

Department of Environmental Studies

Graduate Handbook

Master of Science in Environmental Studies

State University of New York
College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF)
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I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Master of Science (MS) in Environmental Studies graduate program at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF). We are delighted that you have joined a unique set of graduate students, faculty, and researchers who share a deep interest in environmental policy, communication, justice, and decision-making.

The program is intended for a wide range of students, including those with undergraduate degrees in fields other than Environmental Studies. The program facilitates student understanding of fundamental social, political, economic, cultural, and technological forces that drive environmental degradation as well as the application of emerging approaches that can foster sustainability. It does this by drawing on a range of frameworks from the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Coursework combines theoretical, practical, and applied approaches to areas such as environmental policy, environmental communication, sustainable communities, human behavior, collaborative governance, public participation, environmental interpretation, and environmental impact analysis.

The program prepares students to critically analyze and engage with emerging issues and problems related to environmental affairs and sustainability. As part of one of the world's foremost schools of environmental research, the program is enhanced by ESF's diverse expertise in the natural sciences and engineering, as well as by graduate courses at Syracuse University. Courses from Syracuse University in fields such as area studies, climate policy, environmental history, anthropology, religion, and management methods for public agencies and nonprofits allow us to supplement ESF faculty expertise.

The New York State Department of Education and the State University of New York establish policy for all graduate programs. At ESF, the College Faculty has adopted a comprehensive set of Graduate Policies. These are published in the College Catalog. The policies and the procedures which implement College policy are contained in the ESF Faculty Governance body's "Graduate Academic Policies" document, also available in the College Catalog. In addition, the MS Environmental Studies program has its own policies, procedures, and guidelines as documented in this handbook.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MS DEGREE

The ESF Catalog description provides the basic framework of graduation requirements.

In their first semester, students work with their advisors to draft an *Environmental Studies MS Plan* to meet their specific goals (see below for details). The *Environmental Studies MS Plan* is an opportunity for students to consider their learning, experiential, and career interests and objectives in narrative form and outline a sequence of courses and research agenda to help meet those objectives. As a student's program evolves, the *Environmental Studies MS Plan* may be updated in consultation with their Major Professor(s) and/or Steering Committee. All MS Environmental Studies students are required to complete the *Environmental Studies MS Plan*.

Separate from the *Environmental Studies MS Plan*, all ESF graduate students are required to prepare and submit to ESF's Graduate School a list of courses called the *Graduate Program of Study*. This serves as a formal record of courses the student plans to take to meet their program requirements; it is submitted by filling out the MS-3B form. The *Graduate Program of Study*, developed by the student with the advice and approval of the Major Professor and other members of the Steering Committee, must be submitted no later than the end of the student's third semester; earlier is preferable. **Please note:** The *Graduate Program of Study* ('Form 3B') and the *Environmental Studies MS Plan* are two distinct documents. More information can be found below.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for enrollment in the MS Environmental Studies program. It is recommended, however, that students entering this program have some academic background in the Social Sciences, in Environmental Policy or Communication, or in Environmental Science or Ecology.

Advanced Standing

Transfer credit. Up to six (6) graduate course credit hours with a grade of "B" or better that have not been applied to another degree may be transferred via Petition. The Petition must include an attached syllabus, and a justification of how the course(s) are to be included on the student's *Graduate Program of Studies*. Petitions for transfer credit are submitted following matriculation.

Concurrent Degree

Concurrent degree students may "double-count" no more than eight (8) credit hours toward their MS Environmental Studies degree.

Program Requirements

The MS Environmental Studies degree requires 30 credit hours focused on academic scholarship and research related to environmental affairs and sustainability. Program requirements are outlined below. All courses are three (3) credit hours unless noted otherwise.

The Core (9 credits)

Three core courses represent the methodological and interdisciplinary scope of the field of Environmental Studies and demonstrate its applicability to problem analysis and the quest for sustainability.

Required:

EST 600 Foundations of Environmental Studies (Fall)

AND two courses selected from:

EST 608 Environmental Advocacy Campaigns and Conflict Resolution

EST 612 Environmental Policy and Governance

EST 613 Urbanization and the Environment

EST 615 Environmental Justice: Policy, Tools, and Society

EST 640 Environmental Thought and Ethics

EST 645 Mass Media and Environmental Affairs

EST 650 Environmental Perception and Human Behavior

EST 708 Social Theory and the Environment

EST 770 Regenerative Approaches to Sustainable Futures

Research Methods (6 credits)

One core Environmental Studies research methods course and an additional methods course (selected from the list below) provide methodological preparation for MS thesis proposal development and research.

