

CEE Graduate FAQ

Graduate Frequently Asked Questions

The Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Syracuse University was established by the Board of Trustees in 1876. Graduate degrees have been awarded since the 1920's. Civil and Environmental Engineering is one of four departments within the College of Engineering and Computer Science. The department has a long tradition of excellence in graduate teaching and research. Graduate students work closely with their faculty advisors on a variety of research projects. The CEE faculty has a wide range of research and teaching interests. The graduate programs are divided into two disciplines: Civil Engineering and Environment Engineering. Degrees in Civil Engineering are chosen to include an emphasis in Construction Engineering and Management, Geomechanics and Geotechnical Engineering, or Structural and Materials Engineering. Degrees in Environmental Engineering can encompass a broad range of topics or can be more focused on water quality, hydrology, air quality, sustainable infrastructure, or other topics.

We encourage you to become familiar with the [research areas](#) in the Department, to reach out to our [faculty](#) for support, and to become actively engaged in the Department community. One way we encourage our students to become involved is by attending the seminar series we hold throughout the academic year. This is an opportunity to learn about advances in the academic community and to network with faculty and students from across campus.

We are committed to helping you achieve your career goals. Students can take full advantage of what the University has to offer by learning about the [graduate resources](#) available in the College and the [campus resources](#) available at the University.

For the most current information about your degree of study, you can refer to the [Graduate Course Catalog](#). The Graduate School maintains a checklist of [Graduate Requirements](#) that all graduate students should be familiar with to ensure they are on track for degree completion. This site also has many necessary forms, dates and deadlines, and access to resources.

1.0 How and when can I register for courses?

All returning CEE students (MS/PhD) are required to early register. Fall registration begins in April; Spring registration begins in November. The student is responsible for course registration.

Newly matriculated graduate students will be able to register for courses after they have met with their academic advisor. Students will be emailed with their advisor information and instructions for registration.

Please refer to the Registrar's [Academic Calendar](#) for specific dates.

1.1 Unable to register?

If you have a hold on your account, you will see a red circle with a line through it in Myslice. Click on that and it will indicate which office to contact. All registration should be completed before the add deadline. If the add deadline has passed, Myslice will not allow you register; this policy is strictly enforced.

See [Academic Calendar](#)

2.0 What is the deadline to drop classes, withdraw etc.?

Deadlines typically follow the below schedule. You will always want to check the Registrar's [Academic Calendar](#) for the official dates.

- Schedule Adjustments - First week of the semester
- Add Deadline – One week after the first day of classes
- Deadline for Grading Option (audit) - Three weeks after first day of classes
- Academic/Financial Drop Deadline - Three weeks after the first day of classes
- Withdrawal Deadline - Two weeks before the last day of classes
- Early Registration - Approximately four weeks before the last day of classes

When turning in forms/petitions or any type of paperwork which is time-sensitive and/or requires departmental signatures, it can take up to 5 business days to be reviewed. Do not wait until a deadline to submit paperwork.

Be aware, throughout the semester, of the Academic Calendar and plan accordingly. The student is responsible for adhering to deadlines as posted in the Academic Calendar by the Registrar.

2.1 Can't drop a class?

It is best to drop classes before the add deadline; after this date it becomes a manual process.

If the add deadline has passed, Myslice will not allow you to drop a class on-line if you are an international student; all registrations for international students must be verified.

If it is not your last semester, you cannot drop below 9 credits if you are a full-time student.

Did you turn in your last semester memo? (If it is your last semester and you filed your diploma request when you early registered, you should have received your last semester memo during the first two weeks of classes.)

See [Academic Calendar](#)

3.0 How do I enroll in an Independent Study?

Independent Study courses require the submittal of a Proposal to the Registrar's Office. The student will coordinate with a faculty member on the requirements of the Independent Study and criteria for assessment. After the faculty sponsor (must be f/t faculty from CEE) completes and signs the Proposal for Independent Study, the student must email the form to [Nicholas Clarke](#), who will obtain the advisor's and Program Director's signatures.

