Master of Arts
Urban Planning & Environmental Sustainability
Graduate Student Handbook
2026 – 2027

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Planning for Cascadia and Beyond

Cascadia is replete with planning opportunities and challenges: population and economic growth, traffic congestion, housing affordability, urban expansion, poverty and inequality, environmental change, and natural hazards are just a few. Depending on one's definition, the region is home to at least 17 million people and covers over 500,000 square miles from the panhandle of Southeast Alaska to the Northwest coast of California, and east into Canada and the US States of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

Cascadia offers a glimpse into the changes occurring around the world. The most populous cities in the region – Seattle WA, Portland OR, and Vancouver BC – have each experienced population growth of at least 20% over the past two decades. Increasing diversity accompanies growth in these urban areas with over 40% of the population being a racial or ethnic minority and over a half million are foreign born residents. These cosmopolitan cities are surrounded by rich agricultural life, and Cascadia has almost every physical feature imaginable, including coastline, mountains, deserts, and rivers along with the threats and opportunities that come with them.

Situated in the heart of Cascadia, our program offers a unique opportunity to conduct timely research that focuses on planning a more sustainable future for these diverse human and physical features. We are housed in the College of the Environment that also offers graduate education in environmental studies and environmental science, allowing our students to engage with faculty and students from other disciplines and create synergy that transcends backgrounds. Simply put: we encourage our students to "make waves".

About the College and the Department

College of the Environment

Since its establishment in 1970, the College of the Environment addresses environmental issues and prepares interdisciplinary problem solvers. The Department of Environmental Science, Department of Environmental Studies, and the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning & Policy offer majors from urban planning and environmental policy to estuarine science and terrestrial ecology. By integrating faculty-student collaboration, applied research, and professional and community service, each unit strives to promote inclusive community, social justice, and equitable practices.

Department of Urban and Environmental Planning & Policy

The UEPP Department was created in 2021, but the undergraduate Urban Planning degree has been offered for over 50 years. In 2016, the undergraduate degree received its first national accreditation from the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) making it one of only 16 accredited programs in the nation. Our MUPES program seeks to leverage this success and graduates will be able to:

1. Critically assess assumptions, implications, and applications of planning and policy frameworks.
2. Integrate concepts of equity, justice, and well-being to advance socio-environmental solutions.
3. Work collaboratively to identify environmental problems, engage diverse stakeholders, and generate solutions for just and sustainable futures.
4. Apply action research and community engagement methods to analyze data and assess proposals in real-world contexts.
5. Develop effective oral, written, and visual communication skills.

Graduate Program Committee (GPC)

The **Graduate Program Committee Chair** manages the program and can answer specific questions about which courses to choose, and how to find a professional project or an internship. They are also a great resource for discussing career goals, researching and applying for funding, obtaining mentoring, and gaining advice about planning related issues.

Troy D. Abel, PhD
GPC Chair
Troy.Abel@wwu.edu

Gigi Berardi, PhD
GPC Member
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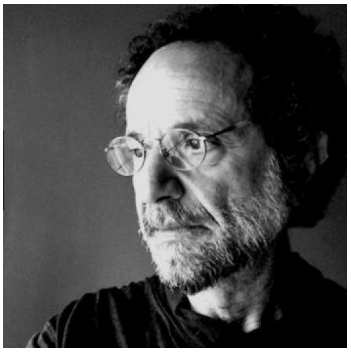

Nicholas Zaferatos, PhD
GPC Member
zaferan@wwu.edu

The **Graduate Program Coordinator** can answer questions about your enrollment, required forms, timelines, deadlines, assistantship assignments, room requests, payroll, stipends, tuition waivers, office space, registration and course overrides, thesis/project copying and binding, etc. He helps with anything that says “Graduate School”.

Ed Weber
Program Coordinator
webere3@wwu.edu

Department Faculty and Contact Information

Troy D. Abel, PhD

Professor

Troy.Abel@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Environmental policy; policy analysis; environmental justice; climate change governance

My teaching and research interests focus on the dynamic tensions of environmental science and democratic politics in a variety of arenas. I believe that because we often see environmental problems and solutions in only technical or political prisms, environmental governance suffers. We do need better science and better democracy. But more importantly, we need a better integration of both that I foster in my classrooms and explore in my scholarship. I hold an appointment with the faculty of Environmental Studies at Western Washington University's College of the Environment where my research programs focus on climate risk governance, environmental justice, and political biogeography.

Gigi Berardi, PhD

Professor

Gigi.Berardi@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Agroecology and sustainable agriculture; food security; resilient food systems

Since coming to Western, she has continued her research and writing in both environmental studies and arts but also has extended her career-long interests to increasingly blend the two fields. In her research into historical consolidation of communities that exist beyond economic or environmental carrying capacities in remote sub-arctic areas, she integrates natural resources and cultural geography with traditional music and dance. In addition to having served as a core faculty member in the Tribal Environmental and Natural Resources Management (TENRM) program, she completed work on a special issue on Alaska natural resources and Native land claims for Journal of Land, Resources, & Environmental Law. Her work on Native dance and arts as subsistence resources has appeared in publications such as Dance Magazine and The Anchorage Daily News.

Nabil Kamel, PhD

Professor & Chair

Nabil.Kamel@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Uneven urban development; urban informality; social and environmental justice

Dr. Nabil Kamel earned his Ph.D. in urban and regional planning from UCLA where he was affiliated with the Institute of Transportation Studies, North American Integration and Development Center (NAID), the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, the Anderson Forecast, and other leading research and policy centers. He taught at UCLA and ASU prior to joining WWU in 2015. Dr. Kamel's academic interests address issues of social and environmental justice, uneven urban development, and urban informality. His areas of professional expertise include housing and community development, urban design, regional and international development, and long-term post-disaster recovery planning.

