



McGill University

Department of Geography

GRADUATE INFORMATION HANDBOOK

Note: This handbook only covers key issues specific to our geography programs. Consult the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies [\(GPS\) office website](#) for all general information on McGill-wide graduate program rules and procedures.

Disclaimer: *If there are inconsistencies in this handbook with GPS, GPS 'trumps' the handbook- this is created as a guide only. If in doubt ask your supervisor, the Chair of GAC, the Graduate Co-ordinator (7th floor) or the Chair of the Department.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This booklet provides information on the graduate program, for new and continuing students, as well as members of faculty and staff. It supplements the official information provided by the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) office, and focuses on information specific to the Department of Geography. For additional information or questions not answered in this Handbook, please contact the Graduate Program Coordinator (who has a workstation in the main office on the 7th floor, Room 705), the Chair of the Graduate Affairs Committee (GAC) and/or your supervisor.

2. ADMINISTRATION OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS

2.1. GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

The [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) (GPS) office is the unit responsible for graduate degree programs at McGill University. Graduate students in Geography are therefore subject to the regulations of GPS as well as the Department. In particular, students should carefully review the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Calendar (also known as '[The Red Book](#)') and general policies on the [GPS website](#). Students should make a point of becoming familiar with the relevant sections of these documents relating to registration, thesis format, dates of submission and time limitations within which a particular program must be completed.

2.2. GRADUATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Within University guidelines, the Department's *Graduate Affairs Committee* (GAC) is responsible for the general supervision of graduate students in the Department of Geography. The committee defines policy, initiates and reviews programs and courses, and evaluates all applications for admission. It also makes recommendations for fellowships, scholarships and other awards. Items of business for the GAC may be submitted by any faculty or student member to the GAC Chair or be presented at any one of its meetings. GAC consists of the GAC Chair, the Chair of the Department; two graduate student members elected by the graduate students in residence, to serve for one year; and two Department faculty members, who serve three-year terms.

Routine *administrative* matters (including advice on GPS and Departmental graduate procedures) are handled by the Graduate Coordinator, 7th floor (room 705), rather than by GAC.

2.3. GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

The Department has a Geography Graduate Student Society (GGS) which organizes a variety of social events for graduate students. GGS is affiliated with the Post-Graduate Students' Society (PGSS), which receives a portion of graduate student fees. Through PGSS, delegates are elected to serve on university committees, and are involved in the organization of social events. Graduate students are automatically members. Graduate student social life centers around Thomson House (3650 McTavish), a convivial pub, restaurant and meeting place run by PGSS.

2.4. DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEES

Student participation on departmental committees allows graduate students to become involved in a variety of activities that enhance professional development as well as protecting their interests.

Graduate students elect representatives to the departmental meetings and to the Graduate Affairs Committee, and are always invited to delegate a member for a search committee for faculty positions. It is vital that these representatives are diligent in reporting and discussing the results of committee meetings with their colleagues.

3. CATEGORIES OF STUDENTS

3.1. REGULAR STUDENTS (FULL-TIME)

Regular students are those enrolled in a Master's or PhD program, and who are attending classes or receiving guidance or consultation relevant to their programs from members of faculty. In Geography, regular students must be registered on a full-time basis; there are no part-time or half-time students.

3.2. RESIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

All students in the Master's Program are required to complete 3 full-time terms (18 months) of residency to complete their program, and must pay full-time fees during this period. See the [Student Accounts website](#) for detailed information on fees beyond this period.

Students who enter at the PhD 1 level must complete four years of residency. Those who have completed a Master's degree meeting GPS standards enter at the PhD 2 level and must complete three years of residency. During this period, i.e., up to and including PhD 4, students must pay the full rate of tuition and fees. After this time, fees are reduced to additional session rates until the completion of the degree. See [Student Accounts website](#) for detailed, up to date information on fees.

3.3. ADDITIONAL SESSION STUDENTS

Additional Session Students are those who have completed their requirements of residency. For example: students who have completed three full-time semesters (18 months) in a Master's thesis program; students who were admitted to PhD 1 and have completed eight full-time semesters; and students who were admitted to PhD 2 and have completed six full-time semesters.

3.4. QUALIFYING STUDENTS

Qualifying students are those required to enrol for one or two semesters before being eligible to enter a graduate program. Such students must meet the minimum admissions requirements of GAC to be admitted for a qualifying period. The qualifying period is intended to supplement a student's background and experience before the start of a graduate program in cases where GAC deems a student's background insufficient for the proposed graduate work but considers her or his application otherwise meritorious. *This option cannot be used to raise a student's GPA to the University or Department minimum.*

Qualifying students maintain a full course load, normally made up of undergraduate courses. The courses and expected level of performance (typically A- or better) must be approved by the GAC in consultation with relevant faculty members prior to registration. Qualifying students are eligible to apply for acceptance to a graduate degree program in the following year, but completion of a qualifying year is *not* a guarantee of acceptance. Courses completed during a qualifying year cannot subsequently be applied toward a graduate degree.

3.5. VISITING STUDENTS

Visiting graduate students are those who are registered in a degree program at another university, and who have obtained written permission from both universities to take one or more course(s) at McGill for credit at the other university. Graduate students wishing to come to McGill to do only research may do so after acceptance by a supervisor in the Department, GAC and GPS, as “Graduate Research Trainees”. The department recommending admission must submit the same documentation as for Visiting Students but specify “Visiting Research.” These students are charged additional session fee rates and any course taken will be charged extra at the rate per credit. See: [Visiting, Exchange and Special Students](#).

3.6. SPECIAL STUDENTS

Special students meet the minimum entrance requirements of the Faculty, but are **not** enrolled in a graduate degree program. They usually take one (at most two) graduate courses (500 or 600 level) per term. Special students may subsequently apply for entry to the graduate program, again with no obligation on the part of the department for their acceptance. Courses completed as a special student may subsequently be credited towards a graduate degree, with the approval of the GAC and the Graduate Faculty. See: [Visiting, Exchange and Special Students](#).

4. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance for graduate students’ cost of living, tuition and fees, and research expenses is available from a variety of sources. Students must be proactive in seeking funding as the Department does not have the resources to fully support all these expenses. Typically, the Department and University provide some support in the first year of a graduate program, but not in subsequent years. A student’s support usually consists of some combination of the following:

- University and/or Department recruitment awards and fellowships (first year only)
- External and major fellowships (see below)
- Teaching assistantships
- Supervisor support (fellowship or research assistantship)
- Personal sources (savings, student loans, etc.)

Canadian citizens and residents are eligible for major fellowships from federal programs such as SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR; Quebec residents are eligible for various provincial programs including FQRNT and FQRSC; non-Canadian students may be eligible for fellowship or loan programs from their home governments. Students should investigate the fellowship and support options listed on the [GPS web page](#) as well as the [Department’s fellowships web page](#). Full-time students are limited to 12 hours of paid employment per week during the academic session whether within or outside the University. Some scholarships impose stricter limits. Certain additional restrictions and visa requirements apply to non-Canadian (international) students.

There are a limited number of *Teaching Assistant* positions available from the Department, and their allocation is regulated by the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill (AGSEM) Union Agreements. Postings for each semester are made a month or two before the start of that semester, with supplementary postings for any unfilled positions during the first week of the fall and winter semesters. Current graduate students must apply formally; some incoming students are offered a TA position as part of their funding package. [Application forms](#) are available from the [Geography website](#).

See Section 11 for more on TA regulations.

Some degree of student support is often provided by her or his supervisor in the form of a graduate fellowship or research assistantship (RA). Students should be sure to have a clear and explicit agreement with their supervisor regarding the varying levels of such support over the course of their graduate program before they accept an offer of admission.

