

University of Rhode Island
Department of Marine Affairs

Marine Affairs

Graduate Student Handbook

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History of URI Marine Affairs

The University of Rhode Island (URI) was the first academic institution worldwide to establish a graduate program in ocean and coastal policy, management, and law. The genesis of the program stems from the work of the Stratton Commission, established by congressional statute in 1966 for the purpose of undertaking a studied and comprehensive consideration of the marine environment, its resources, and its uses. The members of this commission, appointed by President Lyndon Johnson and ranking members of Congress, included John Knauss, the first Dean of the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography. Prof. Lewis Alexander, the founder of the Geography Department at URI, was selected to serve as Deputy Director of the Commission staff. The Commission's 1969 report, *Our Nation and the Sea*, addressed a variety of ocean/coastal issues including fisheries, mineral exploitation, and marine scientific research and led to the creation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). It also set the stage for the later passage by Congress of the Coastal Zone Management Act and the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act.

Based on their experience with the Stratton Commission, Prof. Alexander and Dean Knauss acted on their belief that not only was marine science important in ocean/coastal affairs, but that there was a need for the social sciences to become engaged in these matters as well. Accordingly, in 1969 the Graduate Program in Marine Affairs was established to provide a one year program leading to the Master of Marine Affairs degree. This program was designed for individuals with an advanced degree or five years of experience in marine related fields. Students were drawn from federal and state agencies, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Some international students were sponsored by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Over time the Geography department, which housed the Graduate Program in Marine Affairs, evolved into the Department of Marine Affairs. Its faculty grew and became multidisciplinary with the addition of individuals trained in political science, law, marine science, anthropology, geography, planning, and economics.

In 1977, a two-year graduate program, the Masters of Arts in Marine Affairs (M.A.M.A), was created for students who did not meet the requirements for study toward the M.M.A. degree. Continued growth of interest in marine affairs prompted the development of an undergraduate degree in the 1980s, first with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree and, several years later, a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree program. A doctoral program was developed and in place by 1998. In 2006, URI collaborated with Roger Williams University Law School to create a joint Master's of Marine Affairs (M.M.A.) and Juris Doctor (J.D.), and in 2018 URI started a joint degree program (M.M.A./Masters of Landscape Architecture) with the Rhode Island School of Design.

The Department of Marine Affairs resides in the College of Environment and Life Sciences (CELS) and since its inception, it has accepted students from all over the United States and from more than forty countries. Its graduates work in government service, non-governmental organizations, industry, and academia.

Mission of URI Marine Affairs

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.

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 forty other countries.

Graduate Degree Programs

Established in 1969, the Graduate Program in Marine Affairs offers a Ph.D., 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), a Joint Juris Doctorate Program with Roger Williams University (JD/MMA), and a Joint PhD with the URI Graduate School of Oceanography (PhD/MMA). In addition, some students at URI have worked with their advisors and department chairs to develop individualized joint degree programs, such as a PhD in Biological and Environmental Science and MMA (PhD/MMA), a MS in Oceanography and MMA (MS/MMA), and a Masters of Environmental Science and Management and MMA (MESM/MMA). More information about our different degree programs can be found [here](#).

Major milestones may be found on the [Milestones](#) section of the MAF webpage.

Graduate Certificates and Badges

Certificates and Badges are *not* required for the completion of Marine Affairs degree programs, but students may wish to pursue one or more of these additional credentials during their time at URI. The university offers several [certificate programs](#), which require 12-to-16 credits. Each graduate certificate has its own set of requirements which may change over time. These are listed on the website for the certificate program. Some certificates can be completed without taking additional courses (i.e., by double counting

courses taken for your MAF degree). Others may require you to take additional courses above and beyond your MAF degree requirements.

Popular certificate programs among Marine Affairs students include: Community Planning, Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing, Hydrology, and Science Writing and Rhetoric, Coastal Resilience.

Badges are “micro-credentials” that typically require attendance and participation at a number of workshops. URI offers a [Diversity and Inclusion](#) badge, consisting of a series of workshops that emphasize the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for cultural competence in a variety of environments.

The URI Gender and Sexuality Center offers basic and advanced [Safe Zone training](#).

Marine Affairs Faculty

The Department of Marine Affairs is part of the College of the Environment and Life Sciences. Our faculty come from many different disciplines, and investigate a wide variety of Marine Affairs topics in their research and teaching. The Department Chair - Dr. Austin Becker - oversees all Marine Affairs degree programs, while Dr. David Bidwell serves as the Director of Graduate Programs. The administrative and faculty offices for Marine Affairs are located on the 1st and 2nd floors of the Coastal Institute Building on the Kingston Campus.

