



Graduate Student Handbook for Traditional Students

Fall 2025

Graduate Studies Committee

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www.ou.edu/content/coe/cees/grad_programs

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1 CEES GENERAL INFORMATION FOR MASTER'S AND PH.D. STUDENTS

1.1 CEES Mission Statement

Through a community of scholars committed to excellence in research and teaching, the mission of CEES is to provide our students with the technical education and critical thinking skills needed to lead the country in addressing the complex infrastructure and environmental problems facing today's society.

1.2 CEES Faculty – Director, Dr. Randy Kolar, CEC 334

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Graduate Liaison – Keith Strevett, CEC 322A
Graduate Student Program Specialist – Haley Henrickson, CEC 317
CEES Administrative Assistant – TBD, CEC 334
Donald G. Fears Structural Engineering Lab Manager – John Bullock, Fears Lab
AEI Student Chapter Advisor – Jeff Volz, CEC 107
SEI Student Chapter Advisor – Jeff Volz, CEC 107
ASCE Student Chapter Advisor – Shreya Vemuganti, CEC 424
Chi Epsilon Advisor – P. Scott Harvey, CEC 414
ESSA Advisor – Robert Knox, CEC 301A

1.3 Point of Contacts

Haley Henrickson, CEC 317, ceesgradstudies@ou.edu

First point of contact for traditional and online graduate student information
Provides support for enrollment overrides
Provides support to online student success team
Assist with thesis/dissertation defense: abstract announcement, etc.

Carolyn Emery, 405/325-5913, CEC 334, cemory@ou.edu

Schedule resources: vehicles, conference room, LCD projectors, etc.
Vehicle Key check-out

TBD, 405/325-4216, CEC 334

Director's calendar
Payroll and financial approvals
Assist with thesis/dissertation defense: CEES conference room reservations

Shared Business Services sbsc@ou.edu (contact TBD BEFORE contacting SBSC)

Payroll (monthly and hourly)
ACA monthly certificate reporting
Purchasing/Travel

John Bullock, 405/325-1417 (Fears Lab) john.bullock-1@ou.edu

Fears lab manager
Equipment training

For Additional Information Contact:

Graduate College – Hannah James, Graduate Degree Management Specialist
Robertson Hall Room 213
Phone: 405/325-3811; Email: hannah.a.james-1@ou.edu
Graduate College Website: www.ou.edu/gradcollege

1.4 Communication/Email

Email is the official communication method at the University of Oklahoma. Students are notified of important deadlines and degree-related information by CEES and the Graduate College via their OU email. Students are required to use and regularly check their OU email and respond promptly to any requests.

1.5 Degree Checksheets, Forms, Timelines, and Milestones

Students must meet all deadlines set by Cees and the Graduate College. Missing these deadlines can delay graduation or, in serious cases, prevent it entirely. Refer to the links below for related information.

1. Degree checksheets can be found in the OU General Catalog <https://ou-public.courseleaf.com/gallogly-engineering/civil-engineering-environmental-science/#graduatetext>
2. A list of pertinent deadlines each semester (e.g., last day to submit thesis) are included in the OU Academic Calendar <https://www.ou.edu/registrar/academic-records/academic-calendars>
3. Students should familiarize themselves with the general requirements of the Graduate College found in the Graduate College Bulletin <https://www.ou.edu/gradcollege/forms-and-policies/graduate-college-bulletin>
4. Graduate College checklists, timelines, and milestones specific to each degree, e.g., Master's Thesis, Master's Non-Thesis, Coursework only, or Doctoral <https://www.ou.edu/gradcollege/forms-and-policies/steps-to-degree>
5. All Graduate College forms can be downloaded or submitted at <https://www.ou.edu/gradcollege/forms-and-policies/forms>
6. Cees documents, e.g., handbook, templates, can be downloaded from https://www.ou.edu/coe/cees/grad_programs/student_resources

Students are solely responsible for meeting all deadlines. Cees and the Graduate College provide documentation and semester announcements to assist, but it is up to the student to stay informed. If you anticipate difficulty meeting a milestone deadline, notify your faculty advisor and the Cees Graduate Liaison immediately so that possible solutions can be discussed.

1.6 Graduate College Bulletin

The Graduate College Bulletin is published by the University of Oklahoma Graduate College (Norman campus) and authorized by the OU Board of Regents. Graduate students and faculty are responsible for understanding both the general requirements of the Graduate College and the specific requirements of their academic unit.

<https://www.ou.edu/gradcollege/forms-and-policies/graduate-college-bulletin>

1.7 Conditional Admission with Coursework Deficiencies

Students admitted with coursework deficiencies must complete all required courses before starting the graduate program. A Coursework Deficiency Plan (CDP), approved by the Graduate Liaison, is required before enrolling in program courses. A grade of **C or better** is mandatory in all deficiency courses. Failure to meet admission conditions may result in an **Academic Enrollment Stop**. To begin a CDP, request the form from [Cees Graduate Studies](#) and work with your faculty advisor.

1.8 Grades

Graduate students must uphold strong academic performance by understanding grading policies and academic standing requirements.

- **Grade Posting:** Final grades are typically posted on the **Tuesday following Finals Week** for traditional semesters. For full details, refer to the [Office of the Registrar's Grading Policies](#).
- **Academic Standing:** To maintain good standing with the Graduate College, students should aim to earn a **grade of B or better** in all coursework, supporting the required **minimum 3.0 GPA**.

1.9 Incomplete Grades

An Incomplete grade may be granted under specific conditions and must follow established guidelines for resolution.

- An **Incomplete (I)** may be assigned if **at least 70% of coursework is completed** and the student is **not failing** at the time of the request.
- The instructor must specify:
 - Remaining requirements for course completion
 - A **time limit** for completion, not to exceed **one calendar year**
- If no grade change is submitted within one year, the "I" will convert to the **pre-determined permanent grade**.
- After resolution of an Incomplete, students may **re-enroll** in the course if necessary.

All faculty must use the **university-wide [Incomplete Contract Form](#)** when assigning an "I" grade. This form ensures clear documentation and protects both students and instructors. For full details, see the [OU Grading Policy](#).

