

# GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

Department of Geological Sciences  
College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics  
California State University Long Beach

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**NOTICE:** This is not an *official* university document. We have tried to provide the most comprehensive and current information on your Graduate Program. For documentation that is complete, up to date, and error free, consult the University Catalog and these web sites:

- [University Catalog: Graduate Degree Information](#)
- [Enrollment Services](#)
- [Thesis and Dissertation Office](#)

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## INTRODUCTION

### Welcome to Graduate School in the Geological Sciences Department at CSULB!

Whether you are just beginning your Masters of Geological Sciences, have ‘advanced to candidacy,’ or are writing up your thesis, this handbook is for you! It is a map containing explanations, suggestions, and regulations for all the stops along the road to graduation. It also provides you with the expectations of the department with respect to your progress. Before you know it, you will be proudly submitting your thesis to the library and being ‘hooded’ by your Thesis Advisor.

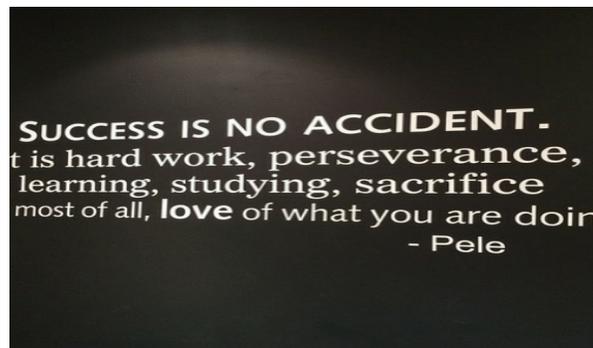
The length of the road will be mainly determined by you. Careful planning, attention to detail, and focus will shorten the road and help keep it relatively smooth. Being aware from the very beginning of possible twists and turns will help to keep you from encountering surprises and roadblocks, and, hopefully, eliminate the need for that extra semester. This handbook only provides general guidelines, and your particular road will be mapped out between you and your thesis advisor. The earlier you do this, the better. And remember what they say about the best laid plans, so be flexible. Your map may change!

### Resources

The Geology Graduate Advisor can help you navigate much of your journey, but many steps are taken outside of the department, and there are decisions that are not made by either the Graduate Advisor or your Thesis Advisor. In addition to this handbook, you will also need the [University Style and Format Guidelines for Master’s Thesis and Project Reports](#) and the [University Catalog](#).

You should also attend a Thesis Workshop, provided for your enjoyment by the Thesis Office, located in the Library. At the workshop you’ll learn about formatting, filing deadlines, and other useful information. Consider attending one of these workshops when you begin the GEOL 698 units. Dates for workshops can be found on the [Thesis and Dissertation Office](#).

The University Style and Format Guidelines for Master’s Thesis and Project Reports is formatted like a thesis and easy to refer to while working. It also tells you interesting things like you ~~can’t~~ cannot use contractions in your thesis, unless “they’re in a quote”. There are rules about tables and figures. It may seem odd to think about this now, when you are just getting started, but better to know at the beginning than to have to re-do things at the end.



Keep going.

## GRADUATE PROCESS MILESTONES

Your graduate progress can be divided into three phases. These phases and their appropriate milestones are summarized below.

### Phase 1: Pre-Advancement

Students in their first year of graduate school are working toward “Advancement to Candidacy.” Students can only advance after they have completed 6 units within the program. The Advancement consists of two parts: the Degree Program (a list of pre-determined classes) and the Advancement Proposal (a brief description of your research project). Students are expected to Advance by the end of their first Spring Semester.

#### Milestones:

- ✓ Completion of Geol 500
- ✓ Formation of Thesis Committee
- ✓ Completion of written Advancement Proposal
- ✓ Presenting the Advancement Proposal to Committee

### Phase 2: Post-Advancement

After successfully Advancing to Candidacy, students will be busy taking the courses in their Degree Program, collecting and analyzing their thesis data, and writing their thesis. This is a period of intense work—not a weekend job. A solid research timeline will be necessary to schedule fieldwork and instrumentation time.