Funding for Graduate Students

Funding graduate studies in Marine Affairs generally comes from one or more of five sources:

- (1) **Self funding** – Students pay their own tuition and sometimes obtain federal or other loans. Information on tuition and fees can be found at [this link](#).
- (2) **External funding** – Students apply for and receive their own external funding through scholarships. Potential sources of external funding are listed [on our website](#), and our graduate students often apply to the [NSF](#) Graduate Research Fellowship, the [Fulbright](#) Student program, and the [Switzer Foundation](#) fellowship. Do alert Marine Affairs faculty that you are applying, as they may be willing to assist you in developing your application.
- (3) **Teaching Assistantships** (TAs) – Students TAs cover tuition and up to 20 hour/week stipend. TA positions are offered to selected Marine Affairs applicants who also have an academic skill set that meets the URI's current needs for TAs. Marine Affairs students commonly receive TAs in Marine Affairs, Biology, Anatomy and Physiology, and Chemistry.
- (4) **Research Assistantships** (RAs) – Students work with a faculty member who has a funded research program. RAs also cover tuition and up to 20 hour/week

stipend for work conducted at the direction of the faculty member. PhD students generally spend at least two years of their program as an RA.

(5) **Scholarships, Awards, and Fellowships** – There are some additional internal sources of funding for graduate study at URI. All scholarships can be found, and applied for, through the [URI Academic Works page](#). The URI Graduate School awards other fellowships which provide a stipend, health insurance, dental insurance, the remission of tuition and a waiver of 20 percent of the graduate student fees. Other internal funding sources are listed [here](#), and include Travel Awards to support travel for research and conference presentations.

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 funded research projects conducted by Marine Affairs and associated faculty.

Internal Communications - Google Groups

A Google Group is an electronic mailing list that distributes messages to subscribers. The Marine Affairs department maintains a number of listservs for the exchange of information on current developments in the field, professional and educational opportunities, meetings and conferences, and input from faculty, students, and alumni.

- maf-net-group@uri.edu - Wider MAF community, including alumni, **everyone** gets added to this one
- maf-faculty-group@uri.edu - MAF **faculty**, including current limited joint appointments
- maf-facultystaff-group@uri.edu - Everyone on the **maf-faculty-group**, plus research/admin staff, emeritus professors, per course instructors, adjuncts, visiting scholars, instructors
- maf-grads-group@uri.edu - Everyone on the **maf-facultystaff-group**, plus current MAF grad students
- maf-undergrads-group@uri.edu - Everyone on the **maf-facultystaff-group**, plus current MAF undergrad students
- maf-phd-group@uri.edu - Everyone on the **maf-facultystaff-group**, plus current MAF PhD students, plus MAF PhD alumni
- coast-grads@uri.edu - Current faculty and students who are affiliated with the Graduate Certificate in Coastal Resilience

These lists get cleaned up periodically. To join any of the lists, students and alumni should visit [Google.Groups.com](https://www.google.com/groups) and do a search for the group name.

You may also wish to subscribe to the MAF Grad and Undergrad Google Calendars, which show all scheduled courses for the upcoming semester at a glance.

Subscribe to the Grad Course Calendar (500 and 600 level) [HERE](#)

Subscribe to the Undergrad Course Calendar (100-400 level) [HERE](#)

Finding Your MAF Advisor

Major milestones may be found on the [Milestones](#) section of the MAF webpage.

Upon your arrival at URI, the Director of Graduate Programs will serve as your academic advisor to help you plan your academic program. As soon as possible, but no later than the start of your second semester, you will need to select a major professor (or advisor) 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 fit between the individual faculty member's expertise, and the subject area, methodology, or other core elements of the

proposed project. Once the decision of major professor is made, that individual then also becomes your academic advisor.

You will have an opportunity to meet the entire Marine Affairs 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. You will also meet faculty and hear about their research in the MAF 651 Navigating Marine Affairs course, which new students take in their first semester. Students should spend time during their first semester learning about faculty member's areas of expertise, and scheduling meetings to discuss their project ideas with potential major professors.

Program of Study

Major milestones may be found on the [Milestones](#) section of the MAF webpage.

There are several major [milestones](#) for progressing through your MAF graduate program, many of which require the submission of forms to the Graduate School. Forms can be found and initiated [here](#) -- be sure to look under the tab for your degree program.

Each student must complete a Program of Study form. For M.M.A. students, the form needs to be submitted by the end of your first semester. For all other graduate programs, the form needs to be submitted by the end of your third semester. The Program of Study lists the courses -- both required and elective -- which the student will take to complete their program. It is prepared by the student with their major professor, and (digitally) signed by the student, by their major professor, the program coordinator, and the Dean of the Graduate School. It is possible to make changes in the program of study, but this requires the approval of the major professor, department chair, and Dean of the Graduate School on the appropriate form.