1.10 Annual and Semester Progress Reviews

Each fall and spring semester, graduate students are reviewed by their faculty advisor to assess progress toward their degree. Results are shared with students, and unsatisfactory reviews are reported to the Graduate College.

Two unsatisfactory evaluations will result in an **Academic Enrollment Stop** and cancellation of future enrollments. If the stop is lifted and a third unsatisfactory review occurs, the student will be **dismissed from the program** and will no longer be able to enroll as a graduate student at OU.

All students must maintain a **minimum 3.0 GPA** in all resident graduate-level coursework.

CEES graduate students must complete an annual spring survey to report research activities, journal publications, and conference participation for the academic year.

1.11 Full-time Enrollment

Students are encouraged to enroll by **December 1** for the Spring semester and **August 1** for the Fall semester. Graduate Assistants (GAs) must be enrolled by **January 5** (Spring)

and **August 5** (Fall) to qualify for the **FICA (Social Security) exemption** on their January and August paychecks.

Without an assistantship, **domestic and international students** must enroll in a minimum of **9 credit hours per semester** for full-time status. There are **no enrollment requirements for summer** unless the student plans to defend during that term.

To receive a **tuition waiver** during the Fall or Spring semester, students must:

- Be enrolled in **at least 5 credit hours**, and
- Hold a **GA appointment of 0.5 FTE (20 hours/week)** for the entire semester.

1.12 Financial Aid and Tuition Waivers

Graduate students in CEES may receive financial aid through Graduate Assistantships (GAs) and tuition waivers covering required credit hours, including any deficiency courses identified at admission. State law prohibits fee waivers.

Courses taken beyond degree requirements are not eligible for tuition waivers unless a valid academic reason is provided and approved through a petition.

Tuition waivers are only granted to students holding a GRA or GTA appointment at 0.5 FTE or higher. For the most current policies on Graduate Assistantships, please refer to the [Graduate College website](#).

GAs include:

- **Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs):** Limited and typically assigned to large undergraduate lab courses.
 - All prospective GTAs, both native and non-native English speakers, must complete the Graduate College's "[New GTA Orientation](#)" before starting duties. Offered each Fall and Spring, it includes online and in-person components.
 - Non-native English speakers must also pass assessments by English Training and Certification Services ([ETCS](#)). Tests are offered before and during each semester—early scheduling is recommended.
- **Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs)**
 - GRA positions are typically assigned by faculty leading funded research projects. Selection is based on application materials or performance in graduate coursework. Most students begin research after completing at least one semester (minimum 5 credit hours).

Tuition waivers are automatically applied within the **first three weeks of classes**. If a student changes enrollment after the waiver is applied, it will be adjusted within **5 business days**. Waivers are part of the student's overall financial aid package, and students are responsible for any remaining tuition not covered.

For questions about tuition waivers the [Graduate Personnel and Finance Coordinator](#).

Important: GAs who withdraw from courses mid-semester will have their appointment terminated. If the withdrawal occurs after the refund deadline (see the Academic Calendar), the student may be responsible for **all tuition and fees retroactively**.

Students without a GA appointment are responsible for all tuition and fees, including those for deficiency and required graduate courses.

Students may request a Leave of Absence through the Graduate College with approval from their CEES faculty advisor and the Graduate Liaison. Refer to [Section 3.6.3 of the Graduate Bulletin](#) for policy details. Please note that a leave of absence **may affect eligibility for financial aid, tuition waivers, and other funding**.

1.13 Use of Human Subjects in Research

The OU Norman campus policy on human subjects' research and IRB application materials can be found on the [Office of Human Research Participant Protection \(HRPP\) website](#).

For questions about compliance or the IRB approval process, contact the HRPP at (405) 325-8110 or email irb@ou.edu.

1.14 Patentable Material

If a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation includes inventions or discoveries owned by the University of Oklahoma—as defined by the University Patent Policy—a reading copy **MUST** be submitted to the [Office of Technology Commercialization \(OTC\)](#) for review and evaluation. **This requirement is mandatory.**

For additional information, students should contact the [Graduate College](#).

1.15 Textbook Copyright

Students are **prohibited from photocopying required textbooks**, as this violates copyright law. If a textbook is listed as "required" in the syllabus, **it must be purchased**. Copying the textbook to avoid the purchase cost is not allowed.

1.16 University and Graduate College Mandatory Training Requirements

All CEES graduate students must complete the following training:

- 1. Title IX Sexual Harassment/Misconduct Training**
 - **Deadline:** Before first enrollment
 - Students will receive an email from the Title IX Office with instructions to complete an online training module.
 - **Failure to complete this training will result in an enrollment hold.**
 - If the email is missed, the training can be accessed through the [Learning Management System](#) website.
- 2. Environmental Health and Safety Office (EHSO) Training**
 - **Deadline:** Before first enrollment and annually thereafter
 - Required for all OU employees, including GAs.

- Modules include:
 - **Hazard Communication/General Safety** (required for all)
 - **Laboratory Safety** (for those working in labs)
 - **Bloodborne Pathogens** (for those working with potentially infectious materials)
- Annual reminders are sent once students are in the EHSO training database.
- **Failure to complete this training will result in an enrollment hold.**
- If the email is missed, the training can be accessed through the [Learning Management System](#) website.

3. Responsible Conduct in Research (RCR)

- **Deadline:** Within the first year of the research program and before submitting the MS Program of Study or PhD Advisory Conference Report
- Required for all students supported by NSF grants and for all MS Thesis and PhD students in CEES
- Enroll at the [RCR website](#)
- Email a copy of the completion certificate to the [Graduate Student Program Specialist](#).

1.17 Role of Graduate Liaison and Graduate Studies Committee

The **CEES Graduate Liaison (GL)** and the **Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)** support students in understanding and meeting departmental, Graduate College, and university regulations and deadlines throughout their time in the program. GSC members are available to meet, answer questions, and help resolve any issues that arise.

Students are strongly encouraged to maintain regular communication with their **faculty advisor** throughout their graduate studies.

