

Geography and Environmental Planning Graduate Student Handbook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK	3
GETTING YOUR DEGREE.....	4
KEEPING IN TOUCH.....	4
ADVISORS.....	4
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE M.A. DEGREE IN GEOGRAPHY	4
TRANSFER OF CREDIT	5
REGISTERING FOR COURSES	5
COURSES FROM OUTSIDE THE TU GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING	
DEPARTMENT	5
NON-GEOGRAPHY COURSES AT TU	5
COURSES FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES	5
COURSES AT OTHER UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOLS.....	6
COURSES AT NON-USM INSTITUTIONS	6
PROCEDURE FOR TRANSFERRING CREDITS.....	6
THE RESEARCH REQUIREMENT	6
THE THESIS OPTION	7
THE PROJECT OPTION	7
THESIS PLAN	7
<i>Graduate School Requirements.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Registering for Thesis Credit: GEOG 897 or 898.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Proposal Approval.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Defining the Research Question.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Research Methods.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Final Defense for Thesis Option.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Reminders for Faculty and Students.....</i>	<i>10</i>
PROJECT PLAN	10
<i>Expectations.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Registering for Project Credit: GEOG 797.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Written Presentation of Research.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Oral Presentation of Research.....</i>	<i>11</i>
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD	12
FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH	12
TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS.....	12
ELIGIBILITY AND COURSE LOAD REQUIREMENTS	12
TERMS AND BENEFITS	13
RENEWAL OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP FOR THE SECOND YEAR	13
STUDENT TERMINATION OF ASSISTANTSHIP.....	13
UNIVERSITY/DEPARTMENTAL TERMINATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP	14
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TEACHING ASSISTANT: TIME COMMITMENT AND DUTIES	14
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE TEACHING ASSISTANT	14
RESPONSIBILITIES OF SUPERVISING PROFESSOR	14
THE GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP OFFICE.....	15
OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT	15
GRADUATION.....	15
APPLYING FOR GRADUATION	15

REQUIREMENTS FOR APPROVAL OF GRADUATION.....	15
RESUBMISSION OF APPLICATION FOR GRADUATION	16
IMPORTANT PERSONNEL.....	16
THE GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING DEPARTMENT GRADUATE PROGRAM	
DIRECTOR	16
THE CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY	16
THE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT	16
THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES.....	17
THE GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION (GSA)	17
LOGISTICS.....	17
ID CARD/ONE CARD-	17
EMAIL.....	17
INTERLIBRARY LOANS	17
DEPARTMENTAL COMPUTER LAB	17
HEALTH CENTER	18
HEALTH INSURANCE	18
HOUSING	18
PAYMENT OF TUITION, FEES, FINES, AND OTHER EXPENSES.....	18
RECREATION AND FITNESS	18
THESIS PROPOSAL DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM	20
PROJECT RESEARCH PROPOSAL APPROVAL FORM	21
PROJECT RESEARCH APPROVAL FORM.....	22
 CLA BUILDING PLAN FOR GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING	 22

Introduction

Purpose of This Handbook

This handbook supplements the Graduate Catalog by providing detailed information on requirements, policies, procedures, and deadlines specific to the Geography and Environmental Planning Graduate Program.

The [Graduate Catalog](#) describes policies and procedures applicable to all graduate students at TU, regardless of their program of study. A new catalog is produced each year, and students must meet the graduation requirements of the catalog in effect when they begin their degree program.

Information in this handbook should supplement, but never contradict, the information contained in the Graduate Catalog.

Getting Your Degree

Keeping in Touch

Correspondence from the department will go to your Towson email address. If you would prefer to use another account, be sure to forward your email from your Towson account.

Advisors

The graduate program director is the graduate student's advisor until the student chooses another faculty advisor, typically when the student has determined a major research interest for thesis and non-thesis research (discussed below).

Requirements for the M.A. Degree in Geography

The Master of Arts in Geography and Environmental Planning has two plans: thesis and project (see pages 6-12).

The requirements for the M.A. degree are located in the [Graduate Catalog](#). Students must complete the requirements of the catalog year they first enroll in the program. The general requirements are as follows:

- Introduction to Physical Geography; Introduction to Human Geography. The graduate program director can consider possible alternatives when appropriate
- 36 credits of coursework
- GEOG 601 Seminar on Geographical Perspectives (typically offered fall semester)
- GEOG 621 Research Design (typically offered spring semester)
- Successful completion of statistics or qualitative methods, or an approved equivalent.
- Thesis plan students must complete and defend a thesis. They must enroll in 6 credits of GEOG 897 and/or GEOG 898. Before enrolling in thesis work, students must successfully complete GEOG 621 (Research Design), GEOG 601 (Seminar on Geographical Perspectives) and defend their thesis proposal (see below). Exceptions must be discussed with and approved by the graduate director.
- Project plan students must complete and defend a research project before a minimum of three faculty. Project plan students must enroll in three credits of GEOG 797.
- Grading for research credit, GEOG 797, GEOG 897, and GEOG 898, is on an S/SU basis. If the student has not completed the thesis or research project at the end of the semester, a grade of IP, in progress, is awarded until the thesis or research project is successfully completed.
- Students who complete their coursework but do not complete the thesis or the project in their final semester of GEOG 897, GEOG 898, or GEOG 797 must maintain enrollment in the university by taking one credit of

GEOG 899 or GEOG 799 while they complete their thesis or research project. Continuum courses are graded on an S/U basis.

