

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

DEPARTMENT OF GEOSCIENCES AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Revised October 2025

PREFACE

The purpose of this manual is to provide MS and PhD students in the Department of Geosciences with information on departmental procedures, policies, requirements, and expectations. This manual is distributed and reviewed during new student orientation. However, it is intended to serve all graduate students throughout their residency at Auburn and, hence, should be kept at hand. Students are responsible for knowing all the information herein and should periodically refer to pertinent sections as they progress through their graduate programs. Additionally, students should refer to this manual prior to contacting the Graduate Program Officer (Dr. Gottardi) or their advisors with program – or expectation-related questions.

Any changes in policy or regulations will be distributed by memoranda to students and faculty. Students should file pertinent memoranda in this manual for future reference. This manual is not meant to supplant or supersede other sources of information published by the University or the Graduate School. Graduate students are responsible for knowing general Graduate School and University regulations as outlined in the current Auburn University Bulletin and the Policy Website (<https://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/>). Additional useful information can be found on the Graduate School web site at <https://graduate.auburn.edu/>.

The graduate student handbook was originally prepared by Charles E. Savrda, Professor Emeritus and developed by Dr. Ashraf Uddin. We thank Dr. Robert A. Gastaldo, a former faculty member and GPO, whose earlier notes, memoranda, and orientation materials provided fodder for this student guide, and Drs. Robert B. Cook and Ming-Kuo Lee for editorial comments and suggestions. Comments and suggestions for the Geography and Environmental Studies component of the handbook have been contributed by Dr. Phil Chaney and former faculty members Drs. Toni Alexander and Josh Inwood. Ms. Ashleigh Rudd provided the on-boarding section of the handbook. Mr. Anthony Hall provided updates on some contents of the handbook. Haylie Mikulak, PhD candidate and G-SEAC graduate assistant conducted thorough review and update of the manual. Dr. Richard Vachula provided important feedback. Critical comments and suggestions for manual improvement from both students and faculty are welcomed.

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USEFUL LINKS

Auburn University Bulletin

<http://bulletin.auburn.edu>

Graduate School Policies

<https://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/other/>

Department of Geosciences Homepage

<https://www.auburn.edu/cosam/departments/geosciences/index.htm>

Department of Geosciences Graduate Programs

https://www.auburn.edu/cosam/departments/geosciences/graduate_programs/index.htm

Doctoral Completion Checklist

<http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/doctoral-completion-checklist/>

Master's Completion Checklist

<http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/masters-completion-checklist/>

University Counseling Services

<http://wp.auburn.edu/scs/>

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I. REGISTERING FOR CLASSES

A. New Graduate Students

Incoming students should meet with their thesis/dissertation advisors to design a class schedule for their first semester. Students admitted without a thesis/dissertation advisor should consult the GPO (Dr. Gottardi, gottardi@auburn.edu, BEMC 2052). Course registration is done through “AU Access/My Academics/Add or Drop Classes” (<https://auaccess.auburn.edu/>). A typical first semester course load for graduate students is three graduate courses.

Use your student username and password to log in to AU Access. They are found on the acceptance letter you received from the Graduate School. If you have misplaced your letter, or cannot log on, please go to the Graduate School (106 Hargis Hall) and ask for assistance. There is an instruction link on aid to register at: <http://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/registration/>

If for some reason you do not or cannot obtain your Banner Username and/or Password, contact Ms. Ashleigh Rudd (334-844-4335; apr0022@auburn.edu) of the Department of Geosciences to have her register you for your initial classes and ask her to forward the necessary schedule information to you. New students must register before the end of the final registration period, which is usually the first day of classes. Registration will not be possible if new applicants have not supplied the AU Medical Clinic (844-4416) with the required medical documents. Additionally, registration holds may be placed on students if they have not provided final academic transcripts from previous institutions. For information on Billing and Fees, see section I.E. below.

B. Continuing Graduate Students

All continuing graduate students must register for every semester during which they are actively pursuing their MS and PhD degrees. Registration for all semesters is done online; students must register during the appropriate pre-registration period. The pre-registration period for graduate students is usually during the middle part of the preceding semester (e.g., registration for Spring semester is normally held during late October-early November). Students should pay careful attention to posted announcements regarding pre-registration. Registration holds will be placed on students who have failed to pay tuition, parking fees, course fees, etc.

C. Additional Registration Notes

Students who have a teaching assistantship should send their course schedule to the GPO as soon as possible to facilitate scheduling of TA assignments. The GPO and department are unable to schedule TA assignments until all course schedules are received from TAs.

Students should be cognizant that some modalities of courses (e.g., distance learning, online, etc.) may incur additional fees. Assistantships and tuition waivers do not cover these additional fees, nor will the Department. Therefore, any additional course fees are the financial responsibility of the student.

D. Schedule Adjustments

With approval of the GPO, students may make schedule adjustments after the initial registration period has been completed. Additional classes may be added up until the 15th class day. Students may withdraw from classes up until the Mid-Semester Day, although tuition refunds are provided only if classes are dropped on or before the 15th class day. Adjustments to schedules can be made in the Department during the first 15 days of class (for summer terms, the 5th class is the deadline). A \$100 per class fee is charged for classes that students drop between the 6th and 15th class day of the fall and spring semester. The charge is assessed for classes dropped between the 3rd and 5th class day of the summer semester.

Graduate students who drop or add a course after the initial 15-day period has ended must initiate the process with a Graduate School counselor Mackenzi Griggers (mrg0014@auburn.edu) for students with last names A-I; Ibrahim Kareem (ilk0001@auburn.edu) for students with last names J-R; and Sherry Ray (raysher@auburn.edu) for students with last names S-Z). Once initiated with a Graduate School counselor, the schedule adjustment process will be completed electronically.

E. Billing and Payment of Fees

1. Registration Fees Per Semester

a. Graduate Teaching and Research Assistants

Students holding a one-quarter time or higher Graduate Assistantship (GTA or GRA) will receive some levels of tuition fellowship. Beginning with the Fall 2013 semester, graduate students with a qualifying assistantship appointment of 1/3rd time or 0.33 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) or higher will receive a full tuition waiver under the Graduate Tuition Fellowship program. Graduate students with a qualifying assistantship appointment of 0.25-0.32 FTE will receive tuition support totaling 50% of in-state tuition rates. Graduate assistants that were appointed prior to Fall 2013 will be grandfathered under the old policy. Detailed information about the policy for both groups of students can be found on the web link: <https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/guidelines-for-graduate-tuition-fellowships/>

GTAs and GRAs with full tuition waiver are required to pay a \$758 matriculation fee per term for Fall and Spring; and \$350 for the summer term. International graduate students will have to pay an additional \$130 per semester as International Student Fees. This benefit is extended to students enrolled during summer term only if they have summer GTA/GRA support. Students who do not have summer GTA support must pay tuition for the summer term. Out-of-state tuition is waived for the latter students, if they held a GTA/GRA during the preceding Fall and Spring semesters. Tuition fellowships are limited to a maximum of **33 credit hours for MS students** and **66 credit hours for PhD students**. When these limits are exceeded, or when GTA support expires or is forfeited, students are subject to tuition and fees outlined below. Additionally, in the Fall and Spring, students without a valid insurance waiver are required to pay for graduate student health insurance. The fee is \$931.60 in the Fall and \$921.80 in the Spring.

b. Other Students

Non-GTA graduate students are responsible for additional fees on a full time or per-credit-hour basis. Student can find these fees here: <https://graduate.auburn.edu/graduate-tuition-fees/>. Resident fees apply to Alabama residents and students with 1/3-(FTE-0.333) time or higher Graduate Research Assistantship appointments. All other students must pay non-resident fees.

2. First-Semester Fee Payment

The Graduate School has instituted a deferred payment plan for all graduate students. Students will receive three fee bills per semester, each reflecting 1/3 of the total fees due for the term. Provided that they do not register until the week prior to the start of classes (after mid-August), new students will receive their first billing for Fall semester in September. Payment will not be due until early October. This policy allows new GTA's and GRA's to defer their first payment until they receive their first full paycheck at the end of September. Students who fail to pay their tuition by the due date will be assessed a late penalty that is proportional to the fee owed (~1.5%).

Billing statements for GTA's should be limited to \$758/in both Fall and Spring semesters and \$350 for summer term matriculation fee (plus student fee for international students) as well as insurance costs when applicable. Statements for Alabama residents not holding a GTA and students holding a one-quarter time or higher GRA appointment should reflect the resident rates outlined above. If billing statements appear to be incorrect, students should postpone payment and contact the GPO (Dr. Gottardi) and/or Ms. Ashleigh Rudd immediately.

3. Resident versus Non-resident Status

Non-resident graduate students holding one-quarter time or higher GTA or GRA appointments receive a tuition fellowship. However, *non-Alabama residents should be aware that they must pay non-resident tuition fees if their assistantships terminate or drop below one-quarter time.* The only way for a student to get around this is to establish Alabama residency in the Registrar's Office prior to the semester in which they would be required to begin paying non-resident fees.

University policies make establishing Alabama residency difficult and non-resident students should not expect to establish residency during their time as graduate students. Alabama and Non-Alabama Student policies published by the University state that *“No person who moves to Alabama for the primary purpose of attending college shall be considered to have demonstrated intent to establish domicile in the State of Alabama and will generally not be considered eligible for classification as a resident student. Clear and convincing evidence to the contrary must be presented to overcome this presumption. In determining Alabama student status for the purposes of assessing fees, **the burden of proof is on the applicant.**”*

Regarding changes in status, University policy states *“Students initially classified as ineligible for resident tuition will retain that classification for tuition purposes until they provide clear and convincing evidence that they have established permanent domicile in Alabama. Non-resident students who carry an academic load considered normal (10 or more hours per term) for students at Auburn University will be presumed to be in the State of Alabama primarily for the purpose of gaining an education and, thus, have not demonstrated the intent to establish a true domicile in Alabama. Clear and convincing proof may overcome this presumption, but again, the burden of*

proof rests upon those requesting change in eligibility. Any change in resident tuition eligibility occurring during an academic term will not become effective until registration for the succeeding term.” University policy also states: *“evidence may be presented to establish 12-month residency in the State of Alabama. In all cases, the person must be at least 19 years of age or married, and financially independent. Otherwise, the person’s residency will be based upon that of the parent or guardian.”* Specified types of evidence include:

- 1) Ownership or rental of residential property in Alabama and continuous occupation thereof on an extended term of not less than 12 consecutive months.
- 2) Full-time permanent employment in Alabama.
- 3) Possession of an Alabama license required to do business or practice a profession in Alabama.
- 4) Legal marriage to a bona fide Alabama resident.
- 5) Registration to vote in the State of Alabama.
- 6) Filing of Alabama resident income tax.
- 7) Holding of a current Alabama driver's license.
- 8) Registration of vehicle in Alabama, and payment of property tax thereupon.
- 9) Evidence of banking activity within the state for 12 consecutive months prior to making application for residency change.

University policy is unclear as to how many of these items of evidence are required (prior to 1996, the required number was 5). It is difficult to satisfy the Registrar's Office requirements, particularly given their new emphasis on permanent employment in Alabama; standard assistantships are only one-third time (not considered as full-time employment). Please consider the new policy as an incentive to complete your degree requirements in a timely fashion! For additional information visit the Registrar's Office in Langdon Hall. See also

<https://bulletin.auburn.edu/generalinformation/financialinformation/>

4. Student Status and Loan Deferments

The Graduate School has rigid definitions of Graduate student enrollment status:

- **Full-time** students are those who are registered for **9 or more** semester hours.
- **Half-time** students are those who are registered for **5 to 8** semester hours.
- **Less-than-half-time** students are those registered for **fewer than 5** semester hours.

To continue to defer student loans (or to seek new loans), most lending agencies require that students be certified as full-time students. The Graduate School will not certify a student as full time unless the student is (1) enrolled for a minimum of nine (9) semester hours of credit or (2) registered for GRAD 7900 (for MS students) or GRAD 8900 (for Ph.D. students). Students wishing to defer loans may register for GRAD 7900 or GRAD 8900 if, and only if, all of the following prerequisites are met: the student (a) is enrolled in a thesis option program, (b) is enrolled concurrently for at least one hour of GEOL 7990 or GEOL 8900/ GEOG 7990 or GEOG 8990 (thesis or dissertation), (c) is engaged **full time** in the completion of thesis research or in preparation of the thesis, (d) is making **sufficient progress** towards degree completion, (e) has fulfilled degree residency requirements (see item IV.C.2), (f) is not enrolled for didactic course work, and (g) is making minimal use of University facilities and resources, including advisor's time. Registration for GRAD 7900 or GRAD 8900 is by request only and must be approved by the Department Chair.

II. ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

As new graduate students, it is incumbent for you to transition from undergraduate education to graduate school. Consequently, the University and Department of Geosciences have designed a series of orientation events that will inculcate you into the culture of research and teaching that is a hallmark of Auburn University. Orientation events are typically scheduled for the first few weeks of the Fall semester each year. New students are required to attend all these programs. Students entering the program during terms other than fall are expected to participate in these programs at the first opportunity.

A. Graduate School Orientation

The Graduate School holds a half-day orientation for new graduate students every year before the start of Fall semester. This session is designed to introduce you to the staff and general policies and procedures of the Graduate School, the Graduate Student Council (GSC), the Library, Division of University Computing, Food Services, and the Off-Campus Association. All new graduate students should attend this orientation.

B. Graduate Teaching Assistantship Workshops

New Graduate students holding Graduate Teaching Assistantships are required to attend workshops designed to prepare them for their role in the laboratory or classroom.

1. University GTA Workshop

This University workshop, offered through the Biggio Center of Auburn University, is intended to acquaint new GTA s with the general university expectations for teachers. Auburn University takes research and teaching seriously, and you should make every effort to excel at each while at Auburn. The workshop usually includes sessions on working with Auburn undergraduates, planning for classes, avoiding sexual harassment and other legal problems, and accommodating persons with disabilities in the classroom. This course is offered via Zoom and information regarding the details, including the date and time, will be sent out to students once it is scheduled.

2. Departmental GTA Orientation

The Department holds one or more informal half-day GTA workshops that are intended to provide more specific information regarding teaching responsibilities and expectations in departmental laboratories and classrooms. Topics addressed include: an overview of GTA responsibilities; ethical constraints and liabilities; importance of GTAs to undergraduate education, importance of laboratories in a science curriculum; laboratory preparation and approaches to effective teaching; laboratory objectives and testing methodologies; and attitudes and equitable grading policies. In addition, GTAs assigned to Geography and Environmental Studies faculty should make appointments to meet with faculty individually to discuss GTA course expectations and duties.