5. ADVISING AND REGISTRATION

5.1. ADVISING AND STUDENT SUPERVISORY COMMITTEES

(Also refer to the GPS Guidelines and [Policies](#), as well as McGill's [graduate supervision website](#))

Students are only admitted if a faculty member has already agreed to supervise them. The supervisor serves as the student's principal advisor and mentor throughout the graduate program. Students and supervisors should be in close touch before the student arrives at McGill.

During the first week of September, faculty members are available to meet with graduate students. Students should take full advantage of this period to obtain advice concerning courses, seminars, possible thesis topics and research opportunities in the Department.

Within the first year in the graduate program (usually before the second semester) a full committee for the student is formed by the student and supervisor in consultation with each other.

For **Master's students** this consists of one additional committee member, alongside their supervisor (the committee as a whole = 2 people; the supervisor and a committee member) (see Section 6.1. for details).

For **PhD students**, this consists of at least two additional committee members (the committee as a whole = supervisor plus 2 committee members). PhD students can have more committee members if they wish. At least 1 PhD committee member should be from the Department (see Section 7.1. for more details).

5.2. REGISTRATION

Registration periods are clearly established by the GPS, and there are financial penalties for late payment of fees, so it is very important to consult their [schedule](#). Continuing students are *required* to early-register in the spring. New students register during summer. Consult the GPS website for detailed information regarding registration. Course registration is done online via [MINERVA](#). (Note: MINERVA can also be used to check fee balances and enrolment status).

5.3. CHANGES IN SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION OF STUDIES

In the rare event that a serious disagreement or incompatibility exists between student and supervisor and/or advisor(s), either party has the right to ask for a change in supervision and direction of studies. The initial step in exercising this right is for the person(s) concerned to bring the incompatibility or disagreement to the attention of the Chair of the GAC, who will notify and recommend appropriate changes to the GAC. Every effort will be made to resolve the difficulty without detriment to the

student's progress.

Great care is taken during the admission procedures and in the award of financial assistance to ensure that the work a student proposes to undertake for his or her graduate degree can be well supervised and supported by the staff and facilities of the Department. A major change in a student's proposed field of study may mean that the Department can no longer adequately or justifiably provide this supervision and support. Any proposals for major change of thesis topic or research program must, therefore, be reported to the Chair of the GAC and to the supervisor. Students should note that major revisions of the research programs to which they were admitted may result in requests to withdraw from graduate studies in the Department or, if major revisions are approved, may require additional courses or new research presentations in the course *GEOG-631 (Methods of Geographical Research)*.

6. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER'S DEGREE

The Geography Department offers both MA and MSc degrees, involving a combination of course work and individual research, including the completion of a thesis. The research should be self-generated, and address a significant geographical problem within the student's chosen field of study. The Master's degree may provide the background for direct entry into a professional career, or may be seen as a period of preparation for more advanced work at the PhD level. The Department welcomes applications from students in related disciplines, although a qualifying year or term, or extra course work, may be required.

6.1. SUPERVISION AND DIRECTION OF MASTER'S STUDIES

The system of supervision and advising described above (Section 5) provides the basis for the direction of a student's study program and guidance for thesis research. Direction is provided by the supervisor, who has foremost responsibility for guiding the student towards timely and successful degree completion. The supervisor thus has a responsibility to both the student and to the Department. The supervisor chairs the student's Supervisory Committee, which must also include one other member.

The **Master's Supervisory Committee** must, at a minimum, consist of two faculty members from the Department of Geography: the student's research supervisor, who is also the committee chair, and another member of the Department. This second faculty member often serves as the internal examiner of the student's thesis. A third committee member, either from within the Department, from another department within the university or from another university, is permitted if the supervisor and student are in agreement as to the necessity of a third member.

Every effort should be made by both the student and the supervisor to involve the other committee member(s) in the student's progress. In addition to meeting to prepare a study plan for a given academic year, the following minimum meeting and student presentation schedule should be observed:

- (a) Before January 15 of the first year of study, a committee member has been selected and the Supervisory Committee has been formed and has met with the student to discuss formative research plans.
- (b) In late April of the first year of study, the Committee meets to evaluate a detailed research proposal, including field research plans, presented by the student. This proposal (ca. 20 pages)

is a required part of course GEOG-631 and is to be reviewed and marked by the Supervisory Committee by May 1, fulfilling the requirement of Course GEOG-698 (see 6.2. for more details). Over the course of the following summer and fall, the student conducts data gathering and analysis and begins thesis writing.

- (c) In the winter term of the student's second year, the student is required to give a 20 minute research progress talk in front of his peers and faculty. This talk is usually conducted in front of the next cohort to enter the program, during a GEOG-631 winter time slot. The student's report of progress in field research, data analysis and preliminary conclusions is reviewed at this time by his or her committee.

The Supervisory Committee also meets with the student at least once more before the end of the second year to assess progress in analysis and writing and to finalise thesis structure.

- (d) Co-signed **Progress Reports** are to be completed by all Master's students and their supervisor twice a year. These are submitted (in paper or by email) to the graduate co-ordinator who passes them to the Chair of GAC. A copy remains on the student's file. Forms are available [here](#). It is the student and supervisor's joint responsibility to make sure these forms are filled in a timely manner. These are taken into consideration for internal funding opportunities.

6.2. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A total of 45 credits (*was 48 until 2010*), 30 related to the thesis and 15 credits (*was 18*) related to course work, must be passed before a Master's degree is awarded. Credits are weighted as follows:

Year 1:	12 credits for four required graduate one-semester courses ("half courses") 3 credits for GEOG-631 "Methods of Geographical Research" 6 credits for GEOG-698 "Thesis Proposal"
Year 2:	24 credits for GEOG-699 "Thesis Research"

Students must pass **four** graduate courses on specific research subjects (in addition to GEOG-631, -698 and -699) selected according to the procedures described below. Students are also, however, required to attend such additional courses as the student's committee thinks fit, or as required by GAC.

Graduate Faculty regulations define a 'passing grade' for a graduate student as 65% (or B-). In case of failure, the student may be permitted to write a supplemental examination only on the recommendation from the Department and approval from the GPS. Any student, who has failed a course required for the degree and does not receive permission to attempt a supplemental will be required to withdraw from the program.

6.3. COURSE SELECTION

The course *GEOG-631 "Methods of Geographical Research"* is directed towards early development of the thesis research, definition of a research question, literature search, and research design. Students are required to register *only once* but all graduate students (MA, MSc and PhD) are required to give two seminars, one at the end of their first term and another one on their formal research proposal during their second term (Master's students also note the additional requirement for a talk to GEOG-631 post-fieldwork, discussed in Section 6.1). All graduate degree students must attend these seminars

during their first year of residence. The proposal, modified if necessary after the seminar discussions and approval of the supervisor, is submitted to the Supervisory Committee before credit for GEOG-631 is obtained.

GEOG-698 "Thesis Proposal"
GEOG-699 "Thesis Research"

It is a good idea for students to enrol for these as they start their program. The student's thesis proposal is evaluated by the student's Supervisory Committee with a letter grade, to satisfy the requirement of course GEOG-698 (6 credits). **Deadlines** for submission of the proposal (approximately 20 pages) are May 1 for students who entered in September and December 15 for students who entered in January.

Three of the four required one-semester courses are normally chosen from Departmental offerings. In exceptional cases, an *undergraduate geography course* (i.e. course number <500) with additional work (e.g. term paper, exercises) may be substituted for one graduate course when no suitable graduate level course is available.

One course can be taken from outside the Department if it is deemed that no relevant course is available from within.

The signature of the GAC Chair must be obtained before an undergraduate course or a non-geography course is substituted in the student's program.