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. More information about the Program of Study can be found in the URI [Graduate Manual](#).

Choosing Your Courses

Major milestones may be found on the [Milestones](#) section of the MAF webpage.

The typical course load for a Marine Affairs graduate student ranges from 9 to 15 credit hours/semester, depending on the student and the program. When enrolling in courses, students should consider their needs for employment, research time, and outside commitments. In order for an MMA student to graduate within one year, they must take 15 credits/semester. Completion of the MAMA degree within two years requires the student to complete a minimum of 39 credits in that period. If you are on an assistantship (research, teaching, or administrative) you should consult with your advisor 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.

The particular courses any student takes will be determined in consultation with their major advisor and by their program requirements, which allow for some flexibility in taking elective courses. More information about the Distribution of Courses for your degree program can be found in the URI [Graduate Manual](#). Please note that some 400-level courses (MAF 410, MAF 415, MAF 450, and MAF 490) are listed in the catalog as “Not for Graduate Credit”; credits from these courses will not count towards a graduate degree. For Ph.D. students, 400 level courses may not be used toward the Ph.D. course requirements.

NOTE: Requirements for individual programs can change from year to year. The requirements students need to meet may be found in the URI Course Catalog for the year they matriculated into their program. Students may elect to follow the requirements laid out in their entry year in the catalog OR if the requirements changed subsequent to beginning a program, they may follow the requirements outlined in a later version of the catalog.

The [Course Schedule](#) can be found on e-campus, and required courses for your Marine Affairs program are listed on the Marine Affairs [Graduate Milestones](#) page. Any required course can be substituted with a substantially equivalent course or set of courses, with approval from both the instructor and the Director of Graduate Programs, under the following circumstances:

1. Student takes another course that covers similar content at the same or higher level of rigor,
2. The student can demonstrate that they already have the skillset covered through the required course (e.g., a student who majored in Oceanography would not need to take Ocean Uses) - in this case another elective may substitute;
3. There are exceptional circumstances that require us to make concessions (e.g., a course has been cancelled and a student wouldn't be able to graduate on time, a student has a life event that requires them to withdraw from a course).

Please note that the [Course Catalog](#) may include classes that are not currently/actively being taught, so it is best to search for classes via e-campus. If you have questions

about which/when courses will be offered, please contact the department chair. When you have a question about a specific course, for example about permissions, pre-requisites, etc., your first course of action should be to contact the instructor directly through their URI contact information.

The Marine Affairs department offers many options for fulfilling elective requirements, but students are also invited to take courses outside of the department, provided they are at the [appropriate level](#). Directed Study (MAF 591/592) 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 should receive/approve a written project proposal in advance of the semester in which the Directed Study will be taken.

Dissertations, Theses, and Major Projects

All graduate students prepare a dissertation, thesis or a major project. These pieces of work require substantial efforts by the student in terms of identifying research question(s), designing an appropriate study, and then executing it. They provide the student the opportunity to develop detailed expertise in some selected area, and 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 M.A.M.A. and Ph.D. programs take a Research Methods course (MAF 502) in the Spring of their first year, which provides them with an opportunity to develop a thesis or dissertation proposal.

The **dissertation** is a requirement for the Ph.D. program, and is evaluated by your advisor and a 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 M.A.M.A. degree. The scope and goals of the thesis are determined in consultation with the major advisor and committee. Theses are evaluated by your advisor and a thesis committee, 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 their thesis committee and a defense chair selected from outside the department to defend the thesis.

Thesis-track M.A.M.A. students enroll in six credits for the thesis research (MAF 599).

More information about formatting requirements, deadlines, and oral defenses can be found [here](#). The requirements are significantly different for non-thesis tracks.

The **major project** is required of students in the M.M.A. program. The major project is evaluated by the student's major professor (advisor). The major project is not subject to a defense, but must include an oral presentation of results. Meaningful interaction between the student and their major professor is an essential part of the process of completing a major project. M.M.A. students receive three credits for their major project research (MAF 589).

Examples of past theses and dissertations defended in the Marine Affairs department can be found by searching for "Marine Affairs" in the [DigitalCommons@URI database](#).

Examples of past MMA projects can be found in [THIS FOLDER](#).

Working with Your Advisor

Your advisor or major professor is your main point of contact for feedback on your dissertation, thesis, or major project. Periodic consultation is very important, and typically includes verbal discussions, email exchange, and commenting on a student's written work. Advisors also oversee the Institutional Research Board approval process in the event that a student's research involves primary data collection from humans.