#### Milestones:

- ✓ Completion of the Degree Program
- ✓ Completion of Data Collection
- ✓ Analysis of Data and Writing the Draft

### Phase 3: Thesis Submission

Once a draft of the thesis has been written, students start the process of perfecting the Thesis and preparing it for publication. Yes—theses are published and thus must conform to the highest standards. The Thesis Advisor will work with the student to improve the draft and the thesis is not complete until all committee members are satisfied that it meets the standards of our department.

#### Milestones:

- ✓ Refinement of the Thesis Draft & Formatting the Thesis to University Standards
- ✓ Review of Thesis by committee members
- ✓ Thesis Check (Thesis Office in the Library)
- ✓ Oral Presentation

## WHO DOES WHAT

Your degree progress will be facilitated by a number of people: some you will know, some you will not. Keep in mind that you are a student of the Graduate School of the University. The Graduate School can (and does) dictate many of the rules by which you and the department must abide. Here is a brief list of who's who:

### Thesis Advisor

This is the professor with whom you have come to work. She/he will be guiding your research, assisting you in course selection, helping you find funds, encouraging you to attend meetings, and ultimately signing off on your Master's Thesis.

### Graduate Advisor

*Current Advisor: Dr. Lora Stevens*

This professor is in charge of the Graduate Program for the Department. She is responsible for the logistics, not research. She signs and files all forms, forwards all petitions (see GS 700), and can serve as an intermediary with your Thesis Advisor should the need arise. She is not responsible for financial aid or any of your research duties.

### Director of Graduate Students (CNSM)

*Current Director: Dr. Babette Benken*

This professor oversees the Graduate Program for the entire College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. It is likely you will never meet her, but in essence she is the Graduate Advisor's supervisor. She signs off on all forms and is responsible for granting petitions for GS 700. She can intercede on behalf of the department and student should the need arise.

### Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies

*Current Vice Provost: Dr. Jody Cormack*

The buck stops here. The Vice Provost is responsible for the entire Graduate Program for CSULB. She/he has the final say in matters related to your time here. In essence she is the Associate Dean for Graduate Students' supervisor.

### Geology Department Chair

*Current Chair: Dr. Rick Behl*

This professor has signatory powers and can step in if the Graduate Advisor and/or Thesis Advisor is not available to sign. Students interested in being TAs should let the Chair know as it is his responsibility to assign sections.

## PHASE 1: PRE-ADVANCEMENT

### Planning Your Course of Study

It is important for you to take some time to think about your whole Master's plan of study at the beginning of your degree process. You need to get a feel for the "big picture" – layout a rough course schedule and research timeline for yourself. These will help both you and your Thesis Advisor plan for your needs.

To aid you in this task, the Geology Department teaches GEOL 500: Introductory Graduate Seminar. This course provides specific information about the Graduate Program in Geology and helps graduate students begin building their Advancement to Candidacy proposal.

In addition to working on your advancement proposal, students preparing to advance must fill out a Degree Program (see Appendix A for an example program). This form lists the courses you intend to take to fulfill your Master's program (the occasional yoga class would not be included). The degree program will be filled out with the help and advice of your Thesis Advisor.

The Department of Geology tries to maintain a relatively predictable rotation of graduate-level courses to make planning easier. Occasionally we may have a unique course offered or will have to cancel a course due to an emergency. We will do our best to maintain a broad course offering that suits everyone's needs. Students cannot be required to take classes later if these courses are not on their degree program.

GEOL 695: Directed Reading and GEOL 697: Directed Research provide ways to focus your learning on specific topics. In addition, you are free to take graduate level courses in other departments. Students in certain sub-disciplines often take graduate courses in Geography and Civil Engineering—so look around. You might find something interesting and useful. Your degree program must be approved by all members of your committee, so it is a good idea to consult with them first before asking them to sign.

### Rules Governing the Degree Program

Although you have a great deal of latitude with your degree program, there are some University/State Rules and Guidelines. Both are listed below with hard and fast rules in bold. We have no flexibility on these—so keep them in mind.

