

# GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

## DOCTORAL DEGREE IN EARTH, ENVIRONMENT, & SOCIETY

Policies and Procedures

Updated: Winter 2024

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## Program Overview

Welcome to Portland State University's Earth, Environment, and Society (EES) doctoral program. We are an interdisciplinary program focusing on the most pressing environmental, geological, and associated societal challenges of today. The expertise of our faculty advisors and students spans a range of physical and social science disciplines with particular focus on water, climate, ecology, and geological hazards. The EES program gives students the skills, knowledge, and training opportunities to excel in a wide range of cutting edge, high-demand professional careers.

Portland State is Oregon's urban research university. Located in the heart of Downtown Portland, within easy reach of the Willamette Valley, Oregon Coast, Cascade Mountains, and high deserts, PSU is a truly unique place to study Earth, environmental, and geospatial science. EES PhD students benefit from the diverse expertise of our faculty and students whose interests are at the heart of today's interdisciplinary solutions. At PSU, we regularly engage with local, regional, and national agencies, NGOs, and industries, with such partnerships enabled by our location in Oregon's largest city. Additionally, the geological, ecological, and societal diversity of the region provides exceptional research opportunities for a wide range of academic and professional interests. The success of EES graduates across a wide range of disciplines and career pathways demonstrates the unique training opportunities we provide.

In this handbook you will find information and resources to support your pathway through the EES doctoral program from application through graduation. Additional resources, policies, procedures, and forms can be found on the Portland State University's [Graduate School website](#).

## Program Learning Outcomes

- **Advanced Knowledge:** Demonstrate advanced knowledge of Earth, Environment, and Society (EES).
- **Original Research:** Design research questions and conduct original research based on rigorous quantitative and/or qualitative methods to advance the discipline.
- **Project Management:** Organize and manage all aspects of an original research project.
- **Scientific Communication:** Learn to professionally communicate relevant theories, research, and findings in publications and oral presentations.

## Diversity Equity and Inclusion

Providing an inclusive graduate learning experience is a top priority for Portland State University and the faculty, staff, and students that participate in the EES PhD program. We recognize that Portland State University occupies the traditional ancestral homelands of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Tumwater, Watlala bands of the Chinook, the Tualatin Kalapuya, and many other Indigenous nations of the Columbia River and that we are here because of the sacrifices forced upon the ancestors of this place. We further recognize that moving towards a fully inclusive program that comprehensively values and supports diversity in all of its forms while providing an equitable learning experience for all students is a work in progress that requires continued effort on behalf of all faculty, staff, and students. We in the EES program are deeply committed to this sustained effort and continued progress. More information on Portland

State University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion can be found at the [Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion](#) and resources for students with disabilities can be found at the [Disability Resource Center](#). PSU also has [resources for students with children](#) and [many other student centers and resources](#) with a wide variety of student-centered services and activities.

## Pre-Admission Information

All applicants are requested to identify an advisor in their application materials and the identified advisor must agree to advise the applicant before acceptance into the EES program. It is therefore **highly recommended that applicants reach out to one or more potential faculty advisors prior to submitting their application** in order to identify the advisor or advisors that most closely match their scholarly interests and would be most likely to best support the applicant towards achieving their goals. Information on our faculty and their research and disciplinary interests can be found [here](#). Faculty advisors will be happy to discuss their research and scholarly interests with prospective students and help them assess whether they are the right advisor.

### When to Apply and When to Enroll

Detailed information on how to apply to the EES program can be found on the [Academic Program Website](#). The standard timeline is for applicants to submit an application by January 15<sup>th</sup> and for accepted applicants to enroll the following fall quarter (September). However, the EES program regularly admits students in different quarters (Portland State is on the quarter system, not the semester system) by arrangement between the faculty advisor and the applicant. Students who submit an application by January 15<sup>th</sup> will receive a decision on their application by no later than mid-February. Students who are accepted are expected to communicate their intent to enroll by April 15<sup>th</sup>. Please note that we do not require GRE scores. More information on application requirements for Portland State, including for international students can be found on the [Graduate School website](#).