1.18 Graduate Student Travel Policies

Students planning to travel for academic or research purposes must **notify the CEES Administrative Assistant**.

- **At least two months in advance** of the planned travel.
- **Obtain approval before making any out-of-pocket purchases**, as some expenses may not be eligible for reimbursement.

1.19 Digital Signatures

Digital signatures are accepted on all CEES and Graduate College forms. Students are responsible for submitting completed forms to the appropriate office.

Graduate College provides many forms in electronic format. For paper forms, they will accept:

- **A scanned copy with signatures**, or
- **An email from an OU address indicating approval**.

A clear photo of each page may be submitted if a scanner isn't available.

1.20 Graduation and Post-Graduation Information

All graduating students must complete the **CEES Exit Survey** before graduation. A link to the survey will be provided by the department at the appropriate time.

- **Diplomas and Degree Certification**

Information about diploma release timelines is available at: www.ou.edu/registrar/graduation/diplomas

Students needing proof of degree completion before diplomas are issued should submit a **Request for Letter of Completion** to the Graduate College.

- **Gallogly College of Engineering Convocation**

Visit the Gallogly College of Engineering Convocation website for more details and information.

- **Alumni Resources**

Graduates are encouraged to explore the following resources:

- OU Career Center (Alumni Services)
- OU Alumni Association

2 PROSPECTUS INFORMATION

All Master's thesis and Doctoral dissertations must be completed under the supervision of a faculty advisor (committee chair) and an examining committee. Before beginning formal research, students must submit a proposed plan of study or **Prospectus** - a detailed research plan outlining clear objectives, hypotheses, scope of work, and tasks.

A well-developed prospectus:

- Guides the research process
- Enhances the quality of the final thesis/dissertation
- Serves as a learning tool for developing a sound research plan
- Helps manage changes in research direction or scope

Submission Requirements:

- Must be approved and signed by all committee members
- Must be submitted to the CEES Graduate Liaison at least one semester before the defense request
- Prospectus and defense **CANNOT** be completed during the same semester
- Doctoral students must submit a prospectus within four years of initial enrollment

Refer to the CEES submission deadlines listed below.

Anticipated Graduation Term:	Summer	Fall	Spring
MS Thesis prospectus due no later than:	*May 15	*August 15	December 15
PhD Dissertation prospectus due no later than:	December 15	May 15	December 15

***Faculty are not obligated to review a prospectus over the summer or winter breaks** and therefore, students are encouraged to submit a completed prospectus by May 15 for a Fall defense and December 15 for a Summer defense.

Master's Student Requirements

All CEES Master's students must submit:

- An **approved Academic Plan**
- A **Master's Thesis Topic and Committee Membership Form** (if applicable)

These forms must be submitted by the deadlines listed below.

Anticipated Graduation Term:	Summer	Fall	Spring
Submit forms no later than the:	First 2 weeks of previous Spring semester	First 2 weeks of previous Spring semester	First 2 weeks of previous Fall semester

Be advised, both forms must be approved by the **Graduate Liaison** before the [deadlines](#) set by the **Graduate College**.

Prospectus Guidelines

1. Cover Page
2. Table of Contents (1-page maximum)
 - list major headings and accompanying page numbers
 - include a List of Tables
 - include a List of Figures
3. Introduction (2-pages maximum)
 - relevance/importance of general topic area
 - describe specific problem to be addressed
 - develop basis for studying the problem (i.e., why the need for the study)
4. Literature Review (10-pages maximum)
 - concise review of recent and relevant published literature
 - organized by topical area (with appropriate sub-topics and sub-sub-topics)
5. Hypotheses and Objectives (1-page maximum)
 - Hypotheses - temporary assumptions on which to draw out observed or empirical consequences (not necessarily required or appropriate in some research projects, but discuss with your faculty advisor)
 - list your hypotheses (OPTIONAL)
 - Objectives - specific aims or intents of the study (achievable and/or measurable)
 - delineate the objectives or intent of the study
 - Goals - general aims or intents of the study (not achievable or measurable)
 - discuss the overall goal(s) of the study
6. Methods, Approach, and Scope of Work (5-pages maximum)
 - a concise delineation of the work tasks to be performed (i.e., scope of work)
 - grouped and organized according to method
 - listed in chronological sequence
 - delineate end-products of each effort
7. Schedule (1-page maximum)
 - depict proposed sequence of work tasks
 - show chronological order plus duration of tasks
 - depict (target) due dates for important milestones and/or specific deliverables
 - identify proposed start and end dates
8. References (no limit)
 - alphabetical listing of references cited in prospectus
 - must use consistent referencing format (see below)

[10]

2.1 Citation Examples

Book or Book Chapter

Knox, R.C., Sabatini, D.A., and Canter, L.W., Subsurface Transport and Fate Processes, Lewis Publishers, Chelsea, Michigan, 1993, ISBN 0-87371-193-9, 430 pages.

Hong, Y., He, X., Cerato, A., Zhang, K., Hong, Z. and Liao, Z. (2015). Predictability of a physically-based model for rainfall-induced shallow landslides: Model development and case studies. In M.Scaioni (Ed.), Modern technologies for landslide investigation and prediction. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer (ISBN978-3-662-45930-027; ISBN978-3-662-45931-7eBook), DOI: 10.1007/978-3-662-45931-7_9

Journal Articles

Taghavi, A., Muraleetharan, K.K., Miller, G.A. and Cerato, A.B. (2016). Centrifuge Modeling of Laterally Loaded Pile Groups in Improved Soft Clay. *Journal of Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Engineering*, Vol. 142, No. 4. DOI: 10.1061/(ASCE)GT.1943-5606.0001443

Conference Proceedings

Quiroga, A.J., Muraleetharan, K.K., Cerato, A.B. and Miller, G.A. (2015). Stress-Strain Behavior of Cement-Improved Clays. *Proceedings of the IFCEE2015 Conference in San Antonio, TX*, March 16-21, 2015.

