Program Focus

The core of the program focuses on understanding the science of ecology, use of the scientific method, interaction between human activities and natural systems, and the history of environmental change. Students demonstrate their acquisition of this knowledge and these skills through completion of a thesis. There are no set concentrations, but students are expected to pursue interests related to the interaction between humans and natural processes in one or more of the following domains: organismal ecology, ecosystem ecology, marine science, geology, and biogeochemistry as well as the application of science to environmental management and policy decision-making. Applications for the Fall term are due February 15 of the previous Spring. Applicants will be informed of the resulting admission decisions no later than April 15, that is, two months after the completed applications are due.

Interim Advisor

Each incoming graduate student is assigned one or more graduate faculty members who will serve as Interim Advisor(s). The Interim Advisor(s) is selected by Program faculty at the time a student is admitted, based on the research interests described by the student in her or his application package. Incoming graduate students should contact their Interim Advisors early in their first semester of graduate work.

An Interim Advisor agrees to commit time and attention to advise the incoming student on an interim basis, and in many cases the Interim Advisor becomes the student’s Major Professor. However, the incoming graduate student is free to seek out another graduate faculty member as who may agree to serve as Major Professor.

Major Professor

A student should select and appoint a Major Professor by the end of the student’s first semester (9 credit hours) in the program. The student and Major Professor should plan a program of study that, when completed, will satisfy the degree requirements specified in the University Catalog. Furthermore, the student should consult with the Major Professor to identify a potential thesis topic and complete a Thesis Proposal, as described

In the event a Major Professor is on temporary leave (e.g., sabbatical, leave of absence, etc.), the Major Professor may continue to serve and shall coordinate, as necessary, with the Program Leader and Department Chair to facilitate the needs of the student.

Most recent draft: Aug 10, 2011
A Major Professor must meet the following requirements. He/she:

1. must hold an appointment as a member of the graduate faculty within the College of Arts and Sciences;
2. must hold a terminal degree in the graduate program's discipline or in a closely-related discipline; and
3. must be a member of the graduate faculty in the department(s) within which the program is housed (currently the Department of Marine and Ecological Studies).

Co-Major Professors

In some instances a student may choose to have two professors serve as Major Professor. In this situation both faculty members are approved as Co-Major Professors and jointly serve in that role. Recognizing the scholarly value added by faculty of diverse disciplinary interests as well as the need to maintain scholarly coherence of a graduate program and ensure its proper administration, a faculty member who meets requirements 1 and 2 above but who does not meet requirement 3 may serve as Co-Major Professor provided that the second Co-Major Professor meets all three of the above requirements.

Approval of a Co-Major Professor who is not a member of the graduate faculty in the department(s) within which the graduate program resides shall be granted on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the graduate faculty in said department(s) with the support of the second Co-Major Professor, who must be a member of the graduate faculty in said department(s). In exceptional circumstances, a Co-Major Professor may be approved who is not employed at Florida Gulf Coast University but who is employed by an outside professional organization or agency. This individual must hold an appointment, which may be an adjunct appointment, as a member of the graduate faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences and Florida Gulf Coast University.

In the case of a student choosing to work with Co-Major Professors, the student will work with both Co-Major Professors to plan a program of study and should consult with both Co-Major Professors to identify a potential thesis topic and complete a draft Thesis Proposal. Both Co-Major Professors must sign approval on paperwork pertaining to the student’s processing (i.e., committee form, change of committee form, etc.). It is important that one of these Co-Major Professors be accessible on the university campus for the student to make satisfactory progress on the thesis.

If a student has a single Major Professor, in the event that Major Professor leaves the University but remains willing to serve (e.g., holds an appointment at another university; retires; etc.), he or she may continue as a Co-Major Professor if the student selects a second Co-Major Professor who meets all three requirements above. As noted above, it is important that one of these Co-Major Professors be accessible on the university campus for the student to make satisfactory progress on the thesis.
Thesis Topic Selection and Thesis Proposal

Students should consult with their Major Professor(s) in identifying a topic area for their thesis research beginning in the student’s first semester in the M.S. Program. The thesis topic must be consistent with the department’s curricular and scholarly mission and be compatible with our existing course offerings. A thesis topic is to be selected no later than the end of the second semester. This topic should be described in a document of a few pages that outlines the intended research topic, summarizes intended research methods, provides a proposed timeline for the research, and includes an initial bibliography of relevant primary literature. This document may be used in discussing the intended thesis with faculty members who might compose the Thesis Committee, described below. The student’s thesis topic description should be presented to potential Thesis Committee members when inviting them to join the Thesis Committee.

