Marine Affairs Graduate Handbook

Who is Who in Marine Affairs:
The Department of Marine Affairs is part of the College of the Environment and Life Sciences. The Dept. Chair (Prof. Tracey Dalton) oversees the program and Benjamin Morris manages general program administration. MAF has faculty from numerous disciplines who teach courses, advise students, and conduct research in areas related to marine affairs. MAF’s administrative and faculty offices are located on the 2nd floor of the Coastal Institute Building on the Kingston Campus.

For a current list of faculty and staff, see: http://web.uri.edu/maf/faculty-staff/

Advising:
Initially, Prof. Austin Becker, the Director of the Graduate Programs, will advise you upon your arrival at URI and serve as your academic adviser to help you plan your academic program. As soon as possible, but no later than the start of your second semester, you will select a major professor to guide your dissertation, thesis, or major paper. The determination of who will serve as your major professor is made on the basis of the expertise of the individual faculty member in relation to the thesis or major paper subject. Once the decision of major professor is made, that individual then also becomes your academic adviser. You will have an opportunity to meet the entire MAF faculty at the department’s orientation program at the beginning of the fall semester. There, you will also meet your fellow students, and learn how the program operates and what is expected of you.

Program of Study:
Each student must complete a program of study, a copy of which is available online at http://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/forms/. The program of study provides a listing of the courses, which the student will take to complete his or her program. That list contains both the required courses and the elective courses. When it comes time to certify the student for receipt of degree, the Graduate School will determine if the contracted and approved program of study has been fulfilled. Failure to provide a program of study or failure to complete the work indicated on that program of study will prevent the student from graduating. The program of study is prepared by the student with his or her major professor. It is signed by the student, by his or her major professor, by the appropriate program coordinator in the Department of Marine Affairs, and by the Dean of the Graduate School. Students are expected to complete this form by the beginning of the second semester in the program. It is, indeed, possible to make changes in the program of study but this must be done with the approval of the major professor, department chair, and Dean of the Graduate School on the appropriate form.

A summary of milestones for the various graduate programs can be found at http://web.uri.edu/maf/gradmilestones/

Course Load:
The typical course load for a graduate student during the fall and spring semesters ranges from 9 to 15 hours and should take into consideration needs for employment, research time, and outside commitments. It should be noted, too, that for an MMA student to graduate within one year he or
she must take 15 credits per semester. The successful completion of the MAMA degree within two years requires the student to complete a minimum of 45 credits in that period. If you are on an assistantship, you should consult with your adviser to determine a realistic course schedule given your other responsibilities. Note that students receiving an assistantship must be registered for a minimum of 6 credits for that semester.

**Dissertations, Theses, and Major Papers:**
As part of their graduate studies, all students prepare either a dissertation, thesis or a major paper. These pieces of work require substantial efforts by the student in terms of identifying and scoping out an appropriate study and then executing it. The dissertation, thesis, or major paper provides the student the opportunity to develop detailed expertise in some selected area and provides a tangible example of the student’s knowledge, understanding, writing, research, and professional capabilities. They represent the culmination of work toward the degree, allowing students to incorporate and build upon the expertise and insights, which they have gained in the Marine Affairs Program. Students in the MAMA and PhD programs take MAF 502, Research Methods, in the spring of their first year and in that course work to develop a thesis or major paper proposal.

The **dissertation** is a requirement for the PhD program. The dissertation involves a major advisor and dissertation committee. It requires a proposal, which is presented to the committee during the Comprehensive Exam. The dissertation is also defended in a formal “defense” presentation that is open to the public.

The **thesis** is a requirement for the thesis-track MAMA degree. Theses involve not only a major professor but also a thesis committee of typically two other professors, one of whom is drawn from outside of the Department of Marine Affairs. The composition of this committee is a matter for discussion between the student and his major professor, followed by approval of the Department Chair and the Dean of the Graduate School. When the thesis is deemed ready for defense, the student meets with his or her thesis committee and a defense chair selected from outside the department to “defend” the thesis. The defense is open to graduate students as observers and graduate students are encouraged to attend. When a defense is scheduled a notice of time, place, and subject will be posted on the graduate bulletin board outside the Marine Affairs Library. Thesis-track MAMA students receive six credits for the thesis with credit being given in the context of MAF 599, Master’s Thesis Research.

The **major paper** is required of students in the MMA program and those in the major-paper track of the MAMA. The major paper does not involve a thesis committee but the student works with a major professor. The major paper is not subject to a defense as is the thesis. Meaningful interaction between the student and his or her major professor is an essential part of the process leading toward completion of a thesis or major paper. MMA and major-paper track MAMA students receive three credits for their major paper through successful completion of MAF 589, Master’s Project Research.

The Graduate School has developed a brochure for the dissertation and thesis, a copy of which is available at the Graduate School at [http://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/thesis-dissertation/](http://web.uri.edu/graduate-school/thesis-dissertation/). It should serve as a guide in your efforts though MAMA students should take note of the
differences between a major paper and a thesis, which are addressed below. A list of past theses and major papers completed in this department is available in the MAF library. Timely and periodic consultation is very important, as is the need to provide the major professor sufficient and realistic “turn around” time for comments on initial work drafts. Be aware that, frequently, faculty are not available during the summer months. It is imperative that in planning for completion of the thesis or major paper the student take into account the time constraints and multiplicity of professional responsibilities of faculty; it is not reasonable to expect faculty to drop all other responsibilities to provide an immediate reading and commentary of your work, particularly toward the end of semesters as graduation deadlines approach. Note, too, that the Graduate School requires that the defense text must be submitted to the Graduate School a minimum of 20 days in advance of the defense date.