C. Auburn University Instrumentation Facility

The Department holds a general graduate student orientation each August in the week before the first week of classes. General Department of Geosciences expectations will be communicated and introductions to the faculty, staff, and continuing students are made at this orientation. First year graduate students are required to attend all Department of Geosciences Orientation meetings.

D. Library Tour

New students will be introduced to pertinent geoscience holdings, search procedures, and other facilities (government documents, map room, etc.) at the Ralph Brown Draughon (RBD) Library. Library tours are usually provided by staff from the Science and Technology Department, which is located on the fourth floor of RBD.

E. Driver's Safety Course

Students generally do not have access to the Departmental 8-passenger vehicles (Chevy Tahoe and Ford Transit). However, graduate students often are called upon to drive Departmental vehicles for field trips or research purposes. To operate a university vehicle, students are required to complete a Driver's Safety Course administered online by the University. For more information, please see Auburn University risk management: <http://www.auburn.edu/administration/rms/>. Information on defensive driving course can be found at: <https://ba.auburn.edu/rms/training/#drivertraining>.

F. Responsible Conduct of Research and Lab Safety Training

All graduate students in COSAM and the Department of Geosciences are required to take an online Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Training through the CITI system. The course can be accessed here: <https://cws.auburn.edu/OVPR/pm/compliance/rcr/home>, and should be completed before students being undertaking research at Auburn.

All graduate students in the Department of Geosciences are required to take general Lab Safety training as well as any additional safety training necessary to undertake research in the respective lab facilities of each advisor/PI. Typically, we schedule a general lab safety training session during colloquium each fall. Students should contact their advisors to request assignment of any additional safety training through the BioRAFT system.

G. Field Trips

The Department tries to schedule one or more informal field trips for new students entering the program in the fall semester. These trips, typically planned for late August or early September, are designed to introduce students to local and/or regional geology/geography, and to provide additional opportunities for new students to meet one another and participating faculty.

H. Departmental Socials

Each semester in partnership with Geosciences Advisory Board (GAB), the departmental faculty typically sponsor and host a social (typically an afternoon or evening get-together with refreshments) for new and continuing graduate students. This event, held during the first few weeks of Fall, provides another opportunity to meet fellow students, faculty, and some of their family and contributes to an overall climate of collegiality among faculty and students. The annual Departmental Spring Picnic serves as an end of semester social as well as the presentation of the departmental awards ceremony. Since many of our awards are sponsored by the GAB, students receiving an award at the Spring Picnic are expected to attend and should thank GAB members in attendance for their financial support.

I. ID Card

After registration for first-semester classes, students should set up their student identification card or Tiger ID. The Tiger ID is the official form of identification for every Auburn University Student. It is used to check out books at the University libraries, gain access to buildings or labs and gain entry to university related events. This is important for geology and geography and environmental studies students as it will serve as your “key” to the Coliseum main office and Haley Center Geography main office respectively for after-hours work. Information and steps to follow to set up your Tiger ID can be found here: <https://www.auburn.edu/administration/tigercard/#uploadphoto>

J. Parking

Students who wish to park their car on campus must register their vehicle. Students can complete their vehicle registration with parking services (located in at 330 Lem Morrison Drive) through your AU Access Account under the “My Campus” tab. More information about parking on campus can be found at <https://auburn.edu/administration/parking/student-registration/>.

GTAs and GRAs are currently eligible for a C or PC zone parking, the cost of which is \$140 (C zone) or \$220 (PC zone) for the full year. Some limited number of B zone parking passes are available, based on approval from the Department chair and Graduate Program Officer. Please contact the Department chair and GPO in early summer for B zone parking from the following Fall semester. Students must also register motorcycles (\$50), electric scooters (no fee), and bikes (no fee) if they intend to park them on campus. More information of traffic and parking regulations can be found at: <https://www.auburn.edu/administration/parking/rules/>.

III. DEPARTMENTAL FACILITIES

A. Graduate Student Offices and Keys

The Department will make every effort to provide office space for all graduate students. However, in times of limited space, students holding GTAs or GRAs have the highest priority for space accommodation. Geology graduate students will be assigned to the complex of offices located in suite of offices in Beard Eaves Memorial Coliseum (BEMC). Others will be assigned office space within laboratory areas that are controlled by various members of the faculty. Geography and Environmental Studies graduate students will be assigned office space mostly in the suite of offices in 2046 Haley Center. At the minimum, student office facilities will include a desk, chair, and some shelf space. Any potential changes in office assignments, made for any reason, must be approved by the GPO.

Upon receiving an office assignment, students should see Ms. Ashleigh Rudd in the main Geosciences office at BEMC to request keys. Students should pick up their keys from the office of Access Control (<https://fm.auburn.edu/access-control/>) located on the first floor of the Stadium Parking Deck. For Geology students, the keys that are assigned should open the front door of, and selected laboratories assigned to various faculty members (see item III.F). After Ms. Ashleigh Rudd submits a request for a key, students will receive an email to pick it up from Access Control and will need to be their student ID to do so. If any changes in office assignments are made, requests for the exchange of keys must be made through Ms. Ashleigh Rudd. Students should not exchange keys with their colleagues. In order to graduate, students are required to return all office and building keys (see item VIII.C.3). A replacement fee will be assessed for any lost or stolen keys.

Doors to Geosciences offices at BEMC, Haley Center and offices and laboratories therein, must be kept locked always when unoccupied. Campus Security continuously patrols campus facilities and will report on open doors. The University does not hold insurance on university equipment. Hence, stolen items are not replaced by insurance funds. If the department has sufficient funds, they may replace stolen departmental equipment. However, neither the University nor the Department is responsible for personal property. If a student is concerned about keeping valuables in their office area, they should inquire about ensuring personal possessions through a renter's insurance policy or by keeping items such as personal laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. at home or on their person always.

Security is particularly important on weekends (particularly during football games on Saturdays) and evenings. When students enter the buildings during these times, they should relock the door and check to make sure that it is locked when they leave. If there are any problems getting a door in BEMC and Haley Center to lock, students can contact Mr. Anthony Hall (334) 844-4880). If doors are found unlocked during the weekend, students should lock the doors and inform Mr. Hall on Monday morning. Office areas should be kept neat. If territorial disputes arise in the area where you have your desk, please see the GPO before taking any action. Personal items, specimens, etc. belonging to another student or a faculty member should not be moved without authorization from the GPO.

Finally, while Auburn University is a safe campus it is important that students take care to protect themselves and their property during times when the campus is empty. This is particularly important at night or on weekends when the campus is largely quiet. The University's Department of Public Safety and Security has created a guide for students outlining different programs to help make the campus as safe as possible (link provided at bottom of paragraph). Two programs every student should be aware of are "The Night Security Shuttle" van service which offers a safe ride from any on-campus location to any on-campus location 6 PM – 7 AM. seven days a week while classes are in session, except for home football game evenings and official Auburn University holidays. To obtain service, call (334) 844-7400. In addition, the Auburn Department of Public Safety – Police Division offers, without charge, an on-campus security escort service when the Campus Security Shuttle is not in operation. If you need an escort, phone ADPS at (334) 501-3100. An officer will respond to your location and escort you to your campus destination. The Security Escort Service is available during university holidays and semester breaks. More information can be found at: <https://www.auburn.edu/administration/campus-safety/index.php>.

B. Mailboxes and Policies

All graduate students are assigned mailboxes, which are in Geosciences office at BEMC main office for Geology students or in the mail room in 2046 Haley Center for the Geography and Environmental Studies students. Students should check their boxes at least once a day, not only for regular mail but also for memoranda from the GPO and other faculty/staff. Memos and/or letters should be read immediately and in their entirety. Requests for information should be answered as soon as possible. To avoid losing or forgetting about memos, students should maintain an organized file that contains various communications that have been received. Graduate students may use the mailboxes to distribute items to faculty and/or other students, or to send campus mail. However, student use of university postal services is otherwise limited. Use of the outgoing mail trays should be restricted to legitimate departmental business.

C. Computer Facilities

Graduate students may set up their own personal computers in their respective office areas. If available and in only certain situations depending on students' financial condition, departmental computers may be supplied in student office spaces. Students can submit a request to the GPO through their research advisors for a departmental desktop computer. Additionally, secondary monitors may be requested for student workspaces. Also, be reminded that there is no institutional insurance coverage for theft or damage of personal belongings housed in Departmental offices.

In addition to a 24-unit computer lab (BEMC 2040) secured for teaching purposes, the Department maintains two smaller computer labs to provide all graduate students with access to computing facilities. These computer labs are in the Geosciences facility at BEMC 2143 and in Haley Center 2194. Computers in these rooms must be used for research, course work, teaching preparation, and acquisition of email. They should not be used to play computer games or for inappropriate activities on the Internet. Do not treat these machines as your own personal computer. Do not modify or add programs to the departmental computers. If you have a program that you believe

would be beneficial and wish to add a program to one or more machines, see Anthony Hall for authorization. Students should make themselves aware of the University's policies towards computer use and privacy which applies to any machine, university or personally owned, that uses a university network connection at: http://www.auburn.edu/oit/it_policies/index.php.

In the past, use of departmental computing facilities periodically was restricted to regular "business" hours (7:45 AM - 4:45 PM, Monday through Friday) because students continually failed to secure the computer room when it was not being used in the evening hours. Currently, students may gain access to the computer lab during evening and weekend hours. However, the computer room should never be left unoccupied (not even for a few minutes) without being locked. Failure to comply with this important security policy may result in restricted access.

D. E-mail

All graduate students should acquire an e-mail address (computer user identification number) as soon as possible. Information about email should be included in the acceptance letter from the university. More information can be obtained by visiting the following link <https://auburn.service-now.com/it>.

Upon receiving an e-mail address, students should check their e-mail frequently for important messages from the Graduate Program Officer, other Departmental faculty, the Graduate School, and/or the Graduate Student Organizations. The University has established the student's e-mail address as an official medium for communicating with students. Students are responsible for checking their e-mail account in a timely fashion and on a regular basis. Emails should employ proper etiquette (salutations, use of titles, etc.).

E. Copying Facilities

The Department maintains two photocopy machines in the main offices of Geology and Geography and Environmental Studies, respectively. However, these machines are not available for personal use by students. Students may request that copies be made by the office staff only when copies are for teaching purposes (e.g., laboratory syllabi, lab exams, etc.). If teaching materials are required, copies should be requested several days in advance (see Ms. Ashleigh Rudd or Ms. Kiley Coan for additional information).

F. Research Laboratories and Facilities

Departmental research laboratories are contained in BEMC, Haley Center, Langdon Hall and CASIC Building. Faculty laboratories and other "general use" facilities in Langdon Building contain rock crushers, rock saws and thin-section preparation equipment; in BEMC fume hoods, magnetic separator, X-ray diffraction and X-ray fluorescence equipment, LECO carbon analyzer, Ar/Ar laser mass spectrometer, microprobe, trace metal radiogenic isotope, gas isotope ratio mass spectrometer, and high precision stable isotope water analyzer, microcomputers, balances, and various research microscopes; in CASIC Building ICPMS. Geography and Environmental Studies

research facilities in Haley Center are primarily dedicated to laser diffraction particle size analyzer, GIS and remote sensing resources, including Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) Laser Scanner.

Use of laboratory space and/or equipment in BEMC, CASIC Building, and Haley Center cannot be made without prior approval from the faculty member responsible for a particular lab or from Anthony Hall (for departmental equipment). The use of facilities should be for research or teaching purposes only (e.g., use of rock saws to make book ends for Christmas presents is not legitimate). All equipment and laboratory space to which access has been granted should be carefully handled and properly cleaned after use. Any accidents or damage should be reported immediately to the department Safety Officer (Anthony Hall).

Other items maintained by the Department for field research include a 12-passenger van, a four-wheel drive Chevy Tahoe, a john boat with associated vibra-coring equipment, and several canoes (including a square-transom canoe with 4-hp gas motor), GPS systems, compasses and stereoscopes. Generally, departmental vehicles are not available for use by graduate students unless accompanied by a member of the faculty. Use of various watercraft is restricted to research purposes and must be approved by the faculty. The department also has various hydrological, geophysical, and geospatial field instruments available to qualified users. A more detailed information on the research laboratory and facilities with the department of Geosciences can be found at the following link:

https://www.auburn.edu/cosam/departments/geosciences/research_instrument/instrument_fac.htm

G. Student Health Insurance

Students should be aware that the University does not provide health/medical insurance to students as a standard benefit. Students who are injured, even during laboratory or field work, or become ill, are not covered by a university policy. Auburn University offers student health insurance through Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama (BCBSAL), serviced by Academic Health Plans (AHP). Any students who do not have medical coverage (e.g., via parent's policies) are required to participate in the Auburn University graduate student health insurance. Students should contact the Graduate School for information on eligibility requirements, plan rates, etc. at <https://auburn.myahpcare.com/>. International Graduate Students (in F and J status) and their dependents (F-2/J-2) are subject to the AU Mandatory International Student and Scholar Health and Emergency Assistance Insurance Plan and are not eligible to enroll independently in this plan. Check with the Office of International Programs for additional details (<https://auburn.edu/academic/international/>).

IV. GRADUATE STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

A. Professionalism

Graduate students should conduct themselves with professionalism in courses, department events, and interactions with department members. Further, graduate students should take ownership and responsibility for their degree and research progress. They should follow standard workplace etiquette, and all guidelines and policies laid out for Auburn University employees and students.

B. Working expectations

Graduate student assistantships are full time. Students should work on a full-time equivalent schedule (meaning a 40-hour work week). Although GRA/GTA and fellowships have varying responsibilities, they should amount to a 40-hour work week in aggregate.

Graduate student appointments are in-person positions. Any extended periods of remote work must be approved by both a student's advisor and the GPO.

C. Colloquium

Graduate student attendance at colloquium is **mandatory** for graduate students in our department. Colloquium is a part of graduate education. It provides a holistic perspective on cutting edge research in the field and trains students on how to give effective presentations. Students should plan to attend every colloquium (Thursdays at 3:30PM) and must provide adequate explanation and notice for lack of attendance to the GPO. Failure to attend Colloquium could result in disqualification for GAB funding, departmental awards, or further sanctions to student standing in the department.

D. Publishing research

Graduate students in the department of Geosciences should aim to publish their thesis and dissertation research, in collaboration with their advisors and research groups. Though there is no publishing requirement for MS students, the department strongly encourages MS students to pursue publication of their work. Academic research conducted without publication becomes unknown to the world. PhD students are expected to have a manuscript submitted prior to their advancement to candidacy and should aim to have a publication plan in place for their thesis chapters prior to defending.

V. ACADEMIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. Degree Options

Students may complete the M.S. program in both Geology and Geography and Environmental Studies following either thesis or non-thesis options. The thesis option is regarded by the Department faculty as the preferred professional degree. It is designed for traditional students – i.e., those who recently have completed an undergraduate degree in geology or geography/environmental studies and have not yet entered the job market. The non-thesis option was developed to accommodate nontraditional graduate students, e.g., those who have been or are currently employed in the field and seek a means of further career advancement, but do not have the time to devote to intensive thesis-scale research. The PhD degree in Earth Systems Sciences (ESS) however must be completed only with a dissertation option https://www.auburn.edu/cosam/departments/geosciences/graduate_programs/index.htm.

1. MS Degree Requirements in Geology

The thesis option requires: (1) a minimum of 30 semester hours beyond the undergraduate degree; and (2) satisfactory completion of a thesis chosen in conjunction with a faculty advisor. The 30 hours include: 21 hours of graduate-level geology courses (6000 and 7000-level, including the required GEOL 7100 Geocommunication), no more than 3 hours of which can be GEOL 7930 Directed Study; and 4 to 6 hours of thesis (GEOL 7990). Although only 4 to 6 hours of thesis can be applied to the 30-hour minimum, students likely will be required to register for more than 6 hours of thesis during their stay at Auburn (see Section V.D.2.c.).

The non-thesis option requires: (1) a minimum of 40 semester hours; and (2) satisfactory completion of a “capstone” experience under faculty guidance. The 40 hours include: 36 hours of graduate-level geology courses (including GEOL 7100 Geocommunication); and 4 hrs. of approved 6000- or 7000-level geology or approved electives, all or a portion of which may be GEOL 7930 Directed Study or GEOL 7980 Capstone Project.

Both degree options require: (1) satisfactory completion of a summer field course or comparable field experience prior to the beginning of the second year of graduate work; (2) demonstrated knowledge of a computer language or computer-based geographic information system (G.I.S.) before graduation; and (3) satisfactory performance on a comprehensive exam (e.g., thesis defense or non-thesis option comprehensive examination).

2. MS Degree Requirements in Geography and Environmental Studies

The thesis option for geography and environmental studies requires: (1) a minimum of 30 semester hours beyond the undergraduate degree; and (2) satisfactory completion of a thesis chosen in conjunction with a faculty advisor. The 30 semester hours include: 24 hours of graduate level geography and environmental studies courses (6000-7000 level, including GEOL 7100 Geocommunication, GEOG 6700 Quantitative Methods and Spatial Analysis, and 18 hours of

graduate-level electives of which 12 hours must come from Geography and Environmental Studies) and at least 6 hours of thesis research credit.

The non-thesis option requires: (1) minimum of 39 semester hours; (2) and the successful completion of a comprehensive written and oral examination by an approved faculty committee. The non-thesis option includes two paths to written and oral exam completion: traditional exam or capstone exam. The 39 hours include: 6 hours of required courses (including GEOL 7100 Geocommunication; GEOG 6700 Quantitative Methods and Spatial Analysis), and 33 hours of graduate-level electives of which 18 hours must come from geography and environmental studies.

3. PhD Degree Requirements in Earth Systems Science

The PhD degree for Earth Systems Science (ESS) requires: (1) a minimum of 60 semester hours beyond the undergraduate degree; and (2) satisfactory completion of a dissertation chosen in conjunction with a faculty advisor(s). The 60 semester hours include: 7 hours of graduate level hours of required core courses across ESS disciplines. Required Core Courses for Ph.D. in ESS are: ESSI 8000 Earth System Science and Global Change (3 credit hours); ESSI 8100 Earth System Observation and Analysis (3 credit hours); ESSI 8200 Earth System Science Seminar (1 credit hour) and ESSI 8990 PhD Dissertation (minimum 10 credit hours with a maximum of 15 hours). Additional elective courses may be added work to develop an academic focus with the approval of the faculty adviser and dissertation committee.

The maximum number of directed-study credits that may be applied toward the degree is six (6) units. The total number of credit hours of previous graduate courses or thesis work may be transferred toward the PhD degree must be less than 50 percent of the credit hours needed to complete a PhD. For students who complete their MS degree at Auburn these courses will be applied to PhD coursework automatically. Students who complete degrees outside of Auburn will need to include their transfer courses on the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions, and Candidacy (CTEC) form. A maximum of four hours of Master thesis credit may be transferred and counted toward PhD course requirement.

B. Degree-Option Declaration

Students must declare a degree option at the time of application in MS program of Geosciences. The degree option that is pursued will dictate the timing and extent of interaction with a faculty advisor and/or their committee members and may impact the type of financial assistance received by the applicant. Changing the degree option after initial declaration is discouraged. However, a switch may be possible under certain circumstances and only by following formal departmental procedures. A student may change from the non-thesis to the thesis option if: (1) can demonstrate to the faculty that time and resources are available to complete a satisfactory thesis, (2) establishes an approved thesis committee, and (3) speaks with the GPO. A change from the thesis option to the non-thesis option is discouraged. Generally, this switch will be possible only after a written request, which includes adequate justification for the change, is submitted to and approved by the student's thesis advisor. Factors that should be considered in this decision include the student's obligation to satisfy commitments made by accepting monetary or other research support from the faculty advisor, University, or outside agencies. If a student's request is denied by

their thesis advisor, the student may choose to file a written appeal to the GPO. In such cases, the GPO will meet with the department head and the entire thesis committee to render a binding decision. If a change to a non-thesis option is approved, the student must meet with the GPO and arrange to complete all degree requirements of the non-thesis option.

C. Transfer or Change in Enrollment Status

For a student to transfer from other Auburn departments to Geosciences requires a new application and good academic standing. They will not need to submit additional copies of official transcripts, test scores, and reference letters (less than two years), but will need to coordinate any of the departmental materials required with Geosciences. Transfer students will compete with new applicants for departmental graduate assistantships.

Current Geosciences graduate students who choose to switch enrollment (i.e., Master's to doctoral or doctoral to Master's) do not need to go through the entire application process. They must submit a curriculum change to the department and compete for departmental graduate assistantships with new applicants. If a student would like to add the PhD to the MS and complete both at the same time, they must indicate so on the curriculum change form and the graduate school would change the curriculum to PhD as priority 1, and MS as priority 2. If a student plans on graduating with an MS in the Summer semester, for example, the graduate school will change their MS to PhD starting the following Fall semester. International students will need to update their financial documentation.

Doctoral students who satisfy all the degree requirements may pursue a MS degree in Geology or Geography and Environmental Studies en route to the PhD. The application for MS programs must be completed and submitted to the Graduate School well in advance of the graduation deadline. Students must satisfy all the MS program requirements for the degree in Geology or Geography and Environmental Studies, including thesis. Once approved, they must apply to graduate as MS by the deadline.

D. Other Requirements/Expectations

In addition to the minimum course and plan-of-study requirements outlined above, students should be aware of several other departmental requirements.

1. Thesis/Dissertation Hour Requirements

Graduate students in Geosciences following the thesis/dissertation option are required to register for thesis hours (GEOL 7990/GEOG 7990/ESSI 8900) for each term that they are enrolled in. This includes summer semester, when students should be actively pursuing their thesis research (and, hence, are utilizing their advisor's time and/or departmental facilities) but are not normally involved in didactic course work. Thesis/dissertation registration is monitored every term by the GPO. The number of thesis hours that a student registers for will vary from term to term depending on whether they are a GTA with a tuition waiver, whether the student is registered for other courses, and the number of credit hours represented by those other courses. As a rule, all students normally

will register for only 1 hour of thesis/dissertation per term, as long as they are also registered for other courses. During Fall and Spring terms, students who are not registered for any other didactic course work should be registered for 3 hours of thesis/dissertation. The latter policy applies to all graduate students whether they have an assistantship or not.

Students who no longer have support (GTA or GRA) and have completed all of their didactic course work must register for 1 hour of thesis every term until their thesis/dissertation submission, thesis/dissertation defense, and graduation. Exceptions to this thesis/dissertation requirement policy generally will not be made. However, if such a student demonstrates clear progress towards completion of their thesis/dissertation (as documented by their thesis/dissertation advisor), they may be eligible for a one-time “grace term” for which only 1 hour of GEOL 7990/GEOG 7990/ESSI 8990 will be required during a Fall or Spring term. The grace term is not a guaranteed, immutable right; rather, it should be viewed as an incentive mechanism that provides productive students the opportunity to reduce tuition costs for one term at or near the end of their graduate program. The grace term must be requested and is subject to approval by the GPO and Department chair.

Under certain circumstances, students may qualify to register for Clearing Registration (GRAD 7900/GRAD 8900) instead of thesis or dissertation (GEOL 7990/ GEOG 7990/ESSI 8990) during their last term before graduation.

2. Graduate School Continuous Enrollment Policy

The Continuous Enrollment Policy (<https://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/registration/>) is effective since 2010. All full- and part-time degree-seeking graduate students must be continuously enrolled. Continuous enrollment is defined as registration in at least two semesters in a given academic year (fall, spring, summer) until the degree is awarded or status as a degree-seeking student is terminated through an official university withdrawal. Students must register for the term in which they take their examinations, defend their theses, and complete degree requirements (including summer term). Although the Graduate School and individual graduate programs will monitor the enrollment status of graduate students, it is ultimately the responsibility of graduate students to ensure that they are meeting the enrollment provisions of this policy.

a. Inactive Status

Students who fail to register for at least two semesters in a given academic year will be declared inactive. To be re-activated, students must apply for re-activation to the program in which they were enrolled and the Graduate School. Re-activation is not guaranteed. To fulfill the continuous registration requirement, students who are re-activated must register retroactively and pay the continuous enrollment fee for all semesters that have elapsed since they were last enrolled – up to a maximum of eight semesters (<https://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/registration/>).

b. Leave of Absence

A student may be granted a leave of absence for medical reasons, family necessity or dependent care, military service, or other approved personal reasons. Students planning to discontinue enrollment for a semester or more must request approval for a leave of absence. Students may petition the Graduate School for a leave of absence for a maximum of two semesters during the entire program. However, the Graduate School may approve extensions to the maximum two semesters’ leave of absence (e.g., for military service obligations extending beyond two semesters).

A petition for a leave of absence (or extension), signed by the Graduate Program Officer or the Department Chair must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. The Graduate School may request appropriate documentation. The request must be filed and approved before the anticipated absence. An approved leave of absence will enable students to re-enter their program without applying for re-activation or owing retroactive continuous enrollment fees.

A student on leave is not required to pay fees, but in turn may not use Auburn University faculty, facilities, resources, or services intended only for enrolled students; receive a graduate assistantship, fellowship or financial aid from the University, or take any Auburn courses related to the plan of study. (<https://bulletin.auburn.edu/thegraduateschool/registration/>)

c. Registration and Graduation Requirements

Students needing thesis final approval and submission and the final examination, or non-thesis graduate students needing to complete projects, must register for 7990 Research and Thesis or 7980 Capstone Project, as applicable. Non-thesis graduate students requiring only a final examination would register for GRAD 7000. Students may not register for GRAD 7000 for more than one semester. Students who have in a previous term completed all requirements for the degree, upon receipt of a “certificate of completion” form from the Graduate School, will not be required to register in a future term if their graduation is delayed or postponed.

To maintain continuous enrollment, students not enrolled in GRAD 7000, 7980 Capstone Project, 7990 Research and Thesis, or any other course must register for GRAD 7890, PhD students should register for GRAD 8AA0. Continuous Registration for Master’s Students and pay the requisite continuous enrollment fee. The continuous enrollment fee allows students to maintain active enrollment status and continuous advising services. Students who want to use other University-provided services must pay the appropriate registration fees.

A graduate student may carry a maximum course load of 16 hours per semester (14 in the summer term). This includes undergraduate courses but does not include 7990 Research and Thesis (8990 for dissertation) when required of all graduate students in a department each semester. Graduate student must carry nine hours per semester or enroll in GRAD 7AA0/8AA0 with concurrent enrollment for a minimum of one hour of 7990/8990 to be classified as full-time students. Enrollment in GRAD 7AA0/8AA0 requires the completion of a certification available at the Graduate School or on the Web at <https://graduate.auburn.edu/>.

3. Transfer of Credit from Other Institutions

Graduate credit taken in residence at an international institution or at a regionally accredited U.S. institution may be allowed when recommended by the student’s major professor and their advisory committee. Students seeking transfer credit must provide documentary evidence showing the relevance of the course to the student’s plan of study and provide an official transcript showing credit earned for the course. No prior commitment is made concerning whether transfer credit will be accepted. A student must earn at least 24 semester hours, or half of the total hours required for a master’s degree, whichever is greater, at Auburn University. A program that requires 30 hours of credit will be limited to 6 semester hours of transfer credit. At least 21 semester hours must be earned as a graduate student at Auburn University in graded course work at the 6000-level or above. The credit must be acceptable to the student’s advisory committee and be pertinent to the

student's plan of study. In the case of graduate degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia agreements, the student must earn a majority of credits from the participating institutions. No transfer credit will be approved without an official transcript. No course on which a grade lower than B was earned may be transferred.

Additionally, credit will not be allowed if the combined GPA on graduate work taken at other schools is less than 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, nor may transfer credit be used to improve the GPA on courses taken at Auburn University. Transfer credit is not reflected on the AU transcript for graduate students.

For a PhD in ESS, the total number of credit hours of previous graduate course or thesis work may be transferred toward the PhD degree must be less than 50 percent of the credit hours listed on the Plan of Study. A maximum of four hours of Master thesis credit may be transferred and counted toward PhD course requirement.

4. Field Camp Requirement (Geology MS Graduate Students Only).

The Department requires that all Geology MS students attend and successively complete a Geology Field Camp before the end of their first year in the Graduate program. Most students will have satisfied this requirement prior to entering the program. Although in rare cases the faculty may approve a petition to accept other field experience as a substitute, those that have not met this requirement will have to attend a sanctioned field camp during the summer following their first year at Auburn. This requirement may be met by enrolling in a geological field camp at another institution, or by completing Auburn University's Field Camp (GEOL 3650). Applications for summer Field Camps outside of Auburn should be submitted early. If the field-camp requirement was not met as part of an undergraduate program, it is the responsibility of the student to meet, as soon as possible, with the GPO and thesis advisor to discuss various options.