Tammi Laninga, PhD

Associate Professor

Tammi.Laninga@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Collaborative planning; federal land use policy and planning; community economic development

Dr. Laninga is a core member of the nationally accredited Urban Planning and Sustainable Development program at WWU teaching courses in land use regulations and technical writing, community development and participatory methods, history of planning, environmental impact assessment, and the planning studio. Dr. Laninga enjoys mentoring students. She has supervised over twenty master's students and one Ph.D. student; served as a committee member for many others; and advises undergraduate student internships, independent study projects, and Sustainability, Equity and Justice Fund (SEJF) grants. She is also the program advisor for the River Leadership and Studies Certificate.

James Miller, PhD
Associate Professor
mille630@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Sustainable architecture; indigenous architecture; settler colonial cities; climate migration

Under the lens of climate change adaptation, James Miller's research investigates the role of Indigenous Design Knowledge in the creation of culturally supportive environments. James is currently investigating the application of Indigenous, place-based models for building community resilience in response to the housing crises and rising socio-environmental issues in Hawai'i. Miller's scholarship provides a space for Indigenous knowledge systems tied to the production of the built-environment to be recognized within fields dominated by western-centric world views. He holds a PhD in Sustainable Architecture from the University of Oregon with specializations in cultural sustainability and Indigenous design knowledge.

Sushmita Rishi, PhD
Assistant Professor
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Research Areas: How those who are most marginalized in the urban environment navigate and negotiate with the planning apparatus, and the role that land use law and regulation play in that negotiation.

Dr. Susmita Rishi joins Western Washington University's Urban and Environmental Planning & Policy program as an Assistant Professor in fall 2026, coming from Kansas State University.
She holds degrees in architecture and a Ph.D. in urban design and planning. Her research explores planning, informality, and spatial justice, focusing on marginalized communities, land use regulation, manufactured housing, climate vulnerability, and brownfield redevelopment.
Recognized for her teaching, mentoring, and community-engaged research, Dr. Rishi looks forward to teaching land use and planning law, exploring urbanization in the Global South, and building community partnerships across Washington.

PaulStangl, PhD
AssociateProfessor
Paul.Stangl@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Collaborative planning; federal land use policy and planning; community economic development

Paul Stangl is an Associate Professor of urban planning and sustainable development at College of the Environment, Western Washington University. He currently teaches a range of urban planning classes, including Introduction to Planning, Transportation Planning, Planning History and Planning Studio I: Urban Design Methods. His research has centered on urban form, city planning and history in Berlin and San Francisco, US pedestrian planning and measures of street connectivity.

Grace Wang, PhD
Professor
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Research Areas: Natural resource policy; sustainability; community-based forestry; cultural resources management

I grew up in the Seattle area, only to move away for college and graduate school. The great Wallace Stegner once wrote that “some people are born in their place, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for.” So I’m back in the Northwest and enjoying the abundant natural resources and recreational opportunities. My childhood included lots of camping and fishing with my family. Partly because of that, both my personal and professional lives have revolved around conserving natural resources. In my spare time you'll find me hiking, running, and enjoying other outdoor pursuits. In addition to my teaching role, I have a second campus role as Director of the Sustainability Engagement Institute
which brings together Western's educational, co-curricular, and operational functions.

Nicholas Zaferatos, PhD

Professor

Nicholas.Zaferatos@wwu.edu

Research Areas: Native American political development; European environmental policy; sustainable development

Nicholas Zaferatos, Ph.D., AICP, is a professor of urban planning and sustainable development at the College of the Environment, WWU. He served as the program director for the Urban Planning and Sustainable Development program, co-directs the minor in Sustainable Design, and directs WWU's faculty-led global learning program in Mediterranean Sustainable Development in Greece. His teaching emphasis in urban planning, sustainable development, Native American planning, and environmental and urban policy complements his regional and international teaching and research interests. He is active in promoting sustainability education at Western Washington University, serving appointments on university committees, academies, and initiatives. Dr. Zaferatos has directed several service-learning programs in Washington State and abroad.

Ingrid Patrick

Department Manager

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The **UEPP Department Manager** assists with making travel arrangements, questions about grant spending, questions about classes and scheduling, and inquiries about the studio or other facilities. They help with anything related to the MUPES program.

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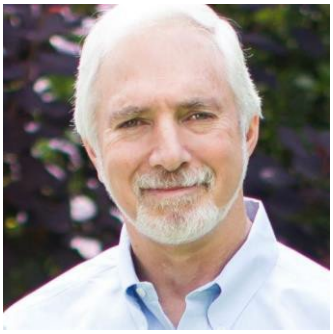

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Process and Milestones

Program Milestones : First Year	
Timeline	**Task**
Prior to 1st Quarter Registration	• Meet or correspond with assigned faculty advisor and with the Graduate Program Coordinator to plan your course of study for the first quarter (Plan of Study)
During Fall Quarter	• Take UEPP 501 – a required course for the degree • Meet faculty who teach and research in your area of interest to identify ideas and topics for thesis/project • Meet with faculty to identify potential committee members • Consider taking independent studies courses with faculty of interest to build foundational literature for thesis/project

End of Fall Quarter	• Form Thesis/Project Committee (TPC)
	• TPC must have at least 3 members (More than 3 are discouraged unless the additional committee member is bringing a unique skill not found in others critical to your thesis/project)
	  • One tenured faculty from UEPP Department (TPC Chair)
	  • Second faculty member must be CENV Graduate Faculty
	  • No more than 1 external member approved by Graduate Program Committee (GPC) and Graduate School

Winter Quarter	• Take UEPP 502 – a required course for the degree • Work with your TPC to refine/finalize your research topic and proposal