After the Graduate Program Director approves, it will be forwarded to the Registrar's office (with a cc to student). Registrar's office will post the Independent Study to your course registration. (Please allow 7-10 business days or longer during high volume periods).

- For PhD Students no more than 6 credits of CEE 690 Independent Study can be used towards the completion of the program of study coursework.
- For MS Students no more than 3 credits of CEE 690 Independent Study can be used towards the completion of the program of study coursework.

[Proposal for Independent Study Course](#)

4.0 I'm a residential student. Can I take an online course?

No, residential students do not take online courses. When searching for classes, be sure to select in-person classes from the drop-down menu. Main campus students cannot register for online or Online2U courses.

5.0 Is there a waitlist for classes that are full? Can I swap a class?

Certain instructors may keep a waitlist at their discretion; contact the instructor. If an instructor gives consent to add you to a closed class s/he must send [Nicholas Clarke](#) an e-mail with your name, SU ID, course number and section number.

If the instructor does not maintain a waitlist, the student must continue to check for open seats.

The student is responsible for course registration including swapping classes/sections.

6.0 Can I retake double-numbered coursework?

Some courses are double-numbered and have both undergraduate and graduate level sections available (typically as 400-/600-level courses). This allows both undergraduate and graduate students to take the same course, with additional coursework required of graduate students.

Students are prohibited from taking both levels of a double-numbered course. A student that completes the undergraduate-level section may **not** later complete the graduate-level section.

7.0 Can I transfer more than 30 credits into my PhD Program?

No, 30 credits is the maximum number allowed. Per the Graduate School's rules, transfer credit can comprise no more than 50 percent of the doctoral coursework. Our PhD program requires 48 credit hours total. The maximum number of transfer credits that is allowed is 24 credits. The only exception being if a student is transferring in their entire MS degree as one 30 credit block.

8.0 Can I apply a course to multiple degree programs?

Students can share a course with no more than two degree programs, as long as the minimum requirements of those programs are met. Refer to the Graduate Course Catalog's [Academic Rules Section](#).

9.0 Is there a requirement to be in class on the first day?

Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at SU beginning with the first day of classes. Students who do not arrive and attend classes starting on the first day of their classes may be academically withdrawn by their college or departments as not making progress toward degree by failure to attend.

10.0 Where can I find documentation of enrollment/status?

See the following form: [Full time status verification](#)

11.0 How do I maintain Full-Time Status?

A graduate student is considered to be full-time under any one of the following conditions:

- registered for a semester, full-time study (9 credits for fall, spring, or summer in a program approved by the student's advisor)
- holding an appointment as a graduate assistant or fellow and registered for the semester (fall and spring only)
- registered for fewer than 9 credits but for at least 0 (zero) credits of thesis, dissertation, or degree in progress for the semester and engaged, at a level equivalent to full-time study in one or more of the following activities as certified by your program.
- a proposed plan of study for the semester should be agreed upon between the student and the instructor (signed by both and filed with the school or college)
 - studying for preliminary, qualifying, or comprehensive exams
 - studying for a language or tool requirement
 - actively working on a thesis or dissertation
 - an internship

If the student is not registered for any coursework, including registration for master's thesis credits, then the student must be registered for GRD 998 Degree in Progress.

12.0 I didn't receive a scholarship when I was admitted. Can I get one now?

Consideration for scholarships was given at the time your application was reviewed. No further funding is available after admission.

13.0 Why was my merit scholarship removed from my student account?

In order to retain the merit scholarship you must:

Be registered for 9 credits that can be used in your program of study each semester. You do not have to be registered for 9 credits during your final semester.

Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher after the second semester. Failure means that the grant will be permanently removed.

14.0 What is the procedure to apply for RA or TA positions?

Research Assistantship appointments: Contact the faculty member with whom you want to work.