Course offerings at upper levels (-500 and -600) vary from year to year and their availability and times should be checked on the McGill [eCalendar](#) and the Department [graduate page](#).

Additional courses may be identified as relevant to the degree program. These are commonly known as 'audit' courses, but this is a misnomer. At McGill such courses are designated as 'not required'. To pass a 'not required' course, a student must complete all the course work. In general the taking of 'not required' courses is not recommended for Master's students.

Occasionally, if an appropriate graduate seminar is not available, a student may undertake an individual reading course with other members of the faculty, but approval for such a course must first be obtained from the GAC. **Only under exceptional circumstances may a student enrol in an individual reading course supervised by her or his supervisor.** Again, approval must be obtained by the GAC.

Students and supervisors are reminded that it is desirable to maintain a balance between courses directed specifically to the student's research and those which give the student a broad appreciation of the setting of the research topic within the field of geography.

The grade of 'K' (incomplete) is given only in cases of unavoidable delay, such as that caused by illness or a family emergency. Students should be aware that the existence of 'K' grades on their transcripts seriously compromises their competitiveness in the annual round of grant and fellowship applications.

6.4. MASTER'S TIME LIMITATIONS

GPS regulations specify that Master's students must complete their degree **within three years of**

initial registration. Less than full-time students are not accepted in the Department of Geography. Note also that GPS no longer considers extensions to time limitation (i.e., three years in the case of a Master's degree). Students who do not complete their degree within the required time limits will their registration terminated. If an individual produces a thesis ready for examination within two years of termination (i.e., having reached time limitation), he or she may be reinstated to deposit the thesis upon recommendation from the Department. Details on the procedures (and fees) for reinstatement can be found on the GPS [website](#).

6.5. MASTER'S THESIS GUIDELINES

See current GPS [Thesis preparation and submission guidelines](#).

The most difficult program requirement is the preparation of the thesis. Almost all new graduate students find themselves faced with the same problem of determining what kind of topic is thesis-worthy. The novice often inclines towards a topic that is too large, and there is often a tendency to spend too much time on data collection, leading to a thesis that is descriptive and insufficiently analytical. There is also a temptation to launch into data collection and then analysis without thinking through the plan in detail. If hypotheses or research aims are not clearly spelled out initially, the student ends up collecting an assortment of data upon which journalistic skills are used to try to string together a plausible 'story'.

The purpose of the Master's thesis is to demonstrate that the student can, with faculty assistance, *design and execute* a piece of research. It is not expected that it should necessarily demonstrate originality of concept or of conclusions; rather, the originality may be in the area of application of existing methods or theories, or in a comparison of existing methods or theories. But a Master's thesis must be based on original research, not summaries of published literature.

A Master's thesis requires a well-defined geographical problem, a clearly stated hypothesis or aim, objectives/research questions and justification, and includes a brief review of the relevant geographical and related literature. It contains an adequate analysis of data, and draws logical conclusions.

While it is the supervisor's role to provide a general idea of what is expected and what kind of schedule is appropriate, with supplementary input provided by the candidate's Supervisory Committee, it is the responsibility of the student to meet the general guidelines set by the Department and GPS.

Length: The manuscript should not exceed 100 pages; or 150 pages including appendices, tables, figures, etc.

Above all, the thesis should be manageable within a reasonable period of time. Official deadlines for various stages of the program are provided by the [GPS](#). Ideally, Master's students plan a program of 24 months' duration to complete the thesis. The following schedule provides recommended deadlines for a 24-month completion.

6.6. MA AND MSC GUIDE AND TIME LINES FOR COMPLETION IN 2 YEARS.

Note that GPS has various submission deadlines in order, for example, to a) avoid the next term's fees or b) to be eligible for the next term's graduation/convocation. Candidates must be aware that these

deadlines vary and that they are responsible for deciding, in consultation with their supervisor, which [deadlines](#) they choose to meet.

IMPORTANT: Also see Section 8 which provides typical time requirements to complete the numerous steps required between thesis submission 'In State' (in Department) to the awarding of the Graduate degree. This list expands upon those details found in Section 6.1.

- Preliminary research proposal to be submitted to Supervisory Committee by November 30 of the first year, and brief presentation of topic in GEOG-631 by December 15. First Progress Report submitted no later than January 15.
- Student presents seminar on thesis proposal to GEOG-631 in April and submits written proposal to his/her Supervisory Committee by April 15. The proposal is marked by the Supervisory Committee as the requirement for GEOG-698, along with the Annual [Progress Report](#) by May 1.
- Field work or data collection should start in the summer, followed by analysis in the fall and winter. In the mid-winter term of the second year, the student is also asked to give a 20 minute talk on his (her) research progress in front of peers and faculty.
- A first draft of the thesis should be submitted to the Supervisor in the spring of the second year and then to the Supervisory Committee. All relevant McGill GPS submission deadlines are listed [here](#).
- The [Nomination of Examiner Form](#) must be submitted for approval by the GAC at least one week before the thesis is submitted to the GPS office.
- **Internal thesis submission/'lying in state'**. Before submission to McGill GPS for external evaluation, one copy of the thesis is deposited with the Graduate Coordinator for a **two week** 'lying in state' period. The copy of the thesis for the 'lying in state' must be submitted in a black folder, labelled with the title of the thesis and the student's full name and degree.
- The purpose of the 'lying in state' period is to provide a 'breather' before initial e-Thesis submission to GPS. During the 'lying in state' period, the thesis is reviewed by the internal reader, and possibly other geography faculty, to ensure that it is free of glaring errors and ready to be submitted to the GPS Thesis Office for formal evaluation. Some changes may be requested before final submission to GPS. Changes that are required are communicated to the student via their supervisor. It is very important that students allow enough time for this process to take place, and that they then have enough time to make any required revisions. It is suggested that the in-state manuscript be considered a "penultimate" draft.
- One hardcopy of the thesis must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator (7th floor) for the 'lying in state' period.
- **Important Note: Thesis submission can occur during the summer only if arrangements are made in advance with both supervisor and committee members.** Between convocation (mid-June) and the end of August, faculty members are often away from the university conducting field work or on summer holidays, such that committee meetings are almost impossible to schedule during this summer period. Supervisors and committee members have no obligation to provide close supervision during this period.

6.7. SUBMISSION OF MASTER'S THESIS TO GPS OFFICE FOR EXAMINATION (INITIAL SUBMISSION)

Guidelines for thesis preparation and submission and all thesis submission forms are available from the [GPS website](#).

As of September 2013, graduate students no longer have to print and submit hard copies of their thesis to GPS. The thesis and related documents are now submitted to GPS in electronic format (see [initial e-Thesis submission](#) guidelines)

Note that the thesis copy submitted electronically must conform to GPS's detailed guide for thesis preparation. This guide should be followed very carefully (with particular attention paid to the naming convention of the thesis file), since a failure to meet its specifications can result in the thesis being returned, and graduation delayed. The thesis will be inspected for editorial corrections prior to forwarding to Faculty, and will be returned to the student if the regulations have not been followed. All theses must be submitted as a [single PDF](#) from your **official McGill email address**. Students will receive a confirmation receipt of submission.

In addition to the thesis copy, the following forms are required with the initial e-Thesis submission. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that these are completed with appropriate signatures when required. These include (but this list can change):

- Nomination of Examiners and Thesis Submission Form (fillable [PDF](#) file)
- Thesis Non-Exclusive License Agreements form (fillable [PDF](#) file)
- Library and Archives Canada (LAC) forms (fillable [PDF](#) file)

Students should also verify the [Thesis Submission Checklist](#) to ensure that their initial thesis submission is complete.

6.8. THESIS EXAMINATION

Refer to the GPS [website](#) for detailed information about Thesis Examination.