5. Computer Language/GIS Requirement (Geology Graduate Students Only)

The Department has a policy that MS students enrolled in the Geology graduate program must have demonstrated competence in either a computer language (Fortran, Pascal, C) or Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Students may satisfy this requirement by: (1) having taken an approved computer programming language course or GIS course as an undergraduate (as verified by their transcripts); (2) taking a course in computer language at Auburn University during their residency; or (3) taking a course in GIS (e.g., GEOG 6830, 4 hrs) at Auburn during their residency. Most students who need to satisfy this requirement at Auburn follow option (3), because courses in computer programming are generally difficult to pick up. Courses taken at Auburn to satisfy this requirement generally cannot be applied towards the minimum hours required for graduation.

6. Minimum Grade Requirements

Minimum grade requirements are imposed by the Graduate School and the Department. Graduate students must achieve a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better (out of 4.0) in order to graduate. Also, the Department requires that GTAs and GRAs maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better to retain their assistantships. If a student's GPA drops below 3.0, they will be placed on academic probation and

must bring their GPA up to the minimum within the next 11 hours of course work (including thesis). Failure to do so will result in academic suspension and forfeiture of the assistantship. Academic suspension can be lifted (and the student readmitted) only after completion of a remediation plan recommended by the Department and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

The Registrar calculates GPA based on the number of hours completed multiplied by a specific weight (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1), and divided by the number of hours attempted. Only grades in AU courses approved for graduate credit are used in determining overall GPA.

Students taking undergraduate courses (5000-level or below) for whatever reason (background deficiency, general interest), are advised to register under the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grading option (unless the course is part of the student's plan of study). To do this, students must complete the S-U option form available at the Graduate School by the 3rd day of class.

No grade below C is acceptable for credit towards a graduate degree. If a student receives a grade of D or F in any 6000- or 7000-level course, the Graduate School will not allow the student to graduate unless they repeat the course for a C or higher grade. This pertains to all courses.

7. Incomplete Grades

Students should avoid receiving a grade of incomplete (INC) in any of their classes. If an INC is assigned, a student has six months, regardless of enrollment status, to complete the course and receive a grade. However, the instructor of the course has the right to impose an earlier deadline. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the course work and to seek a change of grade. Failure to complete a course in the allotted time will result in an automatic (and permanent) change of the INC to an F, and the course will have to be repeated. No student may graduate until incomplete grades are removed; removal must be completed at least three weeks before the date of graduation. This policy applies to all courses.

8. MS Degree Time Limit for Completion

Auburn University's Graduate School has a 6-year limit for completion of all MS degree requirements (including thesis). The student's time to completion begins with the earliest completed course approved for inclusion in the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions, and Candidacy (CTEC) form. Most MS students should be able to complete their degree requirements in two years (actually 21 months, the typical duration of GTA or GRA support) *if they are committed to and work conscientiously on their research*. If it becomes necessary for a student to leave the University before completing their degree requirements (e.g., for a job), they are required to maintain contact with their major professor, and to demonstrate continued progress towards completion of the degree. In most cases, it will also be necessary for these students to continue to register for a minimum of 3 hours of thesis or capstone project every term (see Section V.D.2.).

It is the Department's policy not to support student requests for extensions beyond the 6-year limit except in extreme or unusual cases. Such cases include, but are not restricted to pregnancy, prolonged illness, or military service. Extensions requested based on ordinary job and family obligations will not be supported.

If an extension is granted by the Graduate School for a student to continue their degree work research beyond the 6-year limit, it is University policy that all completed course work older than 6 years must be recertified by the Department. Recertification can be accomplished only through written examination in each of the subject areas. The written examination will include, but will not be restricted to, course materials that were taught during the term in which the student originally enrolled in the course. Faculty may deem it necessary to include questions on developments in the discipline that have appeared since the student was enrolled in the course. Proficiency in these concepts must be demonstrated to be recertified.

9. PhD Degree Time Limit for Completion

PhD students will go through annual reviews to assess progress toward the completion of the degree. PhD students are expected to achieve candidacy within six years and to complete all requirements for the degree within ten years. Upon admission to candidacy (after passing the General Oral Examination), the PhD students will have four calendar years to complete all remaining requirements for the doctoral degree. The content and timeline of the PhD dissertation research is to be determined by the student with input from their primary research adviser and committee. Students should work closely with their main faculty adviser to implement a plan of study in a reasonable timeframe that suits their individual circumstances. University funded in-state tuition support will be limited to 110% of the number of hours required for a graduate degree (in our case 60 credit hours for PhD and 30 credit hours for MS). The student's time to completion begins with the earliest completed course approved for the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions, and Candidacy (CTEC) form. If unable for any reason to complete the requirements on time, the student may petition, with the approval of the advisory committee, the dean of the Graduate School, for a one-year extension. Students failing to complete the degree in the allotted time revert to the status of an applicant and must petition, with the approval of the advisory committee, the dean of the Graduate School, to retake the oral examination.

The student, with approval from his or her major advisor, may request an additional year given extenuating circumstances, such as a major switch in research focus between MS and PhD programs or personal issues. Students who enter the department with a MS degree are expected to take the Written Examination by the end of their second year, and no later than the third year in residence. Students who enter the department with a bachelor's degree typically take the PhD Written Examination by the end of their third academic year. The written exam questions, prepared by the doctoral committee, should be based mainly on topics within or relevant to the student's academic focused areas. The set of questions will test student's ability to integrate advanced material and analyze data from different parts of the area of concentration in the solution of problems. The written exam (typically lasting eight hours in duration) requires that the student demonstrate a depth of knowledge and problem-solving ability appropriate to their research field.

The PhD Oral Qualifying Examination and proposal presentation must be taken when most course requirements for the PhD program have been completed, and within one year after the student has passed the PhD Written Examination. The dissertation proposal (typically more than 20 pages in length), containing the title, problem, introduction, design and methods, work plan, and significance, must be submitted to the main advisor and committee for feedback and revision. Once the advisor, committee, and student agree on the proposal date, the student submits a

Request for the Report on the General Oral Examination form. The student presents the dissertation research proposal (30 min maximum) to the committee in public and answers questions raised. Following the proposal presentation, the student is examined in private by the doctoral committee. The oral exam focuses mainly upon student's research preparation and progress, such as theoretical background, research problems, hypotheses, logistics, strategy, methods, preliminary results, publications, and timetable. The student then leaves the room, and the committee votes to accept the proposal as is, with minor modifications, with substantial revisions, or rejection. Both written and oral exams must be taken at least one semester before the final exam.

Near the completion of the doctoral research, students must present a 40–50-min public seminar on their dissertation research. Following the oral presentation, the student is examined in private by the doctoral committee and an outside reader assigned by the Graduate School. There are four potential outcomes of the final exam decided by the doctoral committee: (1) unconditional pass, (2) conditional pass requiring more course or research work, (3) retake, and (4) fail. Students may retake the final exam only once. If a student fails the final exam, he or she will be dismissed from the PhD program.

There are two exams to the PhD qualification procedure, including a PhD Written Examination and an Oral Qualifying Examination. After passing both exams' students are referred to as "PhD Candidates". A student can pass, pass with requiring more course or research work, retake, or fail the exams. Students may retake the final exam only once. Any student who fails the exam will not be allowed to retake the exam.

10. Financial Support

All students must be evaluated annually by the GPO, main thesis/dissertation advisor, and Department Chair. Students must maintain good academic standing and meet the expectations of GTA, GRA, and thesis/dissertation requirements to receive continuous financial support. Three years of GTA support are guaranteed for PhD students with an existing MS degree in relevant fields. Four years of GTA support are guaranteed for PhD students without a MS degree who continue in good standing. Students who finish a MS degree in Geology or Geography and Environmental Studies en route to the PhD will receive a total of 5 years of financial support (2 years as a Master student and 3 years as a PhD student). GTA support of 21 months is guaranteed for Master candidates. Additional funding may be available for 2nd year MS students assigned to teach labs in the summer. PhD students and MS students on 12 month-appointments must stay on campus in summer to conduct research. Graduate students can present a thesis or dissertation proposal in the summer. The financial support will terminate if MS Students fail to present thesis proposal at the end of 3rd semester (unless students have university-approved circumstances for extension). Funding will be met through a combination of GTA, GRA, and scholarships. PhD and MS applicants, admitted students, and their main advisors are strongly encouraged to seek external funding.

VI. THESIS/DISSERTATION AND RESEARCH

A. Thesis/Dissertation Committee and Topic Selection

1. MS Thesis Committee

Selection of a thesis committee and a thesis topic are important first steps in a successful MS degree program. Some students may have already made some or all of these choices before they arrived at Auburn University, via direct communication with one or more members of the faculty. Others will need to make these decisions during the *first semester* in which they are enrolled. After becoming familiar with faculty research (e.g., during faculty visitations), students should approach those faculty members with whom they have similar interests to discuss potential thesis projects, and to request their services as thesis advisor or major professor. To serve as major professor, the faculty member must be a member of the Graduate Faculty.

Once a match-up has been made, student and major professor should meet as soon as possible to better define a thesis project, and to select the remainder of the thesis committee. The committee must include a minimum of three faculty members, including the thesis advisor.

Committee members should be selected based on their area of expertise and its bearing on the project. One of the two committee members should be chosen from the department. If a committee member is selected from out of Auburn University, permission must be obtained from the Dean of the Graduate School. Thesis supervisor should contact the Dean of Graduate School with a CV of the committee member from outside Auburn University to suggest why inclusion of that committee member will be beneficial for the student's thesis research. Students are responsible for asking faculty to serve on their committees. Committee selection must be completed by the beginning of the student's 2nd semester in residence– all committee members are required to submit the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions, and Candidacy (CTEC) form (see V.A.3.).

Students should take the selection of thesis advisor and thesis topic seriously. To be successful you will need (and are expected) to dedicate approximately one and a half years of your lives to your thesis work. You will undoubtedly be spending considerable nights, weekends and semester breaks conducting research, writing and preparing to graduate in a timely manner. In this light, it is vital that you develop a project that is interesting and temporally and economically feasible.

2. PhD Dissertation Committee

For PhD research the applicants already would know their prospective dissertation supervisors who needed to endorse the applicant before accepting into the PhD program. Students nominate a doctoral committee prior to taking the PhD Written Examination. The formal appointment of the dissertation committee occurs when the Committee, Transfers, Exceptions and Candidacy (CTEC) Form is submitted to the Graduate School. The doctoral committee consists of a minimum of four members. Four members, including the chair, must hold appointments at Auburn in or outside the student's major department. If a student chooses a faculty from another institution, they will still need four committee members from Auburn. When receiving approval for an external committee

member include a CV of the committee member from outside Auburn University to suggest why inclusion of that committee member will be beneficial for the student's dissertation research when submitting the CTEC form. More information about rules surrounding committee members can be found at <https://gradforms.auburn.edu/forms/committee-rules.html>. A 6th member of the committee needs to be added from outside the department to serve as a "University Reader" who evaluates doctoral dissertations since the Graduate School staff may not have in-depth knowledge on the subject matters of a dissertation. For more information on a university reader, please visit <https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/review-of-dissertations-the-university-reader/>.

B. Thesis/Dissertation Proposal

1. Thesis proposal for MS Students

Shortly after defining their thesis topic and committee, students should meet with the thesis advisor for guidance in the development of a thesis proposal. The thesis proposal is a short (5-20 pages) document that summarizes the objectives, incentives, and methods of the research project and, thereby, ensures that the student and their committee understand the project scope. Graduate students should work closely with their advisor to work through the proposal. The proposal must be prepared, approved by the thesis committee, and presented to the faculty **before the end of the student's second semester** (before the bulk of field/laboratory work is completed).

The final organization of a thesis proposal is left to the discretion of the thesis advisor. However, at a minimum, the proposal should include: (1) a review of pertinent previous work that sets the stage for the thesis project (this requires that students begin literature research immediately); (2) a clear statement of objectives of the thesis project; (3) a summary of methods and materials that will be employed to achieve objectives; (4) a carefully devised time table for completion; and (5) a reference section. **The proposed timetable for completion should be as detailed as possible and should be adhered to by the student to the fullest possible extent.**

Preparation of the final draft of a thesis proposal may take several weeks. Students generally submit several drafts to their thesis advisor for editorial comments and suggestions. Students should be respectful of their advisors' other academic commitments – faculty have duties other than supervising your work. The initial proposal draft, and all subsequent drafts, should be prepared as if they were the final version. Once the proposal is approved by the thesis advisor, copies are distributed for further review by the rest of the thesis committee. Please be respectful to them by allowing a minimum of two weeks to provide you with their edits and comments. After the committee comments are taken into consideration, a final draft is prepared, copied, and saved in departmental BOX for 7 days for review by all faculty members in the department.

During the same time the student and thesis advisor should schedule an oral proposal presentation to the departmental faculty and students. The presentation should be scheduled for no earlier than one week after the proposal has been distributed to the faculty. Ms. Ashleigh Rudd will then reserve a classroom during the time when all the thesis committee members are available for proposal defense by the Master's students. Day and time should not conflict with department seminars (see IX.A) or committee member schedules. At least one week prior to the defense the thesis advisor should send an announcement via email to the faculty and graduate students. The oral

presentation should be no longer than 30 min. After the presentation, faculty and students can ask questions, make suggestions, and/or provide critical comments.

2. Dissertation proposal for PhD Students

The PhD Oral Qualifying Examination and proposal presentation must be taken when most course requirements for the PhD program have been completed, and within one year after the student has passed the PhD Written Examination. The dissertation proposal (typically more than 20 pages in length), containing the title, problem, introduction, design and methods, work plan, and significance, must be submitted to the main advisor and committee for feedback and revision. Please be respectful to the committee members by allowing a minimum of two weeks to provide you with their edits and comments. Once the advisor, committee, and student agree on the proposal, the advisor sends a memo to the GPO scheduling a proposal approval meeting and oral qualifying exam. A final draft of the proposal must be saved in the departmental BOX for 7 days for review by all faculty members in the department. Ms. Ashleigh Rudd will then reserve a classroom during the time when all the dissertation committee members are available for proposal defense by the PhD students. The dissertation advisor should send an announcement via email to the faculty and graduate students. The presentation should be scheduled for no earlier than one week after the proposal has been distributed to the faculty. The student presents the dissertation research proposal (30 min maximum) to the committee in public and answers questions raised by the audience after the presentation. Following the proposal presentation and questions from the general audience, the student is examined in private by the doctoral committee. The oral exam focuses mainly upon student's research preparation and progress, such as theoretical background, research problems, hypotheses, logistics, strategy, methods, preliminary results, publications, and timetable. The student then leaves the room, and the committee votes to accept the proposal as is, with minor modifications, with substantial revisions, or rejection. Both written and oral exams must be taken at least one semester before the final exam.

