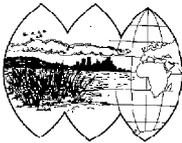


GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK



DEPARTMENT OF
GEOGRAPHY &
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES



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Students --

Welcome to the Master of Arts program in the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. This document is designed to help you navigate the graduate program and the university. You will find faculty members in this department ready to talk with you about courses and opportunities in their own areas of expertise.

Parts of this handbook have been linked to the undergraduate handbook in the past – this may cause some unusual errors here and there.

Much of the information in this booklet comes from rules and regulations that are established elsewhere. We try to update the handbook as procedures change, but it is possible that changes in regulations are not all reflected here. There may be omissions or errors. Our intention is to keep this document current and absolutely accurate; your help in alerting us to editing needs will be appreciated by all.

If you haven't done so already, please be sure to sign up for the graduate student google group by contacting the departmental office, ges@neiu.edu, or under the “be connected” tab on ges.neiu.edu.

Sincerely,

Erick Howenstine
Chairperson, GES

Please contact the GES Graduate Coordinator, Melinda Storie at ms-storie@neiu.edu with suggestions or errors in the handbook. We try to keep the handbook accurate and current, but it is an unofficial document. Consult the University Catalog, the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), the College of Graduate Studies & Research (CGSR), and materials on NEIUpport for the original documents and policies.

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Program Requirements

PREVIOUS (students admitted prior to Fall 2012)

GES-391: GIS 1	3 cr.
GES-411 Scope and Philosophy of GES.....	3 cr.
GES-442 Quantitative Measurements*.....	3 cr.

*or other approved statistics course

ONE OF

GES-430 Research Seminar or	3 cr.
GES-5901, 5902, 5903 Thesis Seminar	at least 6 cr.

Approved Electives..... 18/21 cr..

Total 33 cr.

Pass Comprehensive Exam (research paper option)

Thesis Defense and Deposit (thesis option)

CURRENT (students admitted Fall 2012 and after)

GES-411 Scope and Philosophy of GES.....	3 cr.
GES 413 Advanced Research Methods (411 is prereq)	3 cr.

TWO OF

GES 391: GIS 1	3 cr.
GES-442 Quantitative Research Methods.....	3 cr.
GES 440 Qualitative Research Methods	3 cr.

ONE OF

GES-430 Research Seminar or	3 cr.
GES-5901, 5902, 5903 Thesis Seminar	at least 6 cr.

Approved Electives..... 15/18 cr.

Total 33 cr.

Pass Comprehensive Exam (research paper option)

Thesis Defense and Deposit (thesis option)

Graduate GIS Certificate

GES 391*: GIS I
GES 392*: GIS II
GES 393*: GIS III
GES 442: Quantitative Methods in GES

Two of the following:

GES 387*: Interactive Cartography
GES 390*: Remote Sensing and Digital Image Processing
GES 416: GIS for Natural Systems Management
GES 417: Urban Information Systems

*all 300-level must be completed for graduate credit

Note that only **three** 300-level starred courses may be double-counted as courses that fulfill MA requirements.

Undergrad GIS Certificate

(available for graduate students also)

GES 391: GIS I
GES 392: GIS II
GES 393: GIS III
Approved statistics course or completion of exam

Two of the following:

GES 377: Computer Cartography
GES 387: Interactive Cartography
GES 390: Remote Sensing and Digital Image Processing
GES 395: Internship in GIS

GEOGRAPHY & ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

OVERVIEW

The M.A. program in Geography & Environmental Studies is a 33-credit hour accredited degree that prepares students for scholarly research, professional careers, and advanced graduate work for those seeking a doctorate. The program is offered by the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies along with two undergraduate degrees (Geography, and Environmental Studies) and three undergraduate minors (Geography, Environmental Studies, and Geographic Information Science).

The GES M.A. originated around 1970. At any time there are approximately 30-40 graduate students taking classes, most of whom pursue their studies part-time. Because many of our students work during the day, the program is offered in the evening and weekends. Most classes meet once a week for 3 hours and some meet on Saturdays. If a student takes one course per term and one in the summer (excluding any deficiency requirements), it is almost a four-year program; some full-time students have completed the program in less than two years, but this is rare. Students are required to complete the program within a 6-year timeframe or classes will need to be retaken.

Many students are attracted to the program because of the geography or the environmental studies focus – not both. Although it is possible to emphasize one side over the other, the degree combines these two complementary fields, preparing students for careers involving environmental issues with the skills, models, and tools of a geographer. Because one or the other field may not be fully understood by potential students, we will define them briefly here.

GEOGRAPHY – WHAT IS IT?

Geography describes, explains, and predicts activities on the surface of the Earth. You might say it is the study of space just as history is

the study of time. It is often called “the mother of all disciplines” and the “synthesizer of knowledge” because of its ability to bring together information from many disciplines in the context of space.

It has been traced back before 0 A.D., and it integrates – perhaps more than any other discipline -- knowledge of both the human and natural world. It asks and answers such practical questions as “*why* is that where it is,” and “where *should* it be?” “Where *will* it be?” These questions and their answers are often central to decision making because location is such a practical matter. Answering these questions requires a practical breadth of knowledge that is unusual in academic fields. In this sense it is an integrating discipline.

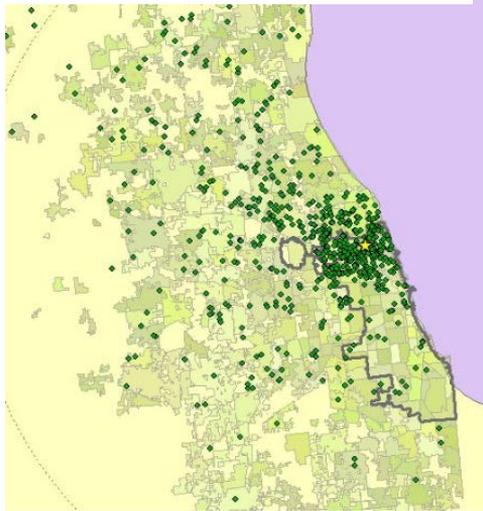
City and regional planners are faced with spatial issues daily. So are decision makers in real estate, retail, manufacturing, transportation, trade, tourism, and governmental agencies at all levels. It is a practical field that can be easily put to work; this makes it an attractive degree to employers and does not pigeonhole graduates into a narrow range of positions.

Cartography was one of the earliest occupations of geographers, and remains central to the field because maps so efficiently convey spatial knowledge. In recent decades cartography has evolved into Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – a relational database that uses mapped location as the link between any number of databases. It also makes extensive use of remote sensing and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Most students in the department learn cartography and GIS, as well as the related tools including GPS, remote sensing and aerial photo interpretation. You will be pleased to know that geospatial information technologies are among the top three growth fields for employment, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. The department now offers a GIS Certificate program, possible in a single year. It can be integrated into the degree as requirements and electives.

To understand the importance of geography, consider the location of Northeastern Illinois University itself: in the center of the continent, on the shore of a great freshwater lake, on fertile soils in a dynamic climate, with good drainage and water navigation, and fairly secure from the standard natural hazards like earthquakes, fire, volcanism,

and major flooding. Its central location makes it a natural hub for rail and air travel. The lake is navigable and one of the largest fresh water reservoirs in the world. These things lend themselves to economic vitality. Chicago has grown to one of the largest metropolitan areas

GES alumni in Cook County (Howenstine)



in the country, with global reach not only in terms of commerce but also as a point of entry for immigrants from around the world.

Within Chicago and its more than 300 municipalities you will find dozens of unique ethnic centers, as a result of segregation and also congregation: a matter of choice. Among those areas is the wealthiest and also the poorest suburb in the nation. The NEIU campus is near the center of this fabulous conglomeration and as a commuter campus it reflects this diversity as a matter of course.

NEIU has earned the longstanding title Most Diverse University in the Midwest.

The Department of GES takes advantage of this vitality by offering frequent field trips, providing internship experiences, and focusing a good part of its curriculum on urban and metropolitan issues such as sustainable development, gentrification, city planning, urban geography, globalization, and the urban environment. It is headquarters to a multitude of businesses, non-profit organizations, and governmental agencies, and our alumni rarely have to go far from home to find employment in their field.

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES – WHAT IS IT?

Environmental Studies -- like geography -- falls between the natural and social sciences, but focuses on environmental protection rather than spatial dynamics. Students learn how to recognize, define, and anticipate potential environmental problems. They learn the tools and methods to define, detect, and monitor problems, then determine the causes and consequences and assess potential solutions from a social science perspective. Environmental problems often fall into the category of pollution or depletion, and they vary in scale from household air quality to climate change. Therefore, solutions often involve community awareness and activism, policy and legislation, economic incentives and technological change. And they must be informed by sound scientific knowledge.

Chicago is a laboratory for the department of GES; students will take field trips to such sites as major sanitary landfills, power plants, municipal water reclamation plants, brownfields, the river and the lake, an impressive array of parks and natural areas. They also can take advantage of the McHenry County Conservation District's 1,200 acres of preserved and restored land, with some short-term student housing just 50 miles north of Chicago. Of course there are many opportunities to get involved in environmental organizations throughout the city, including the headquarters for the EPA Region 5, Center for Neighborhood Technology, nature museums and interpretive centers, and dozens of environmental organizations -- not to mention regional planning centers such as the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and the Metro Chicago Information Center.