Technical Reports

Cerato, A.B., Taghavi, A., Muraleetharan, K.K., Miller, G.A. (2011). Understanding and Improving the Seismic Behavior of Pile Foundations in Soft Clays: An Educational Module. NEEScomm Education, Outreach and Training, GEORGE E. BROWN, JR. NETWORK FOR EARTHQUAKE ENGINEERING SIMULATION (NEES) Report (80 pp).

<https://nees.org/resources/2705>

Electronic Sources

Please use the following link to help with MLA citations of Electronic Sources:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html

2.2 Signature Page Format and Prospectus Submission

The following signature page is the format required by CEES and must be replicated in its exact form. A Word template of the prospectus title page can be downloaded from the CEES website. Students should attach the title page to their prospects, obtain committee signatures, then email the file to the CEES Graduate Liaison for approval.

TITLE OF PROSPECTUS IN 12-POINT, BOLD FONT

A RESEARCH PROSPECTUS

SUBMITTED TO THE CEES GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

(Select one)

MASTER OF SCIENCE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(Select one)

Civil Engineering

Environmental Engineering

Environmental Science

submitted by

(Student Name in 12-point font)

Approved by:

Committee Chair	Signature	Date
Committee Member	Signature	Date
Committee Member	Signature	Date
Committee Member	Signature	Date
Graduate College Representative	Signature	Date
<u>Dr. Keith Strevett</u> CEES Graduate Liaison	Signature	Date

(Master's committee requires 3 total members, including chair; Doctoral committee requires 4 or 5 members, including chair and Graduate College representative)

3 MASTER OF SCIENCE GENERAL INFORMATION

3.1 Guidelines

Graduate students must meet all degree requirements set by both the Graduate College and the School of Civil Engineering and Environmental Science (CEES). In addition, CEES provides specific guidelines for each degree program (e.g., environmental science, environmental engineering, geotechnical engineering, structural engineering, transportation engineering, water resources engineering).

All Master's students are responsible for:

- Obtaining and following the relevant policies, guidelines and requirements from both the Graduate College and CEES
- Meeting all published deadlines

These guidelines are designed to support students in successfully completing their degree. While following them does not guarantee graduation or admission to further study, they provide a strong foundation for academic success.

3.2 Coursework Options and Degree Codes

CEES offers two Master's degree options:

Non-Thesis, Coursework-Only Option

- Requires **30 credit hours** of approved coursework
- **Does not** require a non-thesis examination

Thesis Option

- **Requires 30 credit hours, including:**
 - At least **5 hours of thesis research**
 - **1 hour of technical communications**
- **Includes a** final thesis defense

General Requirements for Both Options

- **At least 18 credit hours** must be 5000-/6000-level CEES courses approved by the faculty advisor
- **No more than 5 credit hours** may be S/U graded (excluding thesis research)
- **Elective course restrictions:**
 - Max 9 credit hours of CEES 4000G-level courses (including core courses)
 - Max 12 credit hours of 4000G-level courses from all departments combined
 - Max **9 credit hours** from departments outside CEES
- **Up to 9 credit hours** may be transferred from another institution (with approval)

A list of Master's degree codes and concentrations are below:

F188- Accel. ArchE BS/MSCE

Q282-Geotechnical
Q634-Structural
Q657-Transportation
Q698-Water Resources

F189- Online Accel. ArchE BS/MSCE

Q283-Geotechnical
Q635-Structural
Q658-Transportation
Q699-Water Resources

F190- Accel. CE BS/MSCE

Q282-Geotechnical
Q634-Structural
Q657-Transportation
Q698-Water Resources

F191- Online Accel. CE BS/MSCE

Q283-Geotechnical
Q635-Structural
Q658-Transportation
Q699-Water Resources

F390- Accel. Env. Engr. BS/MS

F405- Accel. Env. Science BE/MES

M190- MSCE

Q282-Geotechnical
Q634-Structural
Q657-Transportation
Q698-Water Resources

M191- Online MSCE

Q283-Geotechnical
Q635-Structural
Q658-Transportation
Q699-Water Resources

M390- Env. Engr. MS

M405- MES

M518- Online MES: HWS

Q702-Water Management
Q703-Water Quantity
Q704-Water Quality

Planning Courses

Students must review the official **OU degree checksheet** to ensure all required coursework is completed.

Enrollment Requirements

- **Non-Thesis, Coursework-Only Students:**
Must enroll in and maintain a 3.0 GPA (or "Satisfactory" for S/U courses) in at least 3 graduate-level credit hours **each academic year**.
- **Thesis Students:**
Must enroll in and maintain a 3.0 GPA (or "Satisfactory" for CEES 5980) in at least 2 graduate-level credit hours **each academic year**.
After the first semester of CEES 5980 enrollment, students must maintain continuous enrollment in at least 2 hours of CEES 5980 **each fall and spring semester**.

Academic Standing

Students who do not meet enrollment or GPA requirements will receive written notification from the Graduate College.

Time Limit

The Master's degree must be completed within **five calendar years** of first graduate enrollment at OU. This time limit applies to **all students**, including part-time and off-campus students.

Graduation Application

Students must apply for graduation **the semester before** their intended graduation term. The application is available at: www.ou.edu/registrar/graduation

Fall: December Graduation - May 1

Spring: May Graduation - December 1

Summer: August Graduation - March 1

3.3 Selecting Thesis or Non-Thesis, Coursework Only

Students should carefully consider their skills, interests, and long-term goals when deciding between the **thesis** and non-thesis, **coursework-only** Master's options.

At Cees and many other institutions, the **coursework-only Master's degree is typically considered a terminal degree**. Students who plan to pursue a **doctoral degree or further academic research** are strongly encouraged to choose the **thesis option**.

3.4 Thesis Committee Formation

All Master's students pursuing the **thesis option** must form an appropriate thesis committee. The committee plays a key role in guiding the student's research.

Committee Formation Guidelines

- Students must consult with their **faculty advisor** to identify potential committee members.
- The student, in collaboration with the advisor, is responsible for assembling the committee.
- **OU reserves the right** to determine the appropriateness of committee members.
- **No faculty member is obligated** to serve on a student's committee, including the initial faculty advisor.