C. Thesis/Dissertation Funding

Thesis projects generally require some money – funds are typically needed for field work, laboratory analysis, thesis preparation, travel to present research results at meetings, etc. The Department of Geosciences provides small research funds to qualified graduate students from the contributions of the GAB. Besides that, the Department of Geosciences *does not* provide financial support for research beyond that provided by GTA or GRA stipends. Students may have to cover certain costs “out of pocket”. However, there are several potential sources of funds that should be considered.

1. Faculty Grants

A student's thesis advisor may have grant money from various funding agencies (e.g., NSF, NASA, DOE, DOA, USGS, USWF, ACS-PRF, National Geographic Society, industry sources, etc.). Some grant funds may be available for all or part of a thesis project. However, extramural research grants are becoming more difficult to obtain, and generally only a few faculty have grant support at any one time. Moreover, whether grant money can or should be used in support of thesis research is left entirely to the discretion of the faculty member who holds the grant.

2. Presidential Graduate Research Fellowships

The Presidential Graduate Research Fellowship program of Auburn University is offered annually to a select number of qualified graduate students that intend to pursue doctoral and terminal professional degrees in established and emerging areas of excellence. Each year, a minimum of 33 new fellowships will be available for awards to begin in Fall semester of each academic year. Each award will consist of a \$15,000 Presidential Fellowship, along with a minimum \$7,000 Dean's Fellowship, and a minimum \$15,000 graduate research assistantship, along with tuition and fees. Each award will be for three years. Find more information here: <http://graduate.auburn.edu/au-presidential-graduate-research-fellowships/>.

3. Student Grants-in-Aid of Research

Several opportunities exist for obtaining financial support from outside agencies via their competitive grant-in-aid programs. In the past, individual graduate students have been awarded several thousands of dollars from these agencies to help defray the costs of their research. For example, in the Spring of 2003, eight students brought in a total of ~\$18,500 from six agencies. In the Spring of 2018, two students were awarded NSF Graduate Research Fellows that carry a stipend of \$34,000/year for three years. Some of these agencies, along with information regarding application deadlines, maximum awards, etc., are listed below. More detailed information about these and other competitive grant programs is provided by the GPO during Fall semesters.

Funding Source	Deadline(s)	Maximum Amount	Supporting Documents
AAPG https://foundation.aapg.org/	December 2	\$3,000	transcripts and departmental verification; two endorsements
GSA https://www.geosociety.org/GSA/GSA/grants/home.aspx	February 1	\$3,500	one appraisal from thesis advisor
GSA-SE section https://www.geosociety.org/GSA/GSA/grants/home.aspx	February 1	Variable	one appraisal from thesis advisor
SEG https://seg.org/programs/student-programs/scholarships/	February 1	\$5,000 to \$10,000	one appraisal from thesis advisor
SIGMA XI https://www.sigmaxi.org/programs/grants-in-aid-of-research	March 15 and October 15	\$1,000	one appraisal from faculty
Paleo Society https://www.paleosoc.org/grants-and-programs	Varies depending on grant	\$500	letter of endorsement from thesis advisor
AAG https://www.aag.org/award-grant/research/	Varies depending on grant	Variable	Varies depending on grant
SEDAAG https://www.aag.org/award-grant/research/	Varies depending on grant	Variable	Varies depending on grant

Most of the agencies require letters of support from faculty (and/or some form of departmental verification) as part of their application package. Because a faculty member cannot write a supporting letter without first seeing the proposal, and because faculty require some "lead time" and do not appreciate last minute requests for letters, students should discuss options with their thesis advisors and prepare their applications well in advance of the associated deadlines.

4. Department of Geosciences Advisory Board Student Grants-in-Aid.

GAB Student Research Grant - Funded by the GAB. Research needs and activities such as equipment, lab supplies, and travel costs. This opportunity is open to undergraduate and graduate students. Application should be submitted to the Chair of Department of Geosciences Awards Committee by **March 15**.

GAB Student Travel Grant - Funded by the GAB. Travel to academic meetings. Open to undergraduate and graduate students in Geology and Geography and Environmental Studies. Deadlines are October 1st for the fall semester (Travel Dates: August 15 to December 31) and February 15th for the spring semester (Travel Dates: January 01 to August 14).

5. Travel Awards

Graduate students are expected to attend regional national meetings to learn about the wider aspects of their discipline, network, exchange research ideas, and to learn about the job of being a professional in their chosen discipline. Some money is available to qualified graduate students to facilitate travel. Graduate students who travel to present research results at professional meetings can apply and compete for partial travel support from two sources: (1) the College of Sciences and Mathematics (COSAM) Student Travel Fund and (2) AU Graduate School Graduate Travel Grant. Announcements for these competitive travel award programs are distributed to graduate students. Guidelines and applications for these Travel Awards are available on the Graduate School, COSAM, and Department of Geosciences' website. Geography and Environmental Studies students may apply for travel funds related to meeting participation through the David W. Icenogle Fund. Travel awards are also offered by the respective professional organizations where the graduate students intend to present their data. Alabama Geological Society (AGS) also award travel grants. This is recommended that graduate students become members of professional organizations, including AGS. Application deadlines for these travel grants are usually very early and students are encouraged to find out the deadlines from those representative organizations.

6. Other Research Funding Opportunities

The Department periodically receives information regarding other student grants and funding opportunities associated with various agencies (NSF, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, etc.). If pertinent to graduate students in the department, this information is circulated or distributed via departmental mailboxes or e-mail.

D. Thesis/Dissertation Preparation

After completing the bulk of their thesis/dissertation research, students should generate a detailed thesis outline and present it to their thesis advisor for review and suggestions. Once the outline is approved, serious writing must begin. The final organization of the text will vary from one thesis to another, depending on the suggestions of the thesis advisor, the nature of the project and the inherent differences between geography and environmental studies and geology. Nonetheless, a thesis should include an Abstract; introductory sections describing Objectives, Previous Work, and Methods; sections describing Results, Interpretations, and Conclusions; a References section; and supporting Tables and Figures. The general format and writing style should be consistent with that required for publication in a professional journal(s) in the respective discipline/subdiscipline. To be accepted by the Graduate School, the thesis must be prepared according to the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Guide (<https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/electronic-thesis-dissertation-guide/>). This guide provides rigid guidelines regarding margins, pagination, signature and title pages, and much more. After reading pertinent policies in the guide, students should consult with their thesis advisor regarding the format of references and any other questionable issues.

Students should be aware that writing a thesis and everything that goes with it (e.g., preparation of figures, tables, maps, photos) takes considerable time. Most students require at least a full month or two to prepare a good first draft. The first draft submitted to the advisor should be in a form that the student deems to be the final form. It should be properly formatted and devoid of spelling and grammatical errors. Students should remember that faculty have many obligations and cannot necessarily drop what they are doing to edit a thesis immediately. If the first draft is prepared with care, fewer drafts and revisions will be required, and the thesis review process will require less time. A thesis/dissertation draft should not be passed on to other committee members until the thesis advisor gives approval. The committee members should be allowed two weeks to complete their reviews. Depending on the quality of the first complete draft, thesis editing by the advisor and committee, and consequent revisions by the student, may require a month or more.

Once a final draft of the thesis/dissertation has been approved by the entire committee, an electronic copy must be uploaded in departmental BOX for evaluation by all faculty members.

The uploaded copy in BOX will provide an opportunity for other faculty to read over the thesis/dissertation, make additional corrections, and to prepare questions for the thesis defense. The thesis should be uploaded in BOX at least one week prior to the defense. Prior to the final Master's Thesis Defense, students need to submit the Report of Master's Thesis Final Exam.

Before the thesis/dissertation is uploaded in BOX, the student also should submit another electronic copy to the Thesis and Dissertation Office at the Graduate School for a format check. This format check is important. If a format check is not made before final version is uploaded to the Graduate School, and corrections are required, then the student's graduation may be delayed. Students can upload theses/dissertations for a format check as late as one week before expected graduation. However, the Graduate School cannot guarantee that a format check will be completed on short notice. Hence, students are advised to apply for a format check several weeks before the final thesis/dissertation deadline and should monitor the graduate school website for specific submission guidelines.

E. Scheduling Thesis/Dissertation Work

When do most graduate students get their research and writing done? Although it may be tough juggling course work, teaching responsibilities, and thesis research, particularly during the first few semesters, students should begin thesis/dissertation-related work as soon as possible and use their time wisely. Graduate students should not have an undergraduate mind set. The faculty expects graduate students to work and be dedicated to their obligations, when necessary, during evenings, weekends, and semester breaks. Next to Summer terms, semester breaks are the best times to make progress on theses. Graduate students, particularly those who are being paid a GTA or GRA stipend for these time periods, should not treat semester breaks as vacations. All GAs on 12-months appointment must stay on campus to teach or conduct thesis/dissertation research.

Parties and other fun things are necessary to maintain sanity, but they should come at the expense of thesis research. New students may encounter colleagues who seem to have all the time in the world to party, plan trips unrelated to thesis/dissertation work, etc. Before following their examples, new students should ask those colleagues how long they have been in the program and how they pay or intend to pay for the remainder of their education without financial support from the department. If students have questions regarding department expectations, they should direct them to their thesis advisor or the GPO.

F. Thesis/Dissertation Defense and Examination

After a thesis/dissertation is approved by the entire thesis/dissertation committee, the student should save an electronic copy of the thesis/dissertation in Geosciences BOX through the assistance from Ms. Ashleigh Rudd. After consulting with their advisor, students should meet with the departmental seminar series coordinator and Ms. Ashleigh Rudd or Mrs. Kiley Coan to schedule a day and time for the formal thesis/dissertation defense at least 7 days after the thesis/dissertation has been saved in BOX. Students should be aware that a thesis/dissertation defense is not valid unless all thesis/dissertation committee members are present. In rare cases where a committee member will be away from campus for an extended period and, hence, cause unwarranted delays in defense scheduling, changes in the thesis/dissertation committee may be requested.

The defense consists of three parts: (1) a 20 to 30 min presentation; (2) a brief general question period during which all faculty and students in attendance can ask questions; and, following the departure of all other students, (3) a longer session during which faculty ask questions to the candidate. Questions typically concern the student's thesis research. However, faculty also may pose questions regarding other aspects of geosciences to which the candidate has been exposed during didactic course work. After the faculty question period, candidates will leave the room to allow faculty to deliberate and render a decision. The entire defense will require about two hours.

Students should complete two forms before they present their thesis:

(1) Request for Report of Master's Thesis Final Exam, which summarizes the recommendations of the MS candidate's committee.: <https://gradforms.auburn.edu/forms/MSTExamRpt.aspx>

(2) an Auburn University Electronic Thesis Approval Form, which can be obtained at https://bpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/wordpress.auburn.edu/dist/1/170/files/2020/05/Approval_form2020.pdf. If the

candidate's defense is successful, committee signatures may be obtained immediately following the defense.

PhD students should go through the checklist before the final defense:

<http://graduate.auburn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Doctoral-Completion-Checklist112017-5.pdf>. Forms can be generated at <https://web.auburn.edu/alpha/forms/DoctoralDissertationFirstSubmission.aspx>.

Near the completion of the doctoral research, students must present a 40 to 50 min public seminar on their dissertation research. Following the oral presentation, the student is examined in private by the doctoral committee and an outside reader assigned by the Graduate School. There are four potential outcomes of final exam decided by the doctoral committee: (1) unconditional pass, (2) conditional pass with requiring more course or research work, (3) retake, and (4) fail. Students may retake the final exam only once. If a student fails the final exam, they will be dismissed from the PhD program.

Successful students should provide the following forms after the defense:

(1) Dissertation First Submission Approval Form, which summarizes the recommendations of the PhD candidate's committee

(<https://gradforms.auburn.edu/forms/DoctoralDissertationFirstSubmission.aspx>),

(2) Auburn University Electronic Thesis Approval: https://bpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/wordpress.auburn.edu/dist/1/170/files/2020/05/Approval_form2020.pdf.

If the candidate's defense is successful, committee signatures may be obtained immediately following the defense.

G. Thesis/Dissertation Submission to the Graduate School

Upon completion of the defense, and final corrections to the thesis, students must prepare an appropriate number of copies (at their own expense). The Graduate School requires that students submit their thesis as a single computer file in PDF format using the Auburn University electronic thesis and dissertation (AUETD) submission page (<https://etd.auburn.edu/>). If the thesis work involved Alabama geology, students are encouraged to provide a copy to the Alabama Geological Survey. An electronic version of the approved thesis should be uploaded at the Graduate School AUETD and completed copies of Forms and thesis approval form respectively should be delivered to the Graduate School for final approval.

H. Thesis/Dissertation Research Publication

Students should consider co-publishing, with their thesis advisors, all or parts of their research. General agreements between student and advisor should be made prior to thesis completion. Advisors contribute a great deal of time, ideas, and, sometimes, funds to student theses. Hence, they expect that results will be published if appropriate. If a student fails to prepare any planned manuscripts in a timely fashion, the thesis advisor has the right to prepare the manuscript(s). Distribution of effort in paper preparation may impact the order of authorship.

VII. NON-THESIS OPTION FOR MS DEGREE

A. Committee Selection

Students who elect the non-thesis option also are required to establish an advisory committee prior to the development of their Plan-of-Study. After becoming familiar with faculty research (e. g., during faculty visitations), students should approach those faculty members with whom they have similar interests to discuss potential capstone research experiences and recommended coursework, and to request their services as advisor or major professor. Geology non-thesis students must complete a capstone project toward their degree requirements while Geography and Environmental Studies non-thesis students may either complete written and oral exams based upon their graduate coursework or a capstone project.

Once a match-up has been made, student and major professor should meet as soon as possible to establish a course-work plan, to better define a capstone research project or exam areas that are interesting and both temporally and economically feasible, and to select the remainder of the advisory committee. The committee must include a minimum of three faculty members, including the advisor. Committee members should be selected based on their area of expertise and its bearing on the capstone project or courses taken toward exams. Students are responsible for asking faculty to serve on their committees. Committee selection must be completed by the beginning of the student's second semester in residence; all committee members are required to sign the Plan of Study (see item V.B.).