Before End of Spring Quarter	• Take UEPP 503 – a required course for the degree
	• Develop research proposal in consultation with faculty adviser and submit to TPC members
	• When your TPC Chair feels you are ready to present your proposal, coordinate with your TPC Chair and committee members to select a date/time to publicly present.
	  • All TPC members must attend your presentation
	  • Coordinate with the Graduate Program Coordinator AFTER receiving approval from your TPC to book venue/advertise your event.
	• If your TPC has approved your research topic after your public presentation
	  • Submit Thesis Topic Approval or Project Topic Approval ESIGN Form to your TPC Chair
	• After completion of the Topic Approval ESIGN, and with other requirements met, students are eligible to register for UEPP 690/UEPP 691
	• Registration Overrides must be requested from the Graduate Program Coordinator each quarter you will register Thesis/Project

	Credits
Optional in First Year	• Apply for CENV Research Funds (Late-October / Mid-April) • Apply for RSP Funds (see deadlines on RSP website) • Apply for Ross Travel Funds (Oct. 1, Dec. 15, Mar. 15, May 15)

Program Milestones : Second Year	
Timeline	**Task**

During Fall Quarter	• Register for thesis/project credits (UEPP 690/UEP 691)
	• Must have accomplished the following:
	  • Completed 12-credits on Plan of Study
	  • Thesis/project topic approved
	• Register for any remaining coursework on Plan of Study

During Winter Quarter	• Register for thesis/project credits (UEPP 690/UEP 691)
	• Register for any remaining coursework on Plan of Study
	• Begin thesis/project drafts (multiple iterations expected)
	  • See Thesis/Project Drafts for details
	  • For Thesis students, see Thesis Manuscript Format
	• First draft to TPC Chair at least one quarter prior to the quarter of graduation (end of Winter)
	• Your Master's Degree Application is due by the end of the quarter prior to your graduation

During Spring Quarter	• Must be registered for at least 2-credits of UEPP 690/691 or GRAD 699 (Continuous Enrollment) in the quarter of graduation • Submit completed thesis/project manuscript to all TPC members at least two weeks before oral defense • If your TPC Chair approves, get with the Graduate Program Coordinator to reserve a venue. You then submit your Master's Degree Oral Defense ESIGN form to the Graduate Program Coordinator
Before End of Spring Quarter	If you successfully defended your thesis/project, you will submit the appropriate ESIGN form to your program. • Degree Recommendation (Thesis Option) • Degree Recommendation (Non-Thesis Option)

Note: These deadlines may vary if the student is completing a thesis rather than a project. If you are writing a thesis, make sure to check with Graduate Program Coordinator, your graduate advisor, and your committee chair about specific deadlines and requirements.

The MA, UPES Curriculum

A minimum of 45-credits are required to complete this degree with the following restrictions:

Required Coursework (19-Credits Total):

- UEPP 501, UEPP 502, and UEPP 503 (7 Total Credits)
- UEPP 690 (Thesis) or UEPP 691 (Project) (12 Total Credits)

Electives (Upon Advisement) (26-Credits Total):

- Graduate-Level Coursework from UEPP, ENVS, ENRG, or ESCI
- Non-CENV graduate-level coursework considered on a case-by-case basis

Restrictions:

- A maximum of 10-credits of approved 400-level work may be used toward this degree.
- A maximum of 4 elective credits of UEPP 595 (Teaching Practicum) may be used toward this degree.
- A maximum of 10-credits of UEPP 500 (Directed Independent Study) may be used toward this degree.

Graduate Plan of Study **– Required (Degree Works)**
The "Plan of Study" is required by the Graduate School outlining the courses you plan to complete for your degree. It identifies minimum curricular requirements and specifies when requirements are due. The Plan of Study should be completed during your first quarter in DEGREE WORKS. Failure to submit the plan may result in a registration hold. Together, you and your adviser identify the appropriate course work.

Changes to the Plan of Study require an amendment. When you apply for your degree, the plan is compared with courses completed for the degree evaluation.

Amendment to the Graduate Plan of Study **(Degree Works)**. If it becomes necessary to make changes to your Plan of Study, the Graduate School requires an amendment listing all courses to be added and/or dropped. This is done via DEGREEWORKS.

Independent Study Contract and Registration Approval **(E-sign)**
Graduate independent study courses (UEPP 500) are available to enable students to pursue educational experiences not available through the regular graduate courses listed in the catalog. Specific guidelines for development and restrictions from the Graduate School are listed at: http://www.wwu.edu/gradschool/independent-study.shtml. Students should work with appropriate faculty to identify opportunities for independent studies.

Grades and Grading
A maximum of 10 credits of C grades (C+, C, C-) is allowed towards completion of a graduate program (courses listed on the approved plan of study). Courses in which a D+ or lower is earned may not be applied towards completion of a graduate program. The accumulation of more than 10 credits of C+ or lower (including U and Z) grades will result in the student being

withdrawn from the master's program. There are certain courses that must be passed with a grade of B or better; course descriptions note such requirements. All grades of C+ or lower count toward the 10-credit maximum, even if the course is retaken and a grade of B or better, or S, is earned. A graduate student may be required by the department to repeat a course to document attainment of a certain level of competence or knowledge. Pass/No Pass grades are not applicable toward a graduate degree. S grades are applicable but not computed in the GPA. An incomplete (K) grade may be assigned in accordance with the regulations outlined in the Academic Policies section of this catalog. K grades revert to a grade of Z if the instructor has not indicated a final grade to the Registrar. These Z grades are computed as failing grades in a student's grade point average and may affect retention in the master's program. Exceptions to the K grade rule are K grades which are received for thesis and certain research courses. In these cases, the K grades are allowed to stand until the thesis or research is completed, whereupon the grade is changed to the earned grade.

To remain a candidate for the degree, a student must maintain at least a cumulative 3.0 GPA in courses listed on the plan of study. The GPA is calculated on letter grades earned (on record) at the time grades are posted, i.e., K grades are not considered. A student also must be making satisfactory progress in the graduate program to which he or she has been admitted.