Required:

EST 603 Research Methods and Design (Fall)

Required, one of the following:

APM 510 Statistical Analysis

APM 625 Sampling Methods

APM 630 Regression Analysis

APM 635 Multivariate Statistical Methods

EST 604 Survey Research Methods

EST 605 Qualitative Methods

EST 617 Measuring Environmental Inequality

EST 702 Environmental and Natural Resource Program Evaluation

EST 705 Environmental Policy Analysis

LSA 640 Research Methods

Other courses may be identified in collaboration with the student's advisor.

Generalized/ Thematic Area (9 credits)

Three additional Generalized or Thematic Area courses are selected in consultation with the student's Major Professor. These should be used to substantively prepare the student for master's thesis research by building a solid knowledge of some aspect of the interdisciplinary field of Environmental Studies. EST 898 and EST 899 may not be included as thematic area courses.

Thesis Research (6 credits)

All students with an approved MS thesis research proposal take at least six (6) credits of:

EST 899 Master's Thesis Research

In taking these credits, students are expected to develop a research-based master's thesis clearly demonstrating the student's competency in interdisciplinary environmental research and analysis. Completion of the thesis is accompanied by a Capstone Seminar, and an Oral Examination and Thesis Defense (see below).

III. TYPICAL COURSE SEQUENCE

The following is a typical course sequence. Each student may tailor the specific courses and sequencing (within the limits of program requirements) to their own needs.

Year 1 Fall

Course Title	Credits
EST 600. Foundations of Environmental Studies	3
EST 603. Research Methods and Design	3
Core Course	3
Thematic Area Course	3
Total Semester Credits	12

Year 1 Spring

Course Title	Credits
Research Methods Course	3
Core Course	3
Thematic Area Course	3
Thematic Area Course	3
Total Semester Credits	12

Year 2 Fall

Course Title	Credits
EST 899. Master's Thesis Research	6
Semester Total Credits	6
Total Semester Credits	12

IV. PROCEDURES FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING

Major Professor

Each student is assigned a Major Professor (or sometimes, co-Major Professors) in conjunction with admission to the MS Environmental Studies program. Each new student should meet with their Major Professor(s) during the week prior to the start of classes, to discuss their academic and career objectives. This will be helpful in selecting courses for the first semester. The session also will allow the Major Professor(s) and student to share expectations for their academic relationship and establish a schedule for work on the student's *Environmental Studies MS Plan*.

Environmental Studies MS Plan

The purpose of the Environmental Studies MS Plan is to provide structure and coherence to each student's individualized learning within the program requirements. Students are encouraged to think reflectively about their learning objectives and how they can be achieved through a systematic program of coursework and professional experience. The Environmental Studies MS Plan (5-6 pages) will consist of the following parts:

- A descriptive TITLE of the student's thematic area.
- A 100-word descriptive ABSTRACT of the student's thematic area.
- A list of the student's CAREER OBJECTIVES.
- A list of the student's LEARNING OBJECTIVES.
- A 500-word DESCRIPTION of the thematic area that defines its concerns, importance, and limits.
- A 500-word RATIONALE for the thematic area's relevance to the student's career and learning objectives.
- A MATRIX showing courses to be taken and their sequence in relation to the student's learning objectives.

The *Environmental Studies MS Plan* must be approved prior to advising week of the first semester of matriculation and provides the rationale for future course selection. The *Environmental Studies MS Plan* may be adjusted in consultation with their faculty advisor and Steering Committee. All MS Environmental Studies students are required to complete the *Environmental Studies MS Plan*.

ESF Graduate Program of Study (Form MS-3B)

In addition to the overarching Environmental Studies MS Plan, students will complete and submit an ESF Graduate Program of Study (Form MS-3B) that specifies the list of courses, seminars, and thesis credits necessary to meet degree requirements. The Graduate Program of Study must be reviewed and approved by the student's Steering Committee (including Major Professor) and the

Department's Graduate Studies Coordinator (or Department Chair) and submitted to ESF's Graduate School. The Graduate Program of Study can be changed; changes must be approved by all the same parties. The student's Major Professor should have access to an updated version; each student is encouraged to maintain an updated personal copy. Please keep the Graduate Program of Study and the Environmental Studies MS Plan as two distinct documents. Graduate Program of Study (Form MS-3B) forms are available online at the ESF Graduate School website.