The Master's degree combines both geography and environmental studies, and elevates the level of skill several notches over what can be achieved with the undergraduate degree. Research skills, academic standards, leadership abilities, writing and oral presentation, general scholarship and application of modern tools are emphasized in the graduate course of study.

M.A. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

These are the formal goals of the M.A. in GES. Objectives are specific to each course and will be outlined in those syllabi.

Knowledge: Graduate students will pursue and master advanced, specialized knowledge within Geography and Environmental Studies.

Tools of Inquiry: Graduate students will develop academic curiosity and expertise in using tools of inquiry reflecting the norms and standards of Geography and Environmental Studies. This expertise includes research ethics and methodologies, modes of critical thinking and problem solving, and appropriate uses of technology.

Relevance: Graduate students will apply their knowledge and tools of inquiry to contextualize their learning within broad global, public, and academic communities.

Communication: Graduate students will develop professional communication skills, giving them the ability to engage in the critical, open exchange of ideas. They will be able to participate in diverse, collaborative networks within and across disciplines.

Professionalism: Graduate students will be prepared to serve and lead effectively in a diverse, global society according to the professional standards of Geography and Environmental Studies. They will be ready to establish themselves as ethical individuals in their professional lives.

CERTIFICATE IN GIS

Since Fall of 2009, the department has been offering a Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Science (Program Code G902), which may be completed by M.A. students or graduate students at large. The certificate, which will be dispensed separately at graduation, is an 18-hour (six-course) program. Note that the program requires a statistics course. Please contact the GIS

Coordinator, Dr. Ting Liu, for application information.

Required Courses

- GES 391*: GIS I
- GES 392*: GIS II
- GES 393*: GIS III
- GES 442: Geographic Problems in Quantitative Measurements (or approved statistics course)

And two of the following:

- GES 387*: Interactive Cartography
- GES 390*: Remote Sensing & Digital Image Processing
- GES 416: GIS for Natural Systems Management
- GES 417: Urban Information Systems

*all must be completed for graduate credit

The typical schedule (subject to change) for these classes is as follows. Please check with the GIS Coordinator for the most accurate information.

Fall Terms	Spring Terms	Summer Terms
390/387	391	393
391	392	
	416/417	
	442	

Students seeking only a Graduate GIS Certificate will need approval of the Graduate Enrollment Services as well as the Department. Those also seeking a Master's Degree will have the Graduate Enrollment approval for that, and can apply for the GIS certificate separately after entrance into the M.A. program. Please see the GIS Coordinator for details and forms required.

Certificate-only? Apply through Graduate Enrollment. You will be listed as a Certificate-Seeking Student (code: G902). When you complete the Certificate, it will appear on your transcript.

M.A. and Certificate? You will apply to the M.A., indicating GES or – for that matter -- any other graduate program. Apply for the Certificate by contacting the GIS Coordinator after admission into the M.A. program.

Transcripts will reflect the completed Certificate; students will also receive a paper certificate suitable for framing.

ENTERING THE PROGRAM

GRADUATE STUDENT AT LARGE

Non-degree seeking students or those wishing to start their program before formal admission may get the status of “Graduate Student at Large” from the Graduate Admissions Office (D-101). They may then take graduate-level classes and apply to a program at a later time. See transfer credit policy on the College of Graduate Studies and Research website for more details on what can be applied to the degree.

ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Admission to the program requires the possession of an undergraduate degree from a regional or internationally-recognized accredited college or university with a cumulative G.P.A. of at least 2.75 on a scale of 4 (a 3.0 GPA is required in courses that are relevant to the degree). Students must either possess at the time of admission or make up after conditional admission 15 – 18 semester undergraduate credit hours in geography and environmental studies. These must include courses equivalent to the following: 1. World Geography (GES 104) 2. Introduction to Environmental Studies (GES 150). Students may also opt to take proficiency exams for these two courses (see information below). Because this is a dual-field degree, it is common for students with varying academic backgrounds to be conditionally admitted into the program with some undergraduate coursework needing to be completed.

Students will be required, at the discretion of the GES Graduate Coordinator, to remedy the deficiencies noted in the student's undergraduate background before being fully admitted into the program. Students must earn an “A” or “B” in all deficiency courses unless otherwise noted on their acceptance letter. Deficiency courses do not count toward the graduate degree, but may be taken concurrent to graduate coursework in some cases. However, deficiency courses should be prioritized to be completed right away

after admission into the program. **If deficiency coursework is not completed in the first 12 credit hours of coursework, the CGSR will block registration for subsequent courses.**

Those with a G.P.A. below 2.75 can sometimes be admitted under provisional status, which requires an “A” or “B” in all courses up to 9 credit hours of graduate-level courses. Otherwise, occasionally arrangements can be made through individual consultation to reestablish academic standing before applying to the program. Such remedial coursework will be additional to the coursework required for the Master's degree, but in some cases may be done while satisfying specific course deficiencies. See admission outcomes below for details.

The proficiency exams for GES 104 and GES 150 are offered by the Graduate Coordinator once a semester and may be attempted once. These exams are administered as standardized exams and each consist of 150 multiple-choice items. Students are given two hours to complete each exam. Past or completed exams are not available for student review. If students do not meet the minimum score required (112 / 150), they will be required to complete the full course. Preparation for the exams will involve studying the course materials and readings on your own. Consult the Graduate Coordinator for specifics.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The application for the program is available on the NEIU website (<https://admissions.neiu.edu/>) and includes the following components: Application form; two letters of recommendation; a two-page written statement of goals and objectives; official transcripts from all higher education institutions; and a non-refundable \$30.00 fee. There are additional requirements for international students, which can be found here: <http://www.neiu.edu/academics/international-programs>. ALL application materials are due by the following deadlines for domestic students: November 1 for the following Spring semester; April 1 for the following Summer semester; July 15 for the following Fall semester. International deadlines are earlier (see website above). There is approximately a two-month processing

and evaluation period.

There are four possible outcomes of application to the program:

1. *Full Admission*: The student has an adequate GPA, all required background courses, good references and a written statement that is satisfactory to the department.
2. *Conditional Admission*: The student has a satisfactory application packet, but has some deficiencies in their academic background, which must be made up within the first 12 credit hours of graduate coursework. Graduate level coursework may begin immediately, but prerequisite coursework must be a priority. Specific deficiency requirements will be listed on the admission letter.
3. *Provisional Admission*: The student does not meet the GPA requirement, has an erratic undergraduate academic background, or has a degree from an institution for which academic credit equivalency cannot be established. Students admitted to provisional status must achieve a grade of B or better in all courses taken until the term of completion of the first 9 graduate-level credits in the program. Failure to meet this performance standard will result in dismissal from the program. Students admitted to provisional status who also lack mastery of certain, specific program prerequisites may also be allowed to obtain that mastery by completing prerequisite coursework as described above. Such students will be subject to both expectations described above for students in provisional and conditional status.
4. *Denied Admission*. The student is denied admission into the program because of one or several aspects of their application packet.

CHOOSING A PROGRAM ADVISOR

The GES Graduate Coordinator serves as your program advisor until you begin to meet with a faculty member who most closely matches your chosen area of study. To declare a topical advisor after having met with that person and come to an agreement, please submit your request in writing to the Graduate Coordinator (email is fine). Your topical advisor will serve as chairperson for the

comprehensive examination (if there is one) and thesis or research paper. Courses should be taken in consultation with the advisor, whose mission is to see you graduate successfully and move into a satisfying career or doctoral program.

Please keep in mind that the Graduate Coordinator (who is the initial program advisor for all students) will help with paperwork, will maintain records, and will be the student's liaison with the College of Graduate Studies & Research, and so on, even if you are working closely with a different faculty advisor.

The following are eligible GES advisors:

Dr. D. Grammenos	BBH344B	x5641	d-grammenos@neiu.edu
Dr. E. Howenstine	BBH344A	x5647	e-howenstine@neiu.edu
Dr. T. Liu	BBH 344H	x5645	t-liu1@neiu.edu
Dr. A. Peimer	BBH344C	x5642	a-peimer@neiu.edu
Dr. M. Storie	BBH346B	x5697	ms-storie@neiu.edu

ROLE OF ADVISOR

It is important that you meet with your advisor regularly – ideally every semester. While you are working on your research paper or thesis, you will meet with your advisor more frequently. This can be done in person, on the phone, by video conferencing (depending on your advisor), or by email. Advisors will alert you to academic and professional opportunities and solutions to challenges.

Advisors often become a student's mentor or advocate; they can assist a student long after graduation. Students with a close working relationship with advisors are more likely to get strong advocacy through the program and obtain a meaningful recommendation for employment or doctoral programs.

Faculty post office hours on their door, maintain voicemail and email, and are also available by appointment. If your advisor is difficult to reach, don't give up. Just notify the Department Chairperson, who will send a little reminder. Providing you advice is one of our responsibilities – it is never an imposition on our time.