Maximum/Minimum Credit Load

The maximum credit load for a graduate student is determined in consultation with the student's graduate program adviser, within the policies set by the Registrar. The Graduate School defines **full-time enrollment as 8 or more credits per quarter**. Graduate students who have successfully completed all coursework on the approved Plan of Study, except for thesis (690) or project (691) work, maintain eligibility for the teaching assistantship if enrolled for a minimum of two credit hours of excess thesis, or research. Continuous Enrollment (GRAD 699) does not count towards student employment eligibility requirements. See the Financial Aid section for implications of being enrolled for 2 credits if the student requires financial aid or impact on repayment of student loans.

You can register for UEPP/GRAD 699 (Continuous Enrollment) if you have completed all coursework, including 12 credits of thesis/project, and if you have submitted the Application for Degree.

Non-Enrollment

While most graduate students are enrolled continuously in their program, there may be occasions where you are unable to do any coursework for a period of time. Please coordinate your absences with your faculty adviser and the Graduate Program Coordinator if you are not planning on registering for any credits during a non-summer quarter.

Returning Student Application must be completed if you were not enrolled for any credits during the previous quarter (except Summer). There are generally no fees associated with this.

Thesis or Project

What's the difference between a Thesis and Project?

- A Thesis addresses research question or hypothesis, requires approvals from Graduate School, and generally carries more weight if pursuing additional educational objectives.
- Projects are an application of knowledge/learning to a specific topic designed for practical use and/or a particular audience.
- Discuss both options with your Faculty Adviser to determine what's best for your goals.

Thesis/Project Proposal

- You should plan to meet with your adviser early and often to begin discussing a thesis/ project topic.
- You should identify research question(s) or pursue a research hypothesis that is particularly intriguing to you and that is within your capability and the expertise of your adviser.
- Your adviser and committee members are useful for guidance and questions about various aspects of your thesis project.
- Prior students' theses are available through the Wilson Library (Cedar.wwu.edu) to help you with ideas.
- Consider time requirements including time for research and writing. Consider equipment availability and any budgetary needs associated with your proposed research.

NOTE: Students whose research involves human subjects (including surveys), or live vertebrate animals must comply with University policies regarding these types of research. **Approval from the Research Integrity & Compliance office must be obtained before research begins.**

Thesis/Project Proposal Format

Faculty may expect to see a written proposal before agreeing to serve as a committee member and approving the Thesis / Project Topic Approval. Below is a guideline for a thesis/project proposal, though the specifics may vary by project. Please consult with your committee members so that you are aware of any specific requirements they may have. The format of thesis and project proposals are similar in most regards; differences are highlighted below.

- **Problem Statement or Objective.** What do you want to study? Does the proposed research have practical or theoretical significance? Why is this knowledge worth pursuing? **For projects, additionally:** Who is the intended knowledge user? How will the resulting knowledge be useful to them? How did the project idea come about? What is your plan for working with the intended user to ensure that your work is relevant to their knowledge needs?

- **Literature Review.** What have other scholars published in peer reviewed journals or academic press books on this topic? What do they agree on or disagree? What does your proposed thesis provide to the ongoing academic conversation?

- **Research Question/Hypothesis/Objective:** What is your research trying to answer or test?

- **Methods.**
    - **Subjects for Study.** Whom or what do you propose studying? Why are these the appropriate subjects? If it is appropriate to sample, how will you select your subjects? If your research involves human subjects, how will you protect them?

    - **Measurement.** What are your study's key measures or variables? How do these measures or variables allow you to address your questions/hypotheses/objectives? Do your variables and measures follow previous research on the topic?

    - **Information Collection or Activities.** How will you collect data for your study? Or, what activities will you complete?

    - **Analysis.** Describe the kind of analysis you plan on using to understand the information you collect. How will you use the information collected to address your research questions? How do you establish rigor? How will you know to trust your conclusions?

- **Schedule.** Propose a plan/timeline of data collection, activities, and analysis.

- **Budget.** Provide an estimate of costs or funding your study needs.

NOTE: This type of proposal, with minor modifications, can be submitted to the Graduate Program Committee for College of the Environment research funds both fall and spring, and to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) for university research funds.

Public Proposal of Thesis/Project
UEPP requires graduate students to make a public presentation of their proposal for their thesis/project. **This proposal is not a defense.** It is intended for you to present your ideas for research, discuss your methods, challenges, funding requirements and get feedback from faculty and other graduate students. Coordinate with your Faculty Adviser, then contact the Graduate Program Coordinator to schedule/advertise.

Thesis/Project Committee
Your thesis/project committee will advise you, approve the proposed research topic, and conduct the final oral examination. They are a great resource throughout your graduate program. Your committee is generally formed during your first year of studies. Your faculty

adviser can assist you in identifying potential candidates to serve on your committee. Your committee should be **formed by the third quarter of residency**. The **thesis committee** consists of three members: the chair (doesn't have to be your faculty adviser) must be graduate faculty in the MA ENVS program. The graduate faculty includes all tenured/tenure-track faculty in CENV (ENVS, ESCI, and UEPP) as well as individuals from outside of CENV who have successfully applied to be part of the graduate faculty. Second and third members may be graduate faculty, or, when approved by the MA UEPP Graduate Program Committee, may draw from the broader community professionals and others with appropriate experience. **For projects:** The project committee must have at least two members. The chair and second member must be tenure-track graduate faculty of the College of the Environment or be listed as a member of the UEPP, MA Graduate Faculty. An optional third member, with approval of the UEPP Graduate Committee and Graduate School, can come from elsewhere on campus or another university, or can be a professional in the field.

Please discuss with your faculty adviser to determine possible committee members, and work with the Graduate Program Committee to seek approval of committee members who are not currently members of the graduate faculty. All members must attend your oral defense (keep this in mind when considering out-of-town members), although with permission of your Thesis/Project Chair, this can be done using remote options.