Steering Committee

Ideally, by the end of the first semester of study, the student and their Major Professor(s) should seek appointment of the student's Steering Committee, consisting of the Major Professor and at least two other ESF faculty members or other qualified persons. The latter may include faculty members from other institutions, or other recognized professionals. The Steering Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving the student's ESF *Graduate Program of Study* (Form 3B) and thesis research proposal and reviews the thesis prior to the final copy being presented for defense. To ensure consistency and quality, each ESF *Graduate Program of Study* must be approved by the student's Steering Committee and Departmental Graduate Studies Coordinator (or Department Chair).

Master's Thesis Research

In the first (Fall) semester of their first year, all MS Environmental Studies students are required to take Research Methods and Design (EST 603). This three-credit course helps students conceptualize the research process and gain experience in developing a plan for successfully carrying out interdisciplinary environmental research. By the end of the second semester, each student should have completed a master's thesis research proposal for review and approval by their Major Professor and Steering Committee. Thesis proposals typically include the following:

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Research question(s)
- Context of research
- Rationale for the study
- Literature review
- Research design
- Proposed methods for data collection and analysis
- Timeline
- Budget/funding
- Outline of the thesis

The Major Professor will supervise the thesis research and preparation of the thesis, and will work with the student throughout the program, in consultation with other Steering Committee members.

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to any primary data collection involving human subjects, a detailed plan for the protection of all such informants involved in research must be developed and submitted to ESF's Office of Research Programs, for transmission, review, and approval by Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB application is submitted in hard copy under the name and signature of the student's Major Professor, with the student as the co-PI/ graduate student researcher for the project. Prior to submission of this application, both the Major Professor and graduate student researcher must successfully complete the required online CITI training modules on the protection of human subjects. For further information, see the SU IRB website. Following completion of data collection, a final report must be filed with the IRB to close the active file for the research project.

Instructions and Guidelines for Formatting a Thesis

For instructions and guidelines for formatting a thesis, download the document via ESF's Graduate School website.

Capstone Seminar, Oral Examination and Thesis Defense

At the conclusion of the study and research program, each MS Environmental Studies student must present their research at a public Capstone Seminar, and successfully defend their thesis in an oral examination. The objectives of the defense examination include: (1) probing the validity and significance of the data and information presented in the thesis document; (2) assessing the student's skills in critical thinking and data analysis; (3) evaluating the student's ability to relate research results to theory within the chosen field(s); and (4) assessing the student's effectiveness in the presentation of research results. The oral examination covers principally the material in the thesis, as well as literature and information relating to it.

Upon the recommendation of the Department's Graduate Studies Coordinator, the Dean of the Graduate School will appoint the thesis defense examination committee, which consists of members of the Steering Committee and at least one additional faculty member (the Examiner). Additionally, the Dean of the Graduate School will appoint an Examination Committee Chair who is not from the Environmental Studies Department. For students who intend to complete their thesis defense in the spring semester of their second academic year, the Examination Committee must be appointed by early December; for the exact date, see the ESF Graduate School website. The role of the Examination Committee Chair is to manage the defense, ensure its integrity, and represent the interests of the faculty and student. Any member of the faculty may be an observer. The student examinee may invite a silent student observer to attend the examination. Submit "Request for Thesis Defense Committee" (Form 5B) with the ESF Graduate School for appointment of Chair and Examiner according to academic year deadlines.

At least two weeks prior to the date of the oral examination, the student will submit the finalized thesis to all members of the Examination Committee. Additionally, using Form 5A, the student must inform the Dean's office of the agreed upon date, time, and location for the defense at least

two weeks in advance of the defense date. One final copy must be delivered to each member of the Examination Committee, including the Chair, at least two weeks prior to the scheduled defense date. Within five days of the oral exam, the Major Professor will confirm with the Examination Committee Chair that the oral examination should proceed as scheduled. If the Major Professor determines that the written document does not meet the standards established for the thesis exam, the exam may be postponed by the Dean of the Graduate School at the recommendation of the Examining Committee Chair.

The thesis defense typically lasts up to two hours, but its length may be extended. At the completion of the examination, the candidate and observers will be excused from the room and the Examination Committee will determine whether the candidate has successfully defended the thesis. The Examination Committee Chair has the option to vote. Unanimous agreement is required to pass the student. If less than unanimous agreement is reached, the student will be considered to have failed the first defense examination and may request a second defense, which must take place no more than one year from the date of the first examination. At the second defense, the student will pass the defense if there is no more than one negative vote. A student who fails the second defense is terminated from the graduate program.