- Only nine credit hours may be at the 500-level.
- Students must complete all coursework (including transfer credit) within seven years.

Transfer of Credit

Up to 18 credit hours taken at other institutions can be applied to the geography and environmental planning graduate degree, subject to approval by the program director. Courses taken prior to admission must be graduate-level work taken at an accredited college or university and cannot have been applied to a previously earned degree. To transfer credit to TU, you must have the graduate program director complete a transfer credit approval form, which should then be sent to the graduate school.

Registering for Courses

Students can register online or in person at Enrollment Services. We recommend that students register online through [PeopleSoft](#). The initial page will indicate whether students are eligible for registration, or if there are any holds for unpaid fees or immunization requirements. To search for a class and register, view [this helpful document](#) from the Registrar's office.

Some tips to remember when searching for classes:

1. The "Term" code starts with a 1, has the last two digits of the year, and then is a 2 for Spring semester, and 4 for Fall semester, so that Fall 2025 would be term code 1254, and Spring 2025 would be 1252.
2. Graduate courses have a course number that is greater than 500.
3. Geography courses are GEOG, but you can also take up to 2 courses from programs across the campus, such as Environmental Science (ENVS), Global Humanities (GH), Applied Information Technology (AIT) etc. (Exceptions can be discussed in advance with the graduate program director, see below.)

Courses from outside the TU Geography & Environmental Planning Department

Non-Geography Courses at TU

Students are normally not allowed to count more than two (six units) of non-GEOG courses toward their degree. However, the geography graduate program director can grant an exception to this rule when it would clearly benefit the student given the field of study or chosen career. Requests for exceptions must be submitted in writing to the program director.

Courses from Other Universities

Students may earn up to 18 credits toward their graduate degree from other universities. If you took graduate credits from another institution, for example, before you

applied for TU graduate school and these credits did not count towards another degree, then you may be able to use those credits toward your TU degree. The graduate director of the Geography and Environmental Planning Graduate Program must approve coursework taken from other institutions.

Courses at other University of Maryland Schools

Students are eligible to take courses at other University System of Maryland schools. If the course is approved by the Geography and Environmental Planning graduate program director to count toward the degree, both the credit hours and the grades will transfer to your TU record (i.e., your grades will contribute to your TU GPA). The graduate school will not transfer any course taken pass/fail; thus, students must take non-TU courses for a grade. Before registering for a course at another USM institution, students should visit the graduate school office and review both the regulations regarding this type of enrollment and registration procedures.

According to the Graduate Catalog, “tuition and fees for any such courses will be paid at Towson.” If the student is a teaching or research assistant, the tuition waiver will cover all or part of the tuition at another USM school. If the other institution’s cost for tuition is higher per credit, the student will be billed for the difference.

Courses at Non-USM Institutions

If students wish to take a course from another non-USM institution while enrolled in the master’s program in Geography and Environmental Planning, they must receive preliminary approval for courses from the geography graduate program director before they take the course. Courses must be taken for a grade and not pass/fail. Please refer to information on transfer of credit (see below).

Procedure for transferring credits

The first step is to talk to the graduate program director to ensure that the courses are appropriate for transfer into the program. Second, fill out the graduate [Transfer Petition Form](#) and submit it to the Registrar’s Office. Submit this form *prior* to taking a class elsewhere. Include a course description and a rationale for including this course in the program of study here at TU. Third, the Academic Standards committee will review the request to ensure that the course is from an accredited school, check the number of credits, etc. Finally, upon successful completion of each of these steps the course will receive approval and a copy of the approval will be sent to the student.

The Research Requirement

All students must complete and defend original research in the form of a thesis or a research project. Upon admittance or as appropriate shortly afterwards, students choose between the thesis and project plans, though students may easily switch plans later. The graduate school governs the process for completing a thesis, and the Department governs the project process. The thesis need not be more onerous than the research project nor must the research project be considered “easier”; the thesis is longer, and more time is necessarily allotted to complete the work. The thesis is expected to cover more material in greater depth than the research project. The thesis literature review is more

comprehensive, the methodology generally aims at generating broader and multiple sets of data, and the analysis and discussion are in greater depth.

Students should discuss research plans with a faculty member who shares their research interests.