Teaching Assistantship appointments are assigned based on the needs of the department and recommendations by faculty. There is no application process.

Note: Incoming/newly matriculated MS students are not eligible for RA/TA appointments.

15.0 I'm newly hired by the department. What should I do? How do I get paycheck /direct deposit?

Make sure that you register as soon as open enrollment starts. Failure to register on time will mean you are not a student and thus cannot receive an assistantship appointment.

All employees are STRONGLY encouraged to sign up for Direct Deposit. Step-by-step instructions are found [here](#). Please contact Payroll at payroll@syr.edu or 315-443-4042, option 2. Should you have any further questions, please email [Weisi Liu](#)

[Payroll Direct Deposit Request Form](#)

[I-9 instructions](#)

16.0 I'm an hourly paid student. How do I complete my timesheet?

Timesheet instructions are found [here](#). Be sure to submit timesheets based on time actually worked. Submitting timesheets for pay periods in the future is not permitted.

17.0 Do I have to pay Summer Taxes if working on-campus?

Any graduate student receiving income from an assistantship, fellowship, hourly lab work, or other on-campus source during the summer should register for 0 credits of GRD 998 (Degree in Progress).

Students who are not registered for at least 0 credits of coursework during the summer may have FICA taxes withheld from their paycheck during that period.

Please contact the department's budget manager if you believe FICA taxes are being withheld from your paycheck in error.

18.0 What are the departmental policies for going on CPT?

International students that want to gain work experience while in the U.S. may apply for Curriculum Practical Training. To be eligible for CPT, a student must:

- Be in good academic standing with the department;
- Have a minimum overall grade point average (GPA) of 2.800; and
- Have completed no fewer than 15 credits of coursework toward their degree;
- Have completed two on-campus semesters.

The department's administrative assistant will provide a departmental recommendation letter upon request. Students need to have an official offer letter from an employer. CPT must have a start date that equals the start date of classes and the end date must be at the end of the semester.

Students are required to enroll in 1 Credit of CEE 670 Experience Credit during the Semester they are engaged in CPT. CEE 670 cannot be counted towards a student's Program of Study. A Proposal for Independent Study must be completed to register for CEE 670.

Any student interested in CPT should speak with an advisor at the [Center for International Services](#).

[Proposal for Independent Study Course](#)

19.0 What are the departmental policies for going on OPT?

International students with an F-1 visa may be eligible for a 12-month temporary employment authorization.

The department's administrative assistant will provide a recommendation letter upon request. For details, please contact the [Center for International Services](#).

20.0 I have a CO-OP from the CASE Centers. Who needs to sign the form in the CEE Department?

E-mail [Nicholas Clarke](#) the co-op form after you have completed it. He will obtain the signatures from the Advisor and the Department Chair. Once the form has been reviewed, it will be sent to the CASE Center (student will be cc'd on e-mail).

21.0 I am a TA/RA. How do I get a key to the lab?

Request a key request form and obtain instructor's signature. Email to [Nicholas Clarke](#)

22.0 I am a TA. Will I be assigned an office for office hours?

Office space is limited. There is space available on a first come first serve basis in Link 131 and Link 316.

23.0 I am locked out of my lab. Whom should I contact?

Weekdays – During normal office hours, you can contact any Nicholas Clarke in the department to give you access to your lab. Someone can be reached at (315)443-2311 weekdays until 5 pm during the academic year and 4:30 during the summer.

Weekends– Please contact DPS at (315)443-2224

24.0 What should I do with my lab key at the end of the semester?

You are responsible for keys until they have been returned to Nicholas Clarke in Link 151. Please do not leave them with a faculty member or another student.

25.0 What can I do if I am not doing well in my classes?

Reach out to the instructor or TA if you need help in your class. You can also reach out to your Academic Advisor, or Program Director for guidance.