Departmental policy states that students should expect to hear back from faculty members (with an acknowledgement of receipt, if

nothing else) within 2 business days of initial correspondence by e-mail or voicemail. In turn, faculty and staff expect students to respond to e-mails or voicemails within 2 business days.

You should expect to receive comments on drafts of research paper and thesis proposals and drafts within two (working) weeks of your submission.

An exception to the above policies includes extended absences by faculty such as sabbaticals, sick leave, or breaks between semesters. Because many faculty travel and conduct research during semester breaks (especially during summer), faculty will provide information in outgoing messages regarding their expected return date.

Tenured and tenure-track faculty are on a 9-month contract and are not required to be on campus during the summer sessions nor do they receive compensation for advising during the summer months. Many faculty travel for research or conferences during the summer or have other obligations. For this reason, we suggest that you communicate with your faculty advisor and your thesis or research paper committee well in advance regarding any summer plans that may require feedback or input from faculty. Research paper and thesis credits cannot be taken during summer sessions; however, students may work on chunks of their projects after discussion their plans with faculty advisors.

CHANGING AN ADVISOR

Graduate students are discouraged from changing their thesis or research paper primary advisor. Exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis by writing an appeal to the Department Chair, outlining the reasons and providing accompanying documentation to support the appeal. Keep in mind that students changing advisors will likely need to retake any thesis or research paper credits previously taken with the previous advisor.

TRANSFER CREDITS

Credit for coursework taken at Northeastern prior to admission to a graduate program, which the student wishes to count towards that

graduate program, is limited to no more than 50% of the program requirements, except in the case of credits from an earned graduate certificate. The entirety of credits from an earned graduate certificate can be counted towards a graduate degree program. No additional transfer credit is allowed if credits from an earned certificate represent 50% or more of the total program requirement credits.

Graduate transfer credits from other accredited universities can be earned either before admission to the student's program or after admission to the program, provided that the total number of transfer credits (regardless of when they were earned) does not exceed 9 hours. All transfer credits earned after the student has been admitted to his/her program must be approved by the advisor, program advisor, and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research prior to enrollment at the other institution. Courses that have been counted toward the award of a previous degree cannot be used as transfer credit. Only courses that were applicable to a graduate program at the institution where they were taken can be accepted as transfers. Only courses with grades of B or better are eligible for transfer.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

REQUIRED COURSES

The program requirements are organized by your admission into the department. Please consult with the Graduate Coordinator if you were admitted earlier but wish to complete the most recent requirements instead. However, students admitted Fall 2012 and after may not appeal to go back to the old requirements.

For students admitted Fall 2008 – Summer 2012:

GES-391: GIS 1.....	3 cr.
GES-411 Scope and Philosophy of GES.....	3 cr.
GES-442 Quantitative Measurements*.....	3 cr.
*or other approved statistics course	
ONE OF	
GES-430 Research Seminar or	3 cr.
GES-5901. 5902, 5903 Thesis Seminar	at least 6 cr.
Approved Electives.....	18/21 cr..
Total	33 cr.

Pass Comprehensive Exam (research paper option)
Thesis Defense and Deposit (thesis option)

For students who entered the program Fall 2012 and later:

GES-411 Scope and Philosophy of GES.....	3 cr.
GES 413 Advanced Research Methods (411 is prereq)	3 cr.
TWO OF	
GES 391: GIS 1	3 cr.
GES-442 Quantitative Research Methods.....	3 cr.
GES 440 Qualitative Research Methods	3 cr.
ONE OF	
GES-430 Research Seminar or	3 cr.
GES-5901. 5902, 5903 Thesis Seminar	at least 6 cr.
Approved Electives.....	15/18 cr.
Total	33 cr.

Pass Comprehensive Exam (research paper option)
Thesis Defense and Deposit (thesis option)

Students opting for the 6 credit hour thesis are not required to take the comprehensive examination. They must, however, defend their thesis in a public venue.

Students may apply up to 10 credit hours (3 classes) from a short list of undergraduate “starred” classes to their graduate degree if they have the instructor’s permission and satisfy graduate specific requirements for those courses. These courses include the following:

GES 329*: Sustainable Energy Policy

GES 348*: Latino Metropolis

GES 380*: Field Methods

GES 387*: Interactive Cartography

GES 390*: Remote Sensing and Digital Image Processing

GES 391*: GIS 1

GES 392*: GIS 2

GES 393*: GIS 3

*Note: These courses are ONLY available for graduate credit. Students with graduate standing may not take any of the above courses to fulfill undergraduate deficiency requirements.

TIME REQUIREMENT

Students must finish their degree within six years of receiving their first graduate-level grades. For example, if a student were admitted in the fall of 2019 and began taking graduate-level classes that term, they must complete by December, 2025. Students who demonstrate satisfactory academic progress, but have **documentable** extenuating circumstances can appeal to the CGSR to count outdated coursework with the support of their advisor and the Graduate Coordinator. If the six-year window is exceeded (and no extension is received) the student begins to lose credits from the front end of the program. In the scenario above, credits received Fall 2019 would be lost when new credits were added Spring of 2026, unless an appeal had been approved. Talk to your advisor if your deadline is approaching.

GPA REQUIREMENT

Graduate students must maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 in all courses relating to the graduate program. This includes any foundation undergraduate courses assigned as “deficiency courses.” Students may receive only two grades lower than a B during their graduate program (graduate-level courses only). Low grades may be removed in this regard by taking the same course again (see Repeating a Course, below). Grades below C will not count toward graduate credit, but will affect the graduate GPA. Courses transferred in from other institutions will not affect the GPA, but can only carry credit if the student earned an A or B. Thesis grades (HP, P, and NP) do not affect the GPA.

ACADEMIC PROBATION AND DISMISSAL

If a student’s GPA falls between a 2.0 and 3.0, the student will be placed on academic probation by the CGSR and must reestablish their academic standing by raising their GPAs during their next term. This may be done by taking additional courses or – for an additional benefit of removing the C-grade “strike against” -- taking the same course again.

Academic Probation is a status determined once per semester and initiates a letter to the student and Graduate Coordinator instructing the student to establish, with the Coordinator, a plan of action to raise the GPA back to 3.0 or better. Normally this is expected to happen within one or two terms.

Here is a scenario that may help explain. If a student has taken 9 credits and has received an A, a B, and a C, they are running a 3.0 average for the first 9 credit hours. The C has been balanced by an A, and is one “strike against” because only two grades may be below B throughout the program. If they then receive a D (1) that is factored in for a GPA of $(4+3+2+1)/4 = 2.5$. The D will not count as graduate credit or toward the degree. This initiates academic probation and they’ve used up both lower-than-B grade chances. Working in concert with the Graduate Coordinator (and probably the advisor), the student will attempt to reestablish academic standing with high grades. One A will take the GPA to $(4+3+2+1+4)/5 = 2.8$. Two will make $(4+3+2+1+4+4)/6 = 3$, and

they are whole again. The GPA impact of low grades is greatest early in the program since students have fewer courses to average.

If the student's GPA falls below 2.0, the student is automatically dismissed by the CGSR. The CGSR can also dismiss students for failure to make academic progress. This mostly applies to students who continually withdraw from coursework or have failed to make progress on deficiencies, program coursework, or other requirements.

Please review the probation and dismissal policies enforced by the CGSR here: <http://www.neiu.edu/academics/graduate-college/current-student-resources/graduate-academic-policies>

THESIS VS. RESEARCH PAPER

There are two capstone options for graduate students in the department. A thesis carries at least six credit hours, involves three committee members, and requires a public oral defense. The research paper carries three credit hours, requires two committee members, and does not require an oral defense – but RP students must undergo a comprehensive examination, from which thesis students are exempt. In addition, RP students must take 3 additional credit hours of electives (to equal the total 33 graduate credit hours for the program). The next section details the registration process for thesis and RP credits.

A research paper or “library thesis” requires a student to ask a literature-informed, focused question about a specific topic within Geography and Environmental Studies, and then produce a detailed and comprehensive literature review of the topic. In the research paper, RP students discuss their research question in the context of the literature and provide insights and directions for future work. Completed research papers are kept on file in the department; however, they are often publishable as review articles in journals as well. Research paper credit hours are evaluated using a letter grade system; thus the final paper can range from F to A paper quality.

Thesis students also pose a unique research question, but supplement a comprehensive literature review with the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Thesis students discuss their main results within the context of how their thesis contributes to the topic-specific literature. After the research, analysis, and write-up are complete, students present their work in a public forum (defense) and meet with committee members to respond to additional questions. Full copies of theses are kept in the Ronald Williams Library; however, many thesis students publish one or more manuscripts in academic journals. Thesis credit hours are evaluated using a three-level system: High pass, Pass, and No pass.

Research papers are reviewed by a two-member committee: a chairperson and second-reader. A research paper committee chairperson is the student's topical advisor. Both committee members (the chairperson and second-reader) must be tenure-track faculty in the GES Department.

Thesis papers are reviewed by a three-member committee: a chairperson and two readers. A thesis chairperson is the student's topical advisor and must be a tenure-track member of the faculty (Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor). Two other committee members are required, one of whom must be tenure track from the Department. The third may be from another department or a professional from outside the University who specializes in the area of interest, with no specific degree requirement. An outside member must meet the approval of both GES thesis committee members and, if anyone raises a concern, by Department vote (tenure-track faculty only). Students work closely with their thesis or RP advisor throughout the project. Other committee members are involved throughout development of the paper, often especially near its final draft.

