

DEPARTMENT OF EARTH & ENVIRONMENT

Master's Student Handbook

MS, Earth & Environment · MS, Energy & Environmental Analysis · MS, Remote Sensing & Geospatial Sciences

Boston University · College of Arts & Sciences

685 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215

617-353-2525 · earth@bu.edu · bu.edu/earth

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Welcome

Dear Students,

Welcome to the Department of Earth & Environment! We're pleased you've chosen to study here, and we welcome you to the community. We'll do everything we can to make your time here successful. The Department takes great pride in its graduate students and will work with you to help you accomplish your research goals. In return, we expect you to hold your work to the highest possible standards.

Graduate school can be an extraordinarily rewarding experience. It can also be challenging, confusing, and demanding. We've put together this handbook to give you guidance through Department and Graduate School requirements for your Master's program. You should also carefully read the relevant sections of the BU Graduate School Bulletin to familiarize yourself with policies, regulations, and deadlines. This handbook also introduces resources available to you in the Department and at BU. We'll help make your graduate studies go smoothly, but ultimately you are responsible for satisfactorily completing the work for your degree.

If you have questions at any time, please bring them to us or to Amelia Layne, Graduate Program Coordinator (ailayne@bu.edu).

Sincerely,

[Lucy Hutyra](#), Chair

[Jeffrey Geddes](#), Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies

[James Baldwin](#), Master Lecturer and Director of Master's Programs

Quick Reference: Who Do I Contact?

If you need help with...	Contact	Email / Location
Choosing/confirming your advisor, course substitutions, curriculum questions	James Baldwin, Director of Master's Programs	jbaldwin@bu.edu
Day-to-day questions, forms, deadlines, "I don't know who to ask"	Amelia Layne, Graduate Program Coordinator	ailayne@bu.edu · CAS 131D · 617-353-2529
Reserving a room or the departmental van	Fred George, Administrative Coordinator	fgeorge@bu.edu · CAS 130
Policy exceptions, academic difficulty, grievances	Jeffrey Geddes, Director of Graduate Studies	jgeddes@bu.edu · CAS 439F
Department-wide concerns, formal grievances	Lucy Hutyra, Department Chair	lrhutyra@bu.edu · STO 141H
Your BU bill, payment plans, refunds	Student Financials Services	bu.edu/studentfinancials/
Financial aid, loans, work-study	Student Financial Assistance	finaid@bu.edu · 617-353-2965
International student status, work authorization, summer certification	ISSO (International Students & Scholars Office)	bu.edu/isso
Registration, add/drop, transcripts	MyBU Student Portal / Office of the University Registrar	bu.edu/mybu
Career advice, resumes, job search	BU Center for Career Development	future@bu.edu
Mental health support, crisis support	Behavioral Medicine (24-hr line)	617-353-3569
Filing a complaint under Title IX	Equal Opportunity Office / Title IX	titleix@bu.edu

Advising & Registration

Degree Requirements & Policies

The authority on degree requirements is the [BU Bulletin](#). The [GRS Master's Degree Requirements](#) page outlines the official requirements of master's degrees granted by the institution.

NOTE: *All courses must be completed with a B– or better to count toward graduation requirements; a C+ or below is considered failing by the Graduate School. Incomplete grades must be resolved within one year — sooner if you are in a one-year program and about to graduate — or they convert to the grade on the I Grade Report, or an "F" if none was indicated.*

For full policies on grades and course credits, see bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/grades-and-course-credits.

All Master's degrees in the Department of Earth & Environment require 32 credits (8 courses).

Up to **8 credits from previous graduate work** may apply toward the degree, provided the credits were **not used to satisfy the requirements of a previous degree** — even if those courses were taken at the graduate level within the Department of Earth & Environment.

Any graduate-level courses taken in Earth & Environment or elsewhere at BU prior to your official acceptance and enrollment in the Master's program are considered transfer credits, not credits earned within the Master's program itself.

You must be registered for every semester or summer term during which a degree requirement is completed or University facilities are used, unless you are on an official leave of absence. In your final semester, you must be registered when your final degree requirements are completed. It is your responsibility to be aware of the costs associated with attendance, including tuition and fees.