All professors work differently as advisors, and you should expect to communicate with your advisor about their expectations for the development of your project. Please be aware that faculty members work with a densely packed schedule, and spend a significant portion of their work day on teaching and research. Some faculty are not available during the summer months. It is imperative that in planning for completion of the dissertation, thesis, or major project the student take into account the time constraints of faculty, and make an effort to schedule meetings in advance, meet mutually agreed upon deadlines, and provide sufficient "turn around" time for comments on written work.

Submitting Your Project Proposal

Students in the Ph.D. or t M.A.M.A. program must submit a dissertation or thesis proposal for approval by their advisor and committee, as well as initiate the **Proposal Approval** form found [here](#). Finalized proposals and Proposal Approval forms must be submitted to the URI Graduate School. Students completing major projects should informally proposal a project, and receive the approval of their advisor, but there is no requirement for submission to the Graduate School.

Students whose research involves primary data collection involving human subjects will also have to submit their information about their project methodology to the URI **Institutional Review Board** (IRB). Information about the IRB process, including semi-regular training, is provided by the URI [Office of Research Integrity](#). Students who expect to submit an IRB proposal should familiarize themselves with the requirements, and submit their proposal, as early as possible, and in consultation with their advisor. Please note that our Research Methods course (MAF 502) meets the "Responsible Conduct of Research" requirement for IRB applications, but all IRB applicants must complete [CITI training](#) as part of their submission.

If a thesis or dissertation involves human subjects research, an application should be submitted to the IRB prior to submitting the complete proposal to the Graduate School. Academic advisors serve as the Principal Investigator (PI) for your IRB application. **The PI (major advisor) signature on IRBnet is confirmation that the proposal is acceptable to the student's committee.** You will need to include the IRB project number on your Graduate School proposal approval form. It is preferable to wait for full IRB approval before submitting the proposal approval form to the Graduate School.

Nomination for Graduation

At the beginning of the semester a student expects to graduate, the student must initiate the [Nomination for Graduation](#) form for approval by their advisor and the Graduate School. Failure to do so may delay graduation for a semester and require the payment of additional continuing registration fees.

After Graduation

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 high and Marine Affairs alumni benefit from a well-established **network of graduates** who are working in coastal-related jobs in the US and internationally. More information about Marine Affairs job listings can be found on the [Career page](#) of our website, and job opportunities are regularly posted to Marine Affairs listservs. Students are also advised to join the [Marine Affairs alumni network on LinkedIn](#).

Students should also take note of **special programs** for which they may be qualified. As a whole, Marine Affairs graduate students have an impressive historical record securing the very competitive, John A. [Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship](#) Program which allows recent graduates to work in Washington, D.C. with a relevant executive agency or congressional committee for a one year period. Many students also apply for the [NOAA Coastal Management Fellowship](#). These paid internships are 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.

As much as possible, Marine Affairs faculty assist students in securing professional employment. This includes informing students of **placement opportunities**, typically by forwarding information about openings to the MAFGRAD listserv. Because faculty maintain extensive networks of alumni, colleagues, and other 'friend of the program' contacts, we are often made aware of relevant employment opportunities. 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.

When applying for positions (before and after graduation), it is common for students to ask faculty members for **letters of recommendation**. Be sure to consider the following before requesting a letter: experience working with the faculty member (as a student, TA, RA, etc.); relationship with the faculty member; suitability of faculty recommendation for the position. Letters should be requested with significant advanced notice (as much as possible, but ideally at least 3-4 weeks). Letter writers may ask you to give them some bullet points or ideas of things you'd like them to cover in their letters. After graduation, it

is important to keep potential letter-writers apprised of your evolving activities and accomplishments, so that they can write the most accurate and updated letter.

Resources for Graduate Students

The University of Rhode Island [Graduate School Manual](#) answers many questions about your graduate program, and it is suggested that you look for answers here before contacting your advisor, the chair, or the Director of Graduate Programs. Questions about program requirements can also be directed to maf_gradprograms@etal.uri.edu, which is regularly monitored by the Director of Graduate Programs. Other campus-wide resources include:

- [The Graduate Writing Center](#)
- [Disability Access & Inclusion](#)
- [Graduate Assistants United](#)
- [Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines](#)
- [Information Technology Services](#)

A more complete list of resources for graduate students can be found on the URI Graduate School [Community Resources](#) page.

Graduate students may receive access to desk space and storage in the **graduate student office** (Coastal Institute 117, Kingston). The Director of Graduate Programs will coordinate allocation of desk space prior to the Fall semester. Because space is limited, students should expect to share their desk with another graduate student. Desk mates can decide amongst themselves how to allocate time and shared space. The graduate student office also contains a small library of past Marine Affairs students' dissertations, theses, and major projects, as well as a refrigerator, a microwave and a coffee pot. The graduate student office serves as an important home base for students, where collaboration, meetings with undergraduates, and studying occurs.