Both the thesis and research paper must follow APA formatting guidelines, and include an abstract, approximately one page in length, and a table of contents that will reveal the paper's structure. The thesis must be explicit in the methods, analysis, and data interpretation sections. The chairperson and committee members will have other requirements as well.

Students electing to complete a thesis should begin planning early – coursework often serves as preparation by way of chosen topics and written papers. The same is true, to a lesser extent, for students completing the research paper.

TIMING OF THESIS OR RESEARCH PAPER

To enroll in the research paper or thesis credits, the student must be near the end of their program and the thesis or research paper committee must approve the paperwork prior to registration. For research paper students, this includes a full proposal approved by both readers. For thesis students, the Thesis Registration Contract for the current semester must be approved before you may register. For initial registration of thesis credit, a thesis prospectus must also be submitted along with the Thesis Registration Contract, and the Thesis Registration Form. In practice, the proposal often becomes a substantial part of the paper itself. Signatures on the Thesis/Research Paper Proposal Acceptance Form (available on the department website) indicate the agreement acceptable to all. This formal understanding is filed with the Graduate Coordinator. Substantive changes must have the full committee’s approval and must also be filed with the Graduate Coordinator.

If the student has a target goal for completion of the program, he or she should work well in advance of the CGSR and registration deadlines, and get the committee chairperson’s approval at least two months before the date at which all program requirements must be completed. Often the chair and/or committee members require significant changes; remember that it takes them time to review and provide comments on the manuscript, and it may take time for you, the student, to respond. There are often several iterations of readings, suggestions, and revisions. This is the capstone paper and potentially a publishable piece of work, so everyone must be satisfied with the result. Be aware that especially during busy times of the semester or during semester breaks, there may be a longer turnaround time for faculty comments on drafts. **Please make sure to communicate with your advisor about your plans.**

WORKING ON THESIS OR RESEARCH PAPER

Throughout the process of writing the thesis or research paper, the

student works closely with the committee chairperson, but maintains contact with all members and provides them with whatever work in progress they wish to see. Normally, the chairperson approves the paper before it is passed in full to the other members, and at that point the other members may request any manner of change.

It is unusual that a research paper is completed in one term, and almost impossible for the thesis to be done so quickly. Note that if an “Incomplete” grade is given for GES 430, the student will only have until the end of the following semester (excluding summers) to complete the work before the “I” automatically turns into an “F.” Therefore, it is a good idea for the Research Paper student to register for GES 430 during the semester in which they plan to graduate. In order for a student to register for GES 430, both readers must have approved the full and complete proposal.

However, for the thesis seminar (GES 5901, 5902, and 5903), students take a combination of credit hours that is appropriate for the specific thesis work to be completed that particular semester. These credits must add up to at least 6 credit hours by the completion of the student’s program. Careful planning and frequent communication with an advisor is necessary to make sure an appropriate plan of action is carried out. A Thesis Registration Contract signed by the student, advisor, and committee (post-proposal) must be submitted along with the thesis registration forms. For initial registration for thesis credits, the student must also submit a thesis-chair-approved prospectus, which is a 1-2 paged document that summarizes the main components of the thesis. Contact the Graduate Coordinator for thesis prospectus guidelines. See deadline section below for timing considerations.

Use the following guidelines with consultation from your advisor to determine the appropriate combination of credit for thesis work for each semester you are actively working on your thesis. These are *guidelines and averages* based on the assumption that for every hour of coursework, students will spend that hour plus 2-3 more per week concentrating on that course. Every student’s situation will be different in terms of work required for thesis credits. Regular and honest communication with your advisor is vital.

Approximate hours per week spent on thesis work:	Register for...	Name of course(s)
3-4	1 credit	GES 5901
6-8	2 credits	GES 5902
9-12	3 credits	GES 5903
12-16	4 credits	GES 5901 & 5903
15-20	5 credits	GES 5902 & 5903
18-24	6 credits	GES 5903 & 5903

Thesis students are assessed in the following manner *after each semester*. Incompletes cannot be given for thesis credits.

High Pass (HP): Outstanding academic progress on the thesis, an outstanding defense of the thesis, or an outstanding thesis.

Pass (P): Satisfactory academic progress on the thesis, a satisfactory defense of the thesis, or a satisfactory thesis.

No Pass (NP): Student has not made satisfactory academic progress on their thesis or their thesis does not meet the academic standards of the program.

Therefore, if a student does not fulfill the requirements to which they agreed in the Thesis Registration Contract form, they will receive an unsatisfactory (NP) assessment. Students receiving grades of NP in their thesis hours for two semesters will not be allowed to continue with the thesis option.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Normally there are no disputes – there is collaborative work, a common goal, and amicable suggestions and revisions. Disputes, if they do arise, are handled between the student and committee member, or between two committee members. If conflict continues, the committee chairperson is involved, then the Graduate Coordinator, the Department Chair, and if necessary the CGSR Dean.

ORAL DEFENSE

Theses require a formal oral defense, which is announced to the department, NEIU community, and the general public. Non-committee members may ask questions, but may not vote. The date, time, and on-campus place for the defense must be distributed to faculty by the thesis Committee Chairperson at least one calendar week in advance. No later than one calendar week after the student's defense of the thesis, the chairperson of the committee shall notify the student and the faculty of the Department of the results. In practice, the student is usually notified after a short executive session.

No such defense is required for the research paper – just the signatures of approval by both committee members.

SUBMISSION OF THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER

Research paper AND thesis students must submit electronic copies (PDF preferred) of the completed research paper or thesis to the department (ges@neiu.edu) for departmental records. These must contain a scanned copy of the signed Research Paper or Thesis Approval Form.

Thesis students must also submit the final draft of the thesis electronically through ProQuest. This submission takes the place of submitting the thesis to the CGSR. A copy will automatically be kept by the NEIU library. The submission must include the copyright approval form, the signed Thesis Approval Form, and the thesis. See the thesis guidelines on the CGSR webpage for guidance. Thesis students are strongly encouraged to consult with the CGSR Master's Thesis Manual early in the stages of writing a thesis. The manual can be found at the CGSR website.

Additional copies of the research paper or thesis for the student may be bound at the student's expense. Most copy shops, including the campus book store will bind copies of research papers and theses for students.

It is also good practice for students to provide each committee member with an electronic copy of the final version of the thesis

will all the signed documentation for the faculty member's records.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Graduate students undertaking the research paper option rather than the thesis must pass a written comprehensive examination after completing regular course work and before graduation. The purposes of the comprehensive examination are to evaluate the student's ability to apply knowledge and skills gained via coursework in new and integrative ways related to their chosen area of specialty. Additionally, examinations evaluate the student's basic understanding of geography, of environmental studies, of the relationships between the two, and of appropriate techniques or methods.

SCHEDULING OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

Students opting for the research paper option, with approval of his or her advisor, should schedule a comprehensive examination at the earliest in the last semester of regular classes, or at the latest within one year after completing regular courses (other than GES 430).

Exam dates take place in Fall (October) and Spring (March) terms and will be announced at the beginning of each semester. Students must reserve their place for the exams by contacting the Graduate Coordinator by the deadline published each semester. No exams will be scheduled within two weeks of the first and last days of classes. There are related deadlines well in advance of the actual examination date, so the student should begin consulting with his or her advisor no later than two months prior to these dates.

THE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

The exam committee shall consist of **two** Geography & Environmental Studies tenure-track faculty members, one of whom is the chair of the research paper committee, the other being the second reader of the research paper committee. In other words, a student's comprehensive exam committee will consist of the same faculty members as his or her eventual research paper committee. The student should consult with both faculty members to ensure

agreement to serve on the committee as early as possible in the process.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PROCEDURE

Administration of the exams is completed by the Graduate Coordinator with consultation from the students' committee members.

Students are to submit a complete draft of their research paper proposal to the Graduate Coordinator at least two weeks prior to the date of the exam. The Graduate Coordinator will then forward the proposal to both committee members. A complete guideline as to what to include in this proposal can be requested from the Graduate Coordinator. Students who do not submit their finished proposals by the deadline will be removed from the list of students attempting the comprehensive exam that semester.

The chair of the student's committee will consult with the second reader to craft a 3-4 question comprehensive exam, tailored to the student's proposal topic and courses taken. Questions from the exam chairs shall be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator at least 48 hours before the exam takes place.

Comprehensive exams will take place over a three-day period (usually a weekend). For example, students will be sent the questions by the Graduate Coordinator on Friday at 5:00 p.m. and must produce the responses by Monday at 9:00 a.m. The exam will be "take-home," which means that students will have access to all their resources. Students will therefore have a page and reference requirement for each question given by the committee. Students will submit completed questions back to the Graduate Coordinator by the published deadline. All communication will take place through email.

Upon completion of the exam, committee members will review the student's responses and discuss the responses with the committee chair if any member is dissatisfied with the student's performance. To pass, both members of the committee must approve. The examination committee chairperson will communicate the results of the exam to the Graduate Coordinator within two weeks after the

student has completed the exam responses.