**Qualifying Exams:**
PhD students take a written Qualifying Exam after they have completed the four core MAF courses.

**Comprehensive Exams:**
For students in the major-paper track MAMA program and those in the joint MMA/JD. program, a written comprehensive examination will be administered toward the end of the student’s last semester. The exam will focus on the material in the required courses and the particular area of emphasis in the student’s program. The PhD Comprehensive Exam focuses on the student’s dissertation proposal content, major interest areas, and research methods. It consists of a written exam, followed by an oral exam. Once the Comprehensive Exam has been passed, PhD students “advance to candidacy” status.

**Funding:**
Half-time and full-time graduate assistantships are available on a competitive basis for students working toward the master’s degree in this department. Graduate assistants work with faculty members for 10 to 20 hours a week in return for half or full tuition remission plus a stipend. Application for these positions is made to Prof. Becker, Graduate Program Director, and should include a letter expressing interest in an assistantship. The financial aid form is contained in the Graduate School catalog. For PhD students, it is expected that after an initial funding period (generally two-to-three years), with the conclusion of course work, students will be able to generate needed funding or be involved in research projects conducted by Marine Affairs and associated faculty. Opportunities for external funding can be found on our website at: [http://web.uri.edu/maf/financial-resources/](http://web.uri.edu/maf/financial-resources/)

**Internships:**
Internships can provide a significant complement to your academic program, allowing you to obtain professional work experience once you have completed basic course work in the relevant topic area. Internships may be particularly important for students in the MA program who have not yet worked in the field. Students should also take note of special programs for which they may be qualified. In particular, you should be aware of the very competitive, national Dean John Knauss Sea Grant Fellowship Program, which allow graduate students to work in Washington, D.C. with a relevant executive agency or congressional committee for a one-
year period. Since the inception of this program, one or two graduate students in this department have been the recipients of a John Knauss Fellowship each year. This paid internship is extremely worthwhile in terms of building a strong record of professional experience, exposing the recipient to how marine policy is made at the national level, and making contacts, which are important in career development. Another program to consider is the Presidential Management Intern Program, the scope of which is not limited to marine affairs areas, but particular positions may have a marine affairs focus. More funding opportunities can be found through the MAF website at: http://web.uri.edu/maf/job-postings/

Directed Study:
Directed Study, MAF 591 or 592, provides a student with the option to earn three credits for a particular study or project that does not fit into the context of some existing course. Registration is possible with the prior consent of a faculty sponsor who is to receive and approve a written project proposal in advance of the semester in which the Directed Study will be taken. You must speak with the faculty sponsor to obtain an override form to participate in directed study.

Nomination for Graduation:
At the beginning of the semester a student expects to graduate, it is the student’s responsibility to contact Prof. Becker to be nominated officially for graduation. Failure to do so may delay graduation for a semester and require the payment of additional continuing registration fees.

References from Faculty:
As much as possible the faculty assist students in securing professional employment by informing them of placement opportunities. Through our extensive alumni and “friend of the program” contacts we try to keep posted on appropriate position openings. Most importantly, we are pleased to provide references but the department has taken the position that references will be given only after the first draft of a major paper or thesis is in the hands of a major professor. We want you to find the position you desire but our first mission is to make sure that you successfully complete the requirements for your degree. Based on our experience this emphasis clearly best serves the long-term interest of the student who will need the graduate degree for career advancement.

Listservs:
The Department maintains a number of listserv for the exchange of information on current developments in the field, professional position and internships, meetings and conferences, and input from faculty, students, and alumni. To join any of the lists, students and alumni may contact Prof. Becker.

RIMAFNET (the Rhode Island marine affairs network) listserv
The list is closed and limited to our students, graduates, and alumni and has proven to be very useful. It should be noted that all items are archived for reference. Graduate students should make sure that they are signed up on this listserv, a matter that will be brought to student attention at the MAF orientation meeting in September.

MAFGRAD listserv
This list is for current graduate students in the Department.
MAF listserv
This list for graduate and undergraduate students, as well as staff and faculty. It is the “department wide” listserv.

The Marine Affairs Computer Lab:
The department has a computer laboratory available for use by its graduate students. There are numerous computers with Ethernet connections and a variety of software to be used for class assignments and research. Food and drinks should not be brought into this room and the laboratory is to be a quiet working space for the many students who will use it.

The Marine Affairs Graduate Student Offices:
The MAF Grad office has a number of cubicle desks for graduate students in the Coastal Institute Building on main (Kingston) campus. It also contains a small library of past MAF students’ dissertations, theses, and major papers. The office has a refrigerator, a microwave, and a coffee pot and is an important home base for students. Collaboration, meetings with undergraduates, and studying occurs here. Each year the graduate representative (one of the current MAF grad students) assigns desks.

Jobs and Careers after Marine Affairs:
Graduates from the Department of Marine Affairs find positions in a wide variety of government agencies, consulting firms, academia, and non-profit agencies. Job placement rates are very high and MAF alumni benefit from a well-established network of graduates who are working in coastal-related jobs in the US and internationally. Some links to current resources for job opportunities can be found at http://web.uri.edu/maf/financial-resources/.

The Coastal Society at URI:
Graduate students in Marine Affairs are encouraged to join URI’s student chapter of the Coastal Society. The Coastal Society is an organization of private sector, academic, and government professionals and students that is dedicated to addressing coastal issues. The URI hosts meetings and guest speakers once every month. One of the great benefits of TCS is access to their monthly job listings in the field. The Department of Marine Affairs pays for grad students’ $20 registration fee. MAF students officer roles, including President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Social Chair, Web Master, and National Liaison. It is a great network to be a part of a great perk of MAF. You can check out and like the URI Chapter’s Facebook page.

For questions, please contact:
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