26.0 What are the MS Exit requirements?

- No fewer than 30 total credits of graduate-level coursework;
- completion of all coursework group requirements in a selected concentration;
- minimum 3.000 GPA for all coursework used toward the completion of degree;
- minimum 2.800 GPA cumulative for all coursework taken at SU;
- no more than 15 credits of 500-level coursework;
- at least 15 credits must be CEE prefixed graduate level courses; and
- satisfactory completion of either a thesis or an exit paper.

27.0 What are the PhD Exit requirements?

- No fewer than 48 total credits of graduate-level coursework;
- minimum 3.333 GPA for all coursework used toward the completion of degree;
- minimum 2.800 GPA cumulative for all coursework taken at SU;
- for students with an M.S. degree, at least two-thirds of the Ph.D. coursework must be at or above the 600 level, and no more than one-third of the coursework can be independent study;
- satisfactory academic performance;
- successful completion of a qualifying examination;
- successful completion of a candidacy examination; and
- successful defense of a dissertation in an oral examination.

28.0 How do I pursue the MS Thesis Track?

It is the student's responsibility to find a faculty member that is willing to oversee their research and act as the Thesis Advisor.

No faculty member is obligated to serve as a Thesis Advisor.

Once an Advisor has agreed to take you on as an advisee, they must notify [Nicholas Clarke](#).

Important links to the Graduate School's guidelines for a Thesis and Defense can be found below:

- [What you need to graduate](#)
- [Request for exam form](#)– Before submitting your signed form to the Graduate School, email to [Nicholas Clarke](#).
- [Graduation Deadlines](#)
- [Universal Exam Report](#)(to be taken to defense by student)

29.0 What are the requirements for the Thesis Track?

The Oral Thesis Defense and submission of the thesis document to the Syracuse University Graduate School are the final requirements for students in a thesis plan.

Defense paperwork must comply with the [Graduate School's guidelines](#), including formatting.

The candidate must complete 24 credit hours of coursework, which include a set of core courses in the student's chosen area of specialization and a cohesive program of elective coursework approved by the student's advisor, as outlined in the attached programs of study. All Full-Time M.S. candidates are expected to participate in faculty/student seminar series (CEE 660) each year. In addition, the student must register for six credits of CEE 997-Master's Thesis, culminating in the defense of the thesis administered by the student's thesis committee.

30.0 What are the deadlines for scheduling the MS Thesis Defense?

The official Request for Examination form must be signed and submitted to the Graduate School at least **three full weeks** prior to the oral defense date.

A copy of the thesis document must be delivered to all members of the defense committee at least **two full weeks** prior to the oral defense date.

31.0 What are the MS Thesis Exam Committee requirements?

The thesis defense committee will consist of four members, including

- the thesis advisor;
- two faculty members from the department or other specialists in the subject area; and
- the Chair of the Oral Examination Committee

The Chair of the Oral Examination Committee must be a Syracuse University tenured or tenure-track faculty member.

Two of the four-committee members must be CEE faculty members.

A committee member from outside Syracuse University may be allowed by petition.

32.0 When will I receive my Last Semester Memo?

Last Semester Memo (only for non-domestic students) will be sent to your SU e-mail within the first two weeks of the semester.

Receiving this letter from the department does not ensure that you have met all the requirements to graduate. You receive the letter because you filed a diploma request.

If you have questions regarding this memo please visit the [International Center webpage](#)

[Nicholas Clarke](#) sends the Last Semester Memo. Email him if you do not receive one of these.

NOTE: If you fail to file for graduation, you may not receive any communication related to graduation—including the Last Semester Memo.

33.0 Why has my insurance been canceled in my last semester?

If you are not taking 9 credits in your last semester, you are not considered full-time.

You were issued a Last Semester Memo (for international students) which indicates to immigration that, although you are not full-time, we are aware that you are finishing your program.

Part-time students are only eligible for certain insurance plans. Visit ese.syr.edu/international/insurance for other insurance options.

34.0 MS Exit Paper Candidates: What are my final semester requirements?

Must file a Diploma Request in MySlice before classes start (preferably when you early register for your last semester).