Notification (to the student and the department) of the results of the exam will take place no later than two working weeks after the exam date. The results of the examination will also be communicated to the Graduate Records office by the Graduate Coordinator.

PREPARATION

The student is advised to consult with members of the examination committee in advance regarding preparatory reading or subject matter. Preparation for the exam should include review of all class notes and textbooks used in courses completed in the graduate program, and in courses required in advance of the program – World Geography, Introduction to Environmental Studies, Research Methods, and foundation electives. In addition, students should be well-versed in their chosen research paper topic, being able to defend their proposed approach, research questions, literature review, and justifications.

OUTCOMES OF THE EXAMINATION

There are two possible outcomes of the comprehensive examination; pass or fail. Since the examination is take-home and students will have access to reference materials, there will be no opportunities for revision once the student has submitted the responses. In the case of a failing assessment, the student may only attempt the exam once more. In other words, there is a limit of two comprehensive examinations that can be attempted during the MA program.

DEADLINES

There are many deadlines published each semester of which students should be aware. Some of these will come much earlier than you expect. Please anticipate your registration, course add/drop, University requirements, course substitutions, graduation, etc. well in advance. Since specific deadlines shift each semester, the best way to keep track of the deadlines is to regularly check the College of Graduate Studies and Research and Department websites, keep in touch with your graduate advisor and the Graduate

Coordinator, sign up for the department email list and watch for email reminders of upcoming deadlines, and consult the list of deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

THESIS / RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL

Graduate students often underestimate the turn-around time for Research Papers and Thesis proposals and drafts. Remember that every member on the committee will need to read and comment, often requesting revisions. Remember the two-week turnaround time allowed for faculty to make comments may sometimes be longer due to the time of the semester and during semester breaks or summer. Students who ignore or discount the deadlines often can't finish according to their plans. It is not the faculty members' responsibility to accommodate students who do not comply with deadlines.

In consultation with their advisor, students should decide which semester to register for 430 (research paper) or 5901/5902/5903 (thesis credits). Students may only register for these credits in Fall or Spring semesters. Research paper students should take GES 430 during the last semester (if possible) of the student's program. Thesis students will take various credit hours of thesis throughout their program in consultation with the committee chairperson. Working drafts of proposals should be submitted to advisors far in advance of the listed deadlines. Once the advisor approves the proposal paperwork, it may then be sent to the second and third (thesis only) readers for comments and approval.

Before research paper students register for GES 430, a full proposal must be **approved** by the chair of the committee and the second reader by the posted deadlines for registration paperwork (usually late July for fall registration and late November for spring registration). These deadlines are set at levels beyond the department and therefore cannot be extended. Students would be wise to work well ahead of these deadlines, keeping in mind breaks between semesters, in order to allow themselves plenty of time for the revision process.

Thesis students should remember that data collection may not occur until after a proposal has been approved by all members of the thesis committee. However, a full thesis proposal is not required for

registration for initial thesis credits since students might take thesis credits in order to work on a thesis proposal. Remember that the initial thesis registration calls for the thesis prospectus; however, subsequent semesters do not. Any student wishing to take thesis credit must complete the Thesis Registration Contract along with the Graduate Thesis Registration Form. This contract specifically outlines the semester goals for the student along with the end products that must be produced to receive a passing grade. These forms are due well ahead (see research paper registration deadlines above) of the beginning of the semester.

Advisors may implement other deadlines according to the individual schedules of faculty and committee members. Again, students should work closely with their advisors well in advance of these deadlines to ensure timely registration for these credits. Communication is the key to your success.

GRADUATION APPLICATION

Graduate students must apply for graduation for the semester in which they plan to finish. Graduation dates are May and December. A graduate recognition / hooding ceremony and an all-campus graduation ceremony are held at the end of Spring and Fall terms. Graduation application deadlines take place **several months** ahead of actual graduate dates. Specific deadlines for each semester are posted in the Schedule of Classes. Please pay attention to email announcements from the Graduate Coordinator as well.

An application for graduation can be found on the Registrar Services website. Students should fill out the application, along with the appropriate Academic Course Record Forms (found on the GES website), make an appointment with the Graduate Coordinator who will review and sign the application, and then submit the completed application with fee to Enrollment Services.

If a student does not end up completing the work for graduation by the anticipated time, a Change of Graduation form must be filled out and filed with Enrollment Services and the Graduate Coordinator. This does not extend the 6-year time limit though. Students only pay the graduation fee one time.

FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER / THESIS

Research Paper students must submit the FINAL copy (with approval signatures) of the research paper by the last day of classes to receive a grade or graduate that semester. Otherwise, an “*Incomplete*” grade is assigned.

Thesis students are required to submit the FINAL copy of the thesis with all applicable signatures as described in the above section “Submission of Thesis / Research Paper” on the ProQuest website and to the department by the deadline published on the CGSR website, which is usually three weeks prior (mid-November for Fall deposit and mid-April for Spring deposit) to semester grades being due.

FORMS

There are many forms that must be completed along the way. Most of these are available on the CGSR website (<https://www.neiu.edu/academics/graduate-studies>), on the department’s website (<http://www.neiu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-and-sciences/departments/geography-environmental-studies>), or on the Registrar Services website (<https://www.neiu.edu/academics/registrar-services/forms#graduate>). Among the forms you are likely to need:

Application for Admission – from NEIU Admissions website

Two letters of reference

Transcripts

Two-page statement of goals and interests

Application for GIS Certificate Program

NEIU Admissions website

Application of Transfer Credit for Elective/Credit Waiver

Available on the Registrar Services website

Thesis/RP Proposal Acceptance Form

Available on the department website

Signed by all members of committee

Verifies committee membership

Attached proposal acceptable to all members

Given to committee chair – required before enrollment in 430 or before data collection for thesis students

Filed with Graduate Coordinator

Thesis/RP Acceptance and Approval Form

Available from CGSR website (thesis) or from committee chairperson (research paper)

Requires signatures of all committee members

Committee chair distributes to all faculty

Filed with Graduate Coordinator and CGSR

Merit Tuition Application Form

Available from Graduate Coordinator

Submitted per semester or annually to Graduate Coordinator

Research Assistant/Scholarship Awards

See the CGSR website for campus-wide opportunities

Department assistantship applications available from Graduate Coordinator

Research Paper Registration Form

Available on the Department website

Used for Independent Studies, Tutored Studies, Research Papers

The study plan accompanies the Registration Form, and includes a thorough description of the project, why it is particularly important for the student's program, and why the faculty member is the appropriate advisor for it.

Students registering for 430 fill out this form with a finished and approved proposal and Research Paper Proposal Approval Form

Graduate Thesis Registration Form

Available from Department website

Submitted to Graduate Coordinator

Must be signed by committee chairperson and be accompanied by the Thesis Registration Contract Form and Thesis Prospectus (if first thesis hours)

Thesis Registration Contract Form

Available from Department website

Must be completed and signed by committee chairperson (and committee members if applicable) before registration for thesis credits is allowed.

Outlines how you will be assessed at the end of the

semester

Academic Course Record form

Available on Department website

Graduate Coordinator signs off on courses completed, needed, or in progress which constitute the degree requirements.

Accompanies application for graduation

Application for Graduation

Available from the Registrar Services website

Submitted with the Academic Course Record Form to Graduate Coordinator for approval

Then submitted to Graduate Enrollment Services with one-time \$30.00 application fee.

FACULTY AND STAFF

TENURED OR TENURE-TRACK FACULTY



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Environmental Interpretation / Education
Conservation Psychology
Human Dimensions of Env. Systems

INSTRUCTORS AND ADJUNCT FACULTY

The department offers many classes by part-time faculty and faculty who are current professionals in the field. You may encounter them in courses that you take or at departmental events. For more information on current faculty who are teaching in the department, please see the department website. These faculty members do not serve as committee chairs.

STAFF

Please visit our administrative assistant, Lauren DeMatt (l-dematt@neiu.edu) in the GES department office in BBH 346C. The main office contact is (773) 442-5640 or ges@neiu.edu. Keep in mind that Lauren serves several departments and BBH 346C may not be staffed full time. The office is often staffed by a part-time student aide, currently Marco Lopez. For a schedule of when the office is staffed from semester to semester, please see the door sign on BBH 346C or call the number above.

GRADUATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANT

A graduate student helps maintain the computer laboratories and assists students with technical assignments.

GRADUATE TUTORING ASSISTANT

A graduate student assists faculty teaching GES 104 World Geography and GES 150 Introduction to Environmental Studies with office hours in the Learning Support Center in the library.

STUDENT AIDES

One or two Student Aides assist the department administrative staff. You will see them in the office as well.

REGISTRATION AND CURRICULUM ISSUES

There are few prerequisite sequences for graduate courses, because full admission requires a background in both fields. Many students are admitted with a prerequisite requirement specific to individual academic and professional backgrounds. A few students may be admitted without a background in either field. In either case, we recommend making deficiency requirements a priority.