The Thesis Option

The thesis option is best for students interested in developing an in-depth research project over multiple semesters and whose research methodology involves both fieldwork and collection of primary, secondary, and/or historical data. The thesis option allows students to work with a diverse committee with expertise in multiple subject areas, theories, and/or methodologies. Students who are interested in developing diverse research and writing skills in preparation for a career in academia, research, or across several fields that emphasize critical thinking, data management and analysis, writing and communication may be inclined toward the thesis option.

The Project Option

The project is often suited for non-traditional students, those working in day jobs or seeking a career change, and/or those aspiring to professional advancement and need a master's degree. Project students tend to be interested in developing a focused set of applied skills for careers in technical fields. They may develop a pre-existing class project into a more comprehensive research project or collaborate with a faculty advisor on a research project that meets the expectations for a one-semester capstone. Project students' research interests are effectively served by working with a single faculty advisor on a research project designed in consultation with their faculty advisor or whose research interests closely align with the research being conducted by their primary advisor.

Although final projects are often more compact in format, they are no less rigorous than a thesis. Students who choose the project option may consider selecting a peer-reviewed academic journal in line with their subfield and then follow the journal's writing style, methodological standards, and theoretical guidelines as if they were to publish their project in that journal. Indeed, the final project should attain the polish of a potentially publishable article in the journal the student chooses. In all regards, the project must meet the minimum expectations established by the student's primary adviser and it is at the discretion of the primary adviser to determine whether the student has satisfactorily completed the project.

Thesis Plan

Graduate School Requirements

The Office of Graduate Studies [thesis guidelines](#) clearly outlines the guidelines for thesis research and defense including specific deadlines for completion of the different stages of the thesis.

Registering for Thesis Credit: GEOG 897 or 898

Before registering for thesis credit, students on the thesis plan form a thesis committee. The form for creation of a thesis committee is in the appendix of the Office of Graduate Studies' [thesis guidelines](#).

When the graduate program director signs the thesis committee form, they will create a section of GEOG 897 or 898 for the thesis student. Students choose to take either two sections of GEOG 897 (three credits each) over a two-semester period or one section of GEOG 898 (six credits) during a single semester.

Proposal Approval

Prior to progressing far into research (in other words, prior to embarking on non-approved research), thesis students must circulate and defend a proposal for all committee members' approval. Students are advised not to move too far into their research until all committee members and the graduate program director have approved the proposal. The [Thesis Proposal Defense Approval Form](#) is located at the end of this document.

Defining the Research Question

A successful research proposal requires developing a research question or questions. The thesis student should ask questions worth researching ("How many blades of grass are outside room 2340" is a question, which can be researched, but is unlikely "worth researching") or, in the words of the Office of Graduate Studies thesis guidelines, define a worthwhile problem. A worthwhile problem is one that we cannot answer definitively yet and that is debated. Addressing "Worthwhile problems" contributes to our knowledge. If we know the answer already or if the question cannot be answered (how many angels can dance on the head of a pin), then the question is irrelevant (at least for your thesis).

To find a worthwhile problem, students need to know the relevant literature. The faculty mentor will help develop a list of the most relevant sources for the research topic. The literature will frame the research question. Other researchers may have asked similar questions. Students will need to know how researchers have approached the problem in the past and what these researchers found. The research question should be situated in the work of these other researchers and should be a question that these researchers have not asked or an approach previous researchers have not used.

Some recent successful project research questions include what factors shape policy makers' decisions about sea level rise in the City of Annapolis; is Ratzel's organic model of the state useful in explaining Iranian influence in Iraq; did reconstruction in the aftermath of Hurricane Isabel accentuate the trend towards gentrification in the Middle River region; did the plastic bag ban in Baltimore County facilitate attitude changes toward waste and reuse; and are food swamps (the prevalence of fast food retailers) an overlooked factor contributing to obesity in areas of food deserts (lack of access to fresh food)? These questions are all relevant and interesting because we (the scholarly community) do not know the answers but would like to know.

Research Methods

The next step is to develop a methodological approach that will structure your inquiry and enable you to answer the research question(s). Geographers are known for employing, and combining, a wide variety of quantitative, qualitative, primary, secondary, and mixed research methods. Some of these are introduced in GEOG 621: Research Design. The department strongly recommends graduate students enroll in coursework to develop thematic background and methodological skills associated with their research project(s). Students should work closely with their faculty advisor and mentors to select appropriate coursework.

Research methods vary widely depending upon the type of question(s) asked, and the same question may be addressed with many different research methods. Some students may have the impression that only quantitative data derived from empirical research constitutes valid data, but in fact very important research contributions use secondary data, qualitative methods, and data derived from images, photographs, observations, and so forth. The research project, for example, that assessed the utility of Ratzel's theories in evaluating Iran's influence in Iraq used only secondary material. The advantage of generating primary data is that students have new research material not previously used. Among the possible pitfalls associated with empirical methods is that the collected data may not be able to answer the initial research question. Students must be careful when using empirical methods to assure that the data generated by their research methodology is really answering their research questions.