A Master's thesis is examined by an "external examiner". For Master's thesis examination, the "external examiner" may be from inside or outside the University. The "external" may also be a faculty member from within the Department who does not have a [conflict of interest](#).

The supervisor (in consultation with the student) is responsible for choosing and securing the "external examiner". The "external examiner" is recorded on the *Nomination of Examiners Form*. It is the student's responsibility to prepare this form. This must be signed by the supervisor and then submitted for approval by the GAC at least one week before the thesis is submitted to the GPS office.

The "external examiner" gives the thesis a Pass/Fail Grade (which satisfies GEOG 699) and this is accompanied by qualitative evaluations according to various criteria, and usually a comment letter. These comments are returned to the supervisor. If they include final changes that must be made to the thesis or suggestions for improvements, these are made by the student in consultation with their supervisor. It is the supervisor who agrees that the thesis is ready for the final submission.

Final submission to GPS is electronic. For details and step-by-step instructions on how to file, see: [final thesis submission](#). Note that again at this stage, certain forms are required. Note also that signed certificates (if applicable) are not to be included in the final PDF e-Thesis submission. Copies of any certificates of compliance must be retained by the supervisor and student in accordance with McGill's policies on research ethics. Supervisors indicate on the Nomination of Examiners and Thesis Submission Form that the research carried out has complied with all ethical standards.

NOTE: If the research has been carried out at Schefferville or Bellairs, another copy is required (to be submitted when final corrections are completed). Please talk to Faculty who work at those locales for details.

6.9. SUBMISSION OF PUBLISHED PAPERS AS THESIS CHAPTERS

The GPS guidelines permit one or more chapters of the thesis to be in a form suitable for submission to an academic journal for publication. This approach is more demanding than it appears, but is encouraged by some faculty members provided the integrity of the thesis is maintained. Students are encouraged to discuss the suitability and details of this option with their supervisor. Modification of the published paper is almost always required, to make the thesis read smoothly. [GPS guidelines](#) should be consulted for information on manuscripts and authorship. The thesis must contain an explicit statement on the contribution of the student and supervisor or, if applicable, other joint authors.

6.10. TRANSFER (FAST TRACK) FROM MASTER’S TO PHD.

The Department permits students to transfer from the MA or MSc to the PhD program. This opportunity can occur after 12 months in the Master’s program, after all course work has been completed successfully and after substantial progress has been made on the Master’s degree research. A recommendation letter is submitted to GAC by the Supervisory Committee, based on the performance of the student; and includes a manuscript by the student (e.g., a draft of a “submittable” paper) demonstrating the progress made in Master’s thesis research and a two-page proposal identifying how the research will develop beyond a Master’s degree. The recommendation is then submitted to the GAC for review and decision.

If an upgrade is approved, the student is not required to take GEOG-631 again, but is required to present a seminar on the PhD thesis proposal. The Supervisory Committee may require that additional courses be taken. The Comprehensive Examination should be taken no later than 12 months after the upgrade.

6.11. TABLE OF MASTER’S DEGREE COMMITTEES

Supervisory Committee	Examination Committee
Supervisor/Chair (Geography faculty member)	Examiner (Geography faculty member or outside the
Committee member (Geography faculty member)	Department, usually within McGill)
<i>Optional: Third member (any department or university)</i>	

7. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PhD DEGREE

The doctoral degree is the highest official degree recognition of academic achievement within the university. It identifies the holder as one who has a broad intellectual background as well as highly specialized training, and is ready to embark upon a scholarly career. The period of study towards a PhD should provide an opportunity to push one's intellectual ability to its limits, and to become fully confident of one's ability to address issues and solve problems within a chosen field. By the time the degree is awarded, it should be recognized that an original contribution to knowledge has been made.

The PhD, therefore, is more than the completion of a thesis. The thesis is a major component, of

course, and its completion represents the major commitment of time and effort towards achieving the degree. The degree is awarded, however, not to the thesis but to the candidate, who must be deemed to have sufficient scholarly merit, sufficient general background as well as creativity and critical insight, to warrant receipt of a doctorate. The doctoral program should be structured, therefore, to include the thesis as well as courses and seminars, participation in scholarly activities such as conferences and symposia, publication, consultation with advisors and whatever other activities are recommended by the committee as being necessary for the candidate to achieve her or his fullest potential as a scholar. PhD candidates should also recognize that it is these general qualities that will be considered by prospective academic employers.

7.1. SUPERVISION, SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE AND DIRECTION OF PHD STUDIES

Research direction is principally provided by the supervisor who has direct and hands on responsibility for guiding the student towards timely and successful degree completion. The supervisor has a responsibility to both the doctoral student and to the Department. Outside co-supervision is possible but the Geography Department can exert no claim on such a co-supervisor's time and degree of involvement; therefore does not require them to be formal committee members. The Geography supervisor must thus take primary responsibility for guidance of a student in our program. When a supervisor has been confirmed, the student and supervisor organize the student's Supervisory Committee and notify the Graduate Program Coordinator of its membership.

The supervisor chairs the student's **Supervisory Committee**. The Committee consists of at least three persons:

1. The supervisor.
2. At least one member (in addition to the supervisor) is an 'Internal', from the Geography Department. This Internal is not expected to be an expert in a thesis area, but usually works in the same broad area of Geography (Human or Physical) as the supervisor.
3. The third member is usually an expert in a thesis related area, is usually based in another university department (which may be non-geography), possibly outside McGill but usually located in Eastern Canada (to be easily able to meet bi-annually).

GPS regulations prohibit persons who are themselves registered for a doctoral degree from supervising doctoral candidates. The Supervisory Committee is responsible for the direction of a student's study program and guidance for the thesis research. In general, it is advisable to keep formal membership of the Committee small.

The Ph.D. supervisory committee should not exceed five members; if it does reach this size, then three members must be from the Department of Geography.

Outside scientific advisors: Other scholars may play a significant role in a student's research but need not be members of the official Supervisory Committee. These scholars are called 'Scientific Advisors'. Outside scientific advisors may be attached to the doctoral project as scientific resource personnel, but do not need to be members of the supervisory committee as they do not have the same responsibility to the student or the Department. The use of an advisor system of this type can greatly extend the level of academic assistance without committing too many persons to formal procedures and responsibilities.

The Committee is of most benefit to the student if it meets regularly. In September of the first year, the student meets with her or his identified supervisor to consider seminars and courses the student should attend and to discuss possible research topics. Before January 15 of the first year, the Supervisory Committee should have been established and meets with the student to consider the initial thesis proposal (drafted in late fall as part of Geog 631) and the supervisor submits an Interim Progress Report. By May 1, the Committee meets with the student to consider the final thesis proposal and the supervisor submits an [Annual Progress Report](#).

Progress Reports: These are to be signed by the supervisor, committee members (via email if necessary) and the student. They are to be completed twice a year. These are submitted (in paper or by email) to the Graduate Program Coordinator who passes them to the GAC Chair. A copy remains on the student's file. Forms are available [here](#).

It is the student and supervisor's joint responsibility to make sure these forms are filled in a timely manner. These are taken into consideration for internal funding opportunities.

7.2. PhD Course Requirements

Courses should be structured to achieve the background to enter the profession of geography, to teach and conduct research that shows broad intellectual development. All students must register for GEOG-631 in their first year, where a formal thesis proposal is part of the course requirement. Those who have completed a Master's degree in the Department are not required to register formally for GEOG-631 again, but they should attend, and complete those requirements related to the thesis proposal. PhD students are *required* to pass at least two other one-semester courses at the 500- or 600-level. It is normal practice to take one seminar course in each term of the first year and to audit appropriate seminar courses thereafter. In any case, sufficient courses must be taken to ensure that the candidate has an adequate grasp of methodological and theoretical issues within his or her field. The Supervisory Committee or GAC may require the student to register for other courses, and students are expected to participate in informal seminars in their own fields of study.