> **Special Requirements for Committee Members Outside of UEPP:** Email the graduate program coordinator for information on how to seek approval for those not part of the UEPP MA graduate faculty. Approval of outside committee members takes time, so begin this process early.
>
> **Considerations When Selecting Thesis/Project Committee:** What are their research interests and expertise? Can they provide guidance necessary to complete your thesis/project? Will you be comfortable with the scientific approaches they are likely to recommend? What will they be like to work with? Are they supportive, reliable, constructively critical, and able to communicate well with you? How busy are they? How well do they work with other faculty members on your committee? Are they likely to be helpful in getting you a job or into a Ph.D. program? What is their reputation in their field? How strongly will they support you when writing letters of recommendation?

Thesis Topic Approval or Project Topic Approval (E-sign) – Required

Before registering for thesis or project credits, your topic and committee must be approved. This form indicates that you have a committee and research topic, and also demonstrates that you have been in communication with your committee chair and are making progress in your graduate research. This form must be approved by your entire thesis/project committee. Generally, this happens after your committee members have reviewed your written research proposal, you have met with your committee to discuss the proposal, and you have completed your public presentation of your idea.

UEPP 690 – Thesis Research or UEPP 691 – Project Research (12 credits)
A minimum of 12 thesis or project credits are required (repeatable to 36 credits for financial aid purposes).

- Thesis and project credits are graded incomplete (K) until the Degree Recommendation is completed.
  - Your adviser will submit the appropriate S or U to the Graduate School.
  - 12 credits will convert to S (satisfactory) or U (unsatisfactory) following submission of the Degree Recommendation.
  - If you have registered for more than 12 thesis credits, they will remain as incomplete on your transcript.

- To register for thesis or project credits, you must be in the Advanced to Candidacy Stage (no additional paperwork is required to Advance to Candidacy, it is automatic when you meet qualification criteria below), meaning: Your Plan of Study has been approved by the CENV Graduate Program Coordinator and is locked in DEGREEWORKS.

- You have completed a minimum of 12 credits of coursework listed on your Plan of Study while maintaining a 3.0 (B) grade point average.

Thesis Credit Registration: Thesis Topic Approval is completed and on file in the Graduate School. To register for thesis credits, you will need to receive overrides from **both** the CENV Graduate Student Coordinator and the Graduate School. Email your request for override with your W# and CRN to ed.weber@wwu.edu (or stop by ES 545). Thesis Topic Approval must be on file for overrides to be issued.

Project Credit Registration: Project Topic Approval is completed and locked. Email your request for override with your W# and CRN to ed.weber@wwu.edu (or stop by ES 545).

The Thesis or Project
The thesis or project is the culmination of your graduate work and the purpose of the Master's degree. It demonstrates you can complete an original and independent research project: designing and implementing a research plan and reporting on the investigation in a manner appropriate to the intended audience, all in a timely fashion. Writing a thesis/project teaches you how to plan and carry out a research project, how to negotiate work through revisions, and how to manage your time. If difficulties arise, or modifications are necessary, it is important that you discuss the matter with all committee members-- *preferably as a group rather than individually*. A thesis/project can get out of hand - longer does not necessarily mean better! The outline of the written product should be developed early and revised often-- with frequent review by your adviser. The style of the thesis or project should be discussed with and approved by your adviser. If appropriate to your goals, consider discussing with your advisor whether it might be possible to write a portion of the thesis in journal publication format, which can help in the development of a manuscript for publication.

The Graduate School provides Thesis Guidelines on their website. **Project guidelines** should be negotiated with your committee and with the partner organization. Your *first draft* should be completed and presented to your adviser during the quarter **prior to the quarter you wish to graduate**. When the thesis has undergone sufficient revision and when your adviser agrees, a draft of the thesis is circulated to your entire committee and to Ed Weber, CENV Graduate Program Coordinator, who will make it publicly available. The committee should have at least *two weeks* to read it **before the date you have scheduled for your oral defense**. Some rewriting should be anticipated at each stage of this review process.

Public Presentation – Required
A public presentation of your thesis or project, including your research questions/hypotheses, the data, analysis, findings and conclusions should be given to a College of the Environment audience on campus during an academic quarter. When appropriate, PROJECT presentations can take place in venues better suited to the needs of partner organizations. Summer presentations must be coordinated closely with your chair and all committee members as well as the Graduate Program Coordinator. Faculty members may not be on contract over the summer and are not compelled to participate. The public presentation is in the form of a seminar. Your entire committee will be in attendance (online participation of committee members is permitted) and you can then adjourn to your oral defense. The oral defense is typically done immediately following your public presentation but can be done at a different time IF your thesis/project committee agrees.

Oral Defense – Required
An oral defense with all your thesis/project committee present is required and should be scheduled during an academic quarter. The oral defense may cover any aspect of your education, but usually the questions are concerned with the thesis itself. You should discuss with your adviser the nature of the oral defense and prepare accordingly. Note: You can only schedule your defense between quarters or during summer session with the agreement of all committee members. Since the Graduate School can send a representative, students are discouraged from presenting outside the normal academic schedule.

SCHEDULING & PREPARING FOR DEFENSE
Two weeks before your defense:

- Schedule your public presentation and oral defense.
- Submit the Oral Defense Schedule to Graduate School.
- Send a copy of thesis/project to committee members.
- Coordinate with the Graduate Program Coordinator for advertisement of your thesis to the College of the Environment.
- Send a full-electronic copy of your Thesis/Project to the UEPP Department Manager for “tabling”.

For theses only, one week before your defense: If the Graduate School has requested it, send the latest draft of your thesis to the Graduate School for review by the Graduate Council representative via email (gradschool@wwu.edu). The role of the Graduate Council

representative at your defense is that of student advocate to ensure impartiality. They may or may not attend your oral defense.

