

Graduate Study - Wildlife Ecology Handbook

Pre-Fall 2014 Matriculation

Anyone with questions regarding the Wildlife Ecology graduate degree requirements should contact the Student Services Coordinator, Sara Rodock ([email](#) or 608-262-9926).

The Graduate School is the administrative unit overseeing 170 graduate programs of study at UW-Madison. Applicants and students must satisfy the requirements of both the Graduate School and the Forest and Wildlife Ecology Department for admission, progress, and completion of degrees. For information regarding the Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures please visit the websites below:

- [The Graduate School's home page](#)
- [Index to the Graduate School's Academic Guidelines and Forms](#)
- [The Graduate School's completing your degree page](#)

Forms

Listed below are links to some forms that Wildlife Ecology students may need. Please see below for more information regarding program policy and use of the forms.

- [MS thesis advisor approval page template](#)
- [MS and PhD external committee member request form](#)
- [Wildlife Ecology MS Certification form](#)
- [Wildlife Ecology PhD Qualifying Exam form](#)
- [Wildlife Ecology PhD Certification form](#)

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Prerequisite Courses

Important note - These courses represent minimal requirements for both MS and PhD students. Students are expected to enter the program with a majority of these courses completed, but deficient courses may be taken while in the MS or PhD program. A student's Graduate Committee may require additional courses as deemed necessary for competence in a particular field of study.

- one course in introductory biology
- two courses in ecology (one course in population ecology)
- one course in conservation biology, wildlife management, natural resources policy, or human dimensions of natural resources
- one course in organismal biology (i.e. physiology, terrestrial vertebrates, ornithology)
- one course in genetics or evolution
- one course in plant ecology or plant taxonomy
- one course in college-level geometry, algebra, trigonometry, or calculus

Requirements last updated: 4 October 2011

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MS Requirements

Enrollment

The department requires all research assistant funded students to be enrolled full time. For MS students this means at least 8 credits in the fall and spring term and at least 2 credits in the summer term. Students funded through a departmental teaching assistantship should check with the [Student Services Coordinator](#). Students funded by another department should check with the payroll and benefits coordinator of that department to see what that department requires for enrollment. Unfunded students should follow the [Graduate School's rules on enrollment](#).

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Graduate Committee

MS students must form a three-person Graduate Committee that will supervise their degree program. That committee must be composed of the major professor, another graduate faculty member in the department, and a graduate faculty member from outside the department. The student and the major professor should select committee members and convene a meeting to outline the anticipated course of the degree program as soon as possible after a student enrolls. If the student and the major professor would like to request to have a non-tenure or tenure-track faculty member or person from outside of UW-Madison server on the committee they can do so with the [MS and PhD external committee member request form](#).

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Degree Requirements

Effective Fall 2014 the [Graduate School has set new minimum requirements](#) for students beginning in Fall 2014 which include a minimum of 30 credits to receive an MS degree. The Forest & Wildlife Ecology department is working on updating the program requirements and updated information will be posted soon.

All Wildlife Ecology MS students are required to meet the following requirements:

- **Entrance Seminar:** all MS students are required to hold an Entrance Seminar that outlines the proposed research program; often this seminar is immediately followed by a meeting with the Graduate Committee to discuss the plans. Students must prepare a written proposal and the [Wildlife Ecology MS Certification form](#) for the meeting following the Entrance Seminar. The signed copy of the certification must be turned into the Student Services Coordinator (Sara Rodock, 276 Russell Labs). It is in the student's best interest to have their Entrance Seminar and subsequent meeting as soon as possible to help inform course selection and receive direction on their research project.

- **Prerequisite Courses:** students must take, for credit, all of the department's prerequisite courses that have not been completed prior to entering the program; the major professor will review these requirements with the student soon after they are accepted into the program.
- **Graduate Seminars:** students must enroll in at least two graduate seminars. These should be selected in consultation with the major professor and the graduate committee.
- **Statistics:** students must take at least one graduate-level course in statistics.
- **Technical Skills:** one technical skills course, must be taken at UW-Madison (2 credits minimum). This course should be in the area of the student's research and be selected in consultation with the major professor and the graduate committee. Examples of a technical skills course includes GIS/remote sensing, advanced statistics, demographic methods, etc.
- **Minimum Credit Requirement:** the Graduate School requires all MS students to complete at least [30 credits of graduate-level work](#) at UW-Madison. Courses that count towards the minimum credit requirement must meet the following criteria
 - the courses must be numbered 300 or higher and taken for credit
 - students must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0
 - students cannot transfer credits from another institution to meet this requirement
 - graduate-level credits taken to remedy deficiencies from the department's prerequisite course list can count.
- **Other Course Requirements:** the exact courses the student takes to meet the deficient prerequisites and necessary coursework will be determined in consultation with the major professor and the graduate committee.
- **Exit Seminar:** students must present a public exit seminar; typically this seminar is given just prior to the Final Oral Examination.
- **Thesis:** students must submit and defend a thesis that is based on original research undertaken as part of the degree program. Students should check with their major professor for specific details regarding the Final Oral Examination.