Advising

[James Baldwin](#), Director of Master's Programs, is the primary advisor for students in the MS Energy & Environmental Analysis and MS Remote Sensing & Geospatial Sciences programs. Students in the MS Earth & Environment program are assigned an advisor based on conversations that took place during the application process. Throughout your program, you'll also benefit from informal advising from other professors and peers in the Department.

Your Curriculum

All three Master's programs require 32 credits (8 courses). Beyond that shared minimum, each program has a different mix of required core courses, electives, and capstone options. The summaries below are pulled from each program's current curriculum page — always confirm specifics with your advisor, since electives and substitutions are approved case by case.

MS in Earth & Environment

[Official Bulletin listing](#) · [Department program page](#)

This is the most flexible of the three programs: your 32 credits of coursework (500-level or above) are built individually in consultation with your advisor, based on your background and interests. You'll also complete a professional development requirement, which can be satisfied through coursework, University co-curricular activities, professional/community organizations, or activities approved by your advisor.

You'll finish the degree by one of two paths, chosen at admission:

- **With Thesis** — you must have a willing faculty research advisor lined up before you're admitted to this track (see the Department's list of faculty currently accepting thesis students). You'll complete a written thesis, approved by a three-person committee, and defend it orally. Up to 12 of your 32 credits may be 900-level research credits. Full timeline in the Thesis Planning section of this handbook.
- **Via Examination** — no 900-level research credits count toward your 32. Instead of a thesis, you complete either a *Master's Examination Portfolio* (a statement of purpose, representative coursework, and a statement of completion, evaluated by a committee) or an *Examination Project* (a supervised 4-credit directed study demonstrating mastery of your subfield), completed in your final semester.

NOTE: *If you want the thesis track, act early. If you're already enrolled and hoping to switch onto the thesis track, talk to Amelia Layne and James Baldwin as soon as possible.*

Typical full-time pacing (yours may vary):

- Year 1, Fall: 3–4 courses · Year 1, Spring: 2–3 courses
- Year 2, Fall: 1–2 courses · Year 2, Spring: 1 directed study (thesis or examination project)
- [Faculty currently seeking thesis students](#)
- [Selecting a thesis topic](#)

MS in Energy & Environmental Analysis

[Official Bulletin listing](#) · [Department program page](#)

32 credits (8 courses): six required core courses plus two electives chosen with your advisor.

Core courses (6):

- EE 516 Multivariate Analysis for Geographers, or MA 614 Statistical Methods
- EE 519 Energy, Society, and the Environment
- EE 545 Methods of Environmental Policy Analysis
- EE 555 World Oil Markets

- EE 660 Resource Economics and Policy, or EE 528 US Environmental Policy
- EE 712 Regional Energy Modeling

Electives (choose 2, with advisor approval):

- Options include EE 522, 524, 526, 540, 594, 597, 599, 600, 656, 805; IR 537, 573, 587; BI 648; MA 684; SE 543; EK 546 — see the program page for the full, current list and descriptions.
- [Full degree requirements page](#)

MS in Remote Sensing & Geospatial Sciences

[Official Bulletin listing](#) · [Department program page](#)

32 credits (8 courses): three required core courses plus five electives chosen with your advisor. Applicants are expected to have basic competency in calculus and statistics; if you're admitted without that background, expect to do extra independent work or coursework to catch up.

Core courses (3):

- EE 501 Advanced Topics in Remote Sensing
- EE 505 Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- EE 509 Applied Environmental Statistics, or EE 516 Multivariate Analysis for Geographers, or MA 614 Statistical Methods

Electives (choose 5):

- Options include EE 503, 504, 509, 516, 529, 585, 622, 644, 645, 646, 648, 805, 840; 845; CS 521 — statistical-methods courses can't be double-counted as electives if already used to meet the core requirement. See the program page for the full, current list.
- [Full degree requirements page](#)

Registration

Register for, add, and drop classes on the [MyBU](#) student portal. Pay attention each semester to the [deadlines for adding and dropping courses](#).

Substitutions for core and elective courses require prior approval from Program Advisor [James Baldwin](#).

Some Master's students — particularly international students — extend their programs to one and a half years (fall, spring, fall). You are not required to register for the summer semester unless you're taking summer classes or working as a research assistant on campus. International students working on campus over the summer should contact the [ISSO](#) for part-time certification. If you do take summer classes, register as you would for any other semester.