There are, however, some sequences of which you should be aware. GES 416 and GES 417 require the introductory GIS course: 391, as do 392 and 393. GES 413 (Advanced Research Methods) requires GES 411. Students would do well taking GES 411 and GES 413 before more specific methodological courses, such as GES 440 (qualitative) and 442 (quantitative). Please work with your advisor to ensure a plan since some of these courses are offered less regularly than others.

Courses that are graduate-only are typically small so are unlikely to reach their capacity. However, “starred” courses also accept undergraduates and do reach capacity and close. This is especially true with the GIS classes that are restricted to small classrooms because of the computer requirements. Occasionally a class is canceled due to low enrollment. For this reason we ask that you register during advanced registration.

The department has developed a rotating sequence of courses for all faculty members such that we announce the probable frequency and term for some courses. However, regular schedules change depending on the availability of faculty members, adjunct areas of expertise, and faculty leaves of absence. It is best to consult with your advisor for the most up-to-date plan for future course offerings. It is also advisable to have an alternate plan of action so as to not make yourself vulnerable to falling behind if a particular course is not offered at a particular time. The best plan is to have regular communication with your advisor and the Graduate Coordinator.

ADVANCE REGISTRATION

Every Schedule of Classes details the dates for advance registration. Besides reassuring us that the course has made its quota, registering early will help you get the classes you want. Registration is all online through the NEIUport system (<http://neiuport.neiu.edu>).

LATE REGISTRATION

After the open registration period ends, you will no longer be able to register without the departmental approval. Please try to avoid late registration, but in the case you need to add a class after the

beginning of the semester, please contact the instructor of the course for instructions. The authorization can be requested by email, but you should make sure to attend all class sessions. After you are authorized, you will receive word from by email that you are cleared to register (if the faculty member approves). Keep in mind that after you are authorized, you must add the class yourself in NEIUport.

Registration for 430 and 5901, 5902, and 5903 is a bit different. Since these courses require paperwork, you are required to complete that paperwork during early registration. Reviewing proposals or semester plans is often not reasonable. In order to make sure you get registered for GES 430 or 5901, 5902, 5903 during the semester you wish to take it, please consult with your advisor during the early registration time period, which occurs the semester prior to registration (excluding summers).

NON-PAYMENT POLICY

If you are unable to make tuition-related payments on time, please contact the Bursar's office. Northeastern does not cancel your registration for non-payment. Instead, you are asked to review and accept a Financial Agreement document. However, there may be a "hold" placed on your account prohibiting you from registering for additional courses or accessing your transcripts. You are financially responsible for the classes for which you register. The dates for dropping classes and the associated credit/refund percentages are available in the Tuition and Fees Refund/Credit Schedule section. For payment due dates, please refer to the Tuition and Fees Payment Schedule section.

FIRST DAY ATTENDANCE POLICY

If you miss the first class without notifying the instructor, your seat may be reassigned to another student. You are responsible for any financial consequence if you do not drop the course before the appropriate refund deadline.

AUTHORIZATION

If you get permission from the instructor (or the chair) to enter a class, you should request Authorization. Give the instructor your name, course number, section number, and course reference number (a five-digit number from the schedule of classes). A departmental representative will then enter that information into the system, thereby locking open a place in the class for you. You still must register and pay to confirm your registration.

DROPPING AND ADDING

Read the Schedule of Classes carefully. It will tell you when you may Drop-and-Add (change) courses, Drop courses and receive some/most money back, Drop courses without reimbursement, and when it is too late to Drop. Although the drop deadline is firm, students may petition the Dean's office for a late drop. A note of approval from the faculty member is helpful for late drop petitions.

Please remember this: If you stop attending class and do not Drop (Withdraw), you will receive a low grade, probably an F. In some exceptional cases, such as for major illness or other personal hardship, it may be possible to arrange -- at your instructor's discretion -- an Incomplete (see below). Failure to officially withdraw from a class you are not attending will result in a grade of *F*.

REIMBURSEMENT APPEALS

Occasionally there is a good reason to get a full refund for a class even though deadlines have passed. For this purpose, there is a Student Billing Committee to which you may appeal. There is a form on the Registrar's webpage to complete. Contact the Student Billing / Late Withdrawal Committee at sblwc@neu.edu for details.

INCOMPLETES

An Incomplete ("*I*" grade) is given when there is a good reason that the student needs more time to complete the course AND the faculty member agrees to give that time. The instructor is under no obligation to offer an incomplete under any circumstances, and faculty have different policies on giving *I* grades. The catalog states: "*I* (incomplete) may be given if a student is absent from the final examination or fails to complete a special research or individual study

project because of some unavoidable circumstance such as illness.” You really cannot expect to take the whole course over. You would have to pay for that.

Receiving an *I* means you have one additional semester (excluding Summer) to complete the required work before the grade is changed by the Instructor, or it becomes an F.

Many good students taking an “*I*” never finish the work. Do not rely on an *I* grade if you find yourself falling behind; not only is it risky (a professor may not allow it; many do not), it is also dangerous because if you do not attend to the outstanding requirement, it may seriously hurt your GPA. Please be aware that the conversion to *F* is automatically assigned by the University and it happens all the time. Outstanding *I* grades will also reduce your chance of getting merit tuition waivers, and so on.

DEFERRED ADMISSION AND INACTIVATION

Students are considered “active” once they are admitted to the program. Students who do not wish to start the program right away for a legitimate reason, may request to defer their admission for up to a year. Requests must be made in writing to Graduate Admissions. Please copy the Graduate Coordinator on any correspondence concerning deferred admission requests.

Students who do not enroll in any credit hours for three consecutive terms (including summer), will be “inactivated.” This means that in order for the student to continue with their plan of study, they must reapply to the program. Students must go through the entire admission process again without any guarantee of being readmitted. Please do not let this happen. Working closely with your advisor and keeping the lines of communication open are good strategies to avoid unwanted situations such as this. Students may request to take a Leave of Absence (see instructions on CGSR website) if life circumstances temporarily prohibit progress.

SPECIAL COURSES

COURSE CODES

Under the Banner system (beginning mid-2008) special types of courses were designated in the catalog with two-letter prefixes. Here they are:

DI Discussion/Quiz
ELE Engaged Learning Experience
FE Field Experience
HY Hybrid
IN Independent Study
IT Internship
LA Lab
LE Classroom Lecture
MP Master's Project
OL Online
PR Practicum
PT Practice Teaching
SD Studio
ST Student Teaching
TS Thesis Seminar
TU Tutored Study
VC Video Conferencing

In addition, Courses referred to as "Starred" courses are 300-level that carry graduate credit; this is noted in the catalog course description. Courses with the suffix "H" are honors courses. There are also courses held at other campuses, although generally not in our department.

INDEPENDENT STUDY

Independent Study is only allowed in extenuating and rare circumstances as an option for graduate students when there are no other suitable classes available in a term, especially when they are nearing graduation. It is a carefully designed project or plan of study that the student will undertake without the structure of a formal class, and it usually is a research or a field experience. It is not an option available to students-at-large without specific approval of the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences.

On Oct. 2007 faculty voted to enforce the following restrictions on Independent Studies:

- Student must have at least 9 hours in GES and at least a

junior standing, or for Graduate Students, have all deficiency requirements met along with GES 411 and 413.

- Student must prepare a detailed proposal before enrollment.
- A copy of the completed student work will be kept in the Department Library.

It requires three approvals: (1) a faculty member who must be willing to take on the project (“Independent” means independent from a formal class; the instructor will actually work with you closely), (2) the chairperson, who must be convinced that it is a strong plan and in the student’s interest, and (3) the Dean, who will ask why it is necessary. The reality is that having faculty teach students individually is not a cost-efficient way to run a University! However, sometimes it is a very effective way to learn.

These factors are considered before an independent study is approved:

- The importance of the study to the student's learning
- Academic preparedness of student
- Level of student (prior to senior year, unlikely)
- Timing of the study (summers are unlikely)
- Availability of alternative solutions
- Best choice of faculty sponsor
- Current work load of faculty sponsor.

The Independent Study form is signed by the faculty member, the chair, the Dean's office, and the Provost. The student may speed the process by walking it through. A reference number will then be generated. From the student's perspective the form takes the place of online registration. Regular tuition applies.

Independent studies require especially strong justification before the last semester of a student's academic program. They are rarely granted by the College.

INTERNSHIP

Again, although very rare in current times, in the past, it was possible to undertake a three credit-hour internship at the graduate level. This is much like the undergraduate internship but at a higher level of work. Work closely with your advisor if you would like to do this; from the University's perspective it is expensive, and therefore rarely allowed, but it can be an excellent way to gain knowledge. The paperwork and planning must be done in advance.

TUTORED STUDY

Tutored Studies are courses that are regularly taught, but simply not taught the current semester. Like Independent Studies, they are expensive, but sometimes necessary. With these courses, the student typically works through the standard syllabus, exams, and assignments, and receives a grade on the same rubric applied to others. The same three parties must agree.

See Independent Study for the procedure for submitting the forms. It is the same form, and the same process.

Tutored studies require especially strong justification before the student's last semester. They are rarely granted.

