

Your Culminating Experience in Geography

These guidelines for the Culminating Experience in Geography at SFSU are designed to provide an overview of the process and expectations for the final step in the completion of your Masters degree.

1. **The Culminating Experience Committee:** The Culminating Experience committee (the committee) is composed of at least two tenured/tenure-track Geography faculty. Additional faculty or experts may be included at the candidate's or committee's request with the approval of the committee and Department Chair. At an early stage, a meeting should be held with all members of the committee to lay out the specific expectations and ground rules for the successful completion of your culminating experience.
2. **Proposal Development:** Most faculty want to approve a written proposal (presenting, at minimum, the proposed working title, topic, method, outline, timeline) before signing a Proposal for Culminating Experience. Check with your committee to learn what they expect in the way of a proposal.

Soon after you submit the Proposal for Culminating Experience, you will present your research ideas to the department in the Thesis Proposal Presentation program (see details on department website). As part of the proposal development process, the student and committee members should meet to discuss the process, rules, protocols and timeline under which the committee will operate.

Geography theses/research papers often require mapping, fieldwork and spatial and/or statistical analysis. Masters candidates are expected to obtain the necessary background to accomplish these steps. Your committee can help direct you to courses or other resources that support your preparation; do not expect them to tutor you in material you could obtain by enrolling in the appropriate course(s).

3. **Thesis/research paper production:** Most theses/research papers go through an outline, a first draft and at least two rewrites. Major or minor revisions may be required at any stage, although the faculty make every effort to spot major structural problems early on. Your committee's goal is to help you prepare a high-quality thesis or research paper. Take their suggestions in this spirit, and your "culminating experience" should be productive and positive.

Faculty generally read theses/research papers as soon as they have an opportunity. Ask how many other obligations are ahead of your paper in queue. It is reasonable to expect all committee members to read your drafts within two to four weeks, special circumstances excepted. Note: The better your writing, the faster your committee is likely to read your draft. It's generally a good idea to have someone else read your first draft and to edit in accordance with their suggestions before you submit it to your committee.

4. **Defense/Oral exam** Your Final Draft needs to be to your committee 3-4 weeks before the Graduate Division's posted deadline for the semester in which you intend to graduate. "Final Draft" means that all committee members have already had an opportunity to review the full document, complete with maps and tables. Some advisors have earlier deadlines; check with yours. One copy of your final draft must be in the department office for a full week before your scheduled defense/orals.

Your Defense cannot be scheduled until your committee chair and all committee members agree that your thesis or research project is complete except for minor editorial changes. The date and time of the defense will be set to accommodate the scheduling needs of all committee members. Please understand that there can be many competing demands on faculty time near the end of a semester.

5. **Submission:** After your defense, your committee members need to sign your thesis/project and the Report of Completion form. You will need to submit originals of your title page, signature page and Abstract to the Grad Division along with a Thesis Receipt from Rapid Copy. Be sure to submit a Make-Up of Incomplete form to the Registrar as well, if you registered for Geog 895 or Geog 898 in a previous semester.

Be sure to designate one bound copy of your thesis/research paper for the department, as well as a copy for the Library, and a copy (or copies) for yourself, loved ones, etc. Ask your committee members whether they would also like copies, and if so, in what format (bound, unbound, digital.)