Annual Review of Student Progress

At the beginning of each calendar year, the Department of Environmental Studies reviews academic progress of all affiliated research-oriented (PhD and MS) graduate students, including those in this program. As input to this review, each student submits a report by mid-December outlining their accomplishments during the preceding calendar year and progress toward completing degree requirements.

Program Assessment

The Department of Environmental Studies is committed to ongoing assessment and improvement of all its academic programs. Accordingly, data are collected periodically at the beginning, end, and mid-points of this and other programs, with the purpose of contributing to the evaluation of program effectiveness.

V. RESOURCES

Departmental Staff

The Environmental Studies Office (106 Marshall Hall) maintains unofficial student records and a collection of course syllabi that are available for reference. Time-relevant opportunities may be posted on the *ES-Grad-Announce* listserv or via the departmental Instagram page (@ESF_Enviro_Studies).

It is not unusual for students, at some time during their studies, to encounter problems of a personal or academic nature for which they require assistance. An early full discussion of the situation and options is often the key to their resolution. Major Professors, the Departmental Graduate Studies Coordinator, and Department Chair are available to facilitate this process. The Departmental secretary can assist in making appointments as necessary.

Graduate Funding

The MS Environmental Studies degree program is designed to be affordable, and many students in the program are self-funded. Institutional funding opportunities for MS Environmental Studies students are limited. That said, several types of funding opportunities are noted below.

Research Assistantships

As a graduate research institution, ESF is involved in sponsored research that may include Research Project Assistants (RPAs). Each research project is managed by a Principal Investigator who has the responsibility of selecting staff. The Department of Environmental Studies has no direct involvement in this process. Students interested in working as an RPA should discuss opportunities with their Major Professor.

Graduate Assistantships

Occasionally, an MS student may receive an offer of support concurrent with the admissions process. Referred to as “recruitment”, such support may come with funding for up to two academic years, contingent on continued academic progress and availability of funds.

Each semester, a few Graduate Assistantships may be available to MS students on an *ad hoc* basis. Students indicate their interest in being considered for available Graduate Assistantships by filling out and submitting a departmental Graduate Assistantship application. Such Assistantship decisions are made on a semester-by-semester basis and receiving an Assistantship for one semester does not imply or guarantee future funding.

Graduate students in good standing may apply for open GA positions in other units at ESF, such as ESF’s Graduate School or the ESF Open Academy.

Grants and Fellowships

Some graduate students come to ESF with a grant or fellowship (e.g., the National Science Foundation [NSF] Graduate Research Fellowship, or through the Fulbright international exchange program) that covers some or all costs of graduate education. Lead times for fellowships can be quite long – more than a year in some cases. It can be helpful to contact a prospective faculty advisor well in advance to work together to identify and obtain such funding opportunities.

Sometimes there are cooperative funding opportunities for master's students through sponsoring governmental agencies (e.g., NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation), not-for-profit organizations (e.g., The Nature Conservancy), or other organizations. ESF may have other internal funding opportunities, such as through the Randolph G. Pack Environmental Institute or the Sussman Fellowship, that can be used in support of graduate studies. See departmental communications and the ESF Graduate School website for further information.

ESF's Graduate School and Office of Research Programs circulate research, fellowship, and internship announcements throughout the year.

APPENDIX A. THESIS PROPOSAL APPROVAL FORM

Approval of Proposals

MS Environmental Studies graduate students are required to prepare a formal Thesis Proposal. The proposal must be approved by the student's Major Professor and Steering Committee using the form, below, for signatures, with a copy of the proposal attached, with one copy being submitted to the Departmental secretary for the student's file.

Although progress in developing a proposal may vary from student to student, in most cases students are required to produce an approved proposal prior to registering for EST 899 Thesis Research.

Content of Proposal

Proposals will vary in content according to the nature of the planned research. These should be succinct statements of research plans describing the planned work. Thesis proposals will consist of the following parts:

- Title
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Research question(s)
- Context of research
- Rationale for the study
- Literature review
- Research design
- Proposed methods for data collection and analysis
- Timeline
- Budget/funding
- Outline of the thesis

PROPOSAL APPROVAL

Student Name: _____

Thesis Title: _____

Approved:

Major Professor:

Date:

Committee Member:

Date:

Committee Member:

Date:

A copy of the approved proposal should be affixed to this form, and copies of this document with the attached proposal should be provided to each of the above signers, and to the Environmental Studies Office, 106 Marshall Hall.