COURSES FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS

The student may find a course in another department that will be appropriate for the student's M.A. degree, given the student's individual educational needs and goals. Up to 9 hours of credit from outside of the department may be applied toward the GES MA. A syllabus of the course and a written justification from the student explaining how the course supplements their plan of study should be reviewed by the advisor in advance, and advisor or chairperson's written approval must be given to the student in advance. After the course has been taken, the appropriate paperwork found at the CGSR website must be completed and official transcripts sent to Graduate Records.

COURSES FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS

To apply an external course to a GES degree the student should provide their advisor with a copy of the syllabus, catalog

description, course materials and transcripts. Written approval must be received from the academic advisor or chairperson. This is a separate decision from that made by the University whether or not to accept the credits. Courses used to fulfill other graduate degrees may not be used again to fulfill the requirements of the current degree.

The course must have been approved for graduate credit at the accredited institution when it was taken, and must be approved by the advisor.

To obtain credit for a course the student must send an official transcript to Graduate Records as well as submit the appropriate paperwork found on the Registrar Services website. The final decision regarding the transferability of courses will be determined by the Admissions Office when the official transcript is received.

Questions can be directed to Robin Morgan at ext. 4039 or Daniel Weber at ext. 4029. Be sure to refer to the transfer policy in this handbook as well.

CONCURRENT REGISTRATION

Prior to enrolling at another college or university, the student must meet with their academic advisor to determine which courses are appropriate for the student's progress toward graduation. A Concurrent Registration Checklist has been created for the advisor and student to use to assist with choosing courses. The checklist can be found on the NEIU website.

Grades from other institutions do not affect the NEIU graduate GPA – in essence they are brought in Pass/Fail. All transfer courses must have earned at least a “B.”

REPEATING COURSES

You may register for a course a second time to improve the grade and your GPA. A student can take a specific course a maximum of two times (excluding course withdrawals), unless the course is formally approved as “repeatable.” Of course, the course may only

count once for your program of study unless it is a repeatable course, which is rare in the department.

FINANCIAL AID

NEED-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS

The CGSR administers a limited number of need-based tuition waivers to students with extreme financial limitations. Contact the CGSR for information.

MERIT SCHOLARSHIPS

A small number of scholarships in the form of tuition waivers are awarded each semester to students within the department. See the Graduate Coordinator and watch your email for instructions. Students may apply every semester, including summer. Merit scholarships usually cover the tuition of one (three credit hour) course. Applications are prioritized so that as many students as possible are funded. The deadlines for merit scholarships are available from the Graduate Coordinator.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS (GENERAL)

Graduate assistantships typically require 10-20 hours of work per week. Assistantships pay a stipend, waive 1-3 courses tuition Fall and Spring Terms (sometimes summer), and usually provide valuable educational experiences. Non-Illinois residents “spend” two waivers per course. The department hires the teaching and technical assistantship positions each August (see below) and the positions usually last until the following May or August (two-three academic semesters). Announcements seeking applications will circulate through email. The Graduate Coordinator can be contacted for details.

TUTORING ASSISTANTSHIP

The department typically hires one Graduate Tutor Assistant who works in the Learning Success Center to assist in the World Geography General Education course (GES 104) and Introduction to Environmental Studies (GES 150). Preferred qualifications

include a background in the fields of Geography and Environmental Studies, previous instructional or teaching experiences, the ability to work well with different types of learners, and some knowledge of pedagogical techniques. The position requires 10-15 hours per week, comes with a one-course per term tuition waiver, and a small stipend.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANTSHIP

One graduate student is hired to assist in maintaining the GES computer laboratories (BBH-252 and BBH-246) and help students in computer-based courses, specifically GIS. Sought-after qualifications include an excellent knowledge of GIS, cartographic training, experience with hardware and software installation, programming skills, applications software, communication and instructional skills, and ability to work flexible hours. This position requires 20 hours per week, comes with a three-course per term tuition waiver, and a small stipend.

LIBRARY REFERENCE ASSISTANTSHIPS

The Ronald Williams library often hires graduate students for a variety of tasks. Inquire with the library for details.

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP

With faculty sponsorship it is possible to get a paid research assistantship from the CGSR (RCA assistantship). Contact your advisor or the Graduate Coordinator for more details.

MONEY FOR TRAVEL

Many of the courses that involve travel are partly subsidized by the university, but students will pay the bulk of the expenses.

The NEIU Foundation provides up to \$600 domestic (\$1,000 international) to students attending professional and academic conferences. These grants are competitive, and generally require presentation of a paper or poster at the conference. The funds go toward hotel and travel. Contact your academic advisor for more information.

The Department may also have a small amount of funds (up to \$250) to help students travel to professional conferences to deliver papers. Inquire with the Graduate Coordinator; save your receipts.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Although NEIU is a commuter campus and many students come-and-go, there is a rich campus life if you take a moment to look for it. The Student Government Association maintains many active clubs. Among these is the Green Conservation Group – an interdepartmental organization interested in environmental issues. The GCG spearheaded the successful Green Fee referendum, which led to the formation of the Green Fee Committee, who determines how these funds are spent.

COMMUNICATION

One phone number (773/583-4050) will get you to any number on campus during business hours. Alternatively, call the department directly at 773/442-5640 and leave a message if it is after hours. The best way to reach the department office is to email ges@neiu.edu. Faculty phone numbers and emails may be found in the above faculty profiles. We make every effort to get back to all students in a timely matter, but in the case this does not happen, please send another message, call, or stop by the departmental office, the Graduate Coordinator's office or the Chair's office. All faculty have posted office hours and we can help you find the person you need.

NEIUport

Every student has an account on NEIUport (<http://neiuport.neiu.edu>), which is the central portal for NEIU information. It is easily customized and is used for important information and announcements that are not always available elsewhere. It gives direct access to email accounts, registration information, D2L course materials, campus activity calendar, and other useful things. Correct course schedules can also be found on

NEIUport.

YOUR EMAIL

The University will assign you an email address, and it is the only one some departments use to reach you. You can access this in webmail from any browser at <https://nmail.neiu.edu/>. In order to access your email, you will be assigned a NETID and a password after you have been admitted to NEIU.

Within NEIUport you just click on email so you do not need to log in again.

Many students already have a well-established email address and do not want to change. You may have your webmail forwarded to your preferred email address.

Make sure you communicate your email preference to the Graduate Coordinator for the official GES Graduate Student email list that is maintained. In addition, please make sure you check your NEIU email often. All D2L and official University email will be sent to that address.

D2L COURSES

Many faculty members use NEIU's course authoring software: Desire to Learn (D2L). Students are automatically signed into their D2L courses upon registration. You can access D2L directly from NEIUport. Call 442-4357 (Help desk) or email helpdesk@neiu.edu for general questions, or talk with your instructor for help with this program. Online courses are administered through D2L.

Cannot log in? Call x4257 (NEIUport help)

Course not visible? This will occur if the instructor has not made it visible to students or if you have not enrolled, withdrawn, or have been dropped due to nonpayment. In any case, all your records so far will be intact, and will reappear when you are reinstated or when the instructor makes the course visible to student in the course control panel.

DEPARTMENT EMAIL LIST

The Graduate Coordinator automatically adds you to a Graduate Student email list when you are accepted into the program using the email address you provided on your application. If you wish to receive official notices at a different email address, please submit this request by email to the Graduate Coordinator. Very important announcements regarding changes to policies, upcoming deadlines, important dates, and position openings will be sent using this list.

In addition, the department maintains several lists (undergrad, grads, alumni). Please see the "Be Connected" tab on the Department webpage be added to those lists. Important department announcements and job listings will be sent using this list.

FACEBOOK GROUP

There is a GES Facebook group, you can join it at will!

BROWN BAG NETWORK

Periodically the department will announce a "Brown Bag Colloquium" – an ad hoc meeting in BBH202 where a special topic or special speaker will address students from GES and often from other departments. Bring your lunch; it is very informal..

FEEDBACK

We are very interested in your comments about our courses and program as you make your way through it, and as you look back on it years later. There are many opportunities to do this, not least of which is stopping by for a chat with your advisor or with the Department Chair.

COURSE EVALUATIONS

At the end of each course students are asked to fill out an anonymous Course Evaluation, either online through D2L or in class (but not both). These questions refer to the course and to the instructor. The procedure for this evaluation is formal – faculty members are never present when the forms are completed, collected, and the envelope signed and sealed. Faculty never see the actual forms but will see numeric report and typewritten comments, early the next term – as will others. Faculty do not see responses until

after grades are submitted, and no one will see student identities at any time. These evaluations are very important for retention and promotion as well as course improvement; your honest praise and/or criticism will be much appreciated.

ON LINE SURVEY

Periodically we will invite students to participate in an online survey, by way of a link we will send through the department's email list. These are used for program assessment, for scheduling, and otherwise. Please participate!

COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS, DISPUTES

If you have an opinion about a particular class, please state it clearly on the course evaluation form, which are distributed after every class Fall and Spring term (faculty may elect to do them summers, too). Students have commented on these forms: "waste of time, no one reads these." That is far from the truth. These evaluations are taken very seriously. If you particularly liked the course, please say so and explain why. If you did not, also please explain.

Faculty members work very hard and appreciate hearing when they have done well. Problems in courses – and any other sort of problem or complaint – have other outlets too. If there is a concern, please do seek assistance as we want to improve and also to provide you with the best education possible.