PDP (Physical Education) Courses

Registered full-time BU students (undergraduate and graduate) can sign up for one free physical education class per semester through [FitRec](#), with the option to add a second class later in registration if space allows (maximum two per semester). You can sign up directly through FitRec's own registration system.

Directed Studies

Directed studies let you conduct research or other independent work with a professor for credit. You and the faculty member must mutually agree on the project's scope before you enroll. You may register for no more than 12 credits total of directed study, research, or practicum across your entire program.

Cross-Registration and MET Courses

The [GRS Cross-Registration Policy](#) allows Master's students to take no more than one graduate-level course from a BU school or college other than CAS/GRS, unless the course is listed in the GRS Bulletin. All such courses must be approved by your major advisor and your department chair, program director, or director of graduate studies. Use a course substitution form for these classes.

Time Limit

Master's students have a maximum of **three years** to complete their program, counted from their first semester of registration. This is confirmed as current GRS policy ([GRS Academic Standing](#): “The MS, MA, and MFA degrees shall be completed within three years after the first registration for study leading to the master's degree.”) In extenuating circumstances, you may petition GRS for more time.

Auditing Courses

The [GRS Auditing Courses](#) policy allows auditing on a space-available basis. Auditors are still charged full tuition and fees. Courses at the 900 level, as well as language, physical education, studio, and lab courses, may not be audited.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Graduate students must make “Satisfactory Academic Progress” as [defined by GRS](#). The Department considers you “at-risk” if you've earned a non-credit grade (below B–) in two or more courses, or received incomplete grades in two or more courses over two consecutive semesters. If that happens, your academic advisor, the Department Chair, or the Director of Graduate Studies will notify you of probationary status, explain the reason, and set criteria and deadlines for returning to good standing. Students on academic probation must meet with their faculty advisor and develop a written improvement plan.

Graduation Application

Submit the [Intent to Graduate](#) form during your final semester.

Full-Time / Part-Time Status

US domestic students may pursue any Master's degree full- or part-time. International students must pursue their degree full-time, except that they may move to part-time status in their final semester once they've filed their Intent to Graduate.

Tuition & Billing

You are responsible for understanding your cost of attendance, including what tuition does and does not cover. Direct billing or account questions to [Student Accounting Services](#).

Interdisciplinary Certificates & Affiliated Programs

Two interdisciplinary programs at BU are open to Earth & Environment Master's students and are designed to enrich — not replace — your degree. Both require a separate application after you're already enrolled in E&E, and both are built so their requirements can typically double-count against courses and thesis-committee slots you already need.

BU URBAN — Graduate Program in Urban Biogeoscience & Environmental Health

sites.bu.edu/urban · [Program requirements](#) · [How to apply](#)

BU URBAN trains graduate students to tackle urban environmental challenges — air and water pollution, heat waves, storm surges, and related environmental-health risks in cities — through interdisciplinary coursework and partnerships with city government, NGOs, and the private sector. It's open to admitted graduate students from several departments, including Earth & Environment; you must already be admitted to (or enrolled in) E&E before you can apply to URBAN. As of the 2025–2026 cohort, URBAN accepts both Ph.D. and, for the first time, Master's trainees.

Master's trainees choose one of two tracks:

- **Coursework Track** — 12 credits across three areas: one Biogeoscience course, one Environmental Health course, and one Statistics/Data Analytics course. These commonly overlap with courses and electives you're already taking as part of your E&E degree.
- **Internship Track** — a co-developed internship project with a city government office, NGO, or private-sector partner, paired with a 0–4 credit companion course. Timing and structure flex to fit your degree's own requirements.

Both tracks also include a shared set of workshops (an introductory workshop, an Urban Governance series, science communication, professional development, and an annual symposium) open to trainees across departments.

Applications for the Fall 2026 cohort are closed; URBAN expects to reopen applications for Fall 2027 around December or January. In the meantime you can complete the [prospective student interest form](#). The application itself asks for a short URBAN application form, a CV/resume, and a letter of support from an instructor or advisor.

Questions: Director Pamela Templer or Program Manager Emily Walton (urban@bu.edu).