Upon completion of public presentation and oral defense: Committee members will indicate their approval of your thesis or project and award of degree via E-Sign Form.

Next steps for graduating: A final copy of the corrected thesis (addressing comments raised by committee members during the oral defense) should be uploaded to the graduate school via CEDAR by the specified deadline (https://gradschool.wwu.edu/degree-completion).

Delivering Thesis/Project for Copying and Binding

Printing Guide	Hard Copy	Soft Copy	Digital Copy	Notes
Wilson Library – Special Collections	1		Yes	BOTH hard copy and digital are required
Optional Printings – Check with your Thesis Committee				
Thesis/Project Committee Chair		1		Your committee chair MAY request a hard copy – check with them first
Thesis/Project Committee Members		1 each		Optional – ask your committee

You will need the Digital Thesis Authorization Form:
https://esign.wwu.edu/admcs/process/forms/Grad_School/Digital.aspx?valid=true

Your thesis will be published via CEDAR. Please follow all listed instructions. In addition to publishing on CEDAR, the Wilson Library will require 1 hard copy of your thesis. Your thesis committee may require additional copies. Check with them.

Binding and Printing

The Graduate School will provide additional instructions for printing on your Thesis Approval Letter.

Diploma and Degree Posting for Thesis Students

Your diploma will be mailed and your degree posted to your official transcript **after** one hard-bound copy has been delivered to Wilson Library.

Note: Outstanding fines or campus parking tickets must be paid before the diploma is issued.

Annual Review of Graduate Student Progress

UEPP has developed a procedure to assess our graduate students' overall progress prior to the final defense/presentation of their thesis/ project. This is an effort to identify students who are not making satisfactory research/project progress and help them get back on course toward completing their degree requirements.

Approach: The Graduate Program Committee (GPC) will check in annually with each MA, UEPP student (Spring Quarter for First Year students/Winter Quarter for all others) with an electronic survey to note the student's progress toward their degree. Simultaneously, faculty advisors will also be requested to submit an assessment of whether the student is making satisfactory progress toward the degree, based on the following minimum guidelines:

Timeline Criteria for Satisfactory Progress

- **Year 1:**
  - Completion of at least 12 credits of 400- and 500-level classes with a grade of 3.0 or better **and**,
  - Acceptance of the Plan of Study (Approved E-sign form) **and**,
  - Selection of a thesis committee, approval of the research proposal and Thesis Topic Approval e-sign (upon meeting with committee) **OR** approval of Project Topic by faculty adviser
- **Years 2-5:** Satisfactory thesis / project progress will be determined by the student's committee. Students not making satisfactory progress will receive an email listing deficiencies noted by the GPC and will be advised to meet with the adviser and the thesis /project committee as soon as possible.

All Year 2-5 students will be invited to an annual early winter-quarter group meeting to learn of processes and deadlines for completing their degree.

Termination from the Graduate Program: Students who fail to make satisfactory progress for two consecutive years will be terminated from the graduate program unless the student's adviser recommends in writing to the GPC that the student be retained in the program.

Appeals: Students who receive an unsatisfactory rating on their research/project progress may appeal that finding to the GPC in writing within five working days. The GPC will notify the adviser and the student of its decision within ten working days after receipt of the student's appeal. If the unsatisfactory rating is not overturned, the student may submit a written appeal to the Dean of College of the Environment within ten working days of notification from the adviser. If the unsatisfactory rating is not overturned by the CENV Dean, the student may then submit a written appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School within ten working days of the notification of the decision by the CENV Dean.

Preparation for Graduation

Mandatory E-Sign Forms

Master's Degree Application (E-Sign) - Required

The application for degree must be submitted by the **last day of classes (end of dead week) in the quarter prior** to the quarter you intend to graduate. Double-check to be sure all graduation requirements have been met before submitting the application. The non-refundable graduation fee will be billed to your student account (One-Time Only) when your file is evaluated for degree completion. If you don't meet the deadlines for the quarter you applied, **you will have to apply again.**

Degree Recommendation – Thesis or Degree Recommendation – Non-Thesis

This form is submitted to your Thesis Committee Chair (Thesis Option) or Faculty Adviser (Non-Thesis Option) not later than the Friday, 1-week prior to finals week.

Degree Deadlines

See published deadlines on the Graduate School website:

- You must either be enrolled in coursework OR Continuous Enrollment the quarter of graduation.
- In order to receive your degree, it is imperative that you complete all program requirements within 5 years. After 5 years, computer accounts, library privileges and technology services are discontinued, all associated files are purged, and students are withdrawn from the Graduate School unless an extension of the Graduate Program has been granted.
- You may participate in commencement only in the quarter your degree requirements are met.

Maximum Timeline for Completion of Degree

All requirements must be completed within 5 years. Students who have not completed their program after 3 years are required to file a plan for completion within the 5-year limit. Absent this plan, it is understood that the student has decided to withdraw from the program. There is no set format for submission of this plan, but it must include all coursework yet to be completed, quarters in which they will be taken, as well as specific plans/timeliness for completion of Thesis/Project. Submit request through your faculty adviser.

Extension of Graduate Program

You can request an extension (1-3 quarters) for completing the degree requirements if you are unable to finish within the 5-year requirement. The following steps should be taken in making this request: Discuss, then request, an extension with your thesis chair. Your thesis chair and the program adviser determine if they will support the request. You and your adviser work to develop a mutually agreed upon timeline if the extension is supported. The request, faculty statement of support, and detailed timeline are submitted to the Graduate School for consideration.