B. Capstone Project in Geology

The "capstone experience" is a required part of the non-thesis Master's degree option. In our department, this requirement only can be satisfied by the completion of a capstone project under the supervision of a faculty advisor and two committee members. The capstone project must include some original work – i.e., data collection and interpretation – but at a level lower than expected for a thesis project. This level will be defined by the student's advisory committee.

The capstone experience should culminate with the completion of a "capstone" report or paper. This report, which must be reviewed, edited, and approved by the entire advisory committee, should be prepared as if the work was being submitted for publication in a pertinent professional journal. The final organization of the text will vary from one project to another, depending on the suggestions of the project advisor and the nature of the project. Nonetheless, the capstone report should include an Abstract; introductory sections describing Objectives, Previous Work, and Methods; sections describing Results, Interpretations, and Conclusions; a References section; and supporting Tables and Figures.

Preparation of the final draft of a capstone report may take several weeks. Students usually will have to submit several drafts to their project advisor for editorial comments and suggestions. Students should be respectful of their advisor – faculty have duties other than supervising your work and are not unpaid editors/rewriters who make sense out of nonsense. The initial draft of the

report, and all subsequent drafts, should be prepared as if they were the final version. Once the report is approved by the project advisor, copies are distributed for further review by the rest of the advisory committee. After committee comments are taken into consideration, a final report is prepared to submit to the committee members. Students should provide an electronic copy to the GPO for placement in the student's permanent file. Funding for capstone research projects may be available from some of the sources described in section VI.C.

1. Registration Requirements for Capstone Project

While working on their capstone experience, students following the non-thesis option may elect to register for GEOL 7980 – Capstone Project. A maximum of three hours of GEOL 7980 can be applied towards the 40 semester hours of course work required for the degree.

However, if a student completes all other course work, they are required to register for 3 hours of GEOL 7980 every term until the capstone project is completed.

2. Comprehensive Examination for MS in Geology

The completion of a non-thesis Master's degree in Geology also requires satisfactory performance on a comprehensive examination. The exam will be designed to test knowledge acquired during didactic course work, but also may include questions pertaining to the capstone project. Although they may invite questions from other members of the faculty, the student's advisory committee designs and administers the exam and makes the final decision regarding pass or fail. If a student fails the examination, one re-examination may be given on the recommendation of the advisory committee and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. Further examinations will be allowed only under exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Graduate Council.

The examination should be scheduled towards the end of the term in which the student intends to graduate, in consultation with the project advisor and committee. In the case of an open oral examination, the student or advisor should ask their advisor to send an announcement for distribution one week prior to the exam.

Upon completion of course work, capstone project, and examination, students must inform their academic advisor at the Graduate School. A non-thesis approval form will be shared with the non-thesis advisor who will then report the examination results to the Graduate School before the end of the term during which they plan to graduate.

C. Capstone Project in Geography and Environmental Studies

Non-Thesis exams, both written and oral, require that the student document their expertise in specific sub-areas of the discipline based upon graduate coursework. Both written and oral exams must be administered during the term in which the student is planning to graduate in accordance with the Graduate School Calendar deadline for submission Non-Thesis Master's Option Student Comprehensive Examination Report Form.

Students will be required to select one of two options: Traditional Examination or Capstone Examination. In either case, a student will be expected to organize a committee of three faculty members based upon the student's primary subject interests, but also graduate courses taken.

Committees should be established prior to the submission of the Plan of Study to the non-thesis option advisor. One Geography and Environmental Studies faculty committee member must serve as the organizing Chair and Major Professor and should assist the student in identifying additional appropriate committee members. A minimum of two committee members must be Geography and Environmental Studies Graduate Faculty members while the other may be a Graduate Faculty Member from another discipline or department with whom the student has taken graduate-level courses or in the case of the capstone project has expertise relevant to the project topic.

1. Traditional Exam

Students taking a traditional exam approach are required to sit for both written and oral exams.

a. Written Exams

In consultation with the committee chair and members, scheduling of exams must take place at least one month prior to the administration of any exam. To schedule exams, the students should complete the Non-Thesis Exam Request Form (available from the Graduate School) which requires each committee member to identify the dates the student will take their portion of the exam as well as the exam format (see b). All exams must be completed within a two consecutive-week period. The completed Exam Request Form must be submitted to the Graduate Program Officer (GPO) for inclusion on the student's file prior to the initiation of any exams.

Written examinations will be written and administered by each committee member. The faculty member will decide whether to administer the exam as a closed-book, two-hour exam or a 48-hour open resource exam. The faculty member must disclose the format to the student when the student initiates the scheduling of exams. For the former, the faculty member will arrange for a quiet location for the exam to take place – for example, the Haley Bagwell Library/Conference Room may be scheduled.

The content of the exam is to be based upon graduate-level coursework taken by the student. Within one week of the student scheduling an exam with a faculty member, the faculty member will provide the student with a written summary guide of general topics, issues, and/or readings and texts that will be covered on the written exam.

Each written examination must be assessed by the faculty author within one week of the administration of the exam, but no later than three days before the oral exam. While written exams will be evaluated in terms of "Pass/Fail," in keeping with the overall expectations held of graduate students in didactic courses, these comprehensive examinations may only be considering as "Passing" with a performance at the level of a "B" letter grade or higher.

Each committee member will submit a copy of the written examination questions along with the student's responses and the faculty member's evaluation of "Pass/Fail" to the Committee Chair within one week of the administration of the exam. The Committee Chair will then share all these documents with the other committee members no later than 3 days prior to the oral exams. A copy

of these documents must also be filed with the GPO for inclusion in the student's file at the same time.

b. Oral Exams

A joint oral examination will be scheduled at the same time as the written examinations using the Non-Thesis Exam Request Form. The student is responsible for coordinating a day, time, and location that accommodates the schedules of all three committee members. This information must be documented on the Exam Request Form and agreed to by all committee members. All faculty in the department must be made aware via e-mail of the date, time, and location of the scheduled oral exam when the form is submitted to the GPO.

The oral examination provides the opportunity for the student and committee members to further engage with the questions and topics presented in the exam preparation guide. In this examination, faculty members may seek clarification of the student's written examination answers or ask for elaboration on topics presented in the written exam or included in the study summary document. Similarly, the student may be given the opportunity to explain or defend their written responses.

The committee chair is responsible for leading the oral examination. The oral examination shall last no longer than 1.5 hours. The oral examination may be attended by any member of the departmental faculty.

At the conclusion of oral exam, committee members will confer privately to decide whether the oral answers presented confirm the assessed results of the written exams or refute them. The committee will vote upon whether the student has earned an overall "Pass" or "Fail" on the combination of written and oral exams. A two-thirds majority "Pass" vote is necessary for a student to have successfully completed their examinations. The results of the overall exam shall be reported to the Graduate School using Non-Thesis Master's Option form.

2. Capstone Exam

Students taking the capstone examination are required to carry out an original research project resulting in a written manuscript that will be reviewed by the faculty committee and subject to an oral examination.

a. Written Project Guidelines

The Capstone Project should serve as a culmination of the student's graduate coursework by synthesizing material within an original research project – but less extensive than a thesis project. The student should work in consultation with their committee, but especially the committee chair, to identify an appropriate topic of study.

By the end of the student's second semester of graduate study, the student should write a brief (maximum 2-page, single-spaced) proposal describing the work they will undertake. The following concerns must be addressed in the proposal: 1) Research question(s) and/or objectives; 2) Brief review of literature on the topic; 3) Methods; 4) Significance of the project 5) Description of manuscript or report to be generated. In addition, a timeline for completion of the project must be attached to the proposal. The brief proposal must be submitted to each member of the student's graduate committee for approval prior to commencing with the project.

The final project associated with the Capstone Project is a manuscript or report, generally 20-30 double-spaced pages in length exclusive of references. Ideally, such a manuscript/report would be suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal or meet the expectations of a funding agency and may follow those specific expectations. Deviations from these guidelines are at the discretion of the Committee and GPO.

Written capstone project manuscripts will require several drafts over the course at least one semester. While working on their capstone project, students following this non-thesis option may elect to register for GEOG 7980 – Capstone Project. A maximum of three hours of GEOG 7980 may be applied toward the 39 semester hours of course work required for the degree. Committee chairs are expected to provide appropriate and timely editorial comments and suggestions to the student on their manuscript. Once the report is approved by the committee chair, copies are distributed for review by the rest of the committee and an oral exam is scheduled using the attached Non-Thesis Capstone Project Oral Exam Scheduling Form.

b. Oral Capstone Exams

Oral examinations should be scheduled for no sooner than two weeks after the delivery of the manuscript to all committee members. The student is responsible for coordinating a day, time, and location that accommodates the schedules of all three committee members. This information must be documented on the Non-Thesis Capstone Project oral examination scheduling form (available from academic advisors of the Graduate School) and agreed to by all committee members. Once the form is completed, the original approved copy must be submitted to the Graduate School and for inclusion in the student's file. When the form is submitted to the GPO, all faculty must be made aware of the day, time, and location via e-mail. A digital copy of the manuscript must be provided to any faculty member who makes such a request.

The oral exam provides the student with an opportunity to formally orally present their capstone project to their faculty committee and in turn offers the committee with the opportunity to seek clarification or elaboration of information presented in the written manuscript. The oral presentation should typically take the format of a professional conference presentation.

The committee chair is responsible for leading the oral examination. The oral exam shall last no longer than 1.5 hours. Any departmental faculty member may attend the oral exam.

At the conclusion of oral examination, committee members will confer privately to decide whether the written manuscript and oral exam meet graduate standards and whether additional revisions of the manuscript are required prior to acceptance. The committee will vote upon whether the student has earned an overall "Pass" or "Fail" on the combination of written and oral exams. A two-thirds majority "Pass" vote is necessary for a student to have successfully completed their exams. After any revisions are incorporated into the manuscript and approved by the committee members, the results of the overall exam shall be reported to the Graduate School. A digital copy of the final approved manuscript should be provided via e-mail to the GPO for inclusion in the student's file.

VIII. GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Several other policies and procedures must be considered during the final months before graduation. These involve a required graduation check, registration, timing of graduation, and fee and loan payments.

A. Graduation Check

Students are required to request a Graduation Check at the Graduate School during the term preceding the one in which they expect to graduate. This procedure, which can be done electronically on the Graduate School's website (<https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/graduation/>), is required to ensure that the student's academic record follows the departmental and Graduate School regulations. Failure to apply for a Graduation Check in a timely manner will delay graduation. If graduation is delayed for other reasons, additional graduation checks will be required. Students should also notify the Graduate School no later than the fifteenth-class day of the term in which they intend to graduate.

B. Timing of Graduation and Registration Requirements

Graduate students must register for every semester, including the term they plan to graduate. When a student officially graduates depends on when they submit their thesis copies and thesis approval Form (or non-thesis option Form, in the case of the non-thesis option) to the Graduate School.

There are generally two pertinent thesis deadlines for each term, and these are published in the Graduate School Calendar (<https://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/graduate-school-calendar/>). The first deadline is set for a date six to nine weeks into each term. The second deadline is set for graduation day at the end of each term. If a student who is registered for the appropriate number of thesis hours submits their thesis to the Graduate School before the first deadline and receives a Certificate of Completion from the Graduate School, they will then graduate at the end of that term. If the thesis is submitted and a Certificate of Completion is acquired after the first deadline but before the second deadline, then the student will not graduate until the end of the following term. However, the student need not register for that term unless they have incomplete or deferred grades to clear, in which case registration for GRAD 7900 is required.

C. Payments and Other Clearances

1. Graduation Fee

Graduate students are required to pay a \$40 graduation fee at the beginning of the term in which the student expects to graduate.

2. Payment of Debts

Students are responsible for all University debts incurred during graduate work. Before they can graduate, students must pay all library fines, computing bills, photographic bills, fees for parking permits, parking tickets, or any other debt incurred on campus. If students have accounts with any University facility, they must submit to their graduate advisor, prior to the thesis defense, a statement from those facilities that indicates that accounts have been paid in full. The Department is not responsible for student bills.

3. Key Return

Before their departure from the Department, students are required to return all building, laboratory, and storage facility keys to the office of Access Control (<https://fm.auburn.edu/access-control/>). Remind Ashleigh Rudd, Anthony Hall, or your thesis advisor(s) about the fact that you have returned the keys. Failure to return keys may result in postponement of graduation.

4. Employee Clearance Certificate

Upon termination of employment at Auburn University (i.e., termination of GTA or GRA support), students must complete a Clearance Certificate. A completed Clearance Certificate must accompany the final Personnel Action Form (PAF) for an employee to receive their final paycheck. Items of clearance include return or satisfactory arrangement of items obtained from the library; payment of fines and fees; disposal or accounting of radioisotopes, hazardous materials, and/or infectious/biologically active materials; and return of all departmental books, equipment, keys, etc.

5. Student Loan Exit Interviews

Students who have received a loan from Auburn University (i.e., a United States Steel Loan administered through AU) must schedule an exit interview with the Bursar's Office for the term before they graduate. The exit interview is designed to establish a payment schedule that will ensure that the loan is reimbursed to the University within a reasonable time frame. Auburn will not allow students to graduate if they do not complete this interview.

6. Archiving Thesis or Project Materials

Before leaving Auburn University, students should meet with their thesis or project advisor to discuss research material archival. In general, students should plan on depositing a representative set of research specimens, data sets, thin sections, etc. in a clearly labeled box(es) for departmental storage and future reference.

IX. DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES

A. Departmental Seminar Series

A series of lectures is conducted within the Department every semester (except Summer), usually on a weekly to biweekly basis. This seminar series provides students the opportunity to broaden their backgrounds via presentations by guest lecturers involved in various disciplines of geosciences. Graduate students are required to attend all seminars (exceptions are obviously made for students that have conflicting teaching schedules). Schedules for forthcoming lectures will be posted and distributed via Departmental email and posted to the department website. Students are encouraged to approach the current seminar series coordinator if they have suggestions for potential speakers.

B. Student Organizations

Several student-run organizations are active within the Department. These include Sigma Gamma Epsilon (SGE, a geological honorary), the Geology Club, and the student chapter of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG). Organizations for geography and environmental studies students include the Geography Students Organization (GSO), student chapter of Southeastern section of Association of American Geographers (AAG) and the Honor society of GTU (Gamma Theta Upsilon). Participation in these organizations is strongly encouraged.

SGE is supported by funds raised from the quarterly sale of introductory geology laboratory kits and is essentially the medium for Department social events (e.g., Spring picnic etc.). All graduate students are eligible for induction into SGE. Induction to this honorary is once a year, normally scheduled for October. Information about SGE can be obtained from the current SGE president and/or other student members.