Regardless of the particular methods, the most important concern is whether the particular method or methods generate credible evidence to lead to and support the research conclusions. The research methods must convince the reader (in this case the faculty) that the research methodology generates a reliable answer(s) to the research question(s) or, in the words of the Office of Graduate Studies thesis guidelines, constitutes a thorough investigation.

Finally, the research results must stand on the evidence derived by the research. For the conclusions to be "defensible," the evidence must support the statements made in the conclusion. See next section.

Final Defense for Thesis Option/Similar for Non-thesis Project (& see below)

The written document introduces the research, reviews the relevant literature, explains the research methods, presents the research results, and discusses the significance of the results. Consequently, the written thesis/project must be well organized and clearly written. A good research project usually requires multiple revisions before the final product is acceptable.

There is no length required by the program for a successful research project. However, padding a research project with irrelevant pictures or useless narrative could discredit the project. Everything in the written project should contribute directly to answering the research question(s). The oral public presentation of the thesis and non-thesis project is typically a thirty-minute (approximately—this is determined by the student and their advisor) summary of the research. Committee members (in the case of a thesis) will have already read the thesis, so the oral presentation serves to clarify key points and generate discussion. The oral presentation for the non-thesis project serves the same purpose, to clarify key points and generate discussion, albeit faculty present

are less likely to have read the final product. Following the oral presentation, committee members and other attendees will be encouraged to ask questions to help further clarify the research. At the conclusion of the research presentation, the adviser will invite the student to leave while committee members discuss the student's work. Subsequently the student will be invited to return, and faculty will share their suggestions to facilitate successful thesis completion.

Reminders for Faculty and Students

When a student meets with a faculty member about changes to the thesis, the student should always involve the advisor (i.e., committee chair) about such changes. Students also are responsible for thoroughly proofreading all submissions and for correcting all content and writing errors, including typographic, formatting, spelling, grammar, and syntax errors.

Once the final draft of the thesis is approved by the committee chair, the student distributes their work to the committee members for review **at least seven weeks prior to the official end of the academic term** (final exam week) in which the student intends to graduate. At the time of distribution, the student is to meet with the committee chair to establish a date and time for the oral defense of the thesis. The oral defense optimally is to occur at least **four weeks** before the end of the academic term. The student is to complete and submit a copy of the *Thesis Defense Announcement* form to the Office of Graduate Studies **at least 10 working days prior to the defense date**. [See Appendix.] The Office of Graduate Studies or the administrative assistant to the dean of CLA will post defense announcements on the University calendar. Thesis defenses (as are non-thesis project defenses) are open to all members of the Towson University academic community, and to guests invited by the student. The student is to obtain special permission from the committee chair and the program director—or when appropriate the department chair—for a closed thesis defense/presentation in particular circumstances.

Approval of and changes to the committee chair-advisor position and committee members must be granted by the program director, department chairperson, and the dean of graduate studies. **Students who request a change for their committee chair-advisor or committee member(s) must do so in writing and provide a rationale and documentation to substantiate the request.** The documentation is to include evidence of addressing issues of concern with the thesis or committee chair-advisor that led to the request, if relevant. Approval first must be obtained from the program director, then the department chair, then the dean of graduate studies.

Project Plan

Expectations

The project should be completable within fifteen weeks/one semester, from its inception to finish. Research and methodological expectations vary within geography's subfields; for example, an applied approach in GIS will be very different from humanities methods used in humanistic geography, and consequently it is the responsibility of the faculty advisor to assess whether the student has met the subfield's methodological and

theoretical standards. It is the student's responsibility to satisfy their faculty advisor's expectations.

Finding a Topic

The first task is to find a topic of interest. About midway through their graduate career, students should begin to think of a topic of interest. Some students find the research and questioning that went into completing a particular class paper was intriguing and may choose to develop the paper into a research project. Many students find topics related to their current or planned career and use the research project to advance their career prospects. Some students have completed a project and after completing our program have continued their graduate education in a doctoral program.

Once a topic is found, students need to find a suitable faculty mentor. The faculty mentor should have the requisite background in the subject matter to guide the student through the project. One faculty mentor works primarily with the student on their non-thesis project, though students are welcome to consult with multiple faculty members during the project.

Registering for Project Credit: GEOG 797

For students on the research project plan, a faculty advisor must approve the research proposal before enrolling in GEOG 797, Independent Research. Minimally, the project proposal should include a 250-word description of the topic, a brief description of the research methodology, and offer, by example, the name of an academic journal the student suggests would serve as a model (refer to "The Project Option," page 7). Project students must complete a [Project Proposal Approval Form](#) located in the appendix of this document. Upon receiving the completed form, the graduate program director will facilitate the creation of a section of GEOG 797 for the student.

Written Presentation of Research

The written version of the project introduces the research, reviews the relevant literature, explains the research methods, presents the research results, and discusses the significance of the results. Students also are responsible for thoroughly proofreading all submissions and for correcting all content and writing errors, including typographic, formatting, spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. A good research project usually requires multiple revisions before the final product is acceptable.