### Funding Opportunities

Most students who pursue an EES PhD degree receive financial support via a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA). GRAs are most often provided and offered by the student's faculty advisor with the funding coming from a research grant. GRA support is commonly provided by external research grants on which the faculty advisor is a Principal Investigator, although other sources of GRA funding may be available. GRAs are expected to work on research related to the supporting research project, with their advisor's mentorship. Often this research contributes to the student's dissertation. At this time, the University, College, and Departments do not offer GRAs.

EES PhD students may also be financially supported by a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA). GTAs are provided by the department in which the faculty advisor sits and are offered on a competitive basis. GTAs are often of limited availability for EES students and most students are supported by a GRA.

Both GRAs and GTAs provide a stipend and full tuition remission. Stipend rates and amounts may vary so please inquire with your prospective advisor for more specifics. Information on fees and health insurance for graduate assistants is provided by the [Graduate School](#). The [Graduate School](#) provides additional information about ways to finance your graduate education.

*GRAs and GTAs are represented by the Graduate Employees Union (GEU) of Portland State University, and all PSU's Depts, including Geography follow the agreements that the Union and PSU have concurred. More information regarding the GEU can be found at their [website](#).*

## **Post Admission Information**

Once you have formally accepted admission into our PhD program, it is highly recommended that you touch base with your faculty advisor. Together you will develop your program of study, including coursework, formation of committees, and plans for your dissertation research. It is important to meet regularly with your advisor throughout your time enrolled in the EES program.

### **A note on entering the PhD program with a Master's Degree**

Students may enroll in the EES PhD program with or without a previous master's degree. However, it is important to note that we do not offer a master's degree in EES. This means that if you enroll in the EES PhD program without a previous master's degree, you will not be able to obtain one along the way to your PhD as is possible in some other PhD programs. While not required, we encourage PhD students to consider obtaining a master's degree prior to committing to pursuing a PhD. This can be done at PSU by enrolling in the master's in Environmental Science and Management, Geography, or Geology prior to enrolling in the PhD program. With careful coordination with your faculty advisor and thesis/dissertation committee, it is possible to obtain a master's degree and then enroll in the EES PhD program to continue your studies towards a doctoral degree, leveraging your master's degree work and courses' credits towards your dissertation. If you enroll with a previous master's degree in a related discipline, it is recommended that you discuss options for transferring credits or research towards your PhD with your faculty advisor.

### **Required Coursework**

A minimum of 81 degree credits beyond the bachelor's degree are required of doctoral students. More information on credit requirements can be found [here](#). The 81 credits are comprised of 54 course credits and 27 dissertation credits. Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the EES program, there is considerable flexibility the courses a student may take towards their credit requirement. Each student's program of study is therefore customized in consultation with their advisor and Advisory Committee to best support their scholarly goals. The following requirements apply to all EES students, all subject to approval by the student's advisor and/or Advisory Committee:

- Seminar (4 credits; ESM/G/GEOG 507; ESR 655/656/657)
- Research Methods (3-4 credits; ESM 566, ESM 567, G 523, GEOG 525, or others)
- Professional development (2 credits; ESR 655/656)
- Dissertation (27 credits), after advancement to candidacy. The dissertation credits that you enroll in will differ depending on which department your advisor is faculty in (e.g., GEOG 603, G 603, or ESR 603).
- Other graduate electives credits (44 credits). These may include credits transferred from a master's program on a case-by-case basis.

### **Departmental Conditions for Good Standing**

All graduate students are expected to maintain good standing in their program of study. To remain in good standing, each student must:

- Maintain a B average (3.0 GPA) or above and not receive a grade of I, X, M, NP, AU, or C+ or below in any single course. As soon as a student suspects they are in danger of a grade or GPA infraction, they should let their advisor know and contact the Graduate Committee chair(s). If the student has a good reason for why the infraction occurred, and it is their first such infraction, the student may petition to be put on probation for one quarter. A student may remain in good standing (and receive tuition and stipend support) during this probationary period. However, a student who fails to successfully petition for probationary status following a grade or GPA infraction is considered to not be in good standing, and will not be eligible for tuition and stipend support. If such infractions occur in two separate quarters, tuition and stipend support will be permanently terminated. Multiple grade or GPA infractions can be considered sufficient grounds for dismissal from the program.
- Retain an academic advisor who is willing to serve as their mentor.
- Comply with the Student Conduct Code.
- Meet the standards of the profession they will be entering.
- Make satisfactory progress in their research, as assessed by the student, their advisor, and their committee.