Where to get help in the event of unsafe or inappropriate behavior:

You can always discuss issues with Marine Affairs faculty, the Director of Graduate Programs, or the chair. In cases where you do not feel comfortable discussing an issue with Marine Affairs faculty, or the issue is of such magnitude as to warrant broader institutional action, you may want to reach out to other URI offices. The most direct way for students to report incidents of inappropriate or unsafe behavior is the Dean of Students' Office "[Report It](#)" site. Serious issues involving bias, hazing, sexual misconduct, or coercive behavior should be reported. Students can also contact the following offices directly for help:

- CELS Interim Assistant Dean of Diversity, Recruitment and Retention
Aura Fajardo Grandidge
Phone: (401) 874-4616
Email: afgrandidge@uri.edu

- URI Bias Resource Team
File a [Bias Incident Report Form](#)
Bias Resource Team provides respectful listening, timely response, review of options, referrals to appropriate campus resources, and follow-up communication
- [Student Support and Advocacy Services](#)
Dr. Jacqui Springer, Assistant Dean of Students
Phone: (401) 874-2098
Email: jacqui_springer@uri.edu
- [Violence Prevention and Advocacy Services](#)
Survivor-centered, trauma-informed resources to provide students support, advocacy, information and resources
Phone: (401) 874-9131
Email: vpas@etal.uri.edu

Appendix I: Ph.D. Big Picture Meeting

Student, Major Advisor, Proposed Committee

To be held by the end of a Ph.D. student's 3rd semester

Objective: The purpose of this meeting is to convene the student's proposed dissertation committee and for the student to discuss research interests, level of preparedness to begin research, and plan to address expertise gaps.

Below, two alternative approaches are outlined. The student should determine which alternative they will follow in consultation with their major advisor.

Alternative 1:

Instructions: In a written answers (500-1500 words total) and informal oral presentation (20-30 minutes, with slides, followed by discussion) address the following:

- 1) Broadly describe your proposed research area and the main skills and expertise required to conduct investigations in that topic area.
- 2) Discuss how you think your proposed committee members can assist you in your research (e.g., topical expertise, methodological expertise, general mentoring support).
- 3) Discuss any known knowledge/expertise gaps and provide a plan for how you will fill those gaps in the lead up to your proposal and throughout your time in the Ph.D. program (e.g., coursework, independent studies, workshops)
- 4) Discuss funding plan, including grant application timelines and proposal content
- 5) Discuss post-graduation career plans, including how work during the PhD program can support those plans
- 6) Include a proposed Ph.D. timeline with milestones and deadlines
- 7) Note any plans/desires you have for gaining teaching experience while in your Ph.D.
- 8) Identify potential audiences or professional communities for your work (e.g., conferences you might present at and journals you might target for publishing)

Your written ideas should be submitted to your proposed committee at least a week before your Big Picture Meeting.

ALTERNATIVE 2: BIG PICTURE MEETING APPROACH

Name:

Date:

Attendees:

*****This is a collection of possible topics for discussion. Students should determine their priorities and the focus of their meeting and develop an individualized agenda accordingly.***

KEY COMPONENTS:

1. Coursework Planning
 - a. What are you considering for potential coursework?
 - b. How do you and your committee believe you will be able to get training in your proposed methods
 - c. What methods courses might you need? What do they recommend?
2. Research Ideas
 - a. Open discussion building on projects, independent studies, etc.
 - b. Plans for the summer
3. Teaching
 - a. Brainstorm courses to TA based on interests
 - b. Discuss process to pursue TA opportunities
4. Advising
 - a. Establishing connections with relevant advisors/lab group(s), ensuring close advising for second year
 - b. Consider how committee might change as you move from first to second year
5. Annual Review
 - a. Year-at-a-Glance
 - b. Discuss Student/Advisor forms (*if it makes sense with the focus of this meeting—may be preferable to have a separate discussion with just your First Year Advisors*)

Potential additional topics to discuss (this should be tailored for each student).

6. Professional Development

- a. Skills training in communication, teaching, publishing, etc...What to take advantage of and when?
 - b. Developing professional networks (conferences, listservs, journals to read, membership in professional organizations, etc.)
 - c. Funding: Grant applications (when, which to apply for)
- 7. Outreach & service
 - a. Academic Service
 - i. URI , Coastal Society
 - ii. Other communities, university committees, CRC, etc.
 - b. Fostering connections with non-academic communities
- 8. Life after Marine Affairs
 - a. Aspirations for employment upon graduation, and later
 - b. Connections/skills to gain now to position well for life after Marine Affairs

Appendix II: PhD Comprehensive Exams

To be held within 12 months after completion of core Marine Affairs courses

Only PhD students take Comprehensive Exams (often referred to as “comps”) (see Appendix II). Please note that Ph.D. students are also required to have a “big picture” meeting with their advisor, and members of their committee, during their third semester (see Appendix I). Usually this Big Picture meeting will establish what areas the Comprehensive Exam will cover.