Graduate Faculty regulations define a 'passing grade' for a graduate student as 65% (or B-). In case of failure, the student may be permitted to write a supplemental examination only on the recommendation from the Department and approval from the GPS office. Any student who has failed in a course required for the degree and does not receive permission to attempt a supplemental will be required to withdraw from the program.

Those who enter as PhD 1 students, however, are required to take a year of course work (typically four 500- or 600-level classes) in addition to the basic requirements. Proposed courses should be outlined in a written memo from the supervisor to GAC and must be approved, in number and content, prior to registration.

Because financial support is often based strongly upon marks, it is important to have tangible results of course work by mid-December of the first year in the program. Incomplete grades may seriously compromise one's chances in competing for scholarships and awards.

Course offerings at upper levels (-500 and -600) vary from year to year and their availability and times should be checked on the [McGill eCalendar](#) and the Department [website](#).

7.3. DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS ('COMPS') - GEOG-700, -701 AND -702

For students entering as **PhD2**, Comp Oral exams will normally be held within 18 months of a student's entry (before winter term of 2nd year of residence). The **absolute maximum deadline is 2 years from date of entry to the program**. Students who do not meet these requirements will be asked to leave the program unless there are *exceptional* circumstances. Students entering as **PhD1** normally take their comprehensives at the end of the second of year of study. The student along with his/her supervisor (and supervisory committee) will agree on the precise schedule of the Doctoral Comprehensive examinations (Comps), within these time limits. See section on Comps Organisation below.

Note that fear of failure (perceived by the student or supervisor) or need for further preparation are not acceptable reason for delaying Comps beyond these time limits. As noted above: PhD2 candidates who have not successfully completed all their Comps requirements within 24 months of start will be asked to leave the program.

After successful Comps completion, the committee meets with the student once before the end of the first term and once before the end of the second term, to consider the student's progress in field research, data analysis and writing. Progress Reports are submitted and any remedial measures should be discussed.

A draft version of the thesis should be circulated to committee members when it is available and a final meeting set so that the thesis can be discussed prior to its final revision and submission for examination.

7.3.1. ORGANISATION OF COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

The Comps examinations consist of: (1) two written essays, answering specific questions from a prescribed list, with answers written within specific time limitations; (2) a thesis proposal; and (3) an oral exam.

First, to set the process in motion, at an appropriate time based on the agreed Comps schedule, a one-page thesis proposal abstract is prepared by the student and submitted to the supervisor and the supervisory committee.

The student's supervisor and supervisory committee is then responsible for defining the Comp Fields (or knowledge areas) that the student will be examined on and for drafting Comp essay questions for GAC approval (see below).

The supervisor is also responsible for pre-scheduling with the supervisory committee, in consultation with the GAC Chair, the day and time of the proposed Comp oral exam that normally closes the comps period.

Students must register for GEOG-700, -701 and -702 prior to taking the comprehensives (it is their responsibility to make sure that they register for these courses for the relevant semester). Students should also make sure that on completion of these exams, their results have been transmitted to GPS for inclusion on their official transcript.

The supervisor of a candidate doing her or his Comps can of course encourage the student (morally) and do what they can to facilitate the student's comp work (provide relief from other tasks, such as RA work, as candidates are expected to work full time on comps). However, after the student receives his or her questions, the supervisor must completely refrain from providing the student with any ideas or leads to answer the comp questions or formulate any part of her or his proposal. **The principle is that comps evaluate the candidate, not the supervisor.**

7.3.2. NATURE OF COGNATE AND THESIS QUESTIONS

The Supervisory Committee prepares a comprehensive exam consisting of four questions related to the declared research topic - the "Thesis field(s)"; and another four questions of a more general and broader disciplinary nature, drawn from a wider background - the "Cognate field(s)". These two sets of questions (eight questions in total), along with the student's abstract and the membership of the Comps examination committee must be submitted by the supervisor for GAC review and approval, a process that usually takes two weeks. (It is not uncommon for GAC to ask the supervisory committee to revise the comp questions. In such cases, ultimate approval may take more than two weeks total).

Cognate domains are areas of knowledge not normally explored in conducting the narrow thesis project but that are important to the student's broad training. Cognate questions should thus probe a substantively wider range of issues, or question broader imperatives than the thesis questions.

As guidance on providing a sufficiently broad set of comp questions, and to avoid students repeating similar lines of arguments in both question sets, GAC expects very limited overlap in technical terminology or nature of theories and concepts cited across questions, and especially between thesis and cognate questions sets. For example, Cognate questions should not simply enquire about processes similar to those covered in Thesis questions but set in a different temporal or geographical context.

7.3.3. WRITING THE COMPS ESSAYS

The student undertakes research on all eight questions, but also selects **one** question from each set (Cognate; Thesis) on which she or he will prepare and submit an essay. Each essay should be **7500 words or less** (excluding reference list). Upon completion, the student must submit one hardcopy of each essay to the Graduate Coordinator (7th floor). A PDF copy of each essay should also be emailed to the Graduate Coordinator (grad.geog@mcgill.ca).

For each question set, the student has **two weeks/14 days** to complete an essay, from the moment of reception of questions to submission of the relevant essay (four weeks/28 days in total for the two essays).

A detailed **thesis proposal** (7500 words or less, excluding reference list and appendixes) is also submitted by the student to the Graduate Coordinator at the same time as the second essay is submitted (with a PDF copy of the proposal also emailed to grad.geog@mcgill.ca).

Note that the comps clock starts when the student picks up the questions (usually at 10:00 am). It is the student's responsibility to submit one copy each (both printed and electronic) of the essays and proposal to the Graduate Coordinator by the deadline specified on the instruction sheet supplied with the comps questions (students should read these instructions very carefully).

7.3.4. OPTION OF SEPARATING THE WRITING PERIODS OF COGNATE AND THESIS ESSAYS

The student and supervisory committee may agree that the student will receive both question sets at the same time and hand in her or his essays after four weeks. However, they may also opt to structure the Comp exam as two, separate essay writing periods. These can be *up to* six months apart (separation may of course be less). **In all cases, there is a single Comp oral exam at the end, relating to both question sets and to the thesis proposal.** In no case can this process lead to holding the comp oral later than the end of the second year (for students admitted as PhD2 – see above).

For this separated timeline, the supervisor first informs GAC of the proposed timing arrangement and gets approval for the two question sets at the same time (Cognate and Thesis). Cognate questions (only) are submitted to the student first and the student's Cognate essay is returned to the Graduate Program Coordinator, two weeks later. Then, after a pre-scheduled time gap that can range from a few weeks to 6 months, the Thesis question set is given to the student. The student then returns her or his Thesis related essay, along with her or his Thesis proposal, two weeks later. As soon as these are received, the essays and proposal are copied by the Graduate Program Coordinator and given to the student's Supervisory Committee and the Chair of GAC.

7.3.5. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

After both papers and proposal have been returned, these documents are copied by the Graduate Program Coordinator and given to the student's Comprehensive Examination committee, which consists of:

- student's Supervisory Committee (usually including one member from outside the Department)
- Chair of GAC or delegate
- an additional member who is not on the student's Supervisory Committee but works in a related field
- one departmental representative (a human geographer for a physical geography student and *vice versa*). The GAC Chair or delegate may also serve as the latter person.

Individual Comp Examination Committee members evaluate the two essays and proposal and submit a form to the GAC with their overall judgment. This form indicates a *passing* or *failing* grade on the three items of written work (which then equate to GEOG-700). If the majority of examiners have indicated a *pass*, the oral examination is held; otherwise the examination committee meets, arrives at a consensus on the student's performance and reviews its options. These options may be failing the candidate, or giving feedback to the candidate followed by a request for extra written work. In no case can this process exceed two years from entry into the doctoral program.

