Frequently asked questions:  Current students, Master’s in Geography

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Program of Study and Course Requirements

Q:  What is the program of study (POS)?

The POS is a list of courses that you need to take in order to graduate with the MA/MS degree. Some courses in the POS are mandatory for all students (e.g. 700, 701, 799A), while many are elective. See the POS forms in the Master’s Handbook for the requirements for your specific degree program (MA, MS-GIS, MS-Watershed).

Q: I took some of the courses required for my degree at SDSU while I was an undergraduate at SDSU (e.g. GEOG 511, which is required for MS-Watershed). Will they count towards my MA/MS degree?

If you filed for concurrent graduate credit while in your last semester as an undergraduate then the course would be footnoted in your undergraduate record and it will also be carried over into your graduate record. The course would be listed twice on the transcript; once under your undergraduate record and once under your graduate record.

If you did not file for concurrent graduate credit then you would need to make up the 3 units associated with the POS requirements in order to achieve the 30-unit total. The Graduate Advisor (Biggs) determines whether to 1) waive to content and have you take another course towards your POS requirements or 2) recommend that you retake it based on the grade earned or if you need to take it as a graduate student and be required to perform at the graduate level, since some courses require additional tasks/homework/papers for graduate students.

Q: What happens if I don’t take one of the courses in my POS?

If you need to change the courses in your POS, you need to submit revised versions of 1) the departmental POS form in the MA/MS handbook, which includes lines for signatures of both your thesis advisor and the Graduate Advisor. This form is submitted to the Program coordinator (Candra Young) and 2) a Petition for Adjustment of Degree Requirements form, which is signed by the Graduate Advisor (Biggs) and submitted to Graduate Division for approval.

Q: Can courses taken through Open University or another university before I started the MA/MS program count towards my MA/MS degree?

Student are eligible to take courses through Open University as long as they are not matriculated into the University and have those courses count towards their POS requirements or possible pre-reqs should the student be admitted at a later point. It is worth noting that anything that is taken through Open University appears on the SDSU transcript so, if the student does poorly while taking Open University courses the SDSU cumulative GPA will be impacted. Also, students are limited to a maximum of 9 Open University or other university units for a 30 unit POS and this total includes a combined total of courses coming from another institution and Open University. Should the student include an Open University course on their POS, the 7 year deadline by when they must complete their degree requirements begins with the Open University course that is on their POS and not when they were admitted.
Open University courses count towards the GPA requirements, program requirements, unit requirements, and time to graduate as they basically are SDSU courses but are being paid through the College of Extended Studies should the student have missed admission deadlines, are trying to bring their GPA up prior to being considered for admission, or have pre-reqs and are not wanting to wait until the next admission cycle.

**Advancing to candidacy and thesis proposal defense**

**Q:** What does it mean to “advance to candidacy” and how do I do it?

Advancement to candidacy means you have completed one year of coursework, maintained a 3.0 GPA, and can now formally declare your thesis committee with the Thesis Committee Form. You advance to candidacy once you a) submit your Program of Study to the Geography Department coordinator and b) finish at least 12 units of coursework with a 3.0 GPA. Most Geography Master’s Students will have completed 15 units by the end of their first year. The official advancement to candidacy in WebPortal occurs in the summer after your first year, usually by July.

**Q:** When do I find members for and convene my thesis committee?

You should start forming your thesis committee by consulting with your advisor in your first two semesters. You can convene your thesis committee for your thesis proposal defense anytime after your first semester. **Do not wait until you have advanced to candidacy and get the Thesis Committee Form to form and consult with your committee.**

**Q:** Can I defend my thesis proposal, even if I haven’t submitted the Thesis Committee Form?

Yes. The Thesis Committee form will only be issued to you by Graduate Division after you advance to candidacy, which usually happens in summer after your first year. You may defend your thesis proposal before this, and have the committee sign the Thesis proposal defense form in the fall of your second year.

**Q:** Can I defend my proposal and thesis in the same semester?

Yes, pending approval of your thesis advisor, though this is strongly discouraged because it gives inadequate opportunity for the committee to have meaningful input to your thesis, and puts you at risk of the committee not approving of your study design, which could result in your thesis.

**Defending your thesis and graduation: Deadlines**

**Q:** What are the deadlines to apply to graduate?

The deadlines to apply for graduation are posted at [http://aztecgrad.sdsu.edu/gra/Default.aspx](http://aztecgrad.sdsu.edu/gra/Default.aspx).

**Note that for spring and summer graduation, the deadline for application to graduate can be as early as January.**

**Q:** What is the deadline to submit my thesis for graduation?
See http://www.montezumapublishing.com/thesis1/ThesisDeadlines.aspx. The “Final deadline” is the most important. The “Without Risk” deadline does not apply to Geography students, whose advisors and not Montezuma Publishing approve the final thesis content and format.

Q: The Graduate Division website has a deadline for “Last day to report Final Comprehensive Exam”. Is that relevant to me?

No. That deadline is only relevant for students doing Plan B (Exam), while all Geography students are in Plan A (thesis). The deadline for the “Report of Final Examination or Thesis Defense” form is the same as the Montezuma Publishing Deadline.

Q: There are two deadlines listed for Deadlines on Montezuma Publishing and on the Graduate Division website. One says “Final Deadline” and the other “Last day to submit”. What do those two deadlines mean?

The first deadline, “Final Deadline” is to graduate in that same semester, while the second one, “Last day to submit”, is to graduate in the subsequent semester, but without having to register for 799B. If you file by the “Last day to submit” you’ll need to reapply for graduation but would not have to take 799B.

Defending the thesis: Forms and procedures

Q: What forms do I need to have ready going into my final thesis defense?

You should have the signature page of your thesis with you, since all committee members need to sign that form. The other forms (Completion of Thesis in an Approved Format, Report on Final Thesis Defense Form) will be signed after you submit your revised thesis document to your committee chair and/or thesis committee.


1. If your committee requested revisions to the thesis document, you must complete those revisions to the satisfaction of your advisor and/or thesis committee, depending on what was agreed upon at the defense.
2. Once your revisions are complete and the final format of your thesis PDF document is approved by your advisor, have your main thesis advisor sign the Completion of Thesis in an Approved Format form.
3. Fill out the “Report of Final Examination or Thesis Defense” form but do not have it signed by your thesis advisor. Bring the signed “Completion of Thesis in an Approved Format” form and the unsigned “Report of Final Examination or Thesis Defense” form to the Master’s Advisor (Dr. Biggs) for signature.
4. Submit the “Completion of Thesis in an Approved Format” form to the Graduate Program Coordinator in the Geography Department.
5. Submit the “Report of Final Examination or Thesis Defense” form to the Graduate Division.
6. Submit a hardcopy of your signature page to Montezuma Publishing.
7. Email a PDF of your thesis to Montezuma Publishing (thesis@aztecmail.com).

Q: Does my final thesis document have to be approved by Montezuma Publishing (MP), and does it have to follow their formatting guidelines?


Q: I thought I was going to finish in the spring but I will instead finish in summer. What do I need to do?

You will have to enroll in at least one unit of 799B during the summer, and reapply to graduate in summer. To do so, go back into your WebPortal account and “transfer” your application for Spring to Summer (August) by repaying the $55 fee.