Graduate Certificate in Biogeoscience

bu.edu/bio-geo · [GRS Bulletin listing](#)

The Advanced Graduate Certificate in Biogeoscience is open to both Ph.D. and Master's students in any participating program, including Earth & Environment, and is designed to be earned alongside your degree rather than on top of it — the coursework is meant to satisfy requirements or electives you'd likely already be taking.

Admission requires a one-page application to the Program Director, reviewed by the program chair and an advisory committee based on your fit with the program's mission.

Coursework (16 credits):

- Colloquium in Biogeoscience (2 credits) and Practicum in Biogeoscience (2 credits) — recommended to be taken as a fall/spring sequence.
- One course in Biogeophysics (4 credits) — e.g., Micrometeorology, Physical Climatology, Urban Climate, Quantitative Geomorphology.
- One course in Biogeochemistry (4 credits) — e.g., Forest Ecology, Atmospheric Chemistry and Global Change, Marine or Terrestrial Biogeochemistry.
- One course in Statistics, Modeling & Geospatial Sciences (4 credits) — e.g., Remote Sensing, GIS, Applied Environmental Statistics, several of which already appear in the MS Remote Sensing curriculum above.

If scheduling makes the three focus-area courses impractical, you can petition the Program Director to instead take three 4-credit courses across just two of the focus areas, in addition to the Colloquium and Practicum.

If you're doing a research thesis, one member of your thesis committee must be drawn from Biogeoscience-participating faculty — plan your committee with this in mind if you intend to pursue the certificate.

Questions or to apply: Director Jennifer Bhatnagar (jmbhat@bu.edu).

Funding & Financial Support

Financial support for Master's students is allotted based on merit, on a first-come, first-served basis. Support is decided as completed applications are received; there is no separate funding application.

Ways You May Be Funded

- Partial tuition scholarships, offered as part of your admission or later in your program.
- Teaching Assistant (TA) positions for undergraduate courses; leading labs or discussion sections
- Research Assistant (RA) positions, paid hourly. Faculty hire Master's students as RAs occasionally, depending on matching your skills to their needs; these are usually arranged after you've begun coursework.

Reducing Cost if You Are Writing a Thesis

If you're completing the MS with thesis, you may be able to reduce total tuition cost by finishing part of your degree through summer research credit hours while working on your thesis. Under this pathway you would enroll part-time for 4–8 semesters, completing 20 credit hours across the Fall and Spring semesters and 12 research credits over the summer term. Talk to your advisor and Amelia Layne, Graduate Program Coordinator, about whether this makes sense for you.

Outside Fellowships

Competitive, University-wide fellowship programs open to Earth & Environment students include:

- [BU Fellowships \(bufellow\)](#)
- [Pardee Graduate Summer Fellows](#)
- [Pardee School list of external graduate scholarships \(PDF\)](#)

International students should also research funding from their home governments and agencies.

General BU Financial Aid & Cost Information

- [Full financial aid information \(GRS/CAS\)](#)
- [Full cost-of-attendance information \(GRS/CAS\)](#)

General financial aid questions (loans, work-study, billing not related to the Department): [Student Financial Assistance](#), 881 Commonwealth Ave., 617-353-2965, finaid@bu.edu.

University & Department Policies

The authority on BU's academic policies is the [BU Bulletin Policy Section](#). The authority for student-life policies is the [Student Lifebook](#). The policies most relevant to graduate students are linked below.

- [Academic Conduct Code](#)
- [Childbirth & Adoption Accommodation](#)
- [Cross-Registration](#)
- [Disability Accommodation](#)
- [Dissertation/Thesis Work Outside BU](#)
- [Equal Opportunity / Affirmative Action Policy](#)
- [Intellectual Property Policy](#)
- [International Travel](#)
- [Policy on Consensual Relationships with Students](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct / Title IX Policy](#)
- [Transfer Credits](#)
- [Workplace Violence Prevention Policy](#)

Campus & Community Resources

Academic Support

- [Educational Resource Center \(ERC\)](#) — study skills coaching, academic strategy, and referrals; free for all students, including graduate students.
- [Mugar Memorial Library](#) — research databases, librarian consultations, and subject guides.