Committee Requirements

- Must consist of **at least three faculty members**.
- Members should have expertise relevant to the student's research area.
- The committee must be finalized **before enrolling in thesis credit hours (CEES 5980)**.

Changes to Committee Membership

- Changes are only permitted under **extenuating circumstances** (e.g., resignation, retirement).

- A Request for Change in Committee form must be submitted **no later than 30 days before the thesis defense**.

Special Member (SM) Requests

- If a student wishes to include a committee member who is **not a regular OU faculty member** (e.g., research faculty without "RM" status or someone from outside the university), that individual must be appointed to the **Graduate Faculty as a Special Member (SM)**.
- Students should **contact the Graduate Student Program Specialist** for guidance on this process, ideally **60 days before** submitting the **Thesis Topic and Committee form**.

4 THESIS OPTION REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Identifying a Topic and Developing a Prospectus

Students are responsible for identifying and developing their own thesis topic. While faculty may offer guidance, they are not required to do so. The thesis prospectus demonstrates a student's ability to conduct technical research and writing and helps assess their potential to complete a thesis. An approved prospectus also outlines the expected scope of work. Poor performance in developing the prospectus may suggest the student should pursue a non-thesis, coursework-only option.

After completing at least one semester of CEES graduate coursework, students pursuing a Master's thesis must enroll in **CEES 5021 – Technical Communications**, which is offered only in the Spring semester. **Students in the Accelerated Degree Program (ADP) should instead follow the requirements outlined in their Accelerated Degree Graduate Coursework Plan.**

As part of CEES 5021, thesis option students must submit a **draft thesis prospectus**. This draft may be revised before the final version is submitted to the thesis committee. Additional details about the prospectus are provided in [Section 2](#) of this handbook.

4.2 Preparing a Thesis

Thesis Project Expectations and Responsibilities

Students pursuing a thesis must take full responsibility for identifying the scope of their project and completing the required work independently. If the thesis is part of a funded research project, students must adhere to established timelines and deadlines, as delays can negatively affect not only the individual project but the broader research program. Failure to meet deadlines may result in dismissal from the thesis project by the faculty advisor.

Financial Responsibility:

CEES and individual faculty members are not responsible for any student expenses not covered by a research grant. Students are expected to cover costs such as copying, printing, editing, binding, and materials (e.g., paper, ink). Those conducting laboratory studies without grant support must also fund those activities themselves.

Writing Standards and Editing:

Theses must be written in clear, correct English. Students are solely responsible for

proofreading, editing, and revising their drafts. Submitting drafts that require extensive technical or grammatical corrections may lead faculty members to resign from the thesis committee or terminate the project. While resources like the [Writing Center](#) are available, the thesis must reflect the student's original work.

Advisor Role and Draft Review:

The thesis advisor will review the first draft, offering suggestions for improvement. However, the student is responsible for implementing all revisions. Only after incorporating the advisor's feedback should the student submit a near-final version to the thesis committee for review.

4.3 Scheduling Thesis Meetings and Reviews

Students are fully responsible for managing the logistics of their Master's degree program. This includes scheduling meetings, reserving rooms and audio-visual equipment, and coordinating with faculty. Because faculty members often have full calendars scheduled weeks in advance, students must provide sufficient notice when requesting meetings or scheduling thesis defenses. Last-minute requests may not be accommodated.

In addition, **within the first two (2) weeks of the semester in which they plan to defend**, Master's thesis students must submit a [Request for Degree Check](#) to the Graduate College.

4.4 Thesis Submission Timeline and Requirements

CEES requires that a reading copy of the thesis be submitted to the student's committee earlier than the Graduate College deadline to ensure adequate time for review and feedback.

- **Four (4) weeks prior to the defense:** Students must provide a reading copy of their thesis to all committee members.
- **Two (2) weeks prior to the defense:** Submit the Report of Reading Copy and Request for Authority to Defend form to the Graduate College. This form confirms that committee members have received the thesis.
- **One (1) week prior to the defense:** All committee members must approve the form to authorize the defense.

Additionally, students must **email an abstract** (see [Section 4.7](#) for the required formatting) to the [Graduate Student Program Specialist](#) two (2) weeks before the scheduled defense. This abstract will be distributed to the CEES department. A downloadable Word template is available on the [CEES website](#).

4.5 Thesis Final Defense and Completion

The **final date to hold a thesis defense** each semester is **two (2) weeks before the last day of finals**. Students are solely responsible for scheduling and preparing their oral defense. The defense is conducted by the thesis committee and is **open to the public**. Any expenses related to the defense (e.g., room reservations, multimedia equipment) are the responsibility of the student.

The oral presentation should be professional and incorporate multimedia tools. A well-prepared presentation typically lasts **20 to 30 minutes** and should be thoroughly rehearsed. If the presentation exceeds a reasonable length, the committee may interrupt and, if necessary, terminate the defense with a vote of disapproval. There is **no time limit** for committee questioning following the presentation.

The outcome of the defense must be reported to the Graduate College using the **Authority to Defend** form **within 72 hours** of the defense.

Publication of Thesis Work:

Students who successfully complete a thesis are strongly encouraged to prepare one or more technical papers based on their research for submission to peer-reviewed journals. If the student does **not inform the committee of their intent to publish** by the time the final thesis draft is submitted - or fails to submit a manuscript within **30 days** of the defense - the faculty advisor or other faculty members may publish work based on the thesis without listing the student as lead author.

4.6 Deposit of Thesis in the Library

Final thesis submission to the Graduate College is conducted **entirely online**. After a successful defense, students must submit the **Approval for Thesis/Dissertation Submission to ProQuest** form. This form is routed electronically to the student's committee for signatures indicating approval of the final thesis. Students will receive email notifications as each committee member completes their portion of the form. Once all signatures are obtained, the form is forwarded to the Graduate College.

Important: Do not submit your thesis to ProQuest until all committee members have approved the form. Submissions made before full approval will be rejected.

After receiving confirmation of full committee approval, students must complete the electronic thesis submission at www.etdadmin.com/oklahoma **at least one (1) week before the last day of finals**. Students must also meet the **ProQuest semester submission deadline** to graduate in that term.