Students should work collaboratively with their Major Professor(s) in the preparation of a Thesis Proposal that outlines their proposed plan of graduate research. The Thesis Proposal should follow the format and style provided in the Environmental Research Methodology (EVR 6022) course. A thesis proposal includes a well-developed abstract, a full set of proposed research objectives, a detailed description of proposed research methods, a description of potential results and conclusions, and a reasonably extensive bibliography. The proposal may go through multiple drafts and can be considered an initial draft of the thesis. All members of the Thesis Committee have the opportunity to provide input toward the final version of the Thesis Proposal, and the Thesis Proposal must be approved by all members of the Thesis Committee before the student begins substantive research toward the thesis. In some cases, the research may require approval by various extramural agencies, research review boards, and intramural panels; in those cases, the student must demonstrate he or she has completed the applications for approval of those entities and a reasonable likelihood that approval will be received before the Thesis Committee will approve the Thesis Proposal.

Thesis Committee

Each student must have a Thesis Committee that is composed of three to four (3-4) graduate faculty members, two (2) of whom must be members of the graduate faculty in the department(s) within which the program resides. The Major Professor (who shall serve as Chair of the Thesis Committee) must be a member of the graduate faculty in the department(s) within which the graduate program resides (currently the Department of Marine and Ecological Sciences). In the case of Co-Major Professors, both will serve as Co-Chairs of the Thesis Committee. In such cases, only one of the Co-Major Professors must be a member of the graduate faculty in the department(s) within which the graduate program resides.

The third member may be from any university, college within FGCU, or professional organization or agency, but must also hold an appointment as a graduate faculty member within the College of Arts and Sciences, which may be as an adjunct member. Adjunct members must hold graduate adjunct faculty status granted by the College of Arts and Sciences, through a procedure via the Graduate Affairs Committee. Adjunct members are expected to hold an advanced terminal degree, have advanced academic and/or practice-oriented knowledge in a discipline relevant to the student’s thesis research, and have an understanding of what constitutes
excellence in academic thesis research. If Co-Major Professors are present on the Thesis Committee and if only one (1) of the Co-Major Professors is a member of the graduate faculty in the department(s) within which the graduate program resides, then the third member of the Thesis Committee must also be a member of said department. All Thesis Committee members must be appointed as graduate faculty at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Thesis Milestones

These milestones identify specific actions a student should accomplish according to the following schedule if the student is to be reasonably expected to complete the M.S. degree in the anticipated 2- to 3-year time period. These are to be considered guidelines rather than firm deadlines. Individual students and their mentors may find it necessary to accomplish some actions earlier than listed here, and others may find sound academic reasons to accomplish some actions later than listed here. Students and their mentors may identify additional actions, and timing for those actions, that are not included on this list. The timing of milestone completion assumes that a student enters in the fall of an academic year and that they are full time (9 credit hours per semester). If a student is part-time, milestones should be accomplished after the listed number of completed credit hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Timing of Accomplishment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of interim mentor</td>
<td>Upon admission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of permanent mentor (Major Professor)</td>
<td>During the first semester (before 9 credit hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of thesis topic and description of topic in a brief document</td>
<td>During the second semester (after 9 credit hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First draft of Thesis Proposal</td>
<td>Before the end of the second semester (after 9 – 18 credit hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Thesis Committee</td>
<td>Before the end of the second semester (after 9 – 18 credit hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application for permission to conduct research from any intramural or extramural entities whose permission is needed</td>
<td>In concert with preparation of research proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of Thesis Proposal by Thesis Committee (may include a presentation to the Thesis Committee)</td>
<td>Beginning of the third semester (before 27 credit hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register for at least 8 thesis credits and conduct thesis research</td>
<td>After approval of Thesis Proposal by Thesis Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense of thesis</td>
<td>End of 2-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion and submittal of thesis</td>
<td>End of 2-3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A milestone checklist will be provided to your Major Professor. He/she should work with you to track your progress toward graduation. When a milestone is achieved and the checklist updated, the Program Leader should be notified.

The student or mentor is to submit the completed scholarly products (Thesis Proposal and final Thesis) in electronic copy to the Department’s M.S. Degree Program Leader. The Department also requires a bound copy of the completed Thesis. The Program Leader will keep these materials for purposes of verifying progress toward the degree and to be made available for future students and/or mentors as information about products that have been successful in the past.