The Ph.D. 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, and is evaluated by the core defense committee. At the discretion of the student’s major advisor, an additional outside evaluator may be invited for the written exam in order to ensure that all major aspects of the project are covered in the comprehensive exam. Comprehensive Exams must take place within 12 months of a student finishing their coursework. Students are not required to be enrolled in the summer term to complete comprehensive exams during the summer term. Once the Comprehensive Exam has been passed, PhD students “advance to candidacy” status and can/should refer to themselves as “Ph.D. candidates.”

Unanimous approval by the examining committee is required to pass the comprehensive examination. A student whose performance fails to receive unanimous approval of the examining committee may, with the committee’s recommendation and the approval of the dean of the Graduate School, be permitted one re-examination in the part or parts failed, to be taken no later than one year after the initial examinations. Once the Comprehensive Exam has been passed, Ph.D. students “advance to candidacy” status and can/should refer to themselves as “Ph.D. candidates.”

MAF PhD Comprehensive Written Exam

2 day take home exam; 2 questions/day, 8 hours/day, taken on two consecutive days

This portion of the exam is designed to test you on knowledge related specifically to your proposed dissertation research.

Reading list

At least six weeks prior to the exam, the student should work with each of the three committee members to develop a separate reading list of journal papers, book chapters, reports, etc. with which the committee member feels the student should be familiar. These may cover theory, methods, or topics that are relevant to the intersection of the committee member’s expertise and the student’s research interests. The committee members will design the exam questions with this list in mind and the essays should draw from, but not be limited to, that list.

The Exam

The written exam consists of three questions, created and evaluated by each member of your core dissertation committee and based in part on the reading list, plus a fourth question about methodology created and evaluated by the professor/instructor for MAF 502 or a fourth committee member as applicable. Students will receive two questions at an agreed upon start time, and must submit their written answers 8 hours later. The same process will be repeated on the second day. Committee members should specify word limits for their questions.

You should rely in part on the reading lists for sources, but may use your notes and anything on your hard drive and the internet for this portion of the exam. All sources must be properly cited, and you should include a bibliography or reference list at the end of each essay. Use of AI is not permitted unless otherwise specified by the major advisor in consultation with the committee.

MAF PhD Comprehensive Oral Exam

The oral examination should be taken within 4 weeks of completing the written exam. This portion of the exam is designed to allow for follow-up inquiries and clarifications from your written exam, as well as evaluate your Dissertation Research Proposal. The overarching goal is to assess whether the student has sufficient knowledge and is properly prepared to begin his/her proposed dissertation research and finish it in the timeline of the doctoral program (typically 5 years total). The oral examination committee includes the student's committee and one additional graduate faculty member ([guidelines here](#)).

The student will submit a Dissertation Research Proposal ([guidelines here](#)) to their committee at least 10 days before the Oral Exam. The written proposal will discuss how the proposed research will address a significant problem or need in Marine Affairs and the transformative contributions anticipated from this work.

The Oral Exam lasts for a period of 2 hours. The oral exam begins with a presentation of your Dissertation Research Proposal (20-30 minutes). Committee members will then ask questions of the student, focusing on the Dissertation Research Proposal, but also potentially touching on aspects of the written exam answers. Approximately 15-30 min before the end of the Exam, the student will be asked to leave the room, so that Committee Members can discuss the results of the Exam. There are three possible outcomes and the decision must be unanimous:

1. Exam passed and dissertation proposal approved.
2. Exam not passed -- revisions or additional action and retest required.
Committee should specify what the student needs to do to receive a pass, a timeline for completion (not to exceed one semester). A second examination, if permitted, may be taken only after a minimum of ten weeks has passed to allow for additional student preparation. In all cases, a second examination must take place before one year has elapsed.
3. Exam not passed, with no option to retest (only in the event that the student has already retested once). This option results in dismissal from the PhD program.

The student is then called back into the room to hear the results. Upon passing, the committee will submit the Dissertation Approval Form ([here](#)) and the Results of A Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Form ([here](#)).

Appendix III: Thesis/Dissertation Defense

Basic information about the oral defense of your thesis or dissertation can be found in the [Graduate Manual](#), but some elements of the defense are norms of the Marine Affairs Department (see Appendix III).

The Graduate School has compiled a useful document for the [Dissertation Process: From Proposal to Defense](#) that may be a useful resource.