As previously explained, there is no length required for a successful research project. Padding a research project with irrelevant pictures or useless narrative may discredit the project. Everything in the written project should contribute directly to answering the research question(s).

Oral Presentation of Research

When the student's project has been approved by the supervising advisor, the student is ready for their oral public presentation of their project. Students should schedule a public presentation with the faculty advisor and the graduate program director. At least two weeks prior to the defense, students should submit a digital copy of the paper

to the graduate program director. The graduate program director will distribute the paper for faculty to read.

The oral public presentation is typically a twenty-minute (approximately—this is determined by the student and their advisor) summary of the research project. Faculty members will not necessarily have already read the project, so the oral presentation serves to share, inform, demonstrate graduate-level research, clarify key points and then generate discussion. Following the oral presentation, faculty and attendees will ask questions to help further clarify the research. At the conclusion of the research presentation, faculty may share with the student and the faculty advisor their suggestions for enhancing the project.

Once the faculty advisor deems the research complete, the advisor and graduate program director will sign the Project Research Approval Form (see below).

Institutional Review Board

Students working with human subjects, including administering surveys, conducting interviews, facilitating focus group and so forth will need to apply for research approvals through the [Institutional Review Board](#) (IRB). The Institutional Review Board attempts to assure that your research will not cause harm to your project's participants. Approval from the IRB can take months to receive (inevitably IRB will require submission revisions even for an "Exempt" project and this often takes months). Consequently, students will need to plan ahead if the research involves working with human subjects.

Financial Support for Research

External Funding Sources – Depending on the nature of the project, there may be external sources of funding available. Students are encouraged to seek out sources of funding through GSA (Graduate Student Association), department announcements, the AAG's resources, and their advisor.

Graduate Student Association Award – GSA awards funding for travel to conferences and for research expenses. For more information about these funds, check out the [GSA website](#). Note that the Middle Atlantic Division of the AAG (this is the regional division in which our department is a member) hosts an annual student essay competition that offers a combined \$1250 (as of 2025/2026). The deadline for submission is typically the end of October.

Graduate Assistantships

Eligibility and Course Load Requirements

The department has offered graduate assistantships, teaching assistantships, and depending on funding some faculty have been able to provide research assistantships for one and two semesters, and occasionally for two years. Assistantships are based on available funding—which may not be known much in advance of an offer; are awarded through a competitive process and depending on faculty and program needs. Preference may be offered to new applicants and/or those who may have particular skills and experiences needed at the time of funding.

Last revision: July 2025

Terms and Benefits

Graduate assistantships provide a stipend distributed over an academic year, a single semester, and sometimes for the summer depending on the funding award. Some assistantships may offer a full waiver of tuition for up to 12 credit hours per semester; other assistantships may offer a part-time waiver of tuition for up to six credit hours per semester for graduate-level courses. University fees are the responsibility of the student. The first payment of the stipend will likely occur four weeks after the start date, or four weeks after the paperwork was filed, whichever occurs later. If your paycheck is late, please let the graduate program director, faculty advisor, and the graduate assistantship office know.

Special Note: Second Year Assistantships

If department assistantships are available for second-year students, renewal of the assistantship is contingent upon

- Students adequately meeting the responsibilities associated with the assistantship, including development/application of appropriate skills;
- Students not violating the principles of academic integrity in their coursework, teaching, or research;
- Students having maintained a GPA of 3.0 or better their first year; and
- The availability of department funding.

Assistantships will not be renewed after a student has completed 36 credits of graduate coursework, six credits of GEOG 897 or GEOG 898, or three credits of GEOG 797.

Student Termination of Assistantship

It is the policy of the Geography and Environmental Planning Department that students may terminate their department assistantships at any time by giving written notice to the coordinator of the assistantship in the Geography and Environmental Planning Department. Two-week written notice must also be given to the geography graduate program director and the professor supervising the student (if not the graduate program director). Termination of departmental assistantships before the end of the semester causes considerable difficulties for the Geography and Environmental Planning Department. Thus, unless unavoidable, graduate assistants are asked not to terminate their employment, if they choose to do so, until the end of a semester. It is a graduate school policy that voluntary termination of employment before the end date specified in the assistant's contract will void the tuition waiver and students will be billed for tuition at the current rate per credit hour.

Students who are considering termination of their assistantship are urged to discuss the matter with the geography graduate program director before taking any action. The program director will work with the student to find a solution that is least taxing for all parties involved.

University/Departmental Termination of the Assistantship

The Geography and Environmental Planning Department may terminate a student's assistantship for such reasons as unsatisfactory performance, excessive absenteeism, attitude considered detrimental to the department, extended illness (consistent with applicable law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Medical Leave Act), or violation of the terms of the assistantship agreement. Termination of employment before the end date specified in the assistant's contract will void the tuition waiver and students will be billed for tuition at current rate per credit hour.