Each situation is different and it is not always apparent where to direct a complaint. Typically, if the concern is with a person (e.g., faculty member), one would hope that they would be contacted directly to give them an opportunity to respond. That is usually enough, but if needed, a student may go up to the next administrative level. We recommend you document your communication all throughout the process. These are the levels:

1. The instructor themselves
2. Your advisor
3. The Graduate Coordinator (if applicable)
4. The Department Chair
5. The office of the Dean (Graduate Dean in your case)

6. The office of the Provost

If you skip a step, you will likely be directed back by the higher authority. In serious cases, a formal complaint must be made in writing and signed by the student. Such complaints must meet these criteria:

- The student seeks some form of redress
- The complaint, if true, is actionable
- The complaint has not been dealt with to resolution already
- The complaint is received by the correct office
 - (e.g., a complaint against the Dean would not be received by the department)
- It is not a grade dispute or discrimination charge
 - These are handled by the Dean's office (graduatestudies@neu.edu) and Office of Equal Opportunities and Ethics Compliance (eo@neu.edu), respectively

Submit the completed complaint to the Department Chair or Administrative Assistant. If the complaint is against the Chair it would go to the Dean, of course (after direct contact with the Chair if possible).

Grade disputes are different, and are explained in more detail in the University's Student Handbook. Briefly, the student appeals to the faculty member and then to the Dean's office. The Dean would probably gather relevant information and may make a determination independently – but often sends the matter to the Grade Appeals Committee consisting of equal numbers of students and faculty. The committee hears both sides and makes a recommendation to the Dean. The committee advises the Dean who makes the final decision. Remember that as a graduate student, your Dean is the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research.

Complaints such as sexual harassment/discrimination or racial/ethnic discrimination are handled directly by the Office of Equal Opportunities and Ethics Compliance although they may be initiated at the department level. Generally, a student-to-student issue can be brought to the attention of the faculty member or Chair,

or Dean of Students.

IF YOU MOVE

When you move, you must update your mailing address yourself using NEUport Current Student Tab and your student ID number. Or, you can send snail mail to the Records office (graduate-records@neiu.edu). Please also remember to update the Graduate Coordinator so your departmental file will be accurate.

PITFALLS

This section should help you avoid problems that other students have experienced.

DEADLINES

Many deadlines are earlier than you might think – usually there is a good reason for this and often these deadlines are outside of the department’s control. Those that are most problematic include enrolling in popular courses before they fill, holds for non-payment, early graduation deadlines, and early deadlines related to the Research Paper and Thesis.

CLASS CHANGES

There is no longer a printed version of the Schedule of Classes. This information can now be found on the NEIU website. The NEUport version of the catalog (one department at a time) is the current one as well; you can check it for prerequisites, etc.

INTERNSHIP REPORTING

Although the requirements for regular bi-weekly reports to the advisor are clear, many students get caught up in their internship and do not report until it is well underway or done. This is bad for two reasons: (1) if something could be improved, the advisor needs to know and (2) it’s difficult to give a top score to someone who has not fulfilled an important requirement.

NEIU FACILITIES

LIBRARY

Your ID card will allow you to take books out of the library, which

we think you'll find to be quite nice. If you have specific recommendations for library holdings, please tell the Department Chair, who may pass on the recommendation to our liaison. It will also allow you access to many online journals, eBooks, and borrowing privileges at networked libraries. See the reference librarian for more details or visit the website here: <http://www.neiu.edu/library/>.

BOOKSTORE

The Bookstore should have all the texts for your classes, often times offering book rentals as well as purchasing options. With enough advanced notice you may be able to find texts for a lower price through one of the online textbook sellers. The University-designated Bookstore in the Student Union may purchase your books back at the end of the term, if you don't want to keep them. If there is a new edition, they may not.

P.E. BUILDING

Many NEIU students come to campus, take their classes, and go home, or go to work. If you do have some spare time, however, you might enjoy the underutilized facilities in the P.E. building on the south end of campus. There is an Olympic-sized pool, a weight room, a gym, aerobics room, ping-pong, lots of racquetball courts, outdoor tennis, and more. Many interesting fitness classes are offered each semester. There are clubs and special events as well and most of this is free or at low cost to students.

PARKING

A Blue Zone parking fee is automatically added to each student's bill. Fees are based on the number of credit hours for which the student is enrolled. Students must opt out of the parking fee if parking on campus is not desired. This is done by completed a Parking Fee Waiver Form and submitting it to Student Payment Services. In addition, students can apply for Gold parking. See the Parking Office webpage for details. <http://www.neiu.edu/university-life/parking>. You may park for free on the south side of Bryn Mawr, the west side of St. Louis, and some of the cross streets east of the P.E. building. If you park in the permit-only area (e.g., east

side of St. Louis) you *will* be ticketed.

Bike racks are available by most buildings. A few are covered (the largest of these is on the north side of Lech Walesa Hall. There are also a few covered spots on the north side of Building B. There is also a bike repair station on the West side of Building B. There is a DIVVY station just east of BBH along St. Louis Avenue.

ID CARDS

Near the bookstore and café stand you'll find the Information Center where you can get your student ID. Keep this with you, and thereafter only use the ID number as identification, even if you are asked for your social security number. The ID will do. The first few numbers are not useful, and your ID will be highlighted in yellow. After the ID number will be a 00. If you need to replace your card (e.g., the swipe strip malfunctions), turn in the old one and you won't be charged. You'll be able to keep the 00 digits. However, if you ever lose your card it is replaced, for a fee (~\$10), with the same ID number but with 01. The next time, 02 is added. The 01 or 02 have become part of your ID and thereafter always include those digits or you will have some problems – for example, for swipe card access.

ID cards can hold money for copying, and they are sometimes coded to allow you to enter the computer lab or other rooms.

COMPUTER LABS

There are student computer labs all across campus that are available for student use. One of the largest, with 100 computers, is in the B building. The department has two labs, BBH246 and BBH252 -- BBH252 is the main one for students; BBH 246 is for special projects and the Technical Assistant. BBH 252 is between the lockers, next to the ramps on the second floor of the BBH. There is swipe card access; your professor can arrange to activate your ID for this purpose. Students in the technical courses will find this equipped with the software they need.

INTERNET ACCESS

Any student who wishes to host a website within the neu.edu

domain will need to work closely with the Marketing department. There are branding specifications, etc. Most students will only be updating websites if they are involved in campus organizations.

WRITING HELP

There is help for students to improve their writing. The Center for Academic Writing can help with course and project-related writing and holds periodic workshops. Take them a copy of your written work and get their professional advice. See <http://www.neiu.edu/academics/center-academic-writing> or go to the fourth floor of the library for information.

WHEN YOU GRADUATE

After you graduate, we will want to stay in touch with you. Often we are able to still help alumni with letters of reference, job search, and advice. We encourage you to sign up for our alumni google group on our department website. You can also find our "brag board" on our website as we like to boast about what our graduates are doing now. It's useful for networking, too.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

NEIU has a Career Development Center. See <https://www.neiu.edu/university-life/career-development> for more information. They can help you refine your resume and target your job search. They also periodically bring employers to campus to interview students – the interview is set up in advance after employers look through resumes on file. Through your academic career, you should make as many professional contacts as possible, and continue to refine your own job interests. Here are some criteria that employers have listed in national surveys as what they look for in an interview:

- Professional Appearance
- Poise, Self-Confidence
- Verbal Communication Skills
- Listening Ability and non-verbal behavior
- Clarity of Career Goals & Interests

- Ability to link academic background with position
- Ability to describe prior work experience
- Provide Evidence of Leadership
- Quality of Questions Asked by Applicant
- Demonstrated Knowledge of Company
- Interests in and Enthusiasm about Position
- Display Realistic Self-Appraisal
- Mature/Professional outlook

Also stay in touch with your advisor and the other department faculty members; they will be important for references and information.

ALUMNI: STAY IN TOUCH

We also would like to hear from you when something exciting happens. The department maintains a "brag sheet" on the website so you can look in on what others are doing as well. Please stay in touch with the department even if it is only by way of the Alumni Mailing List, to which you can subscribe in the main office.

GIVING BACK

The University budget comes partly from the state, part from tuition, and a large part from donations. Big donations are sought from corporations and from wealthy families and individuals. One way NEIU demonstrates its vitality to those large donors is to show that alumni contribute. If X percent of alumni contribute, that is meaningful to someone considering a major grant. Even a small donation can help leverage a larger one. What's more, you can designate your donation directly to the Department of GES Foundation Fund, which supports students presenting at conferences and other student-centered expenditures. Besides enjoying the feeling of philanthropy, recognition does come back to the University, College, Department, and to you. Now it's as easy as can be: Just go to <https://www.neiu.edu/alumni-and-giving/giving/give-neiu>. You can designate the department by clicking on "other" in the designation section and writing "Geography & Environmental Studies Department" in the "leave a comment" section. You'll get a note of thanks in the mail to keep with your tax records.

Your Notes and Contacts:

Please see <http://www.neiu.edu/about/campus-map-and-directions> for a clear map of all parts of the main campus and directions to campus.