4.7 Abstract Format

TITLE OF ABSTRACT (in 12-point, bold font)

(Select one)

CEES MASTER'S THESIS DEFENSE

or

CEES DOCTORAL DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Name of Student

Degree (e.g., Civil Engineering – Water Resources)

Committee Chair (e.g., Advisor: Keith Strevett)

Date (e.g., Friday, March 17, 2023)

Time and Location (e.g. 10:00 AM, CEC 333 or Zoom)

ABSTRACT

(keep to one page)

5 DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY GENERAL INFORMATION

5.1 Doctor of Philosophy Guidelines

Doctoral students must meet the specific requirements set by both the Graduate College and CEES. In addition to general university policies, CEES provides program-specific guidelines for areas of study: environmental science, environmental engineering, geotechnical engineering, structural engineering, transportation engineering and water resources engineering. Students are expected to obtain and follow all applicable policies, procedures, and deadlines from both the Graduate College and CEES.

Note: It is the student's responsibility to stay informed and ensure compliance with all deadlines and requirements.

The following guidelines are intended to support students pursuing a Doctoral degree. While strict adherence to these guidelines does not guarantee degree completion or continued enrollment, following them will help students navigate the program successfully.

5.2 PhD Residency Requirement

All Doctoral students must fulfill a **residency requirement** by enrolling as **full-time students at OU for two (2) consecutive sixteen-week semesters**. This requirement **cannot be met during a Master's degree program** and applies to **all students**, including those who are part-time or off-campus.

Note: It is the student's responsibility to plan accordingly to meet this requirement within their doctoral program timeline.

5.3 Degree Sequence

The general sequence for completing a Doctoral degree is outlined in **Table 1** of this document. Two key **milestones** in this process are the **Advisory Conference** and the **General Examination**.

- The Advisory Conference helps define the student's program of study and committee membership.
- The General Examination is a critical assessment of the student's readiness to continue in the doctoral program.

Important: Successful completion of the General Examination is required to continue pursuing the Doctoral degree. Failure to pass this exam results in termination of the degree plan.

Only after passing the General Examination does a student officially become a Doctoral Candidate.

Table 1
Doctoral Program Sequence

Step	Milestone	Deadline/Timing	Rqm't Tracked By
1	Admission to CEES Doctoral Program	Upon entry	----
2	Responsible Conduct in Research Training (RCR)	Within first year, before ACR	CEES
3	Advisory Conference Report (ACR)	Within first year of enrollment	GC
4	Completion of Coursework & CEES Technical Writing Requirement	Within 4 years of first enrollment	CEES
5	General Exam Application	First 2 weeks of exam semester	GC
6	General Exam (Written & Oral)	Final semester of coursework or following semester; within 4 years	GC
7	Enroll in CEES 6980 (Dissertation Research)	After passing General Exam	Advisor
8	Dissertation Prospectus	Within 4 years and ≥ 1 semester before defense Due: Dec 15 (Spring/Summer), May 15 (Fall)	CEES
9	Graduation Application	Semester before graduation	GC
10	Request for Degree Check	First 2 weeks of defense semester	GC
11	Submit Reading Copy of Dissertation to Committee	5 weeks before defense	CEES
12	Dissertation Defense Submit Report of Reading Copy & Request for Authority to Defend	≥ 1 semester after prospectus Form due: 2 weeks before defense	GC
13	Submit Abstract to Graduate Student Program Specialist	2 weeks before defense	CEES
14	Submit Approval for Dissertation Submission to ProQuest	After full committee approval	GC
15	Submit Dissertation to ProQuest	≥ 1 week before finals must meet semester deadline	GC
16	Participate in CEES Exit Survey	Before graduation	CEES

GC = Graduate College

5.4 Coursework

Doctoral students must complete **at least six (6) credit hours of coursework outside the CEES department**. These external courses may also help identify a suitable external member for the student's Advisory Conference/Doctoral Committee.

Additionally, all doctoral students are required to be **in residence at OU for two (2) consecutive 16-week semesters**. This residency must occur during the doctoral program and **cannot be fulfilled during a Master's program** ([Graduate College Bulletin, Section 8](#)).

The coursework requirements for the CEES Doctoral degree are outlined below.

- 90 credit hours of graduate-level work (including coursework, research hours, etc.), beyond a Bachelor of Science degree.
- Minimum number of coursework hours = 48 credit hours
- Maximum number of dissertation research hours = 41 credit hours
- Required Course = 1 credit hours, CEES 5021–Technical Communications
- A maximum of 44 credit hours may be transferred from any approved graduate-level academic program. For example: 30 credit hours of a completed master's degree and an additional 14 credit hours of graduate coursework from another doctoral program that was not completed.
- A minimum of 24-25 credit hours of CEES or equivalent courses and a minimum of 6 credit hours outside the department depending on area of study

Students must apply for graduation during the intended graduation semester by the deadline below. The graduation application can be found at [www.ou.edu/registrar/graduation](#)

Fall - September 15

Spring Semester - February 15

Summer Semester - June 1

5.5 Advisory Conference and Report

Doctoral students must submit an **Advisory Conference Report (ACR)** that includes all coursework to be counted toward the degree. CEES recommends submitting the ACR within the **first year of enrollment**, although the **Graduate College requires it by the semester prior to the General Exam**. A downloadable Word template is available on the Graduate College website, and the completed form must be submitted online.

In consultation with their faculty advisor (committee chair), students are responsible for selecting members of the Advisory Conference. However, the **University reserves the right to approve committee membership**. The Advisory Conference should be scheduled early to establish a formal plan of study. Typically, the advisory committee becomes the student's Doctoral committee, which guides research activities.

The Doctoral committee must include faculty members with expertise in the student's research area and **must include a Graduate College representative**. This representative must hold a graduate faculty appointment **outside of CEES** and is responsible for ensuring that

Graduate College policies and student rights are upheld. They must attend all committee meetings and report any violations of policy or procedures.