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Finishing the MS

Early in the semester in which a student intends to graduate they need to submit the [online warrant request form](#). By filling out this form students will be giving the Student Services Coordinator, Sara Rodock, the information necessary for their warrant to be requested from the Graduate School. By requesting the warrant the student will trigger a check of their record by both the department and the Graduate School. The online warrant request form should be filled out four weeks in advance of the defense. For a listing of the Graduate School's requirements for completing the MS degree go to their [Completing Your Degree page](#).

The Forest and Wildlife Ecology department follows the Graduate School's guidelines for thesis formatting. For information on the Graduate School's thesis formatting requirement please visit the [Guide to Preparing Your Master's Thesis](#) website. Please note that all theses deposited at Memorial Library are required to have an advisor approval page that is signed by the advisor. Students can either follow the directions on the Guide to Preparing Your Master's Thesis website or use the [department's template](#).

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PhD Requirements

Enrollment

The department requires all non-dissertator research assistant funded students to be enrolled full time. For non-dissertator PhD students this means at least 8 credits in the fall and spring term and at least 2 credits in the summer term. Students funded through a departmental teaching assistantship should check with the [Student Services Coordinator](#). Students funded by another department should check with the payroll and benefits coordinator of that department to see what that department requires for enrollment. Unfunded students should follow the [Graduate School's rules on enrollment](#).

Dissertators must always enroll for 3 credits during the fall and spring terms (and summer if funded over the summer term).

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Graduate Committee

Students pursuing a PhD degree in Wildlife Ecology are required to have several formal meetings with their PhD Committee: a Qualifying Examination, a Preliminary Examination, and a Final Oral Examination (commonly called the "thesis defense"). The PhD Committee is composed of at least 5 members, 3-4 Graduate Faculty members from the Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology and 1-2 Graduate Faculty members representing a minor. The student and the major professor should form the committee as soon as possible, preferably early in the first semester in residence (but must be completed by the end of the student's first year upon enrollment in the PhD program). Early selection of the committee is important because the Qualifying Examination must take place as early as possible in the student's program, preferably during the first semester in residence. If the student and the major professor would like to request to have a non-tenure or tenure-track faculty member or person from outside of UW-Madison serve on the committee they can do so with the [MS and PhD external committee member request form](#).

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Degree Requirements

Effective Fall 2014 the [Graduate School has set new minimum requirements](#) for students beginning in Fall 2014 which include a minimum of 51 credits to receive an PhD degree. The Forest & Wildlife Ecology department is working on updating the program requirements and updated information will be posted soon. All PhD students are required to meet the following requirements:

- **Qualifying Exam:** see below for more information regarding the qualifying exam. PhD students are expected to pass their exam by the end of their first year.

- **Entrance Seminar:** all PhD students are required to hold an Entrance Seminar that outlines their proposed research program; often this seminar is followed by a meeting with their graduate Committee to discuss their PhD program. Students must prepare a written proposal and the [Wildlife Ecology PhD Certification form](#) for the meeting following the Entrance Seminar. The signed copy of the certification form must be turned into the Student Services Coordinator (Sara Rodock, 276 Russell Labs). It is in the student's best interest to have their Entrance Seminar and subsequent meeting as soon as possible to help inform course selection and receive direction on their research project.
- **Prerequisite Courses:** students must take, for credit, all of the department's prerequisite courses that have not been completed prior to entering the program; the major professor will review these requirements with the student soon after they are accepted into the program.
- **Graduate Seminars:** students must enroll in at least two graduate seminars. These should be selected in consultation with the major professor and the graduate committee.
- **Statistics:** students must take at least one graduate-level course in statistics.
- **Technical Skills:** one technical skills course, must be taken at UW-Madison (2 credits minimum). This course should be in the area of the student's research and be selected in consultation with the major professor and the graduate committee. Examples of a technical skills course includes GIS/remote sensing, advanced statistics, demographic methods, etc.
- **Minimum Credit Requirement:** the Graduate School requires all PhD students to complete at least [32 credits of graduate-level coursework](#) at UW-Madison before they can become a dissertator and 51 credits to graduate. Courses that count towards the minimum credit requirement must meet the following criteria
 - the courses must be numbered 300 or higher and taken for credit
 - students must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0
 - students cannot transfer credits from another institution to meet this requirement
 - graduate-level credits taken to remedy deficiencies from the department's prerequisite course list can count.
- **Other Course Requirements:** the exact courses the student takes to meet the deficient prerequisites and necessary coursework will be determined in consultation with the major professor and the graduate committee.
- **Minor:** for more information on minors please see the [Graduate School's Minors](#) information page.
- **Teaching Requirement:** ways to complete the teaching requirement include serving as a teaching assistant for a course, developing and offering a seminar course or an extension/outreach based education program. Students should consult with their major professor and graduate committee on how to meet the teaching requirement. Students who wish to receive credit for their teaching experience can enroll in F&W Ecol 799 with their advisor.
- **Preliminary Examination:** see below for more information regarding the preliminary exam.
- **Exit Seminar:** students must present an exit seminar; typically this seminar is given just prior to the Final Oral Examination.
- **Dissertation:** students must submit and defend a dissertation that is based on original research undertaken as part of the degree program.

