GEOGRAPHY - DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Overview

The New Mexico Doctoral Program in Geography (NMDPG) is a collaborative Ph.D. program jointly administered by the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies at New Mexico State University (NMSU) and the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies at the University of New Mexico (UNM). This unique partnership provides students with access to faculty expertise, research resources, and coursework across both institutions, offering a truly interdisciplinary and flexible approach to advanced geographic study and enabling students to pursue a wide range of career paths in higher education, government, private industry, and nonprofit organizations.

A Research-Driven, Interdisciplinary Approach

The Ph.D. in Geography is a rigorous, research-intensive program that cultivates expertise across a wide range of geographic subfields, including geographic information science and technology, landscape ecology, biogeography, political ecology, environmental policy and planning, geohumanities, historical geography, and health geography. The program builds on the existing strengths and resources of both universities, with a curriculum designed to evolve in response to emerging human-environment challenges and shifting career demands within professional geography.

The program's primary regional foci include New Mexico and the broader Southwest, the Mexico-U.S. borderlands, and Latin America, providing students with opportunities to engage in place-based research that informs both academic and applied geographic inquiry.

Students develop proficiency in quantitative, qualitative, critical, and creative research methods, learning to integrate these approaches into a mixed-methods framework that deepens their ability to analyze complex geographic issues. The program provides a strong theoretical foundation, methodological expertise, and hands-on experience, preparing students to tackle urgent global and regional challenges through innovative geographic research.

Each student works with faculty advisors to develop a personalized course of study, combining core geographic theory, research design, and specialized coursework aligned with their research interests and professional aspirations.

Ph.D. students collaborate closely with faculty advisors and dissertation committees from both NMSU and UNM, benefiting from interdisciplinary mentorship and cross-campus resources. The curriculum balances theoretical training, applied research, and technical proficiency, equipping students to conduct original, high-impact geographic research that advances knowledge in the discipline while informing policy, practice, and community-based solutions beyond academia.

Collaborative Learning & Distinctive Opportunities

Students reside at either NMSU (Las Cruces) or UNM (Albuquerque), selecting a home institution based on faculty alignment with their research interests. However, students engage with faculty, resources, and coursework on both campuses, either in person or remotely.

The program also offers:

- State-of-the-art research facilities, including GIS and remote sensing labs with UAS technology, field spectroscopy, and survey-grade GPS units.
- Access to distinctive landscapes for field-based research, spanning the Chihuahuan Desert, Rocky Mountains, U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and urban centers.
- A collaborative, interdisciplinary environment, drawing from strengths in geography, anthropology, environmental science, public health, and more.
- Opportunities for teaching and research assistantships, providing funding and professional experience.

Program Structure & Coursework

The Ph.D. program requires a minimum of 66 credits beyond the bachelor's degree, including:

- Core courses in geographic theory, application, and research design
- Elective courses tailored to students' research interests
- Comprehensive exams to assess competency across geographic subfields and expertise within students' areas of specialization
- An original and significant dissertation

Students develop an individualized program of study in consultation with their faculty advisor and dissertation committee, ensuring alignment with career goals and disciplinary expertise.

Who Should Apply?

Applicants from diverse academic backgrounds are encouraged to apply. While a master's degree in geography or a related field is preferred, students without prior geography coursework may be required to take preparatory courses. Prospective students should consult with the Graduate Program Director at their chosen home institution to discuss application requirements and pathways into the program.

Career Pathways

Graduates of the Ph.D. in Geography program pursue careers in:

- Higher education (teaching and research in universities and colleges)
- Government agencies and NGOs (e.g., environmental management, conservation, and climate policy)
- Private industry (e.g., data science, geospatial analysis, and environmental consulting)
- Public health and emergency management (e.g., epidemiology, disaster response, and risk assessment)

The program equips students with theoretical expertise, technical skills, and research experience needed to lead innovative geographic inquiry and apply their knowledge to real-world challenges.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the Ph.D. in Geography, students will be able to:

1. Apply advanced geographic knowledge and skills, demonstrating a critical understanding of how their expertise connects to broader geographic and interdisciplinary fields.

2. Conduct all stages of an independent, original, and significant research project, including conceptualization, planning, implementation, management, and communication.
3. Integrate communication, teaching, and professional knowledge to excel in academic, governmental, and industry careers.

More Information

For details on course and credit requirements, major program milestones, and additional academic guidelines, please refer to the NMDPG Handbook available under the Requirements tab.