

Graduate Program in Environmental Sciences Plan B non-thesis MS completion guide

These guidelines are meant to help you complete your non-thesis MS degree. This degree category includes the vast majority of all 4+1 MS degrees. The rules of the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) change periodically. It is **your** responsibility to check that you have complied with all SGS policies. In any case where the SGS rules differ from the guidelines presented below, SGS rules apply.

Please note that you must be registered as a student in the School of Graduate Studies and take at least 9 course credits (i.e. credits that count toward your degree, a category that does not include research credits) in that school before you can graduate. For 4+1 students, this means that you must graduate with your BS and then enroll in the School of Graduate Studies for at least one semester and nine credits before you can receive your MS.

At the beginning of your MS program, you should choose an advisor and a critical essay topic. Start working on your essay as soon as possible.

This essay should be a synthesis paper. That means in addition to documenting what's known, you should also identify and discuss similar or contrasting results across studies and point out knowledge gaps. You may need to broaden or narrow the scope of your topic, as appropriate so that you have enough original studies to draw from. Twenty papers is a good target. Review papers or book chapters may be useful for background information, but the focus should be on the latest information available in recently published, original journal articles. The essay should be approximately 20-30 pages of text, double spaced, excluding figures, tables and references. It will go through several drafts until your advisor approves. Only your advisor needs to approve the essay. The critical essay is **not** submitted to the SGS.

After your advisor approves your critical essay and you have checked to make sure that you have fulfilled all of the course requirements for your MS, you may schedule your oral exam.

For the oral exam, you are responsible for:

- Making sure you are registered for classes or matriculation continued in the School of Graduate Studies the semester you take the exam
- Making sure that you have fulfilled all of the course requirements for your MS **before** scheduling the exam (or will complete them in the semester you take the exam).
 - This includes taking at least 9 course credits while a student of the School of Graduate Studies
 - This includes requesting transfer of all credits taken while you were an undergraduate that you want to count toward your MS by filling out the transfer of credit form and submitting it to the School of Graduate Studies **before** you schedule the oral exam (this may include both graduate and undergraduate credits, anything taken while you were an undergraduate)
- Getting approval of your critical essay from your advisor **before** scheduling the exam
- Finding three professors who are in the graduate program to sit on your exam
- Scheduling the oral exam (use a when2meet poll or similar tool to find a time)
- Finding a room (with help from the program's administrative assistant)

- Bringing your [Master's degree application form](#) to the exam (available at grad.rutgers.edu if this link stops working)
- Bringing a copy of your transcript to the exam
- Studying all of the material covered in the courses you took for your MS. Pay particular attention to the material from the core courses.

If you pass the oral exam, you may then apply to SGS for your diploma (instructions are [here](#)). If you do not pass the oral exam on your first attempt, you will be given a second chance. However, you must wait at least three months before re-taking the exam. This means that you will probably have to register for another semester, paying all applicable fees and tuition.

The School of Graduate Studies currently has three deadlines for submitting all of the documentation you need to graduate. The dates given below are approximate and may change, so you are responsible for checking the SGS website for exact dates. The three dates are around April 1 for a May degree, October 1 for an October degree, and January 2 for a January degree. You must submit all of your documentation to SGS by midnight on these dates. Do not wait until the last minute! SGS will then check all of your paperwork, but this can take a few weeks. If they find errors, you may be given the chance to correct them.

If you complete your degree by the October deadline, you do not have to register for classes in the fall semester. However, if you aim for the October deadline and miss, you must still register for the fall semester. We can help you register even though the registration deadline will have passed.

To be clear, you must be registered for classes for the semester that you graduate. That means you must be registered for the fall to graduate in January, and registered for the spring semester to graduate in May or October.

Counting credits toward your MS degree

Thirty credits are required for the MS degree. Of these, at least 18 must be graduate level credits with course numbers above 500 and grade of B or better (one C grade may be counted toward the MS degree). Nine of these must be taken while you are a student of the School of Graduate Studies. Up to 12 can be undergraduate level credits. In order for undergraduate credits to count toward any graduate degree, they must fulfill all of the following criteria:

1. They must be at the 300 level or above.
2. You must get a B or better in the class.
3. They must be approved by the Graduate Program Director (GPD). The GPD will only approve courses that are directly related to the graduate degree program. For example, humanities courses will not be approved.
4. The undergraduate credits must be in excess of the 120 credits required to get your BS degree.

For 4+1 students, please check that your transcript shows at least 150 total credits taken at Rutgers and at least 18 graduate credits, at least 9 of which were taken while you were a student of the School of Graduate Studies.

Internship credits are not required, but students who work at an environmental job can count 6 credits of graduate internship toward their MS degree. Graduate internship credits require more work than undergraduate internship credits. To earn graduate internship credits, the student must write a lengthy report describing their work each semester and have it approved by their advisor or the GPD. Talk to your advisor and the graduate program director about the requirements before registering for graduate internship credits.

Research credits do **not** count toward the plan B non-thesis MS degree.

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