7.3.6. ORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

At the oral comprehensive examination, which is scheduled in a time slot of 2.5 hours minimum, the committee first meets to discuss and agree upon the grades to be allocated for the written essays.

The student is then invited to make an oral presentation of their thesis proposal lasting no longer than 20 minutes (this can include the use of PowerPoint, but it is the student's responsibility to book and organize this technology).

The student then answers one or two rounds of questions about the submitted essays, the questions that were not answered and the thesis proposal. Afterwards, the examination committee meets in private to make an assessment of the student's performance and preparation for thesis research. At this stage grades are also assigned to GEOG-701 (oral performance) and GEOG-702 (overall comps performance). These are pass/fail grades that are submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator who will enter the marks on Minerva; supplemented by qualitative rankings (the latter are used in the Department for internal awards and fellowships). Within one week of the oral comprehensive examination, the student's supervisor prepares a written critique of the student's performance. A copy is given to the student, members of their committee and to the Graduate Program Coordinator for the student's file.

7.4. TIME LIMITATIONS (PHD)

From GPS: *"Doctoral candidates may maintain their connection with the University for four years after completing their residence requirements [i.e. up to and including PhD7]."*

See [Time Limitation Policy](#) for specific details on time limitations, and the consequences of reaching these.

7.5. FORMAT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS AND ACADEMIC ARTICLE INCLUSION

A doctoral thesis consists of a typed manuscript, together with well-drawn maps and clear photographs conforming to the requirements set out in the GPS [Thesis Preparation and Submission Guidelines](#).

It can take considerably longer than first imagined to complete the final proofreading and typesetting of a PhD. Students must make sure to give themselves enough time for this important step.

There are no length limits for doctoral theses, but it is rare that a thesis contains more than 250 pages of text and diagrams.

The GPS guidelines permit one or more chapters of the thesis to be in a form suitable for submission to an academic journal for publication. This approach is more demanding than it appears, but is encouraged by some faculty members provided the integrity of the thesis is maintained. Students are encouraged to discuss the suitability and details of this option with their supervisor. Modification of the published paper is almost always required, to make the thesis read smoothly. [GPS guidelines](#) should be consulted for information on manuscripts and authorship. The thesis must contain an explicit statement on the contribution of the student and supervisor or, if applicable, other joint authors.

7.6. SUBMISSION AND REVIEW OF PHD THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT

Also called: **internal thesis submission/'lying in state'**. Before submission to McGill GPS for external evaluation, one copy of the thesis is deposited with the Graduate Coordinator for a **two week** 'lying in state' period. The copy of the thesis for the 'lying in state' must be submitted in a black folder, labelled with the title of the thesis and the student's full name and degree.

The purpose of the 'lying in state' period is to provide a 'breather' before initial e-Thesis submission to GPS. During the 'lying in state' period, the thesis is reviewed by the internal reader, and possibly other

geography faculty, to ensure that it is free of glaring errors and ready to be submitted to the GPS Thesis Office for formal evaluation. Some changes may be requested before final submission to GPS. Changes that are required are communicated to the student via their supervisor. It is very important that students allow enough time for this process to take place, and that they then have enough time to make any required revisions. It is suggested that the in-state manuscript be considered a “penultimate” draft.

7.7. SUBMISSION OF PHD THESIS TO GRADUATE OFFICE FOR EXAMINATION

The Thesis office has separate submission deadlines that are set (a) in order to avoid the next term fees or (b) to ‘make’ the next term’s graduation/convocation date (these are not the same deadlines). See: [Deadlines](#)

Guidelines for thesis preparation and submission and all thesis submission forms are available from the [GPS website](#).

As of September 2013, graduate students no longer have to print and submit hard copies of their thesis to GPS. The thesis and related documents are now submitted to GPS in electronic format (see [initial e-Thesis submission](#) guidelines)

Note that the thesis copy submitted electronically must conform to GPS’s detailed guide for thesis preparation. This guide should be followed very carefully (with particular attention paid to the naming convention of the thesis file), since a failure to meet its specifications can result in the thesis being returned, and graduation delayed. The thesis will be inspected for editorial corrections prior to forwarding to Faculty, and will be returned to the student if the regulations have not been followed. All theses must be submitted as a single PDF from your **official McGill email address**. Students will receive a confirmation receipt of submission.

In addition to the thesis copy, the following forms are required with the initial e-Thesis submission. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that these are completed with appropriate signatures when required. These include (but this list can change):

- Nomination of Examiners and Thesis Submission Form (fillable [PDF](#) file)
- Thesis Non-Exclusive License Agreements form (fillable [PDF](#) file)
- Library and Archives Canada (LAC) forms (fillable [PDF](#) file)

Students should also verify the [Thesis Submission Checklist](#) to ensure that their initial thesis submission is complete.

7.8. EXAMINATION OF THE THESIS (NOT THE ORAL DEFENCE)

Before the oral defence (see Section 7.9), a doctoral thesis is first evaluated by two examiners, one internal and one external to the University. The internal examiner is often the internal member of the student supervisory committee. Note that she or he should be knowledgeable in the area and topic of the thesis and serves to ensure that McGill norms are observed in terms of the quality of the thesis. The external examiner must come from outside the University and must have an arm’s length relationship with both student and supervisor. Refer to the GPS site for additional details. Note that the supervisor may not be the internal examiner.

The examiners are selected by the student's supervisor in consultation with the student. Within the Department of Geography, the supervisor, in consultation with the student and/or committee members, must forward the names (with contact information) of *three* potential external examiners with brief explanation of the nominees' suitability to GAC. The nomination list may be ranked. *GAC will select one of the nominees and solicit her or him to serve as an external.* Once a nominee has accepted, the student completes the GPS [Nomination of Examiners Form](#).

Note that the form provides for only one name to appear as the external examiner. Therefore, it is now to be the accepted practice that students will know the name of their external examiners in advance of the oral defence.

It is the student's responsibility to prepare this form, which must be signed by the supervisor and the Chair of GAC. The form is submitted to GPS along with the thesis.

The external examiner is requested to return their forms/examiner report to GPS within 6 weeks. In addition, it can take a week or two for GPS to send out the thesis, and another to organise the returned report. Hence, this process can take anywhere between 4 to 8 weeks (and even then, GPS has no 'leverage' over the external if they are slow).

Examiners give the thesis a Pass/Fail grade and this is accompanied by qualitative evaluations according to various criteria, and usually by a comment letter. In the event that one or more of the examiners deems the thesis unsatisfactory, an oral defence will not be held until the problems have been corrected. Normally in such cases, the candidate undertakes to make the revisions suggested by the examiners and re-submits the thesis. This procedure is automatically implemented by the GPS Office.

Alternatively, a candidate may choose to challenge the examiners' judgement and to submit the thesis without further change to two new examiners. Because that procedure is thereafter without appeal, it is rarely recommended by the Department or the GPS.

When the reports (from the internal and external examiners) are received by GPS they are forwarded to the supervisor and to members of the oral defence committee. The student does NOT see these reports until after the oral defence.

7.9. ORAL DEFENCE

The oral defence will be tentatively scheduled after the thesis has been submitted. It is the supervisor's responsibility to organize this committee in consultation with the student's supervisory committee, the student, and GAC; although selection and attendance of the Pro-Dean is organized by GPS.

The **oral defence committee** consists of not fewer than five and not more than seven members (not counting the Pro-Dean). Its composition varies depending on how many committee members are present, and a range of other factors. For precise details see the [oral defence](#) section on the GPS website.

