

Proposed Program Change--Graduate Program in Environmental Science and Policy

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Until now, all Master of Science graduate students in the Environmental Science and Policy Program have been asked to complete a thesis as part of the 36 credits required for graduation from the program. In many cases, the thesis requirement has extended the student's time in the program to three years or longer. For students planning to go on for a Ph.D. in a field related to Environmental Science and Policy, the thesis requirement has been beneficial, but after considerable thought and deliberation, the ESP&G Department has concluded that many of our students-especially those with no plans to pursue a Ph.D.-would benefit from the establishment of a non-thesis track option.

The proposed non-thesis track would deviate from the current thesis-track in only one respect. Students in the non-thesis track would take at least 33 hours of course or independent study work prior to registering for a 3-credit hours of EVR 6908 (Independent Study) which would complete their degree requirements. Currently, all Environmental Science and Policy students take a minimum of 30 credits of course or independent study work before registering for a minimum of 6 thesis hours. Instead of requiring students to register for at least 6 thesis credit hours and to complete a multi-chapter thesis, the non-thesis track option would require students to research and write an article-length (25-30 pages) essay based on primary research. The student would work under the direction of a faculty mentor, who would guide the research and writing of an essay that, ideally, would be appropriate for submission to a professional journal.

The Environmental Science and Policy Graduate Program is confident that the non-thesis option will provide flexibility without any diminishment of intellectual rigor. On the contrary, we feel that it will improve the program by: (1) facilitating timely completion of the program; (2) increasing the number of credit-hours that our students spend in regularly-scheduled courses, an important consideration in a multi-disciplinary program that asks students to confront a broad range of disciplinary perspectives; and (3) focusing attention on the quality, rather than the quantity, of the capstone experience, allowing us to accommodate the needs of our diverse student population by tailoring the development of professional research and writing skills to individual circumstances and career goals. With the decline of graduate assistant funding, a large number of our students must now work at least part-time (and many work full-time); some of these students find it all but impossible to carve out the extended concentrated time required to complete a thesis. We feel that for a significant number of our students the non-thesis option will prove to be more compatible with the realities of balancing graduate work with occupational and family commitments. However, we will continue to recommend the traditional thesis track to all students planning to continue their education at the Ph.D. level.

Old USF St. Petersburg Graduate Catalog Copy:

Environmental Science and Policy (St. Petersburg Campus)-Total minimum required hours: (36)

DEGREE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS: Requires 30 hours of graduate coursework, 6 hours of thesis research, completion of the comprehensive examination, and thesis defense.

New USF St. Petersburg Graduate Catalog Copy:

Environmental Science and Policy (St. Petersburg Campus)-Total minimum required hours: (36)

DEGREE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS:

Requires 30 credit hours of coursework, plus 6 additional credit hours of thesis research, successful completion of the comprehensive examination, and defense of an acceptable thesis (Option I), or

Requires 33 credit hours of coursework, plus at least 3 additional credit hours of EVR 6908 (Independent Study) and an acceptable journal article manuscript--and successful completion of a comprehensive exam (Option II)

Option I (Thesis Track):

30 hours of coursework; at least 24 hours must be at the 5000 or 6000 level. Six credit hours may be at the 4000 level, but only if approved by the student's major professor or the ESP program's Graduate Coordinator. After completion of core classes, students must pass a comprehensive exam. After the completion of 9 credit hours of coursework, each student will constitute a thesis committee and begin the development of a thesis topic; after completing 18 credit hours, students will write and orally defend their thesis research proposal at a meeting of their committee. Each student will then write and orally defend in public their thesis. Students are required to enroll for at least 6 credit hours of thesis.

Option II (Non-Thesis Track):

33 hours of coursework; at least 27 hours must be at the 5000 or 6000 level. Six hours may be at the 4000 level. Each student will register for EVR 6908 (3 credits), select a research topic, choose a faculty mentor, and write a 25-30 page essay based on primary research. The essay should be appropriate for submission to a professional journal.