- A minimum of 30 units must be taken. (More units than 30 can be taken, but reasonable limits are set to around 36-40 maximum. Be aware that the number of units you take impacts the type of financial aid you can receive.)
- The 30 units include 6 units of GEOL 698 (Thesis Credits)
- 70% of the units (ex. 21/30) must be 500-600 level courses
- 30% of the units may be 300, 400 (400/500 cross-listed courses are part of the 30%)
- Up to four units of 695 may be included in the program
- Up to three units of 697 may be included in the program
- Up to 9 units can be transferred from another university or from CCPE (College of Continuing and Professional Education)
- Students graduating from a University in a country where English is not the native language must meet the CSULB Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR). (This can be met by either passing the Writing Proficiency Exam or receiving a passing grade in English 301b.)

### Filling Out Your Degree Program

There is more to planning your course of study than simply selecting courses. You want to plan your schedule so that you are as close to completion of your thesis as possible by the time you have completed the coursework in your program. (Note: It is departmental policy that data collection and a rough draft must be completed by the end of GEOL 698.)

Financial aid often has unit limitations. Many students take a 1 unit kinesiology class (e.g. yoga, bowling, archery, etc.) to keep themselves at the appropriate unit level. These do not go on your Degree Program form. See [Financial Aid: Newly Admitted and Current Graduate Students](#).

To fill out your degree program correctly and avoid unnecessary hassles, follow these easy steps:

1. Request an electronic copy of the degree program from the Graduate Advisor.
2. Fill it in electronically with your Thesis Advisor.
3. Send it back (electronically) to the Graduate Advisor for checking. 90% of all degree programs have a mistake. Catching mistakes *before* the signatures saves everyone time and aggravation. If the GA catches mistakes *after* the signatures, then the student will have to do it all over again.
4. Once the Graduate Advisor “oks” the degree program, she will send it back you electronically. Print it out and take it to your advancement presentation. You will need the signatures of the thesis advisor, grad advisor and dept chair.
5. Once signed, place it in the Graduate Advisor’s box in the main office. She will route it to all the necessary people. Your program is filed with the University.
6. You should receive an email indicating acceptance of your degree program by the university within 4 weeks. Please keep this notification on file.



### Advancement Proposal

While the University is concerned with your Degree Program, the Department is concerned with your Advancement Proposal. The Advancement Proposal is a brief (6-10 page) document outlining your research question, your plan to answer that question (including methods and time table), and the background necessary to put your question and findings into a larger context.

Work on the Advancement Proposal begins the moment you arrive in the Fall. You and your Thesis Advisor should discuss possible projects and decide which is most appropriate for you within the first month. Later in

the semester, you will begin to assemble key pieces of the proposal during GEOL 500. It is expected that you will be thinking about your project the entire Fall semester and refining the question(s) you want to answer.

A draft of your proposal should be completed by the end of winter break (e.g. the end of January) and sent to your Thesis Advisor. **A finalized draft should be completed no later than March 15 and sent to all committee members.** Committee members should be given a minimum of 3 weeks to read the proposal.

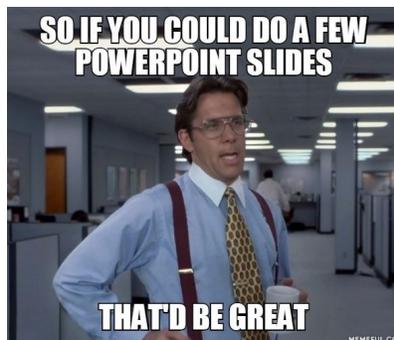
You should schedule an Advancement presentation before the end of April. Presentations during the last week of classes and during Finals Week are VERY strongly discouraged. Professors are extremely busy at this time. **Advancements cannot be done in summer** (University Rule).

The expectations of what is included in an Advancement Proposal vary from professor to professor—so check with your Thesis Advisor. Some advisors want preliminary data. All will want a thorough literature review and time table.

### What an Advancement is Not

Some students mistake their Advancement Proposal and Presentation as a defense, which makes them unnecessarily anxious about the process. This is not correct. You are expected to be able to justify what you are doing and why—but the Advancement is really about getting feedback from experts who can guide you to the best thesis, executed in the most efficient manner, possible. There will be discussions at your Advancement and (most likely) several changes. But perfection is not the objective.