As a general guide, this committee *usually* comprises:

- the Chair of the Department or designated representative
- the supervisor
- a department member of the supervisory committee
- at least one other member from inside the Department (not involved in thesis research)
- and a member selected from outside the Department (often called the 'internal-external' as that person is from McGill or a university close by) who has not had direct involvement in the thesis research.

If the committee consists of seven members, at least two should be external to the Department. Again, this does not include the Pro-Dean. The external examiner, if not remote, may be invited to attend the defence. However it is not essential that the external be present, and his or her questions on the thesis are read by the supervisor for the student to answer.

The oral defence committee may accept or reject the thesis, regardless of the recommendations of the examiners. In the rare event that a passing recommendation of the examiners is overturned, clear and precise regulations govern the re-submission and appeal process.

The oral defence begins with a private, closed meeting of the defence committee (held in a room separate from the defence). Everyone then moves to an open session. First, the student gives a 20 minute presentation of his or her findings (often with the use of PowerPoint – note it is the student's responsibility to make sure that this technology is booked and works). This is followed by one to two hours of questions by members of the defence committee. The role of the research supervisor at the oral defence is to present all questions and observations submitted by the external examiner, as well as asking his or her own questions. After the question period, the committee retires back into a private session to prepare its judgement, which the Pro-Dean conveys to the candidate. If the judgement is favourable, the Pro-Dean recommends the candidate for a degree. If unfavourable, the Pro-Dean recommends appropriate action to the GPS.

The oral defence committee considers the examiners' reports (from the internal and external examiners), the candidate's record at McGill and elsewhere, the thesis, the candidate's defence of it, and any other information relevant to the judgement. The granting of a PhD degree, then, is not only based upon the thesis but also upon the judgement by a final committee that the candidate has achieved a substantial level of creative and critical scholarship.

Members of the Department, especially PhD students who will soon be examined themselves, are encouraged to attend the open session, to provide moral support as well as to familiarize themselves with the process.

PhD Candidates are responsible for ensuring that all their course requirements have been met prior to the submission of their thesis.

Final submission to GPS is electronic. For details and step-by-step instructions on how to file, see: [final thesis submission](#). Note that again at this stage, certain forms are required. Note also that signed certificates (if applicable) are not to be included in the final PDF e-Thesis submission. Copies of any certificates of compliance must be retained by the supervisor and student in accordance with McGill's policies on research ethics. Supervisors indicate on the Nomination of Examiners and Thesis Submission Form that the research carried out has complied with all ethical standards.

Note: If the research has been carried out at Schefferville or Bellairs, another copy is required (to be submitted when final corrections are completed). Please talk to Faculty who work at those locales for details.

7.10. TABLE OF DOCTORAL COMMITTEES

Supervisory Committee	Comprehensive Examination Committee	Oral Defence Committee <i>[this is an <u>example</u> only as many variations are possible; see GPS website]</i>
Supervisor (Geography faculty member) Internal member (Geography faculty member) Third member (usually outside the Department) <i>Optional: Fourth and fifth members. Also possible to have scientific advisors – see above.</i>	Supervisory Committee (3-5 members) Non-committee examiner #1 (Geography faculty member) Non-committee examiner #2* (Geography faculty member) GAC Chair or delegate (Chairs the examination)	There are numerous variations on the oral defence committee. A typical committee might consist of: Supervisor Internal examiner (member of the supervisory committee, but not the supervisor) Other examiner (Geography faculty member not on supervisory committee) Internal-External examiner (non-Geography faculty member from McGill not on supervisory committee) Department Chair or delegate Pro-Dean (appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Science; chairs the examination) External examiner (outside McGill; typically <u>not</u> present at examination) For precise details, refer to the GPS website: Oral defence

*Must be a physical geographer for human geography topics, and a human geographer for physical topics. The GAC Chair or designate may serve as this examiner as well.

8. THESE THINGS TAKE TIME – THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN YOU SUBMIT YOUR MASTER’S OR PhD THESIS

Each student prepares a timetable delineating the steps to be followed in her/his program including completion of required coursework, the time to be devoted to data acquisition and analysis and the schedule of writing of the thesis. It is expected that the average Master’s program will be completed within two years and that of Ph.D.’s within four years. This requires diligence and organization, as seen below.

Students must be aware, however, that delays in one or several of their program steps may delay submission of the thesis beyond the anticipated and/or regulation time. Students, therefore, should be realistic in the scheduling of their program stages, and not least in calculating the time necessary to draft a polished, submissible manuscript.

The time it will take a student to analyze her or his data, draw proper conclusions in light of relevant theory and write first drafts of all thesis chapters is mostly in the student’s hands and is not to be underestimated.

Neither however should the time to graduation be underestimated, once first drafts are completed and shown to the supervisor.

Students need to be aware that there can be a **significant time lapse** from when they complete their 'full first draft' of their thesis to the granting of the graduate degree (not necessarily convocation).

For **Master's** students, this can take approximately **3 months**.

For **PhD** students, this can take approximately **6-8 months**.

For **PhD students**, this lengthy process includes numerous steps:

- 1) around 4-8 months are typically required, depending on the quality of the drafts, from reception of chapter or paper first drafts by the supervisor, through various rounds of comments, re-analyses, second and third drafts of the various chapters to preparation of a final thesis to submit to 'lie in state'.
- 2) 1 month is required from internal thesis submission 'in state' to receive feedback from student's committee and to make eventual, minor changes, before formal, thesis office submission.
Note: The Thesis office sets separate GPS submission deadlines in order either avoid the next term fees or to make the next terms graduation/convocation date (these are not the same deadlines) See: [Deadlines](#)
- 3) Another 6 weeks can elapse before GPS receives all evaluation reports (the external in particular is sometimes delayed, and there is nothing the Department can do to speed up this process) See Section 7.8.
- 4) Finally another few weeks usually elapse to schedule and hold the PhD oral exam.
- 5) Then there are final changes as required from the external examiner and the oral defence committee; the length of time available for these is decided upon by the oral defence committee.
- 6) Formal convocation is separate.

9. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

No student shall, with intent to deceive, represent the work of another person as his or her own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or program of study or represent as his or her own an entire essay or work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted. See: [Keeping it honest](#).

10. FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A GRADUATE SUPERVISOR AND COMMITTEE

1. The Department has the responsibility for providing a student with a guided program of study in terms of:
 - (a) course work;

- (b) thesis direction;
 - (c) the completion of the requirements of the degree within the time span set by departmental expectations and University regulations.
2. The implementation of 1(a) requires the definition of a program of:
 - (a) essential (required) courses;
 - (b) adequate training, both background and specific, in the field of study; and
 - (c) assistance in the formulation of a thesis topic.
 3. The implementation of 1(b) requires direction and advice in:
 - (a) gathering research material and undertaking its analysis;
 - (b) reviewing and interpreting the work in scholarly (scientific) and critical terms; and
 - (c) preparing and presenting the results in written (thesis) form
 4. The implementation of 1(c) requires active contact and guidance of a student's activities to ensure that both the course work and the thesis work are:
 - (a) reasonable and practical for the degree being sought; and
 - (b) carried out expeditiously and without undue delay on the part of both the staff and student involved.
 5. The supervisor and committee responsible for a graduate student are required to:
 - (a) carry out the responsibilities to the student efficiently, and without undue delay;
 - (b) ensure that the student has proper exposure to scholarly (scientific) attitudes and viewpoints and to critical appraisals (evaluation) of the work; and
 - (c) provide the Department with the prescribed reports of the student's work and progress, according to procedures laid down by and agreed to by the Department from time to time. Such reports are due twice each year.