Teaching Assistantship Responsibilities, Time Commitment, and Duties

Although CLA currently (2025-2026) does not offer funding for TA positions, this may change. Should TA positions be offered, please consider the following. In exchange for the stipend and the tuition waiver, students would be expected to work for up to 20 hours per week for a total of 330 hours over the course of an eighteen-week semester-long contract. The duties of a teaching assistant would include, but not be limited to teaching laboratories, assisting with audiovisual material in lectures, proctoring exams, meeting with students one-on-one, and staffing the computer laboratory. Teaching assistants could be asked to do some simple grading, such as processing scantron sheets or reviewing short answers to questions, but in general student assessment would remain the responsibility of faculty, not the teaching assistants. Furthermore, teaching assistants are not approved by CLA to grade essays or research papers. Time spent in all of the following should be counted toward the maximum 20 hours/week requirement: attending lectures, preparing for laboratory (writing lectures, developing quizzes, running through procedures), and scheduled office and tutoring hours, whether undergraduates are present or not.

Should TA positions be Reinstated: Responsibilities of the Teaching Assistant

Teaching assistants are expected to

- Meet all classes, laboratories, and study/review sessions on time and be fully prepared to carry out responsibilities;
- Promptly inform supervisor when ill or otherwise unable to perform duties;
- Treat undergraduates with courtesy, fairness, and impartiality;
- Return graded material to the supervisor or students in a timely fashion; if circumstances prevent quick turnaround, the supervisor should be informed as soon as possible;
- Clearly post office/tutoring hours and be present during those hours; and
- Avoid entering into relationships of a personal nature with undergraduate students during the period when the TA may have some control and influence over the grades or evaluation of students.

Should TA positions be Reinstated: Responsibilities of Supervising Professor

The following are expected of supervisors of teaching assistants:

- Adequately explain to the TA what is expected during the course of the semester and during individual weeks;

- Provide TAs with materials needed to complete duties including textbooks, laboratory manuals, background reading materials, office supplies, and photocopying privileges;
- Provide TAs with adequate training to teach laboratories and complete light grading;
- Monitor the average number of hours the TA is spending on teaching duties and take steps to reduce the TA's workload if this number exceeds 20;
- If necessary or prudent, attempt to provide some degree of flexibility in the TA's workload on a weekly basis, given the TA's other responsibilities related to coursework and research (e.g., TAs may work 15 hours one week and 25 the next, if such a schedule is agreeable to both the TA and the supervisor);
- Administer the student evaluations of the TA's performance using standard forms and share results of the student evaluations with the TA.

A TA who believes that the supervising professor is not following the expectations listed above should first talk to the supervisor. If this does not bring relief, the student should contact the graduate program director.

The Graduate Assistantship Office

The [Graduate Assistantship Office](#) is part of the Office of Graduate Studies. They are located in Room 209 of the Psychology Building, and may be reached at x4484 or gao@towson.edu. The Graduate Assistantship Office produces a very helpful [GA Handbook](#).

Outside Employment

The official policy of the [Graduate Assistantship Office](#) is that a full-time assistantship (i.e., 20 hours of work per week, plus classes) is a “full-time undertaking” and that “full-time assistants must satisfactorily fulfill their responsibilities without interference from outside employment.” If financial necessity requires outside employment, it must not interfere with the completion of assistantship duties. As a courtesy, students should inform both their thesis research advisor and the graduate director of their outside employment activity.

Graduation

Applying for Graduation

Students apply for graduation online via the following email address: "Graduation Office" <graduation@towson.edu>. Deadlines for submission of applications are found on the Registrar's website.

When you submit an application for graduation, both the graduate school and the geography graduate program director examine your record to determine whether you meet the requirements for graduation.

Requirements for Approval of Graduation

- Credits are less than seven years old.

- Student must have completed all required coursework including core courses (GEG 601, 621, and an approved methods course) and the prerequisites (introduction to physical and to human geography), without violating restrictions on the number of courses taken as a non-degree student, the number of 500-level courses allowed (3), the number of courses from outside the department (2 or six credits), and the number of courses transferred from other institutions (six or 18 credits). All of the above are discussed in detail in various sections above.
- Student's GPA must be at least 3.0.
- The student may have C grades for no more than 6 credit hours of courses.
- For thesis-track students, the final copy of the thesis must be delivered to the graduate school on the last day of regular classes of the semester in which the student is applying for graduation. Both thesis and non-thesis projects must be shared and available to the department's faculty and majors no less than one week in advance of the oral presentation and announcements for the oral presentations must be circulated within the department—and preferably to complement the departmental announcement to the wider academic community as well.

Resubmission of Application for Graduation

If a student is not approved for graduation in a particular semester, the student must reapply for graduation in a subsequent semester.