Before the Defense

When your advisor has thoroughly reviewed the final draft and determined that it is defensible, students must submit the Request for Oral Examination in Defense of a Thesis/Dissertation [form](#), including a proposed date, time, and location of the defense. Students are responsible for booking a room for the defense, and rooms should hold at least 20 people. Students should also arrange for any necessary equipment, such as a projector or screen, adaptors, cables, remote, laser pointer, etc. Many of these resources can be borrowed from the department or college.

Students should send digital copies to all committee members at least 2 weeks before the defense. It is recommended that students send a Google Calendar invite to committee members that includes the time, date, and location of the defense, including a link to a virtual platform if that is an option for attendance.

At least one week before, students should circulate an announcement of the time, location, and subject of their thesis or major project. Be sure to include your name, project title, names of committee members and their department affiliations, and a brief abstract. Announcements should be posted on the Marine Affairs Google Group as well as physically posted around the Coastal Institute (Kingston).

During the Defense

The oral defense of the dissertation is open to all members of the faculty and, generally, to all students. The examination, usually two hours long, is conducted by an examining committee comprising the student's program committee and one additional graduate faculty member who will chair the examination.

Thesis and dissertation projects are evaluated by a committee, which is composed by the student in consultation with their advisor, and the consent of each committee member. The requirements for defense committees are established in the [Graduate Manual](#). Each committee must consist of the following:

- Advisor/major professor from Marine Affairs (may be a joint appointment)

- "Inside" member - from Marine Affairs or closely related department

- "Outside" member - with URI Grad Faculty Appointment, but outside Marine Affairs

Chair - from URI, but outside Marine Affairs – this person oversees the proceedings, but does not have a role beyond the defense

Faculty with joint appointments can serve as a major advisor and *either* inside or outside committee members.

Please note that the Graduate School requires that the finalized thesis/dissertation text must be submitted to the committee a minimum of 20 days in advance of the oral defense date.

The Ph.D. and M.A.M.A. defense and the M.A.M.A. Major Project oral presentation is open to the public, and graduate students are encouraged to attend. The total time for an Ph.D. or M.A.M.A. defense proceeding will be no more than 2 hours, including presentation, Q&A, discussion, and a closed door session of the committee. The Marine Affairs department typically follows the following procedure*, which is in line with Graduate School Guidelines:

- (1) The defense chair welcomes the audience and introduces the committee, the student, and the research title. The chair then requests that the major professor asks the first question, which is: Can you (defending student) give us a brief overview of your research?
- (2) The student provides a roughly 20-45 minute presentation of their research, including all main elements of the research design and findings. Students typically utilize a powerpoint for their presentation, but this is not technically required.
- (3) The chair invites any audience members who do not want to stay for the committee questions to leave, and allows a brief pause for them to exit the room.
- (4) The committee asks questions, typically one-at-a-time, and for two rounds, with each faculty member taking roughly 10 minutes per round. The defense chair moderates this discussion, keeps track of the time, and can ask questions if desired.
- (5) Once the committee is done asking questions, the defense chair invites any questions from the general audience.
- (6) The audience and the student are asked to leave, so the committee can deliberate about whether the student has passed the defense, and what revisions are necessary for final acceptance of the project. Deliberation and discussion is moderated by the defense chair, and typically lasts 10-15 minutes.
- (7) The student is invited back into the room to hear the results of the deliberation, and discuss necessary revisions. At the end of the defense, and after a decision has been reached, the defense chair will initiate the Results of an Oral Examination form to be signed by each member of the committee.

** Note that there may be variations and students should confirm the run of show with their major advisor in advance of the defense.*

After the Defense

Depending on the results of the defense, students will revise their dissertation in line with requested revisions and either submit the revised dissertation to the full committee or just their major professor/advisor.

Appendix V: Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently used links

[URI Graduate Student Manual](#)

[URI Academic Catalog](#) (lists program requirements)

[URI Graduate School Forms](#)

[URI Graduate School Deadlines](#)

[Marine Affairs Graduate Student Handbook](#)

[Marine Affairs Graduate Student Milestones Table](#)

Which course and credit requirements apply to my cohort?

Program requirements change for a variety of reasons and new requirements can take time to officially take effect. Your requirements are determined by those that were in effect the semester you accepted admission. The official version of these can be found in URI Course Catalog [HERE](#). Look up Marine Affairs to find the list of official requirements in the Catalog for the year you were accepted into the program.

How are MAF electives course offerings determined?

The department has a wide array of potential elective course offerings, but is limited in what can actually be offered in any semester by the instructors/faculty available and the total number of students to fill the classes. The College does not allow 400 level (and below) courses to run with fewer than 20 students or 500 level courses to run with fewer than 10 students. Thus, we are not able to offer courses that will not be popular enough to meet this threshold.