Please note that the above requirements are specific to the EES program, but include the Graduate School requirements which can be found [here](#).

### **Grounds for Dismissal**

Repeated grade/GPA infractions may constitute grounds for dismissal from the EES PhD program. Additionally, dismissal from the program can occur if a student chooses to no longer work with their advisor or the advisor chooses to no longer work with the student *and* the student is unable to find a new advisor within two quarters (see “Advisors” section for additional details), or if a student fails comprehensive examinations or a defense or presentation (see “Comprehensive Examinations” and “Defenses and Presentations” for details).

Finally, dismissal can occur if the advisor determines that a student is not making satisfactory progress in their research. The student may then hold a meeting of their committee (including the primary advisor) to discuss the progress and state of their research. If, following the meeting, the consensus of the committee is that the student has not made satisfactory progress, then this is sufficient grounds for termination and dismissal from the program. The student will be notified of the decision by email at their pdx.edu account.

If the student disagrees with the committee’s determination, the student has two weeks to respond to the email notification. The department’s Graduate Committee should also be included on the response letter. The response will be reviewed by the Graduate Committee and a written notice of their decision will be emailed to the student. Graduate School policy on dismissal can be found [here](#).

### **Leave of Absence**

Admitted graduate students in good academic standing may request a leave of absence. A leave of absence is a hiatus of a student’s studies during they are not registered and are not engaged in any phase of research or aspects of an exam, project, thesis, or dissertation. Information on what may qualify for being granted a leave of absence and how to apply (request form) is found [here](#).

### Degree Progression Milestones and Forms

Students may follow different timelines depending on their rate of progress and other factors. However, all EES students must follow the progression outlined below and submit the appropriate forms associated with each milestone.

- 1) Form an Advisory Committee: Your advisory committee must consist of your primary advisor and two other faculty who can [advise in the EES](#) program or are affiliates of the program (discuss with your advisor to determine if non-EES faculty count as affiliates who can serve on your committees). **Students are expected to form their Advisory Committee after their first 9 credits of coursework via this [ESR-006](#) form.**
- 2) Form a Comprehensive Exam Committee: Your Comprehensive Exam Committee can be the same as your Advisory Committee, but does not have to be. Your Comprehensive Exam Committee will develop, deliver, and grade your comprehensive exam. This committee includes your primary advisor and 2-3 faculty members who can advise in the EES program or affiliates of the program. Committee members should have expertise in your area of study. **Students must submit form [ESR-007](#) prior to their comprehensive exam to form this committee.**
- 3) Complete the Comprehensive Exam: The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to assess the student's command of content knowledge related to their area of study. Prior to taking your comprehensive exam, you must submit a comprehensive exam prospectus to your Comprehensive Exam Committee. Specific expectations for the prospectus should be discussed with your Comprehensive Exam Committee but in general a prospectus entails a 1-2 page description of a possible dissertation topic, a list of relevant coursework, a reading list, and a resume or CV. **When your committee approves your Prospectus, form [ESR-008](#) must be submitted.**

Comprehensive exams are usually taken after a student completes their second year as an EES student and must take place no earlier than one full quarter after the formation of the Advisory Committee, however the timing may differ depending on your situation and should be discussed with your advisor. The exam consists of a written and an oral component. You will determine the content areas on which you will be examined with your Exam Committee. The Exam Committee will communicate the format of the exam, provide necessary readings (if applicable), and expectations ahead of the exam and will design all exam questions or activities.

There are four possible outcomes for the comprehensive exam:

- 1) Pass (unconditional)
- 2) Conditional Pass: Student passes with the condition that they take and pass courses prescribed by the Exam Committee. The exam does not need to be repeated.
- 3) Conditional Fail: Student must retake the exam, either in full or just the oral component as determined by the committee, and satisfy other conditions prescribed by the Exam Committee. Per Graduate School guidelines, a student may retake an exam only once.