Career Development

- [BU Center for Career Development](#) — resume help, mock interviews, and job/internship search support. future@bu.edu, 100 Bay State Road, 6th floor.
- [Handshake](#) — internship and job postings.
- The Department hosts an annual Environmental Career Fair each spring; watch for Department announcements.

Mental Health & Wellbeing

- [Behavioral Medicine](#) — 24-hour phone line: 617-353-3569. Regular appointments 8 a.m.–8 p.m. Mon–Thu, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Fri.
- [Sexual Assault Response & Prevention Center \(SARP\)](#) — 24-hour hotline: 617-353-SARP (7277).
- [The Danielsen Institute](#) — licensed mental health clinic serving BU and the community.

Basic Needs & Food Access

- Terrier Meal Share, through the Office of the Dean of Students, offers short-term crisis assistance.
- [Project Bread Food Source Hotline](#): 1-800-645-8333.

General BU Contacts

- [Dean of Students](#) — 617-353-4126, George Sherman Union, 3rd floor.
- [Equal Opportunity Office / Title IX](#) — 617-353-9286, titleix@bu.edu.
- [Office of the Ombuds](#) — confidential, informal dispute resolution.

Thesis Planning

It's strongly recommended that students completing the MS in Earth & Environment with thesis meet with Amelia Layne, Graduate Program Coordinator (ailayne@bu.edu), at least four months before their defense date. Reserve a room for your oral exam with them as soon as a date is set.

The timeline below assumes a typical two-year, four-semester degree; coursework, which is selected in consultation with your thesis advisor, is not included here. Part-time students should expect this timeline to extend.

[Click here for the Graduate School's official procedures.](#)

[Thesis Defense Evaluation Form \(PDF\)](#) (unofficial – department use only)

[Thesis Template \(Word\)](#)

Semester 1 (1st fall semester)

- In consultation with your advisor, formalize a plan for the thesis, including topic, scope, and methodology.
- With your advisor, choose two additional Earth & Environment faculty members for your committee. The committee must include your advisor and at least two additional readers, one of whom must be from Earth & Environment. The committee may include more than three people, but only three “readers” are required and only they sign the approval page; other “committee members” do not.
- Begin drafting the prospectus.

Semester 2 (1st spring semester)

- Finalize the prospectus.
- Schedule a private prospectus defense with your committee early in the semester. This is a presentation of your planned research and a chance for the committee to discuss methods, objectives, and expected outcomes. It is not formally submitted to the Graduate School — it exists for you and your committee only.
- In consultation with your advisor, finalize your plan for the second year based on feedback from the prospectus defense.

Semester 3 (summer 1 or 2nd fall semester)

- Continue thesis research and writing.

Semester 4 (summer 2 or 2nd spring semester)

- Complete thesis research and writing.
- Send the thesis to your committee at least 10 days before the defense.
- The defense is a public, conference-style presentation of your research, methodology, and findings, followed by a public Q&A, then a private Q&A and deliberation with the committee only. The whole process takes about two hours.

- Upon passing, submit the thesis to the Graduate School and pay the \$25 processing fee (full steps in “After the Defense” below).

Thesis Prospectus

The prospectus outlines your proposed thesis research. It should be single-spaced, no more than 4 pages long, in type no smaller than 11-point, with 1-inch margins. The title page, 250-word abstract, references, and any figures/tables do not count toward the 4-page limit. The faculty advisor will naturally influence the proposed research, but the prospectus should represent your own original work: a statement of significance, the hypotheses you'll test, your methods, and expected outcomes. Prospectuses are evaluated largely on your ability to pose testable, topically significant scientific questions and design a strategy to address them. Submit it to your committee at least one week before the scheduled defense. The committee may request edits, but there is no formal submission to the Graduate School.

Prior to the Defense

1. In coordination with your committee chair, set a date bearing in mind the deadlines set by the Graduate School. Work with the Administrative Coordinator to reserve CAS 132.
2. [Submit the Intent to Graduate form.](#)
3. At least three weeks before the defense, submit a full draft of the thesis (PDF only) to the Graduate School for format review: grsrec@bu.edu. The Graduate School may recommend formatting edits, including to your signature page — follow their instructions if given; otherwise, leave your signature page as submitted.