Even so, come to your Advancement prepared. You won't be kicked out of the program for a weak Advancement—but you are expected to be on your way to mastery of your problem. It looks really good and is enormously satisfying to be able to answer questions posed by your committee.



## PHASE 2: POST-ADVANCEMENT

Research can be difficult to fit into schedules when you are taking classes and working or TAing classes. Still, exploration and mastery of a specific topic is the goal of your program. In fact, it is the cornerstone. Classes are important—but don't mistake a Master's degree as an extension of your Bachelor's degree. It is something completely different.

Even if it is difficult to find time for your research, you are expected to make timely progress. Timely progress will likely include late nights, weekends and intensive summer work. In fact, Fridays and summers are key. Even though the beach may be calling, this is your most unfettered time (especially if you need to get things done in the field). Summer isn't a vacation during a Masters—its prime working time. Use it wisely.

You are expected to have all data collection and interpretation done by the end of your last semester of GEOL 698 units. Ideally, you will have a draft prepared by then as well. All data must be uploaded into your Thesis Advisor's folder on the Geology Department's N-drive. Failure to meet either criteria may result in Administrative Academic Probation, which will be discussed later.

Occasionally a student's research hits a snag that is not of their making. Examples include loss of access to a field site, poor weather, instrument failure. It is up to your Thesis Advisor to make reasonable accommodations for you to complete your thesis. You are not expected to sit idly for months waiting for access or a machine to be fixed. If you are concerned about an issue such as this, please notify the Graduate Advisor and she/he will facilitate a compromise.

Sometime students are unfamiliar with what constitutes a reasonable amount of work for a Master's thesis. The best guide is to skim through previous theses (especially more recent ones) that are kept in the main office. Cutting edge techniques may require fewer analyses, whereas more traditional theses that build on vast amounts of literature may require more. This is an important discussion to have with your Thesis Advisor.



## PHASE 3: THESIS COMPLETION, PRESENTATION, AND SUBMISSION

Most of our students need more time after their GEOL 698 units to complete their theses. The University recognizes this need and has set up GS 700 units to give students a chance to finish.

### GS 700 Units

#### What are they?

GS 700 units are place holder units through CCPE (College of Continuing and Professional Education). These are taken only *after* all course work has been completed.

#### Why do I need them?

All students must maintain continuous enrollment in the degree program or be dropped by the University. Students must be either taking courses or GS 700 units for every semester they are in the program. Students do not need to be enrolled in courses or GS 700 during summer and winter breaks unless they plan to submit their thesis during those times. If a student submits their thesis during summer or winter, they *must be enrolled* in GS 700 at that time.

#### How do they work?

You may enroll in two semesters of GS 700 units online through CCPE with Department consent. The cost is a flat fee of around \$375 (subject to change). Note that the two semesters include summer and winter breaks if you plan to finish during those times.

#### How many do I get?

You can enroll with Department consent the first two times online at MyCSULB. After the 2nd time, Enrollment Services will put an automatic hold on your account, preventing you from registering, and the system will notify you to meet with your advisor. If you need additional semesters of GS 700 after the first two, you must write a petition outlining why you need/deserve additional time to finish your degree.

The petition must be approved by your Thesis Advisor and the Graduate Advisor, after which it is forwarded to the Director of Graduate Studies, College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. This must be done for every additional semester needed. The Director has the authority to deny the request for additional GS 700. This is rare and more likely the student is placed on Administrative Academic Probation.

#### Restrictions

The GS 700 forms are designed to give a student a little extra time to write their thesis. The Geology Graduate Advisor will **NOT** petition for additional GS 700 unless there is a viable draft by the end of the first two semesters of GS 700. The only exception is a major life emergency such as birth, major illness, or a death in the family. Weddings, new jobs, or moves are not considered emergencies.

