Marine Affairs Graduate Student Handbook

About the Marine Affairs Degree Programs

Established in 1969, the Graduate Program in Marine Affairs offers a PhD, a Master of Arts in Marine Affairs (MAMA), a Master of Marine Affairs (MMA), a joint Masters in Landscape Architecture Program with Rhode Island School of Design (MLA/MMA), and a Joint Juris Doctorate Program with Roger Williams University (JD/MMA).

The mission of the Department of Marine Affairs is to advance research on and provide leadership for the management of complex coastal and marine environments through distinction in teaching, research, and outreach. Through degree programs at the Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral levels, students develop the analytical, collaborative, communication, and leadership skills necessary to make theoretical and applied contributions to socially just, ecologically sound, and sustainable human-environment interactions associated with coastal and marine systems. With a diverse set of skills and areas of expertise, department faculty engage in research and practice on a wide range of issues. The department strongly values inclusive engagement with government, business, professional groups, local communities, historically underrepresented groups, resource users and non-governmental organizations.

As a department, our programs focus on governance issues for both coastal and oceanic systems. Curriculum options utilize the wide variety of scientific and environmental expertise found across the University and within our department’s college— the College of the Environment and Life Sciences (CELS). Within CELS, emphasis is placed on multidisciplinary education, which enables our students to grasp the implications, needs, and potential applications of ecosystem-based governance systems.

In the Marine Affairs programs, policy problems are examined at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels. Subjects studied have included management of living and non-living resources in the exclusive economic zone, environmental protection in the coastal zone, the interplay of marine science and public policy in areas such as ocean pollution and fisheries management, developments in international ocean law, and the role of governments and international organizations in Marine Affairs. To date, students have been attracted to the program from all over the United States and from over 35 other countries.

Who's who in MAF
The Department of Marine Affairs is part of the College of the Environment and Life Sciences. The Dept. Chair (Dr. Tracey Dalton) oversees the program and Dr. Austin Becker serves as Director of Graduate Programs. MAF has faculty from numerous disciplines who teach courses, advise students, and conduct research in areas related to marine affairs. For a current list of faculty and staff, see: http://web.uri.edu/maf/faculty-staff/

MAF’s administrative and faculty offices are located on the 2nd floor of the Coastal Institute Building on the Kingston Campus.

**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 project. 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 project 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.

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**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.

You may find a summary of milestones for the various graduate programs at this link.

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 a 30 credit 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. Students receiving an assistantship must be registered for a minimum of 6 credits for that semester.

Dissertations, Theses, and Major projects

As part of their graduate studies, all students prepare either a dissertation, thesis or a major project. 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 project 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 project 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 their 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 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 project** is required of students in the MMA program and those in the major-project track of the MAMA. The major project does not involve a thesis committee but the student works with a major professor. The major project is not subject to a defense, but should include a presentation of results. 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 project.

MMA students receive three credits for their major project through successful completion of MAF 589, Master’s Project Research.

MAMA students opting for the major project would receive six credits and be expected to:

1. Form a committee consisting of a major advisor in MAF, an additional member from MAF, and at least one additional member who is outside of MAF. This person could be non-academic and/or viewed as the “client” for the project
2. Develop a major project proposal (in MAF 502) which includes:
   - Major objectives
   - Milestones
   - Deliverables
   - Criteria for evaluation
3. Have the proposal approved by all members of their committee
4. Present their final project in a public forum with an oral component
5. Submit to the committee a report on the project

**Examples of major projects:**
- Business plan for a seafood operation
- New dataset on coastal land use
- Technical paper
- Documentary
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/. It should serve as a guide in your efforts though MAMA students should take note of the differences between a major project and a thesis which are addressed below. A list of past theses and major projects completed in this department is available in the MAF library. The actual theses and major projects are also available to you for review upon request.

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 project 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.

**STEPS FOR FILLING OUT THE PROPOSAL APPROVAL FORM FOR MAMA THESIS TRACK STUDENTS:**

1. Fill out the first half of the form and get the signatures from your committee. Do not complete below question #7.

2. Upload this half-completed form to your IRBnet application. Also upload your CITI Training certificate (and your advisor’s CITI form as well). The IRB will sign off on your RCR (which confirms your CITI training) and then will sign off on HU subject review (after reviewing your complete IRB application).

3. Once you get those two signatures, you can send the Proposal Approval Form to the Chair or Grad Director for electronic submission. They will cc: you in the email to the Grad School so you can print out the signed form.

4. Bring the printed Proposal Approval Form and three hard copies of your proposal to the Graduate School. (Quinn Hall, Room 204)

**GUIDELINES FOR MASTERS THESIS, MASTERS PROJECT, OR PHD DISSERTATION ORAL DEFENSE**

*At least one week before the defense:* At minimum, the student will announce their defense on the MAFGRAD listserve and hang hard copy announcements in the CIK. The announcement should include: research project title, student name, location, day/time, and short abstract, names of chair and committee members (including department and role on the committee) and photo/image.
**Book a room:** Students are responsible for booking a room for the defense. Rooms should hold at least 20 people.

**Arrange for equipment:** projector or screen, adaptors, cables, remote, laser pointer, etc.

**Day of the defense:**
(1) The defense chair welcomes all to the defense and introduces the committee, the student and research title. Defense chair turns it over to the major advisor who asks the first question: Can you (defending student) give us a brief overview of your research? (~20 minute presentation)

(2) After the student presentation, there is a brief pause for audience members to leave if they would like (before the Committee questions).

(3) Each committee member generally gets 10 minutes to ask questions in the first round. There is another round or two of questions, depending on time. The defense chair moderates this discussion and can ask questions if desired.

(4) Once the committee is done asking questions, the defense chair asks if anyone in the audience has questions.

(5) The audience and the student are asked to leave so the committee can deliberate for 10-15 minutes.

(6) The student is invited back to the room for discussion and to hear the results of the deliberation.

(7) Student is responsible for taking all signed forms over to the Graduate School as required (thesis track only) (204 Quinn Hall).

*Total time of defense—including deliberations—lasts no more than 2 hours per Graduate School policy.*

**Comprehensive Examinations**

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/

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 project 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.

Listserves

The Department maintains a number of listserves 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) listserve

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 which 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.

MAFPHD Listserve

This list is for PhD students and alumni

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The Marine Affairs Computer Laboratory

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. While virus protection is provided on the machines, students are asked to be careful about what they download and to ensure that the disks they use are clean. 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.

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The Marine Affairs Grad 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 projects. 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 MAF

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/](http://web.uri.edu/maf/financial-resources/).

For questions, please contact:

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