If changes to committee membership are necessary, students must consult their faculty advisor. Changes are only permitted under **extenuating circumstances** (e.g., resignation, retirement) and require submission of the **Request for Change in Committee** form to the Graduate College **at least 30 days before** the General Exam or defense.

Students wishing to include a committee member who is **not a regular OU faculty member** (e.g., research faculty without "RM" status or individuals from outside the university) must request that the individual be added to the Graduate Faculty as a **Special Member (SM)**. The SM **cannot serve as the Graduate College representative**. Students should **contact the Graduate Student Program Specialist** at least **60 days before** the Advisory Conference to initiate this process.

5.6 Technical Writing Requirement

Doctoral students must demonstrate proficiency in technical writing. This requirement may be satisfied in any manner deemed appropriate by the **Doctoral committee**, based on **concrete evidence** of the student's writing ability.

Due to Graduate College policy, departments may **not modify the ACR Word document**. Therefore, the committee's decision regarding the Technical Writing Requirement must be recorded in the **comment section** of the **online ACR submission form**.

To fulfill this requirement, students must submit **written documentation of the committee's assessment**, signed by **all committee members**, and email it to the **CEES Graduate Liaison** for approval prior to taking the General Exam.

5.6.1 Incorporating the Technical Writing Requirement

The **Technical Writing Requirement** is designed to ensure that CEES doctoral graduates possess strong technical writing skills—an essential competency in both industry and academia. This requirement serves as a developmental tool to help students improve and gain confidence in their writing abilities.

Because the goal is improvement, it is **not appropriate for the committee to waive this requirement entirely**. If the committee believes the student demonstrates competence based on prior coursework or preliminary research documentation, they should assign a **short research paper or another measurable writing task** to formally assess the student's technical writing proficiency.

5.6.2 Assessing Technical Writing Skills

The purpose of the Technical Writing Requirement is to evaluate a student's **technical writing proficiency**, not the publishable quality of a paper or the fundability of a proposal. The committee's focus should be on the student's ability to apply both **basic elements of English grammar**—such as sentence structure and punctuation—and **advanced writing skills**, including organization, clarity, and coherence.

This requirement serves as a **starting point** to assess the student's current writing level. Each student will begin at a different place, and the goal is to help identify and address areas for improvement. The committee and faculty advisor should use this assessment to guide the student's development as a technical writer.

Methods for fulfilling the Technical Writing Requirement:

The **Technical Writing Requirement** may be fulfilled through various methods, as deemed appropriate by the student's doctoral committee. Options include, but are not limited to:

- **Enrolling in a Technical Writing Course**
Example: *ENGL 3153 – Technical Writing*
- **Passing the English Assessment Program (EAP) Writing Test**
Must be passed at the "Instruct" level or "Level A."
- Submitting an Original Writing Sample (*not edited by the faculty advisor*)
 - First draft of a **conference paper or journal paper**
 - First draft **research proposal**
 - First draft **prospectus**

If the **research proposal** or **prospectus** is used to fulfill both the Technical Writing Requirement and the **written portion of the General Exam**, it must be approved by the committee for the writing requirement **prior to applying for the General Exam**.

Important: Approval for one purpose does **not guarantee** approval for the other. A document may be well written but lack sufficient research content—or vice versa.

Additionally, it is critical that the committee does not sign or approve the prospectus—whether it is being used for the Technical Writing Requirement, the General Exam, or both—until all members agree on the content and scope. The prospectus serves as a research contract for the dissertation, and premature approval may lead to misalignment in expectations.

Using a Previously Completed Technical Writing Course

In select cases, a previously completed technical writing course may fulfill the requirement.

- The course must have been taken at an English-speaking university in an English-speaking country.
- The student must provide the course syllabus and a sample writing assignment for committee review.
- This documentation should be available prior to and during the Advisory Conference for evaluation.
- **Important:** The Technical Writing Requirement is intended to help students improve their writing skills. It should not be waived. If a student is already a strong writer, the committee should still assign a short, original writing task to formally assess proficiency.

5.7 Submission of Technical Writing Results

Students must use the **official CEES signature page format** for documenting completion of the Technical Writing Requirement. This form must be **replicated exactly** as shown in the examples below. A downloadable Word template is available on the **CEES website**.

Once all committee members have signed the form, students should **email the completed document to the CEES Graduate Liaison** for final approval.

Example 1: Course

By unanimous committee decision, and noted on the approved Advisory Conference Report, (Student's Name) enrolled in (Course Number) (Course Name) in the (Semester Year) semester to fulfill the CEES Technical Writing Requirement for the PhD Degree.

(Student's Name) has successfully passed this course with a grade of (Letter Grade).

By our signatures below, we confirm that (Student's Name) has successfully completed the CEES Technical Writing Requirement for the PhD Degree.

Committee Chair	_____
Committee Member	_____
Committee Member	_____
Committee Member	_____
Graduate College Representative	_____
Date	_____

Example 2: Research Report

By unanimous committee decision, and noted on the approved Advisory Conference Report, (Student's Name) wrote a research report to fulfill the CEES Technical Writing Requirement for the PhD Degree. The research report was assessed by the committee members.

The results of the assessment show that the written report was of good quality.

By our signatures below, we confirm that (Student's Name) has successfully completed the CEES Technical Writing Requirement for the PhD Degree.

Committee Chair	_____
Committee Member	_____
Committee Member	_____
Committee Member	_____
Graduate College Representative	_____
Date	_____

5.8 General Exam

Doctoral students must complete the **General Examination** within the **first four (4) years of enrollment**. It is typically taken in the final semester of coursework or the following semester. While students may enroll in CEES 6980 (Dissertation Research) during the same semester as the General Exam, CEES recommends waiting until after the exam is completed. Once enrolled in CEES 6980, students must maintain **continuous enrollment of at least two (2) credit hours** each semester until graduation.

The General Exam may be taken during the first semester in which a student enrolls for dissertation hours. Students must submit the **Application for the General Exam** to the Graduate College **no later than the end of the second week** of the semester in which the exam will be taken. CEES strongly encourages students to review the Graduate College Bulletin for detailed policies and procedures related to the General Exam.