The activities of the Geology Club vary from year to year, but typically include fossil- or mineral-collecting trips, caving trips, and community functions such as Adopt-a-Stream clean ups.

Students are also encouraged to participate in Graduate Student Council (GSC) activities. The GSC *“exists to promote research and improve the conditions under which graduate students live and work”*. All graduate students become members of GSC when they enroll in the Graduate program. The GSC sponsors, among other things, the Graduate Research Forum. For additional information, students should consult the Graduate School web page or contact the current department representative to the GSC Senate.

C. Student Service

The Department assists in many University- or College-sponsored events, including regional Science Olympiads and Science Fairs for junior and senior high school students. Graduate students are frequently called upon to help with these events. Similarly, students may be requested

to make periodic visits to elementary schools to talk about Earth Sciences. Student service in these endeavors is strongly encouraged and greatly appreciated.

D. Social Events

Graduate students typically co-organize several Department-oriented social functions each year, including a Spring picnic. These events are open to all students, faculty, alumni, GAB members, family, and friends, have been outstanding, and should not be missed.

E. A Required Warning

What students do during their free time off campus is basically their business (if activities do not negatively impact their performance as employees or progress towards the degree). **However, students should be aware that Alabama law strictly prohibits the consumption of alcoholic beverages** (<https://auburnpub.cfmnetwork.com/B.aspx?BookId=12261&PageId=460639>) **and other controlled substances** (<https://auburn.edu/administration/campus-safety/prevention.php>) **on campus (except on gamedays).**

X. GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A. Initiating Employment

Employment-related forms from the Office of Human Resources (HR) and W-4 are sent via email to all incoming graduate assistants from Ms. Stephanie Woodley. All graduate assistants will need to communicate with Ms. Stephanie Woodley (334-844-5872; woodlsc@auburn.edu; 249 Sciences Center Classroom) if they have any questions and to return all completed appointment papers. All appointment papers should be completed and returned promptly to avoid delays in the receipt of the first check. Completed forms must be accompanied by legible copies of at least two of the following forms of identification, at least one of which must contain a photograph (passport, driver's license, social security card, and/or birth certificate).

B. Teaching Assistantships

1. Twelve-month Appointments

Graduate Teaching Assistantships for MS and PhD students in the Department are generally one-third time positions. MS student appointments are for twelve-month periods and are limited to two years except under unusual circumstances as approved on a case-by-case basis by the Department Chair and the GPO. PhD students are funded for three years with an MS Degree in hand or for four years without an MS degree. These appointments are strictly monitored and offered through annual evaluations of students' progress. GTA responsibilities take up approximately 13.3 hours per week on average. Generally, each GTA will spend ~8 contact hours devoted to teaching assignments. The remainder of the time is spent in office hours, class preparation, and/or grading. In addition, GTAs may be called upon to present "substitute" class lectures or assist in the grading of lecture exams. GTAs must work at least equal hours which will be monitored by their research supervisors. We do not require all GTAs to teach summer laboratory sections as only a few courses are offered in summer. GTAs who are not chosen to teach in summer will work as a Graduate Assistant by helping research for their main advisors or other professors and for the main office.

2. Teaching Assignments

Teaching assignments for GTAs are made by the GPO near the beginning of classes every term. Final assignments cannot be made until registration is complete and copies of GTA schedules have been received. Upon receiving their assignments, GTAs should contact the course instructor immediately for instructions regarding laboratory or lecture course syllabi and other information. Because some laboratory sections may be canceled or rescheduled after the start of classes, some changes in GTA assignments may be required during the first two weeks of classes.

3. Summer Teaching Assignments

PhD students receiving two and more years of department GTA support will be assigned to teach one summer as GTA. The summer GTA assignments will be rotated in the order of seniority.

First year MS students should focus on research in their first summer. However, if there are no second year MS students available, first year MS students may be assigned to teach the labs that they have taught before. Their teaching loads in the following fall or spring semesters will be reduced accordingly.

Second year MS students may be assigned to teach labs in their second summer if they have made good progress and need additional summer support to finish their thesis. Preference (for 2nd summer support) will be given to students with outstanding teaching evaluations and those who received external funding (e.g., GRA, Fellowships, research grants, etc.) in their previous semesters.

4. Teaching Evaluations

GTAs are required to evaluate their teaching performance every term and for all laboratories assigned. Evaluations are performed at the end of the term through AU-Evaluate. Results will be used by the GPO to gauge teaching efforts and to guide teaching assistants towards improved performance. Results will also be used by the faculty as a basis for nominating students for COSAM Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Awards (see section X.B.7.).

5. Maintenance of Appointments

Teaching Assistantships are awarded and maintained on a competitive basis. A student may lose their financial support for either of two reasons: (1) poor performance in assistantship duties as determined by teaching evaluations and/or the faculty for whom the student is working; and (2) poor grades. GTAs are required to maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better. If a student's overall GPA falls below 3.0, the student generally has one term to bring it up before the assistantship is jeopardized. Of course, to be on an assistantship, a graduate student must be registered for at least one course during each academic term of the assistantship.

6. International Students

International students who are not native speakers of English must demonstrate competence in spoken English before they can be awarded a GTA. International GTAs are required to submit evidence of satisfactory English-speaking skills. This can be demonstrated with a score of 23 or higher on the Speaking Section of the Internet-based TOEFL (iBT), or a score of 7 on the Speaking section of the IELTS, or a score of 4.4 and above in the Speaking section of the iTEP (replaced the SPEAK test), which is administered at Auburn University prior to the start of classes. International GTAs may be asked to enroll in a course designed to improve their oral communication skills. (Follow instructions at: <http://graduate.auburn.edu/current-students/guidelines-graduate-assistantships/>). Students who don't pass the SPEAK test typically are required to complete INT 1820- Classroom Communication Skills for International Teaching Assistants before considering for a GTA appointment by the Department.

7. Teaching Awards

The Department has the privilege every year of nominating one or two of its GTAs for consideration for Outstanding Graduate Teaching Awards given by the College of Science and Mathematics. Departmental nominations are made based on teaching evaluations and faculty comments.

Faculty also nominate graduate students for other awards, including the Graduate School's Outstanding Masters and PhD Student Awards and various scholarships awarded by the Alabama Geological Society. Although these are not strictly teaching awards, teaching performance is an important criterion used by Department faculty in making nominations.

C. Research Assistantships

Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs) are generally available for one or two years. However, appointments may vary depending on the type and extent of faculty funding. Duties and responsibilities of students holding a GRA are determined by the professor responsible for the administration of the associated research grant. Failure to perform required duties will result in forfeiture of the assistantship.

D. Graduate Student Annual Evaluation

All graduate students will undergo an annual evaluation of academic progress in the spring semester. Continuation as a student at the graduate program and future funding support will depend on the outcome of the evaluation. The thesis/dissertation advisor will prepare an annual report on student's academic progress to distribute to the GPO. There will then be a follow-up meeting which will include the student, student's thesis advisor, and the GPO to discuss student's academic progress and future funding opportunities. The Department Chair may also take part in some of the meetings regarding annual evaluations.

E. Termination of Employment

Upon termination of employment as a GTA or GRA at Auburn University, students must complete a Clearance Certificate. Students should refer to item VIII.C.4 for details.

F. FICA and Medicare

According to the Graduate School and based on Section 218 of the Social Security Act, all students on assistantship are exempt from FICA and Medicare, regardless of the number of hours registered for, as of June 30, 2000.

G. Graduate Student Resources

- AU Medical Clinic (<https://cws.auburn.edu/aumc/>; 400 Lem Morrison Drive) For non-emergency medical needs including COVID-19 testing.
- AU Student Counseling & Psychological Services (<http://wp.auburn.edu/scs/>)
- Phone for non-emergency appointments or after-hours assistance (334-844-5123) or stop by in person at the AU Medical Clinic (400 Lem Morrison Dr., #2086).
- East Alabama Mental Health 24/7 Hotline (800-815-0630)

- Safe Harbor (<http://wp.auburn.edu/healthandwellness/safe-harbor/>)
- 24/7 crisis phone number: 334-844-SAFE(7233); Drop-in: 1206 Student Center)
- Safe Harbor believes, supports and assists students and employees of Auburn University who have experienced power-based personal violence, including dating/domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking/harassment.
- Title IX Office (<http://www.auburn.edu/administration/aaeeo/title-ix/>)
- In cases of sexual misconduct, you can find the Title IX Coordinator in 317 Foy Hall or contact them at 334-844-4794 or taylokg@auburn.edu. The website also has useful resources and information about the reporting process.
- AU Ombudsperson (<http://www.auburn.edu/administration/ombuds/>) is a neutral resource with training in conflict resolution. Contact: Kevin Coonrod (334-844-7170; ombuds@auburn.edu).
- Auburn Cares (334-844-1305; Student Center suite 1115; <http://aucares.auburn.edu/>) Services offered include but are not limited to navigating campus and community resources, exploration of and referral for mental health concerns, coordination and follow-up during and after an illness or injury, financial hardship assistance, problem resolution, crisis management.
- Academic & Teaching Support: Miller Writing Center (3436 RBD Library; Auburnwrites@auburn.edu) <http://wp.auburn.edu/writing/writing-center/>
- Library Services for Graduate Students <https://libguides.auburn.edu/gradservices>.
- Biggio Center for Teaching & Learning (<http://wp.auburn.edu/biggio/>).

H. The Onboarding Document

This document will also be helpful in navigating resources around Auburn and the Department of Geosciences (https://auburn.edu/administration/human_resources/onboarding/new-employees.php)

I. Geosciences Student Excellence and Accountability Committee (G-SEAC)

This committee is charged with supporting student excellence initiatives and accountability in Geosciences and with contributing to COSAM initiatives in these areas. G-SEAC is responsible for creating and assessing progress towards the department's student excellence goals (e.g., climate surveys), serving as an accountability structure for the department, and depending on circumstances, advocating for issue resolutions with department leadership. G-SEAC is co-chaired by a faculty chair (appointed by Chair) and the department G-SEAC graduate assistant (G-SEAC-GA, appointed by chair following faculty vote and interview). All other faculty and student membership is voluntary (no appointments). The faculty committee chair is responsible for supervising the GA, serving on the relevant COSAM Committee, and serving as the department's point-person to COSAM's Dean of Strategic Initiatives and Programs. The GA is responsible for organizing monthly G-SEAC meetings and conducting a semester student-only town hall. The faculty chair and GA share responsibilities.

G-SEAC GA will assist the Committee with the following tasks:

- Be a student leader for the G-SEAC
- Assist in planning and coordinating events facilitated by the G-SEAC committee
- Attend faculty meetings and retreats to brief accomplishments or in-progress work
- Design and conduct Climate surveys to faculty and students every year and work with G-SEAC and the Department Chair to make actionable plan and develop new initiatives based on the survey results
- Assist GPO to update Graduate Student Handbook on student training, professional development, and issues
- Help G-SEAC to develop a process of filing a student complaint or resolving conflicts
- Assist in outreach to local/regional colleges, K-12 schools, community organizations, and alumni to build new collaborations and partnerships
- Assist in publicizing and recognizing scholarly accomplishments and contributions of our students
- Support communications (e-Geotiger, webpages update) and social media operations
- Contribute to student learning/training needs of Geosciences
- Assist with recruiting and supporting the colloquium series and/or workshops for Geosciences

XI. INFORMATION FOR GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

A. Purpose of Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Graduate teaching assistantships, which are awarded on a competitive basis, assist the Department in the operation of its undergraduate programs and support recipients in their pursuit of a graduate degree. Specifically, the primary functions of assistantships are as follows:

- 1) Assistantships help the Department by allowing more students to be taught in an informal, small-group context. Laboratory instruction provides students with the “hands on” experience that is so crucial to understanding the subject matter, but normally impossible to provide in a lecture setting. Also, because laboratories are designed to hold no more than 30 students per section, they are particularly beneficial to undergraduate students who may require more personal attention than they can obtain in a large lecture section.
- 2) By providing the opportunity to teach the fundamentals of the discipline, teaching assistantships allow graduate student recipients to become more competent in, and

confident with, their basic knowledge of Geology and/or Geography and Environmental Studies.

- 3) Teaching assistantships provide recipients with the opportunity to develop and refine oral communications skills, which will be of considerable importance in professional careers that follow graduate work.
- 4) Graduate assistantships provide a stable financial base from which recipients can pursue course work and thesis research.

B. GTA Appointments

GTAs are appointed to one third-time (33.3 %) appointments. These percentages are defined based on a normal teaching load, relative to a full 40-hour work week. Therefore, third-time GTAs are expected to devote no less than 13.3 hours a week to their Departmental duties (see section XI.F.).

C. Geology Teaching Assignments

Teaching assignments will be made by the GPO (Dr. Gottardi). Most GTAs will participate in introductory Dynamic Earth (formerly Physical Geology; GEOL 1100), Earth and Life Through Time (formerly Historical Geology; GEOL 1110), and Environmental Geology (GEOL 2100) courses. However, some GTAs will be called on to teach laboratories associated with upper-division Geology courses. These include Mineralogy and Optical Crystallography (GEOL 2010), Introduction of Paleobiology (formerly Principles of Paleontology; GEOL 3200), and Sedimentary Petrology (GEOL 4010) (Fall semester courses); and Igneous and Metamorphic Petrology (GEOL 2050), Structural Geology (GEOL 3400), Stratigraphy (GEOL 4110), Economic Geology (GEOL 4210), Hydrogeology (GEOL 5100) and Geomorphology (GEOL 5220) (Spring semester classes). Although it may not be possible to accommodate requests, students with an interest in teaching laboratories for upper division courses should contact the GPO and/or the instructor for the course.

Final teaching assignments typically are not made until just before the start of each semester. These final assignments cannot be made until all GTAs send their class schedule to the GPO. Assignments are based on GTA background or experience, laboratory course enrollments after final registration, and GTA class schedules. Regarding the latter, GTAs must provide the GPO with a schedule of their own courses before the start of each term (see section XI.F.1.).

Occasionally, one or more laboratory sections are canceled during the first one or two weeks of classes, typically due to under-enrollment. Cancellations may result in minor changes in teaching assignments. Any cancellations or assignment changes must be approved by the GPO.