Funding, Safety, Travel and Miscellaneous

Teaching Assistantships (TA) through UEPP Department (Note: TAs may be granted by other departments and are subject to rules established by those departments)

- Teaching Assistants are paid salaried positions. They are not awarded based on financial need. They are awarded based on the strength of student's application, academic record, and the match between department needs and student skills. Graduate Teaching Assistants are paid twice monthly. You are assigned to assist a professor(s) with a specific course of instruction as agreed upon by the department, GPC Chair and CENV Graduate Program Coordinator.

- A nominee must have full admitted status to the Graduate School (not provisional status) and, if a current student, be making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

- The Graduate School awards assistantships by an official letter of appointment (delivered via email). The Graduate School notifies the Student Accounts and Financial Aid offices of the names of assistantship recipients, and their records for fee payment and financial aid purposes reflect this.

- Full-Time TAs are expected to work approximately 19 hours/week. Half-Time TAs are expected to work 10 hours/week. No combination of employment at the university should put you above 19 hours/week on a consistent basis.

- Compensation is listed on the Graduate School Website for TAs.

- The Graduate School provides either a full or partial tuition waiver for all TAs dependent upon your assignment as either a Full-Time or Part-Time TA. Your tuition waiver only applies to courses leading to your degree and are listed on your approved Graduate Plan of Study. Tuition waivers can only be applied to credits taken through regular Western registration (not extended education or other institutions).

- TA Compensation DOES NOT include university fees, which typically amount to about 10% of your total tuition and will vary dependent upon your quarterly credit load. It is your responsibility to pay these fees.

- The Graduate School determines annually if they can support paying the Health Care Benefits for Graduate TAs. If you are eligible and want coverage, you must register: http://www.wwu.edu/gradschool/health-insurance.shtml.

- TAs must be enrolled in a minimum of 8-credits during any quarter they are assigned an assistantship, unless the only thing they have remaining are Thesis/Project credits (UEPP 690/691). TA can drop to a minimum load of 2-credits in this case. You may still need to be enrolled in more than 2-credits to qualify for financial aid/loan

deferrals/international student eligibility. In these cases, Financial Aid requirements supersede Graduate School requirements.

- Graduate teaching assistantship applicants whose native language is not English must demonstrate English language proficiency required for classroom or laboratory instruction.

- Proper assignments for a graduate teaching assistant include instruction (under the supervision of a graduate faculty member), grading of tests or essays (at the lower-division level), preparation of labs, or assistance to faculty members conducting research.

- Improper duties for graduate assistants are routine (clerical) assignments, tasks that undergraduate work-study students can perform, tasks that do not relate in any direct way to the assistant's academic reasons for being at WWU, and tasks that are properly performed only by regular faculty members--that is, advisement, substituting for absent faculty members, etc.

- It is the responsibility of the department UEPP Department Chair and the Graduate Adviser to see that assignments are appropriate. Every effort should be made to ensure that the assignments given to assistants do not prevent the person from taking required courses, especially core courses, or interfere with the assistant's principal reason for being at WWU, which is the expeditious completion of the Master's degree.

- Your assigned professor should discuss performance expectations with you before the start of the course. The Graduate School recommends that TAs be evaluated on the same forms used to evaluation faculty for a class.

Research Assistant (RA)

- Research Assistants are typically paid salaried positions, although a few may be hourly. They are not awarded based on financial need. Research Assistants are paid twice monthly. You are assigned to a professor to assist with their ongoing research projects.

- A nominee must have full admit status to the Graduate School (not provisional status) and, if a current student, be making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

- The professor and their department awards Research Assistant positions. There is no action required through the Graduate School for RA positions.

- Salaried Full-Time RAs are expected to work approximately 19 hours/week. Salaried Part-Time RAs are expected to work 10 hours/week. No combination of employment at the university should put you above 19 hours/week on a consistent basis.

- Salaried STIPENDs are equal to pay listed on the Graduate School Website for TAs. Hourly RA positions are paid $18/hr. minimum/$22.85 maximum.

- Tuition waivers for RA positions should be coordinate by your professor with the WWU Graduate School and are covered by the WWU ESA.

- University Fees are generally not covered, but if your professor's grant allows for it, it is possible to cover. Speak with your professor.

- Health Care Benefits are covered for RA positions by their professors grant per the WWU ESA.

- RAs must be enrolled in at least 8 credits during any quarter they are assigned an assistantship, unless they only have Thesis/Project credits (UEPP 690/691). RA can drop to a minimum load of 2-credits in this case.

- You may still need to be enrolled in more than 2-credits to qualify for financial aid/loan deferrals/international student eligibility. In these cases, Financial Aid requirements supersede Graduate School requirements.

- There are no language requirements for RA positions.

- A RA is assigned to a specific professor to assist with ongoing research. Duties will vary by professor/project. It's your responsibility to communicate with your professor to determine if the RA assignment is right for you.

Summary of TA and RA Compensation:

Teaching Assistant (TA) vs. Research Assistant (RA)		
	TA	**RA**
WWU Tuition (excludes Extended Education)	Yes	Yes
Stipend	Yes	Yes
Health Care Coverage	Yes	Yes
Fees	No	Maybe

Enrollment Requirement for Financial Aid Purposes

- Full financial aid award requires registration of 8 credits or more each quarter.

- Students on financial aid (those with graduate work-study and/or RA support) can

work up to 40 hrs/wk during intercession--the time period when school is not in session (i.e., during the Christmas break between fall/winter quarters and during spring break, but cannot submit time for actual holidays when the University is closed, i.e., Christmas Day, New Year's Day, etc.) weekends included as long as the 40 hrs/wk is not exceeded.

- You may attempt up to 125% of the credits required for completion of your program of study (however, these credits are expected to be on your approved Plan of Study).

- Students enrolled in thesis option programs are eligible for federal financial aid for the number of credits allowed by the program for thesis (UEPP = 12-36 credits).

- You are encouraged to plan your academic course loads efficiently to reduce excessive student loans; in other words, you cannot receive financial aid indefinitely.