### Thesis Submission

Your thesis is ready for submission to the library only after your entire committee signs off on the signature page (Appendix B). Some students find it frustrating that their Thesis Advisor requires multiple iterations of edits. This is normal. Ask your Thesis Advisor how many rounds of changes and edits they did on their last paper or research proposal. You will find that even professors must do the time-consuming work of perfecting language and figures. Remember that a Master's thesis isn't a research paper—it is something much more.

All theses should be “A” quality and that can mean 5, 6, even 10 rounds of edits. Also keep in mind that each member of your committee should be given a **minimum of 3 weeks** to read your thesis. This is 3 weeks AFTER your Thesis Advisor gives the final stamp of approval. So, please don’t expect to hand everyone a first draft of your thesis one week before the library deadline. That is not enough time and you will not make the deadline.

### **Submission Process**

Your thesis must be approved by the University Thesis Office. The Thesis Office has established a window of time to receive theses each semester. This deadline is early in the semester. Once received, a thesis will be reviewed within a 4-week window. If there are significant errors found upon review, the thesis will be returned to you, and you will be asked to correct the error(s) identified (usually within one week). When the thesis is reviewed for a second time, if errors still persist, you will need to work on the thesis and resubmit within the defined window of time the following semester.

All theses are now submitted electronically. However, the signature page, must be brought to the thesis office separately in hard copy.

Please note filing your thesis with the library Thesis Office is separate from filing to graduate. You must file to graduate the semester before you intend to graduate. See [Graduation Checklist for Master’s Students](#).

### **Thesis Assistance**

Prior to the window of times indicated by the [Thesis and Dissertation Office](#), the personnel are happy to work with students on a drop-in basis or by appointment to answer questions about style and formatting of their theses. They also have handouts on questions not addressed by the Thesis Handbook. Please visit the Thesis and Dissertation Office in the library or their website for updates, deadlines, and changes to policy.

### **Presentation**

The final step in completing your Master’s degree is 20-30 minute oral presentation that is open to the public, including friends and family come. This is an opportunity to show off all that you have accomplished. Talk to your Thesis Advisor about the most appropriate dates.

Note that this is not a defense. Some people may ask probing questions, but no one is trying to derail your presentation. The best research raises more questions than it answers.

### **Filing to Graduate**

You must [file to graduate](#), which is done months in advance. If you do not finish during the semester in which you applied to graduate, you must refile. Please see the University Catalog for rules and help in Applying for Graduation.

## DEPARTMENT POLICIES

The Department of Geological Sciences has established a set of policies that are in accordance with College and University policies and to which all graduate students in our program will be held accountable.

1. Students admitted conditionally (i.e., students with course deficiencies or needing to take the GVAR) must make up those deficiencies within the 1st year.
2. Students formally registered with [Disabled Student Services](#) (DSS) must notify the Graduate Advisor and their Thesis Advisor within one month of registration. We encourage students who can benefit from the services provided by DSS to register with DSS as soon as possible.
3. Students are expected to Advance to Candidacy *before the end of their second semester*. Students **must** Advance to Candidacy *prior to* the end of their third semester. Failure to do so will result in the student being placed on Administrative Probation for one semester during which time the student will Advance. Failure to advance by the end of the 4th semester will result in termination from the Graduate Program.

Note: Students may not advance during summer months according to University policy. Please plan accordingly.

4. Students are expected to complete all data collection and have a rough draft of their thesis by the end of their GEOL 698 units. Students **must** complete data collection before being allowed to register for GS 700. Failure to do so will result in the student being placed on Administrative Probation for one semester during which time the data collection will be completed.
5. Students needing more than 2 semesters of GS 700 must write a formal petition justifying the need for additional time. This petition must be approved by the Thesis Advisor and Graduate Advisor.

Note: Approval of additional GS 700s is not guaranteed.

6. Students **must** have a complete draft of their thesis by the end of their 5th year, even in situations where the student took a Leave of Absence. Students beginning their 6th year without a complete thesis draft will be automatically placed on Administrative Probation for failure to progress. The student will remain on Administrative Probation until the thesis is completed. If the Thesis Advisor determines that inadequate progress has been made on the thesis in any given semester **while on Probation**, then the Graduate Advisor will terminate the student from the program.
7. All students will upload raw data files and maps to their Thesis Advisor's folder on the University OneDrive. This can be done at the time of submission to the thesis to the library.
8. All students will present their thesis project orally to any member of the Department wishing to attend. This is NOT a defense.