- 4) Fail: The student is not allowed to retake the exam and admission to the EES program is terminated.

The written exam may take place over one or more days and will consist of a set of exercises, writing activities, and/or problems to solve as designed by your Exam Committee members. Each committee member will determine if the student passed, marginally passed, or failed the portion of the written exam that they contributed. A pass or marginal pass is required on a majority of the questions/exercises to be considered a pass on the exam. A complete copy of the exam will be part of the student's file.

The oral exam will largely focus on results from the written exam and any other topics that the committee wants to explore in accordance with the prospectus. The oral exam should take place no more than two weeks after the student passes the written exam. All Exam Committee members must be present for the oral exam. Students are responsible for scheduling their oral exam prior to taking the written exam and should plan for 2-3 hours.

**After passing the comprehensive exam, form [GO-22](#) must be completed.**

- 4) Formation of Dissertation Committee: After passing your comprehensive exam, the next step is to form your Dissertation Committee. This committee can be the same as your advisory committee and/or Comprehensive Exam Community, but it does not have to be. The Dissertation Committee must consist of at least four, but no more than six, PSU faculty members including the primary advisor who serves as dissertation chair. The majority of the Dissertation Committee members must be PSU employees ([policies elaborated on here](#)), however it is possible to have an expert from outside of PSU serve on your committee per approval by the Graduate School. **Formation of your Dissertation Committee requires form [GO-16](#).**
- 5) Dissertation Proposal Defense: The next step towards graduation is to write, present, and defend a dissertation proposal. This proposal will outline your research and scholarship plans for your dissertation and should include the following:
- Background and general status of knowledge in the problem area.
  - Theoretical and empirical framework within which the proposed problem exists, beginning with a concise statement of the problem.
  - Significance of the proposed research and its likely contributions.
  - Research methodology, including participants and their recruitment, design, and measures to be used.
  - Analysis plan.
  - Discussion section, containing the limitations of the research and future studies.

To be advanced to candidacy, students must complete all required courses, have official approval of the proposal by the [Human Subjects Committee](#) (if applicable), have met the requirements for advancement to candidacy established by the Graduate School, and have a dissertation proposal that is approved by their committee via a proposal defense. Per Graduate School guidelines students have a

maximum of three years from the completion of comprehensive examinations to advancement to candidacy.

**Upon successful defense of your proposal, you are eligible to advance to PhD candidacy using the [GO-23](#) form.** At this point you may register for Dissertation Credits (603).

- 6) Submission of Dissertation and Dissertation Defense: The final formal step before graduation is to submit your written dissertation to your committee, present your dissertation to your committee and an audience open to the public, and defend your dissertation to your committee. Your committee will likely request edits for your dissertation document based on their assessment of the dissertation and your presentation and defense. Once you pass your defense and make any requested revisions to your dissertation, **your committee will submit the [Recommendation for the Degree \(GO-17D\)](#) form to the Graduate School.** Be sure to apply for graduate prior to defending your dissertation by following the directions [here](#).

Graduate policies and deadlines can be found [here](#).



**Sample doctoral program timeline**

Timeline and time to completion may vary substantially for a variety of factors. At a minimum, students must be enrolled in 1 credit per term (excluding summer) until they graduate.

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Year 1	Coursework (9 credits = full time)	Coursework Advisory Committee Formation ESR-006	Coursework
Year 2	Coursework	Coursework	Coursework
		Comprehensive Exam Committee Formation ESR-007	Comprehensive Exam Prospectus ESR-008
Year 3	Finish any outstanding coursework	Finish any outstanding coursework	Finish any outstanding coursework
	Take Comprehensive Exam, Completion of Comp Exams ESR-004	Form Dissertation Committee GO-16D	Dissertation credits
Year 4	Dissertation credits Dissertation Prospectus Approval ESR-005 Advance to Candidacy GO-23	Dissertation credits	Dissertation credits
	Dissertation credits	Dissertation credits OGS Application for Doctoral Degree (online)	Dissertation defense Dissertation Signature Page & ETD Access Form GO-17D Recommendation for Degree