Grants and Research Funds

CENV Small Grants: Each fall and spring CENV provides a limited number of small grants to foster and facilitate graduate research in environmental science and environmental studies. These grants are intended only to cover small expenses, such as expendable supplies (chemicals, glassware), travel to field sites, or attendance to present results at a professional meeting. Awards are competitive and will likely be in the range $300-$800. Maximum duration to spend funds without requesting an extension is 18 months. Deadlines for applying are mid-October and mid-April. Your Thesis Topic Approval card must be on file in the Graduate School before these research funds will be made available.

Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP): The Graduate Research and Creative Opportunities Grant Program, sponsored by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) and the Graduate School, awards students currently enrolled in graduate programs research support in amounts up to $1,500. See RSP website for application processes and deadlines. Be aware that your faculty adviser and the ENVS department chair must approve of all funding requests, so time your application accordingly.

Other Funding Sources: Check the CENV Graduate Funding website.

Using Grants for Thesis Research (on-campus sources)

If you apply for a "small grant" through CENV or a Research and Sponsored Programs (RSP) grant for thesis work, the funding will be deposited into the department account. Purchases can be made with WWU purchase forms or through Purchasing, or reimbursements using services/reimbursement forms.

- Some items, such as computer software and chemicals, have specific acquisition rules that must be complied with prior to purchase. Failure to follow these rules may result in you not being reimbursed. Please consult WWU Purchasing Office or Ed Weber.

- All “non-expendable” purchases become property of Western Washington University and must be turned in when you are complete with your project.

- There are various ways to spend your grant--see Ed Weber for assistance.

- Refer to the travel section below for grant money of any sort being used for travel to seminars, research sites, and any type of travel. In all cases, ***keep your receipts***.

Using Grants for Thesis Research (off-campus sources)
Grants administered through RSP must follow guidelines. If you are overseeing a grant with your faculty adviser, all paperwork will require his/her signature. If you or anyone else (other students) are to be paid out of grant monies, you must have a Payroll Appointment form in the university payroll system before you begin working on the grant. Grants all have a designated five-digit number beginning with a “5.” See the UEPP Department Manager to be placed on the payroll, for travel, for purchases, and for reimbursements.

Ross Travel Grant
Provides support for students to travel to present papers at professional meetings and conferences. The awards cover the amount equivalent to the minimum airfare or other public transportation cost to the conference city, with a maximum of $500 granted to any single applicant. Ground transportation, lodging, per diem and registration fees are generally not covered. Student must be a matriculated graduate student during the time of travel. If student has already graduated, they are not eligible.

Health Insurance and On-Campus Medical Care Information
Student Health Center: Graduate students taking at least 3 credit hours have the option of paying the Health Services fee for the quarter so they can utilize services if they choose to. A signed authorization form, available from a Health Center receptionist, is necessary. In general, students enrolled in 6 or more credits are automatically billed the fee for the quarter.

If you are serving as a graduate TA or an RA, you may be enrolled for as few as three (3) credits and still be eligible for services from the Student Health Center (notify the Graduate School so your account can be manually charged)

WWU Student Health Insurance Plan: This insurance plan is available to any WWU student who meets eligibility requirements as stated in the plan brochure; however, the Graduate School will pay your premiums on a quarterly basis if you are a Graduate Teaching Assistant.

Safety Training
The University has a responsibility to provide safety training to new employees and students who will be working with chemicals and performing hazardous tasks. It is the responsibility of each faculty member to ensure that his or her employees and students are trained. Contact Environmental Health & Safety (x6582) for the safety orientation checklist.

Graduate students who perform research in the field and laboratory should be trained in issues such as transport of chemicals in vehicles (personal and university) and the potential risks if they transport chemicals in luggage via air. In addition, personal protective equipment, hazard communication, lab safety and hazardous waste are among the other topics that should be reviewed.

Lab TAs are required to contact Scott Wilkinson (ES 422, x3667) prior to the beginning of each quarter for lab safety training information.

Travel Regulations and Procedures

First, consult UEPP Department Manager about procedures. A Travel Authorization form is **required prior to** traveling to seminars, research sites, etc. A Travel Expense Voucher is **required** upon your return. **You will need a Travel Authorization number to book your travel.** Airline travel **must** go through a state qualified travel agent. **Do not charge airfare to your private credit card.** Refer to the WWU Travel Desk site on-line for the currently approved local travel agencies.
For day travel involving your personal vehicle, a new form is available on-line at the Travel Desk site. For the current reimbursement rate for private vehicle expenses, see www.gsa.gov/travel.htm. For overnight travel when lodging and meals are authorized, see the UEPP Department Manager for information. In all cases, ***keep your receipts***.

Vehicle Reservations from ENTERPRISE (12-passenger): As a TA, or when conducting research, you may be asked to reserve a 12-passenger van from Enterprise and drive the van for the class. Contact the UEPP Department Manager as early as possible for complete instructions and van rental procedures. Information you will need to provide: date of trip, time of pickup and return of vehicle, destination, purpose of trip, and driver's name. Vehicles must be reserved for individual trips. Please cancel vehicle reservations if plans change.

Van Training: Any driver, faculty, staff, student or volunteer, operating a 12-passenger van on behalf of WWU **must at least age 21, have 5 years driving experience** and complete both the state required large passenger van training **every two years**. Drivers and their supervisors are responsible for monitoring this. It's a 4-part course involving a PowerPoint presentation, quiz and completion of two state forms that need to be printed, completed and signed by the driver and her/his supervisor. The completed forms stay with departmental files. Secure training early in the year to be prepared for potential TA assignments. Van training is provided by Risk Management (x6582). Training is available on Canvas.

International Van Travel: Vans larger than 10-passenger may not be driven into Canada. Multiple smaller vans would need to be driven if taking more than 10-persons.