Important Personnel

The Geography and Environmental Planning Department Graduate Program Director

The graduate program director administers the M.A. degree program in geography and environmental planning. In general, if students have questions about anything relating either to completion of degree requirements or their assistantship, they are asked to contact the program director as well as their main advisor. The director should be able to answer their question or obtain an answer from the appropriate authority.

The Chair of the Department of Geography and Environmental Planning

The chairperson of the Department of Geography and Environmental Planning is ultimately responsible for all activity in the department. The graduate program director works closely with the department chair when making decisions that affect student coursework, research, and programmatic assistantship employment.

The Administrative Assistant

The departmental administrative assistant is knowledgeable about faculty, course offerings, and many logistics, but she does not occupy the position of an academic advisor.

The Office of Graduate Studies

The Office of Graduate Studies is responsible for processing applications for graduation, administering assistantships, reviewing thesis formatting, and other matters. The Office of Graduate Studies maintains [a website](#) with information on subjects such as graduation requirements, thesis preparation guidelines, records and transcripts, how to register for classes, and services available to graduate students.

After admittance to the M.A. degree program, students will normally not have much direct contact with the Office of Graduate Studies. If questions or problems arise, contact the geography graduate program director or the faculty advisor.

The Graduate Student Association (GSA)

All graduate students are automatically members of the GSA. The GSA publishes a newsletter for TU graduate students and maintains [a website](#). The website has graduate student related information that is worth checking out. The GSA provides students with some funds for research and for travel to meetings to present papers. Our students have been quite successful in receiving GSA support.

Logistics

ID Card/One Card

The student ID card, the “[One Card](#),” is available at the Auxiliary Services Office inside the Student Union. The One Card is required for checking out material at the library, and it is a debit card used to make purchases around campus.

Email

A free email account is available through the Office of Technology Services. Faculty and University staff will communicate with students through Towson email. If students prefer using a different email system, an email forwarding system is available. Activate a NetID [online](#).

Interlibrary Loans

Students may check out materials from other universities in the USM (University of Maryland System) as well as materials not available through USM by using interlibrary loan: <https://libraries.towson.edu/using-the-libraries/interlibrary-loan>. Graduate students do not have to pay for interlibrary loan materials. When filing out the form to order materials, check “Faculty,” not “Student.” In response to the form’s question, “How much are you willing to pay for this item?” answer “0.”

Departmental Computer Lab

The Geography and Environmental Planning Department maintains a computer lab in room LA2329. When not in use by a class, the lab is available to any TU student.

Health Center

The [Health Center](#) provides basic medical services to all registered students at a reduced cost, including outpatient care for illnesses and more minor injuries, flu shots, gynecological exams and birth control, and physicals.

Health Insurance

A comparatively economical health insurance plan is available to all students. Visit the [health center](#) for more information.

Housing

Information on housing is available at the [Office of Student Activities](#) (410-704-3307). Among other information, they maintain a list of available apartments, rooms for rent in private homes, and people looking for roommates.

Payment of Tuition, Fees, Fines, and Other Expenses

All payments of tuition, student fees, library fines, and other campus charges are processed through the [Bursar's Office](#). Lack of payment may result in students being removed from all classes in which they are registered or enrollment prevention.

Recreation and Fitness

All students with a valid ID have free use of workout facilities, a pool, and racquetball courts and gymnasiums located in Burdick Hall and the Towson Center.

Counseling Services

The [Counseling Center](#) provides a variety of services to students under various types of stress. All services are free and confidential.

Office Space

All graduate students can receive key card office access to desk space and computer access in rooms 2337/2327. This secure work space allows graduate students a place to study, interact, and hang up coats while on campus. Graduate Assistants can also have desk space in "Contingent Corridor," (room 2346). Please contact the graduate director to obtain access.

Parking

Graduate Assistants can purchase a special parking permit at the [Auxiliary Services Business Office](#). All graduate students at Towson University can purchase parking permits. Towson University requires all vehicles on campus to have a valid parking permit. Parking on campus requires a valid permit from Monday to Thursday, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Friday, 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. Graduate students can purchase permits through the eParking portal using their TU NetID and password: <https://tuflexport0616.t2hosted.com/Account/Portal>

Keys

Graduate assistants can gain access to the “Bat Cave” (room 2326), the computer lab (2329), the physical geography lab (2328), the two research offices (2327 & 2337), as well as for after-hours access to the building as needed. See the graduate program director to gain access to these rooms.

Graduate Student Computers

The Main Contingent Faculty office (“Contingent Corridor,” room 2346) has several computers as well as a printer and scanner for use by GAs. Paper is available in the geography office. Requests for printer cartridges and other computer-related consumable supplies must go through the administrative assistant. Note that the computers, paper, printer ink, etc. are intended for tasks related to teaching, research, and coursework. Students should keep printing related to personal business to a minimum. If the computer develops problems, contact the department administrative assistant.

To use the computers students will need to activate their [NetID](#).