**Program of Study**

Graduate students should work with their Major Professor(s) to select a program of study that is integrated around a particular research theme and supports the thesis work. Electives that are allowed in the Program are described in the University Catalog.

**Recommended Course Sequence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Estuarine Ecology (OCB 6635) OR Advanced Ecology (PCB 6064C)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elective 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elective 2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Environmental Research Methodologies (EVR 6022)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts and Applications of Sustainability (EVR 6322) OR</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental Planning (EVR 6022) OR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Environmental Law (PAD 5620) OR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Environmental Policy (EVS 6937)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elective 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Elective 4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elective 5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s Thesis (EVS 6970)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate Seminar in Current Topics (EVS 6920)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Elective 6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s Thesis (EVS 6970)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ABT: “All But Thesis”**

Students occasionally complete all their course requirements and just have the completion of their thesis remaining. For some, particularly those that leave the program prematurely by taking a job, the thesis completion can languish. Two problems arise in these situations: it can take some time for students to finish, making it difficult to remain engaged in their research; and
students lose critical university privileges, like use of the library. Consequently, graduate
students, to be considered active within the graduate program, must enroll in a minimum of 1
credit hour each fall and spring semester from the time they enter the program until they
graduate. This is most easily accomplished by registering for one thesis research credit.

Leave of Absence

Students may, under special circumstances, apply for a leave of absence through the University’s
Office of Graduate Studies. The University policy dictates that non-enrollment for 3 consecutive
semesters (summers included) results in the student being dropped from the program as an active
degree-seeking student and the student’s status being changed to that of non-degree seeking. In
order to graduate from the program, the student is required to reapply for admission, and, if
reinstated, the program will determine which previously earned credits are applicable toward
graduation. Furthermore, if a student becomes inactive and is therefore required to reapply,
reinstatement requires the permission of the former major professor.

Thesis Defense Guidelines

A thesis defense must be scheduled no later than one week prior to the last day of classes each
semester (in the Fall, Spring, or Summer Session B semesters) and not during a time of semester
breaks or holidays. The student will submit a complete draft of the thesis to all Thesis Committee
members no later than two weeks prior to the scheduled defense, and Thesis Committee
members will expect to deliver comments on the draft at the time of the defense. If the student
would like to receive comments prior to the defense, the Thesis Committee members must
receive a complete draft no later than four weeks prior to the defense.

The presentation portion of the thesis defense is open to the general public. The defense must be
widely announced within the University and to the broader public (e.g., flyers, email broadcasts,
etc.) at least one week, and preferably at least two weeks, prior to the date of the thesis defense.
The student will first present the thesis research in a session that is open to the general public
(non-Thesis Committee members) and also attended by the Thesis Committee. Upon completion
of that presentation, the public will be invited to ask questions. At the end of this period, and
after the public has departed the room, the Thesis Committee will ask further questions of the
graduate student. As a rule, the entire process is expected to be completed in no more than 2 ½
hours.

Each student is expected to defend his/her thesis to the unanimous satisfaction of the Thesis
Committee. The student is also expected to incorporate comments made by Thesis Committee
members at the time of the defense into the thesis, to the unanimous satisfaction of the Thesis
Committee, before it is approved for submittal to the University, and therefore should schedule
the defense at a time that will allow this thesis revision and further Thesis Committee review
prior to the University’s submittal deadline. A number of other administrative deadlines must be
met before and during the final submittal, and the student is responsible for meeting these
deadlines and for being aware of the time that will be required for the Thesis Committee and the
University to provide approvals prior to expected graduation.
Structure and Submission of the Written Thesis

The university has a prescribed structure the thesis must follow, and the library has rules governing the thesis’s binding and submission. These details are available at the Office of Graduate Studies web site: www.fgcu.edu/Graduate/thesisguidelines.html.

Some highlights to be aware of:

Please make sure you follow the prescribed guidelines for the thesis’s construction. This includes the inclusion and structure of a title and an approval page, the type of paper, the size of the margins, and accompanying materials.

At least 3 bound copies are required: 2 for the library, and 1 for the Department. In addition, you may chose to bind copies for your Major Professor, committee members, and friends / family. The Department also requires a digital version that should be submitted on disk.

The binding and submission processes are described on the Thesis Guidelines and on the Thesis Finding Form (linked to the above web site).