Scheduling of courses takes into account the constraints of room availability, instructor availability, balancing spring/fall offerings, and endeavors to minimize scheduling conflicts for courses that students may want to take in any given semester.

Some specialized courses require a certain faculty member to teach them. When faculty have other obligations (e.g., teaching other courses, sabbaticals, medical leaves, administrative duties), those courses can not be offered. They remain “on the books” because we anticipate that they will be taught again in the future.

The teaching capacity of the department is currently lower than it has been in the past due to faculty leaving the department (retirements or moving to other institutions) and the department not being able to replace those positions.

Why are there limits on taking non-MAF courses as electives and on the total number of 400-level courses?

In order for MAF to be able to offer as many MAF electives as possible, the department requires that a certain number of required electives be listed within MAF. This helps us maintain our course offerings which may otherwise not make the minimum enrollment requirements set by CELS. Students may also take credits above and beyond those required of their particular program if they wish to take courses that do not fit within the constraints of their program.

The graduate school sets limits on the number of 400 level courses that may be counted toward a graduate degree (see Grad Manual [HERE](#)).

Who is allowed to serve as thesis or dissertation committee chair, co-chair, or defense chair?

The graduate school sets the requirements for committees. Information can be found [HERE](#). Faculty who have joint appointments in MAF and another department can serve as either an inside or outside member in any of the roles.

A Defense Chair is required for thesis and dissertation defenses. This must be a person from outside our department who has been approved as Graduate Faculty. While we can get people approved as graduate faculty, they must have the highest degree offered in their field (usually a PhD).

How do I plan my timeline toward graduation or thesis/dissertation completion?

Your main point of contact should be your major advisor. If you have not yet identified a major advisor, the graduate program director fills this role.

All deadlines are set by the graduate school. Information can be found [HERE](#).

An overview of MAF specific requirements can be found [HERE](#).

Why were grad program requirements changed in the last couple of years (e.g., required courses and electives)?

The department must balance a number of factors when determining its program requirements:

- Remain competitive with other graduate programs both within and outside URI

- Ensure students graduate with a core set of Marine Affairs skills and expertise
- Maintain enrollment in MAF courses to ensure that they can be offered
- Allow flexibility for students to take courses that match their interests

CELS has increased the minimum number of students required for a course to run. In recent years, the department reduced the overall required credits for the MAMA from 45 to 39 and, after much discussion, added Coastal Zone Law as a required course for both the MMA and the MAMA. This resulted in a necessary reduction in the number of electives required for the MAMA. In order to help ensure that MAF courses could continue to be offered, the department added that a certain number of electives be within the MAF department. Note that students are not restricted to 39 credits and may take additional courses if they desire to do so.

Why aren't there more TA opportunities for MAF grad students?

Teaching Assistant positions are allocated to the department by the College. The total number of TA positions is determined in part by the overall teaching needs of the College and in part by the total amount of URI funding available for TA positions. Our department has few large enrollment courses that qualify for TA instructional support, thus there are very few TA opportunities within MAF. There are larger instructional needs outside of MAF (e.g., BIO) and historically MAF students with BIO experience have been provided with TA positions that have teaching duties in BIO. The College is developing a new approach to identifying students to serve as TAs, but the department has no role in making those decisions. More info on funding for MAF students can be found [HERE](#).

What do I do if I find inconsistencies in guidance around program requirements, policies, or other things?

Please let us know if you see inconsistencies! There are numerous documents and policies that are revised and changed over time, including the MAF website, the MAF grad handbook, the Grad Student Union Contract, the URI Grad Manual, the URI Catalog, and many more. We do our best to keep up with changes and ensure that our documents are consistent and up to date, but we do miss things occasionally. If you see issues or receive guidance that is inconsistent, please let the Chair or Grad Director know, so they can be clarified and corrected as appropriate.

Can I audit a course, and what is the process?

Permission to audit a course must be obtained from the instructor. Some instructors are happy to have students audit and others do not allow it. Students auditing a course do not count toward the minimum enrollments, as they are not enrolled. You must also complete a [Course Audit Authorization Form](#) and file it with enrollment services.

Who can help with administrative questions and paperwork?

Typically, you should start with your major advisor to get direction on administrative support. They may point you to the grad school, enrollment services, or the department's administrative support staff that sits in Room 205.

Can the department offer more social or community-building events?

Faculty organize social and community-building events for the graduate and undergraduate students, typically one or two per semester. Students are also encouraged to organize events and the department will generally be able to contribute funding to support things like refreshments or an honorarium for a speaker. A request for support can be directed to the chair.

Is there a way to receive more information about university-wide graduate events?

You can follow the URI Events Calendar and subscribe to Google Groups at URI that you might be interested in by searching at [Groups.Google.Com](https://groups.google.com).