Structure and Format of the General Exam

The General Exam is developed and administered by consensus of the full Doctoral committee and consists of **two mandatory components**:

1. **Written Examination** – Covers the student's major area(s) of study.
2. **Oral Examination** – Conducted after successful completion of the written portion and attended by the full committee.

Note: Students may not proceed to the oral portion until the written exam has been satisfactorily completed.

The format of the General Exam varies by discipline and by committee. Students are encouraged to discuss expectations with their committee early in their program. Below are general guidelines by discipline:

- **Geotechnical Engineering:** Students take a standardized written exam.
- **Structural Engineering:** Students complete either a topic-specific exam or a writing prompt related to their research area.
- **Transportation Engineering:** Students receive a research-related writing prompt and may answer additional questions from committee members. Assessment may cover disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills, either individually or in combination.
- **Environmental Engineering, Environmental Science, and Water Resources:** Students are given a writing prompt, with the option of additional topic-specific questions from committee members.

The written portion may be scheduled over several weeks or within a defined period, depending on committee preference. If a writing prompt is used, it often serves as the basis for the oral exam, which may include a presentation and open-ended questions from any discipline-specific topic.

5.9 Identifying a Topic and Developing a Prospectus

Doctoral students are responsible for identifying and developing their own dissertation topic. While faculty advisors may offer guidance, they are **not obligated** to do so. The dissertation prospectus serves as an early indicator of a student's ability to conduct technical research and writing, and it outlines the expected scope of the dissertation project.

All students pursuing a doctoral dissertation must enroll in Cees 5021 – Technical Communications, offered **only in the Spring semester**, the first time it is available after completion of the Advisory Conference.

If not already completed, students must develop a draft dissertation prospectus as the written product for Cees 5021. This draft may be revised and expanded before submitting the final version to the student's committee.

For more information on the dissertation prospectus, refer to [Section 2](#) of this document.

5.10 Preparing a Dissertation

Doctoral students are responsible for identifying their dissertation topic and completing the required work independently. While faculty advisors may offer guidance, students must take initiative and ownership of their research.

If the dissertation is part of a funded research project, students must adhere to the project's schedule and deadlines. Delays can negatively impact not only the individual project but the broader research program. In cases of repeated delays or failure to meet expectations, the faculty advisor may dismiss the student from the dissertation project.

Financial Responsibility

CEES and individual faculty members are not responsible for any student expenses not covered by a research grant. Students are expected to cover costs such as:

- Copying and printing
- Editing and binding
- Materials (e.g., paper, ink)
- Laboratory studies not supported by grant funding

Writing Standards and Draft Review

The dissertation must be written in correct and professional English. Students are solely responsible for proofreading, editing, and revising their drafts. Submitting drafts that require extensive grammatical or technical corrections may result in:

- Faculty members resigning from the Doctoral committee
- Termination of the dissertation project

While resources such as the [Writing Center](#) are available, the dissertation must reflect the student's original work.

The faculty advisor will review the first draft, offering suggestions for improvement. However, the student is responsible for implementing all revisions. Only after incorporating the advisor's feedback should the student submit a near-final reading copy to the Doctoral committee.

5.11 Scheduling Dissertation Meetings and Reviews

Doctoral students are responsible for managing all logistics related to their degree progress. This includes:

- Scheduling meetings (e.g., committee meetings, defenses)
- Reserving meeting rooms and necessary audio-visual equipment
- Coordinating with faculty well in advance, as their schedules are often booked weeks ahead

Important Deadline:

During the **first two weeks** of the semester in which the student plans to defend, a **Request for Degree Check** must be submitted to the Graduate College.

5.12 Reading Copies of Dissertation

CEES requires doctoral students to submit a reading copy of the dissertation to their committee **at least five (5) weeks prior to the defense date**. This submission must occur before the Graduate College deadline to allow adequate time for committee review and approval.

The Report of Reading Copy and Request for Authority to Defend must be submitted to the Graduate College **a minimum of two (2) weeks before the scheduled defense**. The form is circulated to all committee members to confirm they have received the dissertation and that no major revisions are required prior to the defense. Committee members must provide approval **at least one (1) week before the defense date**.

Students must **email an abstract** (see [Section 4.7](#) for the required formatting) to the [**Graduate Student Program Specialist**](#) **TWO (2) weeks prior** to the scheduled defense for distribution to the entire CEES department. A Word template of the abstract can be downloaded from the [CEES website](#).

5.13 Dissertation Final Defense and Completion

The final oral defense must be held **at least two (2) weeks before the last day of finals**.

Doctoral Student Responsibilities:

- Scheduling and preparing the oral defense
- Reserving rooms and equipment
- Covering any associated expenses

Defense Format:

- The final defense is conducted by the doctoral committee and is open to the public.
- Students are allowed only one attempt at the final oral examination.

- The oral presentation should be professional, use multimedia technology, and last 30–45 minutes.
- Students should rehearse thoroughly in advance.
- If the presentation exceeds a reasonable length, the committee may interrupt and terminate the defense with a vote of disapproval.
- There is no time limit for the committee's questioning following the presentation.

Reporting Results:

The outcome of the defense must be reported to the Graduate College using the **Authority to Defend** form within **72 hours** of the defense.

Publication Encouragement:

Students are strongly encouraged to prepare and submit two or more technical papers based on their dissertation.

If the student does not:

- Inform the committee of their intent to publish by the time the final draft is submitted, or
- Submit a paper within 30 days of the defense and notify the committee,

faculty may publish from the dissertation without listing the student as lead author.

5.14 Deposit of Dissertation in the Library

Submission Process:

- Final dissertation submission is electronic via ProQuest.
- Students must submit the **Approval for Thesis/Dissertation Submission to ProQuest** form to the Graduate College.
- This form is routed electronically to the committee for approval.
- Students are notified by email as each committee member signs.

Important Notes:

- Do not submit to ProQuest before receiving full committee approval—early submissions will be rejected.
- Final submission to [ProQuest](#) must be completed at least one (1) week before the last day of finals.
- Students must meet the submission deadline to graduate that term.