Telephone

Graduate students have access to a telephone in the Main Contingent Faculty office (room 2346). This phone is equipped with voicemail. The phone in this office can be used for campus calls and local calls but should not, under any circumstances, be used for long distance calls. Graduate students will, on occasion, need to make long distance calls related to their research. Such calls should be made using their research supervisor’s telephone.

Saving for Retirement

Graduate assistants are eligible to participate in the University’s Supplemental Retirement Plans. If interested, contact the [Office of Human Resources](#).

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

Thesis Proposal Defense Approval Form

Student Name: _____

Title of Proposed Thesis: _____

This is to certify that the following committee has approved this student's thesis proposal and that the student is entitled to begin registering for thesis hours.

Thesis Chair _____

Member 1 _____

Member 2 _____

Additional Members _____

Graduate Program Director:

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

Project Research Proposal Approval Form

This is to certify that the faculty advisor has reviewed and approved the proposed research plan.

Research Topic: _____

Brief Description of Topic (250 words):

Brief Description of Research Methodology (250 words):

Sample Journal for the project:

Signatures

Student

Date

Faculty Advisor

Date

Graduate Program Director

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

Project Research Approval Form

This is to certify that the faculty advisor has reviewed and approved completion of the project research.

Title of Research

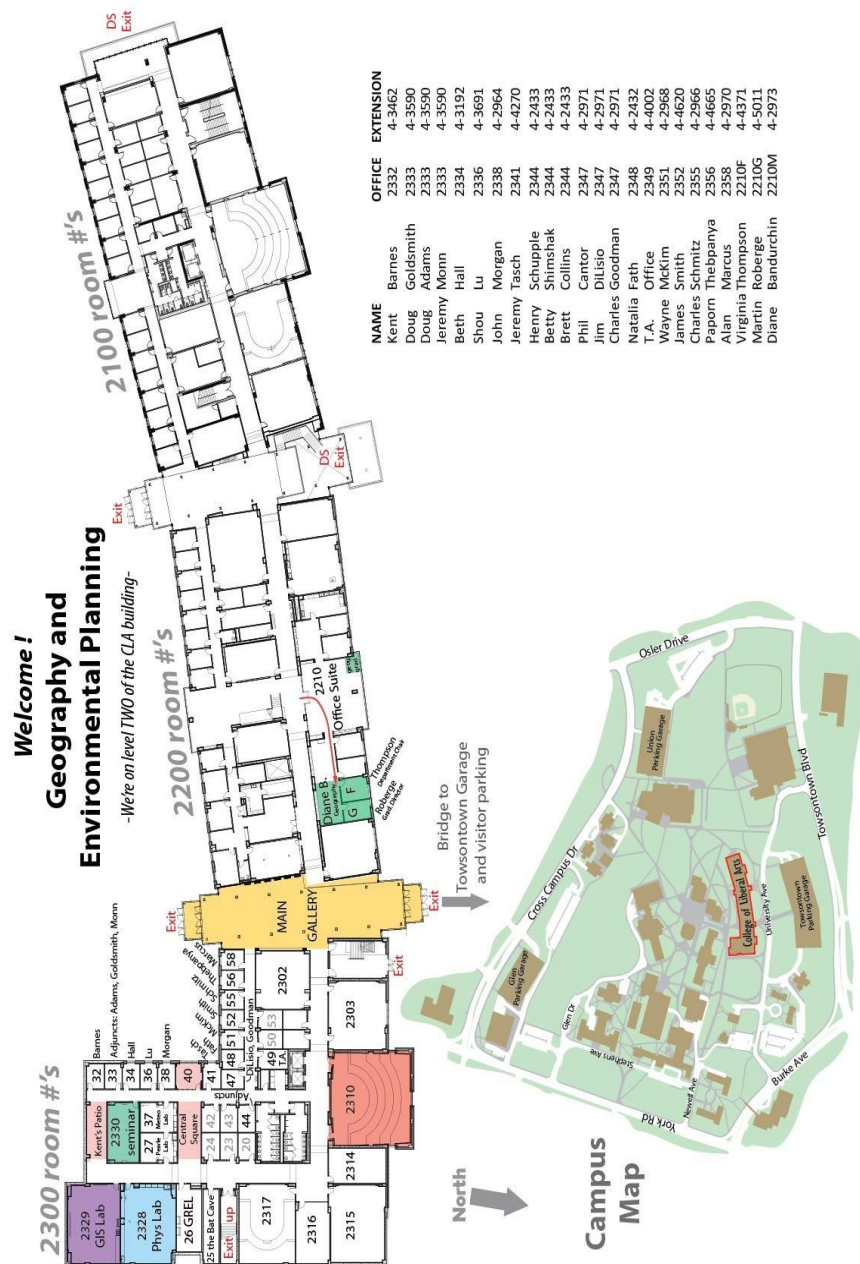
Student

Faculty Advisor

Date

Graduate Program Director

Date



CLA Building Plan: Geography and Environmental Planning (revisions pending)