## ODDS AND ENDS

### Academic and Administrative Academic Probation

All graduate students at CSULB are required to maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. If a student's GPA drops below 3.0, the University will place that student on **Academic Probation**. The student will have one year to bring their GPA above 3.0.

Graduate students may also be placed on **Administrative Academic Probation** by the Graduate Advisor for:

1. repeated failure to progress toward the stated degree objective
2. lack of communication with their advisor (e.g. no updates for 3 or more months and/or failure to return emails), or
3. failure to comply, after due notice, with an academic requirement or regulation which is routine for all students or a defined group of students

The Graduate Advisor is required to notify the student, the Thesis Advisor and the Associate Dean of Graduate Students, immediately in writing and provide, with guidance from the Thesis Advisor, a schedule to help the student make appropriate progress. If the student continues to make poor progress, the Graduate Advisor will petition the Director of Graduate Students CNSM to terminate the student from the program.

For further details on Probation, please see [University Catalog: Academic Information and Regulations](#).

### The 7-Year Myth

According to the [Graduation Checklist for Master's Students](#), graduate students have seven years to complete their Master's degree. But this isn't 100% correct. The "fine print" indicates that what it really means is that graduate course work is good (meaning relevant and up to date) for seven years after matriculation.

#### So how much time do I really have?

Barring personal emergencies and leaves of absence, a student has until all of the courses, including Geol 698, in their degree program are completed. This is usually 2-3 years for full time students and 3-4 years for part time students.

The Department recognizes that there are many cases of extenuating circumstances, such as equipment failure, delays in receiving data from outside laboratories, access to field areas, etc. that may put a student behind schedule. That is why a student is allowed 2 semesters of GS 700 after completion of their degree program to give them time to finish writing their thesis. All students, including part time students/full time workers, should have their theses completed at the end of five years. However, the target for completion is three years.

#### So why does it say I have 7 years?

Life happens. The seven years is designed to protect students who have unusual mitigating circumstances (pregnancy, illness, financial hardship). It is the maximum time allowed for students to complete their degrees, taking into consideration leaves of absence due to illness or family emergencies and catastrophic problems with data collection.

## RESOURCES

There are a number of resources at your disposal to help you along the way.

### Graduate Studies Resource Center

The [Graduate Studies Resource Center \(GSRC\)](#) is located on the 5th floor of the University Library. It provides a number of very useful services including advising and writing assistance. It holds workshops on a diverse set of subjects from writing, job application, and thesis formatting. This is a tremendous resource. You are highly encouraged to avail yourself of it. The Graduate Advisor will post a list of workshops near the main office.

### Counseling and Psychological Services

Juggling work, a personal life, and the demands of graduate school can be exhausting and take a toll on our well-being and state-of-mind. [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) provides short-term counseling for individuals, group counseling, career development counseling, referral services, psychoeducational workshops, and crisis intervention. They are well-respected among students and faculty. If you find yourself struggling to keep your head above water, please contact them.

- Phone: 562.985.4001

### Disabled Student Services

Students are encouraged to take advantage of [Disabled Student Services \(DSS\)](#) if appropriate. The staff is very helpful and can be contacted below:

- E-mail: [dss@csulb.edu](mailto:dss@csulb.edu)

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Thesis Assistance**

## **APPENDIX B**

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE,  
HAVE APPROVED THIS THESIS

**THE TITLE OF YOUR MANUSCRIPT USES INVERTED PYRAMID FORMAT  
AND BOLD FONT: USE TITLE AND SUBTITLE**

By

Firstname M. Lastname

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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John D. Smith, Ph.D. (Chair) Geology

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Jack D. Smith, Ph.D. Geology

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Jill D. Smith, M.A. Director, Long Beach USD

ACCEPTED AND APPROVED ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSITY

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V. I. P. Smith, Ph.D.  
Head Honcho, Appropriate Department, College or School [names listed online]

California State University Long Beach