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Qualifying Exam

The Qualifying Examination is administered by the full committee and typically requires about 1-2 hours. There are 2 purposes for this meeting:

- to uncover the rare instances in which a student proves to be unqualified to continue in the PhD program and
- to expose through oral questioning any weaknesses in the student's background that must be remedied with formal coursework, individual instruction or independent reading before the student takes the Preliminary Examination.

Students are expected to pass their Qualifying Examination by the end of their first year in the PhD program.

Students may wish to do some cursory review before this meeting, but it is not intended that a student should undertake intensive preparations. Committee members are to have reviewed the student's file and be prepared to probe the student's background by asking questions designed specifically to reveal weaknesses. When the questioning is complete, the Committee decides on the student's suitability to continue in the PhD program. The Committee and the student then agree on required coursework or other learning activities that must be completed before the student takes the Preliminary Examination. These requirements will include

- any deficiencies in the prerequisite courses required of all graduate students majoring in Wildlife Ecology,
- any courses that remedy weaknesses identified during the Qualifying Examination,
- any courses that may be required to satisfy the minor, and
- any courses in which the student learns a new technical skill not previously possessed.

Once a consensus is reached, the student and the Committee members sign the [Wildlife Ecology PhD Qualifying Exam form](#) that becomes part of the student's official records maintained by the department. The signed PhD Certification form should be turned into the Student Services Coordinator (276 Russell Labs).

The student and the committee may also wish to discuss the student's research proposal at the meeting during which the qualifying exam occurred. If this is the case, the student should circulate the research proposal to the committee ahead of time, giving adequate time for the committee members to read it. Also, the student should plan for a longer (2-3 hour) session with the committee. If the research proposal is not discussed during the Qualifying Examination, another meeting for that specific purpose should be scheduled. Often, the student may wish to give their Entrance Seminar to the department in conjunction with the committee meeting at which the research proposal is discussed.

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Preliminary Exam and Dissertator Status

A student can schedule the Preliminary Examination either during their final semester of coursework prescribed by the committee or once all of the prescribed courses have been completed. Students must satisfy the Graduate School's minimum credit requirement (32 credits) before they can become a dissertator. This is a 2 to 3 hour oral examination administered by the full committee in which the student will be questioned extensively about their knowledge in wildlife ecology and related fields. It is expected that the student will have prepared well for this meeting, and it is usually wise to seek council from each committee member about what to expect.

Early in the semester in which a student intends to take their preliminary exam they need to submit the [online warrant request form](#). By filling out this form students will be giving the Student Services Coordinator, Sara Rodock, the information necessary for their warrant to be requested from the Graduate School. By requesting the warrant the student will trigger a check of their record by both the department and the Graduate School. The online warrant request form should be filled out four weeks in advance of the exam.

Once a student has passed their preliminary exam and all of their committee members have signed the preliminary warrant they should return the warrant to Sara Rodock for final processing so that they can become a dissertator.

Students who have passed their preliminary exam are called dissertators. There are very specific rules for being a dissertator, it is very important that students follow all of the rules: if a student fails to follow these rules, they may lose their dissertator status. A full listing of the dissertator rules can be found on the [Graduate' School policy page](#). The three most important rules of being a dissertator are:

- Dissertators must maintain continuous registration by enrolling for 3 credits every fall and spring (and summer if funded) until they graduate, otherwise they will be assessed a degree completion fee.
- Dissertators should not enroll in any courses except research credits or a required departmental seminar unless they have an extenuating circumstance (students should check with the Student Services Coordinator if they think they have an extenuating circumstance).
- Dissertators have five years from the date that they pass prelims to defend and deposit their dissertation. If a dissertator does not meet this requirement they may be required to pass their prelim exam again before they will be allowed to graduate with their PhD degree.

Anyone with questions about dissertator status requirements should contact the [Student Services Coordinator](#) ASAP.

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Final Oral Examination and Finishing the PhD

Early in the semester in which a student intends to graduate they need to submit the [online warrant request form](#). By filling out this form students will be giving the Student Services

Coordinator, Sara Rodock, the information necessary for their warrant to be requested from the Graduate School. By requesting the warrant the student will trigger a check of their record by both the department and the Graduate School. The online warrant request form should be filled out four weeks in advance of the defense. For more information on the Graduate School's rules for defending, depositing and formatting your dissertation please visit their [Completing Your Degree](#) page.

The Final Oral Examination is a 2 to 3 hour process. A public defense of the student's dissertation occurs first, immediately followed by an examination administered by the full Graduate Committee after the student has submitted a draft of the PhD Dissertation to each committee member and the major professor has agreed that the student is ready to defend. The purpose of the examination is to question the student intensely about the work presented in their dissertation and ascertain that it meets all of the committee's expectations.

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