After the Defense

4. Your advisor completes the Thesis Defense Evaluation Form, submits it to the Department, and shares a copy with you.
5. You must also submit a copy of your dissertation approval page (the third page of your dissertation) with signatures. Once you have obtained signatures from all readers, email this form to grsrec@bu.edu. You may use physical signatures, Adobe Forms, Docusign, or another method.
6. Taking note of [deadlines](#), submit your thesis to the [Electronic Theses & Dissertation \(ETD\) site](#). Do not insert your signed signature page into the final version — submit with a blank signature page. ETD submission requires a \$25 processing fee. You may separately order hard-bound copies; the Department will reimburse the cost of two copies (one for you, one for the archive in CAS 132), but does not reimburse the ETD processing fee. Submit your copy receipt to the Administrative Coordinator. After you submit, a Mugar Library reviewer may request formatting changes; you'll receive notice once approved.

Outcomes

- Unconditional Pass — no edits or changes required; you may submit the thesis.
- Conditional High Pass — minor edits/changes required, but they do not need advisor or committee review before submission.
- Conditional Pass — substantive edits/changes required, and they do need advisor review before submission.

- Conditional Low Pass — substantive edits/changes required, and they need the entire committee's review before submission.
- Fail — the project's goals were not successfully executed. Next steps (additional research, editing, a second defense) are discussed with the committee on the day of the defense or within one week.

[Click here for BU's Guide for Writers of Theses & Dissertations.](#)

Room & Van Scheduling

Rooms

The Department has several conference rooms and classroom spaces available. The most frequently requested are CAS 130F, CAS 132, STO 141C, STO 453, and STO 465. Contact Administrative Coordinator Fred George (fgeorge@bu.edu) to schedule a space or reserve the van.

Van

This applies to all undergraduate and graduate students, including teaching fellows and assistants — no exceptions, even for experienced drivers. Plan ahead. To request driving privileges:

- Submit proof of a valid driver's license to Fred George (fgeorge@bu.edu).
- Request online training from Fred; you'll receive an email with a link.
- Complete the training's two quizzes, download your certificate PDF, and email it to Fred.
- [Comply with university guidelines.](#)

Students with a valid commercial driver's license are not required to complete additional training but must still show proof of license.

Grievance Procedures

To give students a formal avenue for raising concerns, the Department offers the process below to further equity, parity, and security across all graduate programs. This is one of several processes already established by BU; where another process already applies — including [Title IX](#), the [Academic and Professional Conduct Code](#), or [mandatory reporting](#) — that process takes precedence. You may also consult the [Associate Dean for Student Academic Life](#), the [Office of the Ombuds](#), the [Dean of Students](#), deans' offices, or [other BU resources](#).

You may also bypass these Department-level procedures to pursue a complaint at a higher level, depending on the nature of the grievance: [Grievance and Complaint Procedures](#).

When possible, students are encouraged to first try resolving a difficulty through discussion with the other party. You may consult the Department Chair, Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), or other faculty for advice on having that conversation, or to help facilitate it — but attempting discussion first is never a prerequisite. You can file a grievance with or without a request for departmental action.

With Departmental Action

Send a written complaint to the Department Chair (or the DGS, if the Chair is involved). Include a clear statement of the grievance, supporting evidence, any efforts already made to address the problem, and a proposed resolution.

The Chair (or DGS) forwards a copy to the respondent and refers the matter to a committee within two weeks. That committee includes the Chair/DGS, the DGS (unless involved), at least two other faculty (possibly from other departments), and at least one E&E graduate student — with an odd number of voting members.

Within three weeks, the committee hears both parties, reviews evidence, and prepares a report with a majority-vote determination or recommendation. (Student committee members do not vote on grievances related to academic records.) Within 30 days of filing, the Chair issues a formal written decision to both parties. You may appeal through the Office of the Dean.

Without Departmental Action

You may instead lodge a complaint confidentially with the Chair or DGS, in writing or in person, and determine next steps together informally.

Regardless of whether you request formal action, BU's FERPA Policy and mandatory reporting requirements still apply. All matters are handled with sensitivity and appropriate privacy.

Contact Amelia Layne, Graduate Program Coordinator (ailayne@bu.edu), with any questions.

Adopted October 2019; revised September 2021.