11. DUTIES OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN GEOGRAPHY

This section outlines the Department's general expectations of Teaching Assistants (TA). Information about the scheduling and deadlines for applications, process and notification of assignment, level of eligibility, and salary level for teaching assistants in the Department follow those set out in the Collective Agreement between McGill University and AGSEM. The Department of Geography supports the procedures in the collective agreement.

Expectations:

1. Teaching Assistants are expected to be present on campus one week prior to the start of classes and to be available through the entire final examination period (16 weeks);
2. Teaching Assistants are typically assigned 90 hours per term (a "half" TA position);
3. Teaching Assistants will help with the preparation of teaching and laboratory materials, photocopying of class materials, preparing reading lists and checking on class-related library holdings, equipment operation during classes/labs, the general administration of tests and other assignments, receiving class assignments, and contact with students as necessary concerning assignments;
4. To help gather material for the preparation of tests, labs and examinations;

5. To assist in the marking of sections of tests, examinations and labs that are objective (i.e. multiple choice, true-false, machine scored) in nature, and essay style questions for which there is a marking guide;
6. To hold scheduled office hours for consultation by students;
7. To perform as discussion or seminar leaders of small groups in so far as these activities may form part of the assigned course's academic activities;
8. Teaching Assistants are not expected or required to: a) set questions for class tests, assignments or labs; b) mark any test, assignment or lab materials that does not conform to No. 5 above (i.e., long essays or research papers for which there are no guidelines); c) give lectures or talks requiring original preparation; d) invigilate final examinations set outside the exam or lecture period. However, these activities can be undertaken, in prior agreement with the course instructor, if appropriate and the TA wants the experience and skills;
9. Teaching Assistants should keep a log of their workload hours, to be submitted to the Graduate Chair and course instructor at the end of the term assignment. "McGill University Teaching Assistant Workload Forms" are available from the Graduate Affairs Coordinator.

For information on the Teaching Assistants' Union (AGSEM) Collective Agreement, please refer to your Union Representative.

12. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Non-Canadian (international) students at McGill should consult the *International Student Service (ISS) Office* [website](#). The International Student Service's Office is located at 3600 McTavish Street (tel: 514-398-4349; international.students@mcgill.ca).

ISS has very useful information and advice on problems specific to international students, such as immigration (e.g., Study Permit, CAQ, Work Permit), health insurance, family support, housing and a variety of student services. Its website should be visited before leaving for Canada.

There are [various student organizations](#) that represent the needs of international students at McGill, provide advice and assistance during the settling-in period, and organize a variety of social events.

Student funding is always a problem, but more so for those who are required to pay non-resident fees. It is very important to check deadlines, and get applications for funding in on time, to as many potential funding sources as possible. Non-resident fee waivers are very competitive, and cannot be guaranteed to all those who need them.

The Department does its best to provide part-time employment for all students, through research or teaching assistantships. Employment can only be taken up, however, after all the necessary authorizations have been received, including a [Social Insurance Number](#).

Also see: [spousal work permits](#).

13. DEPARTMENTAL FACILITIES

The Department of Geography is housed in Burnside Hall (floors 3 to 7), adjacent to Sherbrooke and University Streets on McGill's lower campus (street address: 805 Rue Sherbrooke West). Questions about access to Departmental facilities should be addressed to the Departmental Administrative Assistant (7th floor) or the Chair.

13.1. OFFICE SPACE

The Department provides shared office space for Master's students for a maximum of two years, and for PhD students for a maximum of four years. When individual offices become available, these are allocated to PhD students. There is a waiting list for these offices kept with the GAC Chair and the Graduate Program Coordinator.

13.2. COMPUTING FACILITIES

The Department has a range of common computer facilities, most notably, in the GIC lab and on the 5th floor. For students with computationally intensive research, the supervisor normally provides appropriate computer equipment and access in their own labs. However it is not a regulation that students are provided with their own computer, and most students have their own laptops.

13.3. LABORATORY FACILITIES

Access to specialized laboratories for chemical analysis, microscope work, etc. should be arranged with the student's supervisor. The Departmental Technicians (see [staff webpage](#)) should be approached to make arrangements for the borrowing of field or laboratory equipment. The Department has a range of field equipment, so it pays to ask if it is available for loan.

13.4 GRADUATE STUDENT LOUNGE

Graduate students have access to the graduate lounge on the 4th floor (room 430), traditionally the heart of social life for the graduate program. This room contains basic kitchen equipment as well as a telephone (local calls only) and the mail 'file box' for registered graduate students. Mail is delivered to the graduate student mailbox in the departmental office (705).

13.5. PHOTOCOPYING, PRINTING, AND SCANNING

Graduate students may use the photocopying machine on the 7th floor, as well as the 400+ photocopiers available on campus (uPrint). Usage of the photocopiers will be charged to the student's account directly.

13.6. STATIONERY, TELEPHONE CALLS AND KEYS

Should you need any other office equipment, please speak with the Administrative Assistant. The Department does not provide stationery or supplies to graduate students. Long distance telephone calls and FAX transmissions can be arranged in the main office, at cost. Local personal calls can be made on the telephone in the graduate lounge.

Keys for rooms in Burnside Hall are available with a deposit of 25\$/key, which is exchanged at the Math Department's office (10th floor). Requisitions can be obtained from the Accounts Administrator (i.e. a form is required to take to the 10th floor). No cash, checks only.

13.7. LIBRARIES

The [McGill Geographic Information Centre](#) is on the 5th Floor of Burnside Hall. Its goal is to actively support the teaching, learning and research activities of the University in the areas of Geographic Information Science and Remote Sensing. The Centre contains maps, atlases, air photos and reference books, periodical indexes useful for environmental sciences, as well as specialized collections in cartography, physical geography, oceanography, meteorology, free access to provincial and federal GIS databases, as well as some electronic maps and CD-ROM databases.

General books, periodicals and government documents are found in the McLennan Library, or in other libraries such as Blackader (Architecture and Urban Planning), or Blacker-Wood (Biology). The Schulich Library, located in the Rutherford Building, is an especially important resource for physical geographers. Special introductions are offered in the Hitschfeld, Schulich and other libraries regularly.

13.8. FIELD STATIONS

The university owns four main research stations, located at: Mont Saint Hilaire in southern Quebec; the Bellairs Research Station in Barbados; Schefferville in the sub-arctic; and Axel Heiberg in the high arctic. Professor Wayne Pollard is the Director of the two northern stations.

13.9. VACATION POLICY

Graduate students and post-doctoral fellows should normally be entitled to vacation leave equivalent to university holidays and an additional total of fifteen working days in the year. Funded students with fellowships and research grant stipends taking additional vacation leave may have their funding reduced accordingly. For information on McGill's parental leave policy, consult the [University Regulations](#).

14. SAFETY, LIABILITY AND INSURANCE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

Graduate students are urged to take advantage of the University's insurance policy, in order to provide themselves with coverage for injury or accident in the course of field work or laboratory work. You must be enrolled and your premium paid *before* an accident occurs.

If you are a Teaching Assistant, you should familiarize yourself with the risks or hazards of any laboratory or fieldwork or special field trips off campus. You cannot make any assumptions about the levels of experience or common sense of undergraduate students. Teaching safe practices is part of teaching science. Every graduate student who uses a Department laboratory should be thoroughly familiar with: (1) the line of responsibility for keys, security, and supervisory regulations; (2) the emergency equipment (shower, ventilation); (3) how to call for help; and (4) standard safety practices in laboratories, as described in the handbook *Safety in Laboratories*, ed. Hartree and Booth, 1977.

If your own research involves fieldwork, you should consult your supervisor and others with experience about the risks involved and the precautions to take. The Department has painfully

acquired a certain amount of information about tropical diseases, sunstroke, bears, snow blindness, frostbite... Yes, it *can* happen to you. **And always, always back up your data!**

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