherent document that provides a complete and systematic account of a research topic based on original research. Most dissertations include necessary background information to contextualize the research, a statement of the research problem/hypothesis or research focus, the methods and procedures used in exploring the phenomenon under study, the results/outcomes of the study, and interpretation and/or discussion of the study's outcomes. Although not all dissertations are structured exactly the same, a traditional dissertation typically contains chapters: Introduction, Review of Literature, Methodology (Research Design & Methods), Presentation of Research (Results, Summary, Discussion), Conclusions (Implications).

#### **Article-style dissertation**

This style of dissertation typically consists of 3 or more manuscripts or articles that must be based upon independent research or creative activities completed while the student is enrolled at The University of Alabama. For each article, the student must be the first author, or equivalent, as defined by the discipline.

As with traditional dissertations, the article-style dissertation must be the student's original idea and work. The articles included in the dissertation must be in a publishable quality around a cohesive theme. To demonstrate the student's in-depth understanding of the unifying framework for the articles, an introductory chapter or section should be included to review the relevant literature and to describe these articles, show how they are related, and explain their significances. The article-style dissertation should also include a conclusions chapter/section that highlights the importance of the studies, integrates the major findings, and discusses the implications for the overall topic.

### **4) Dissertation Defense**

When the dissertation has been completed, the PhD student must publicly defend the dissertation. The final oral dissertation defense is the culminating experience in the doctoral program. A draft of the dissertation should be provided to all members of the dissertation committee at least two weeks prior to the date of the defense. Once the dissertation committee has agreed that the student is prepared for the final oral dissertation defense, the student and committee members will set the defense date. Notice of the dissertation defense must be given to the department two weeks prior to the defense date. The defense should be advertised with posted flyers and emails to the department faculty, staff, and students with the date, time, and location of the event. All members of the dissertation committee are expected to attend and participate in real time. Virtual attendance via interactive video or teleconference is permitted for off-campus external committee members, but the student and Tuscaloosa campus faculty should attend in person unless extraordinary circumstances dictate the need for virtual attendance. In circumstances where virtual participation is necessary, real-time and fully interactive audio and visual communication capability must be included, and all participants must follow the Virtual Participation guidelines of the Graduate School.

A successful pass in defense is met by the majority vote of the dissertation committee to approve the written dissertation and defense. The defense result must be reported through the Committee Acceptance Form (CAF) signed by all committee members, department chairperson, and graduate dean. The CAF must be submitted through the UA DocuSign system in myBama to the Office of the Graduate School.

## **Time Limits for Degree Completion Requirements**

Typically, students are expected to complete all requirements for the PhD within three to five years following admission to the doctoral program. The maximum time limit for the doctoral degree is nine years, as indicated by the graduate school's information about time limits for degree completion.

Each candidate for a doctoral degree must submit an Application for Degree via myBama no later than the last day to register or add a course for the semester (or first term of the summer semester) in which requirements for the degree are to be completed. That specific date is published each semester at the Graduate School's website under Current Students/Deadlines for Graduate Students.

## **Student Progress Requirements**

Students need to submit an annual progress report at the end of the Spring semester. The annual report covers the student's progress in coursework, comprehensive exam, dissertation progress, publications, and other research activities (fieldwork, conferences). The annual report will be reviewed by the student's advisor and the Graduate Program Committee. A student can be dismissed for lack of satisfactory progress or terminated for the department funding.

## **Academic Misconduct Information**

Academic misconduct, including cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication of information, will be handled by following the Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy.

## **Withdrawals and Leave of Absence Information**

If a graduate student desires to withdraw from a course or from the university (i.e., withdraw from all courses in the semester), either for non-

medical or medical reasons, the student is encouraged to consult with his or her academic advisor and the department head. It is the student's responsibility to review the UA Academic Calendar for the specific date by which one may drop a course. Under compelling circumstances beyond the student's control, a graduate student may request that the department petition the Graduate School with the rationale for granting a leave of absence. The written request must be approved (signed) by the advisor and Graduate Studies Director and placed in the student's file. The student is not guaranteed funding upon their return to the program.

More detailed information about withdrawals and leave of absence.

## **Academic Grievances Information**

Information about academic grievances.

## **Scholastic Requirements**

All graduate students must earn and maintain an overall graduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better for all graduate courses undertaken at The University of Alabama. Students who have received an academic warning with a GPA below 3.0 may not hold graduate assistantships.

Information about Scholastic Requirements.

## **Graduate School Deadlines Information**

It is the student's responsibility to regularly check Graduate School deadlines.

## **Application for Graduation Information**

Information about application for graduation.