D. Geography and Environmental Studies Teaching Assignments

Most assistants will participate in introductory Global Geography (GEOG 1010), Honors Global Geography (GEOG 1017), Human Geography (GEOG 2010), Global Systems: Weather and Climate (GEOG 1020), Global Systems: Land and Water (GEOG 1030), and Cartography and Graphics (GEOG 3810) courses. However, some GTAs will be called on to teach laboratories associated with

upper-division Geography and Environmental Studies courses. These include Aerial Photography and remote Sensing 5820/6820) and Geographic Information Systems (GEOG 5830/6830). Although it may not be possible to accommodate requests, students with an interest in teaching laboratories for upper division courses should contact the GPO and/or the instructor for the course.

Final teaching assignments typically are not made until just before the start of each semester. Assignments are based on GTA background or experience, laboratory course enrollments after final registration, and GTA class schedules. Regarding the latter, GTAs must provide the GPO with a schedule of their own courses before the start of each term (see section XI.F.1.).

E. Concepts of Science Teaching Assignments

The Concepts of Science (CoS) laboratory sections are coordinated by Dr. Marilyn Vogel. GTAs in CoS will teach laboratory sections of Concepts of Science (SCMH 1010). More information can be obtained from Dr. Vogel.

F. GTA Duties and Responsibilities

1. Before the Start of Classes

Before the start of classes each term, GTA's must supply the GPO with their course schedules so that teaching assignments can be made without schedule conflicts. Blank schedules will be distributed by the GPO for this purpose. Classes listed as TBA (to be arranged) should not be entered in these schedules unless the class days and hours have been previously arranged by the instructor. Classes that are not applicable to degree work (e.g., weightlifting, dance, etc.) do not take priority over teaching responsibilities and, therefore, also should not be entered on GTA course schedules. Once GTAs know both their class and teaching schedules, they should also provide the GPO with their office hour(s) for the term (see section XI.F.5.).

Once teaching assignments have been made, GTAs should contact the instructor(s) responsible for the courses to which they have been assigned. Instructors will provide specific information regarding lecture/laboratory duties, lab prep meetings (see section XI.F.3.), production of laboratory syllabi (see section XI.F.4.), grading for lecture professor for Geography and Environmental Studies, etc. Because communication between GTAs and course instructors is essential, all GTAs must be physically present in the Department on the first day of classes each term.

2. Distribution of Teaching Effort

As previously noted, third-time GTA appointments generally involve a total of 13.3 hours per week. GTAs are generally assigned ~8 contact hours per week. For example, a student may be assigned 3 distinct two-hour introductory laboratory sections, 2 two-hour introductory lab sections and 1 two-hour upper-division laboratory, etc. In addition, GTAs will spend one to two hours per week with office hours (see section XI.F.5.). The remainder of time will be devoted to lab prep meetings (with instructors and colleagues; see section XI.F.3.), laboratory preparation (see section XI.F.6.) and maintenance (see section XI.F.8.), grading (see section XI.F.9.), and/or instructor assistance (see

section XI.F.10.). Should a GTA find that their duties require more than 13.3 honest hours per week, they should report the condition to the GPO and course instructor(s).

3. Laboratory Prep Meetings

GTAs are responsible for arranging and attending a laboratory prep meeting each week with the appropriate course instructor. Attendance at laboratory prep sessions is mandatory.

These sessions provide a venue for the introduction of forthcoming laboratory tasks, goals, and expectations, clarification of general policies and procedures, and/or discussion of problems that arise with lab equipment, lab exercises, specific students, etc.

Laboratory prep meetings are most effective when they are scheduled for the same day and time each week. GTAs assigned to GEOL 1100 or GEOL 1110 labs and GEOG 5820/6820 and GEOG 5830/6830 will meet (not individually), once a week, with the faculty laboratory coordinator for the respective course. GTAs for all other courses should arrange weekly laboratory prep meetings with the course instructor.

4. Syllabus Preparation

GTAs responsible for **upper-division** laboratory courses should consult with the course instructor for information regarding laboratory syllabi. They should find out if they are responsible for the lab syllabus and, if so, how the syllabus should be prepared.

GTAs for **introductory** laboratories (GEOL 1100 or GEOL 1110) should meet, **immediately after receiving teaching assignments**, to develop a unified laboratory syllabi in consultation with Dr. Marilyn Vogel (for SCMH 1010, GEOL 1110) and Dr. John Fronimos (for GEOL 1110). These syllabi should, at the very least, include: (1) names, office locations, and office hours of all GTAs assigned to laboratories for the course; (2) the schedule for laboratory study sessions (if known); (3) a brief statement of laboratory objectives; (4) the title of the laboratory manual being used; (5) a summary of other required materials (if any); (6) a weekly schedule of laboratories; and (7) a clear and detailed statement of laboratory grading policies. Veteran GTAs should have copies of previous syllabi that can be used as models.

5. Office Hours

All GTAs must schedule two weekly office hours each term. Office hours should be scheduled to optimize utilization by students (generally mid to late afternoons) and should not conflict with course lecture times. Upon scheduling office hours at the start of each term, GTAs should report office hours to the GPO and include them on laboratory syllabi.

GTAs may find that students rarely visit during office hours. However, GTAs should remain in their office during the posted times. If for some reason a GTA cannot attend their regularly scheduled office hour, they should inform their students. The GPO, department head, and other faculty do not appreciate hearing reports from students that their GTA could not be found during office hours.

6. Laboratory Preparation and Lectures

GTAs should carefully prepare for laboratory well in advance of each exercise. They should review each exercise and any associated samples, maps, etc. to make certain that they understand how the exercise should be completed. This should be done **before** laboratory prep meetings, so that problems or questions can be addressed prior to laboratory sessions. During their review of laboratory exercises, GTAs should anticipate student questions and prepare lucid responses.

The amount of introductory lecture required during laboratory sessions varies with the course. GTAs generally are required to provide a 10 to 30 min introduction to each laboratory exercise at the start of each session. These GTAs should meet with the course instructor to find out what and how material should be presented. Introductory lectures should be prepared in advance, and presented in a clear and concise manner, in a vocabulary that is commensurate with the geologic background of the students.

Prior to Fall 2000, laboratory sessions for introductory courses (GEOL 1100 and GEOL 1110) were only 50 minutes long. Hence, GTAs responsible for these laboratories did not utilize laboratory time for lectures. Instead, students enrolled in these classes were required to attend a weekly lab preparatory lecture, given by the course instructor prior to laboratory. During these lectures, course instructors provided all of the introductory information that the students need to work on the lab. Hence, GTAs generally were only required to provide a brief (a few minutes) review of the exercise at the start of each session. With the change to the Semester system, introductory laboratories have been modified to the more traditional two-hour format. Hence, it is now the responsibility of the GTAs to provide an introduction to laboratory materials at the start of each section meeting. This makes attendance at laboratory preparation meetings all the more critical and mandatory!

7. Laboratory Teaching

GTAs should arrive at all of their scheduled laboratory sections on time and fully prepared to teach. They should not miss any lab sections to which they have been assigned. If a GTA needs to be absent for any reason, **they are responsible for finding a graduate student colleague to substitute**. The course instructor should be informed of any substitutions in advance of the laboratory session(s) that will be missed. GTAs should never let a laboratory session go unattended.

GTAs must remain in the lab room during laboratory sessions. GTAs are responsible for opening the lab doors and locking them after the students leave. Students in introductory geology courses (GEOL 1100 and GEOL 1110) and the Concept of Science (SCMH 1010) should not be permitted to remain in the room after the scheduled lab time. If they require more time, they should be advised to attend one or more of the scheduled GTA office hours or other pre-arranged help sessions. Students in upper division Geology and Geography and Environmental Studies classes are permitted to work in respective lab rooms whenever they have time. These students will have key-card access to the appropriate lab room doors.

The main task of GTAs is to assist in the teaching of students. In the laboratory setting, this is best done by providing individual attention. GTAs should never denigrate a student or make them feel foolish for asking a question. Most students in introductory courses at Auburn University have had their last introduction to Geology/Earth Science in the 8th grade. Therefore, most questions posed by students are honest ones. Some students are reluctant to ask questions; GTAs may need to

approach these students to find out if they need assistance. The success of a GTA depends, in large part, on their leadership style and consideration for students.

GTAs are expected to conduct their laboratories in a professional and fair manner.

Personal appearance and hygiene are signs that distinguish GTAs from their students and help establish teacher-student relationships. Hence, GTAs are expected to dress and groom appropriately for laboratory sessions.

A note on Students with Disabilities – Auburn University is committed to providing its students with an accessible campus and equitable learning environment. If a student in your class has a disability that requires academic accommodations, access to assistive technology training, or support services, they should contact the Office of Accessibility for additional information: 1228 Haley Center; 334-844-2096 (Voice/TT) or visit the Office of Accessibility website at www.accessibility.auburn.edu.

8. Laboratory Maintenance

GTAs are responsible for assuring that all laboratory sample kits, specimens, and equipment (e.g., microscopes, etc.) are adequate and in order throughout the term. Any damage, theft, or other losses should be reported immediately to the course instructor(s) and/or to Mr. Anthony Hall.

GTAs assigned to standardized introductory laboratories (GEOL 1100 and GEOL 1110) should pay particular attention to rock, mineral, and fossil specimens. For GEOL 1100 laboratories, the Department maintains 45 boxes of each of five numbered specimen sets: silicate minerals, non-silicate minerals, igneous rocks, sedimentary rocks, and metamorphic rocks. When these sets are being used in laboratories, GTAs should make sure that students do not use acid in the boxes or put acid-soaked samples in the boxes, that students properly return specimens to the boxes, that specimen quality is maintained, and that boxes are undamaged. If any specimens in any set need to be replaced (due to loss or poor quality), new samples can generally be found in the storage bins in ACLC. Replacements should be made by GTAs; students should not be granted access to these bins. Under no circumstance should samples be replaced with specimens from the upper-division course laboratories. GTAs should contact the course instructors and Mr. Anthony Hall immediately if replacement samples are unavailable or diminishing from storage bins. GTAs should keep track of acid bottles and refill them when depleted. If 10% diluted HCL acid solution is not available, contact Mr. Anthony Hall to make more 10% HCL acid solution to refill the small lab bottles.

GEOL 1110 laboratory specimens (rocks and fossils), which are stored in the Lane sample prep lab of ACLC are currently relatively meager. There are no “replacement bins” for these samples. Hence, GTAs should make every effort to ensure that the samples we do have are clearly labeled, carefully handled by students during lab sessions, and properly stored when not in use. Loss or damage of specimens should be reported immediately to the GEOL 1110 faculty lab coordinator.

Laboratory maintenance requirements for GTAs in charge of upper-division Geology and Geography and Environmental Studies laboratories vary from course to course. These GTAs should seek instructions from the course instructor.

9. Laboratory Grading

Grading procedures and policies for introductory laboratories (GEOL 1100 and GEOL 1110) should be standardized to ensure consistency among GTAs. Standardized grading procedures and policies will be established at the initial GTA meeting each term, with the guidance of the faculty laboratory coordinator. These procedures and policies should be clearly summarized in laboratory syllabi, and strictly followed throughout the term.

GTAs for upper-division courses should seek information about laboratory grading policies and procedures and relay pertinent information to the students on the syllabus.

GTAs should carefully keep written records of class attendance as well as exercise, quiz, and exam grades. Grade records and final laboratory grades, which are the property of the University, must be submitted to the course instructor in a timely manner at the end of each term. ***GTAs should not leave campus at the end of any term before course instructors have had an opportunity to review lab grades and to investigate any problems.***

Student work should be graded and returned promptly. Grade assignments should be fair and impartial. For this reason, GTAs ***are not permitted to date any laboratory students*** until after the end of the term in which the student was enrolled in their lab.

If a GTA suspects that a student has cheated on a laboratory assignment, a homework assignment, a quiz or an examination, they should present the problem to the course instructor or laboratory coordinator. Guidelines and policies concerning cheating are provided in the Tiger Cub, the student guide to life on campus.

10. Other Tasks

GTAs may be called on periodically to provide additional assistance to course instructors. GTA help may be needed in leading class field trips and/or proctoring and grading lecture exams. Also, teaching assistants occasionally may be required to serve as a substitute lecturer for faculty members who are temporally off campus.

11. Teaching Evaluations

GTAs are required to evaluate their teaching performance every term and for all laboratories assigned. Evaluations are performed near the end of the term via *AU Evaluate* (see the GPO or Dr. John Fronimos or Dr. Marilyn Vogel for instructions). Results will be used by the GPO to gauge teaching efforts and to guide teaching assistants towards improved performance.

12. End-of-Semester Duties

At the end of each term, GTAs will be given assignments to clean up pertinent laboratory instruction facilities, following the guidance of the lab coordinator, course instructor, and/or veteran GTAs. This typically involves checking, restocking, and/or reorganizing laboratory kits (including sample re-labeling), storage of samples and other supplies, and general laboratory tidying. End-of-term clean-up for GEOL 1100 and GEOL 1110 labs is best achieved as a group effort by all GTAs who were responsible for these introductory laboratories. GTAs responsible for upper division laboratories

should seek clean-up instructions from the course instructor. Lab clean ups ***should not*** be postponed until the start of a subsequent term.

G. Maintenance of Teaching Assistantships

Graduate Teaching Assistantship reappointments are not automatic. In order for a GTA to be reappointed, recipients must do the following: (1) maintain a grade-point average (GPA) of a 3.0 or better on all course work (including undergraduate courses at AU that are not taken on the S/U option); (2) make satisfactory progress toward the degree (including thesis work); and (3) receive acceptable teaching evaluations.

If a GTAs overall GPA falls below 3.0, that student has one term to bring it up before the assistantship is forfeited. Progress towards the degree will be judged by the student's thesis advisor and/or the GPO. Teaching performance is assessed using standard teaching-evaluation forms and instructor feedback. GTAs are required to evaluate their teaching performance at the end of every term, for all laboratories assigned.

H. Graduate Assistant Privileges and Rights

In addition to the privileges that are granted to all graduate students, GTAs are (1) eligible for membership in the Auburn University Federal Credit Union, (2) eligible to apply for travel funds administered by the Graduate School, and (3) granted a tuition fellowship** (for one-third time or higher appointments).

In addition to rights as a student at Auburn University, graduate assistants have the right to receive written notification of all decisions, actions, or contingencies that will affect their assistantship. This includes how they are evaluated and reappointed. Assistants also have the right to seek resolution of assistantship-related grievances through the Graduate Assistants Grievance Policy. If complaints are received about a GTAs performance, whether by a supervisor, academic advisor, or department Chair, the GTA has the right to receive prompt notification and to be offered the opportunity to respond to the complaint, presenting evidence in their defense. In such cases, the burden of proof rests on the person(s) making the complaint.

**Tuition fellowship limited to 33 credit hours for MS students, and 66 credit hours for PhD students.