Check Degree Works to see if you are on track to graduate. You can access Degree Works via MySlice; it will appear under the Advising tile on your home page.

If you are an International Student you will need to file your Last Semester Memo.

If you are a non-thesis track student, then you will need to register for CEE 995 Master's Exit Paper and email your Academic Advisor for their Exit Paper requirements and deadlines.

35.0 What are the Exit Paper requirements?

Students not completing a Master's Thesis must instead complete a Master's Exit Paper. To complete the degree requirement, a student must also take CEE 995-Master's Exit Paper for zero credit. The exit paper must be an original work that address issues related to their specialty approved by the academic advisor and have a minimum length of 2,000 words. The academic advisor determines the formatting and requirements for the exit paper.

36.0 MS Thesis Candidates: What are my final semester requirements?

Must file a Diploma Request in MySlice before classes start (preferably when you early register for your last semester).

Students that have completed all coursework requirements are required to enroll in 0 Credits of GRD 998 Degree in Progress.

Students need to be aware of the Graduate School's Deadlines for Thesis Exams in the given semester.

Students who are defending a thesis or dissertation must submit a signed [Request for Examination](#) form to the Graduate School at degrecert@syr.edu at **least three (3) weeks prior** to the proposed defense date. A final, signed [degree audit worksheet](#) must be on file with the Graduate School or submitted with the signed [Request for Examination](#) form, at least three weeks prior to the proposed defense date.

[Electronic dissertation/Thesis submittal checklist](#)

After you submit an Electronic Request for Exam Form, you will receive a PDF version of RFE Form. Email this PDF to [Nicholas Clarke](#) a copy to obtain the Advisor's and Chair's signature.

37.0 Do I need to fill out a Program of Study?

No, programs of study will be completed by Nicholas Clarke and submitted to the Graduate School.

38.0 When is the PhD Qualifying Exam to be completed?

Students are expected to complete their Qualifying Exam after their first year of study.

39.0 What are the PhD Qualifying Exam requirements?

The examination is composed of two parts: a written exam followed by an oral examination covering materials from at least three graduate level classes that the student has taken at Syracuse University, as well as relevant materials from undergraduate coursework. The purpose of this examination is to assess the student's background knowledge in his/her primary subject area(s) and his/her preparedness for Ph.D. level research. The result of this examination is a decision by the exam committee as to whether or not the student should continue in the Ph.D. program.

The student must work with their advisor to select the members of their exam committee, and to determine the date and time of the written and oral parts of the examination. The length of time spent on the written portion of the exam will be determined by the advisor in coordination with the committee.

Students must notify [Nicholas Clarke](#) at least two weeks prior to the oral examination date with the Date, Time and Location of the oral exam and the selected Committee Members.

Qualifying oral examinations can be held in the CEE Conference Room (151A Link Hall) if available, or other space upon request.

At least 2.5 hours should be scheduled for the oral exam to allow sufficient time for questions.

40.0 What are the PhD Qualifying Exam Committee requirements?

The exam committee shall consist of at least three faculty members. The advisor will serve as one committee member. The majority of the committee membership shall be faculty members from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Syracuse University.

41.0 When is the PhD Candidacy Exam to be completed?

Students are expected to present their research proposal to a faculty examination committee after completion of the student's required Ph.D. coursework, but no later than the fifth semester after admission into the Ph.D. program.

42.0 What are the PhD Candidacy Exam requirements?

Prior to this examination, the student shall prepare a detailed research proposal that includes but is not limited to a review of relevant literature leading to a statement of objectives (including major questions or hypotheses to be addressed in the dissertation), a description of methods and approaches to be used, and a brief description of the significance of the proposed work. The proposal will often include preliminary results from the student's work to date.

The oral examination is initiated by a 30-40 minute summary of the dissertation research proposal and progress to date by the student.

Following the presentation, the dissertation committee members ask the student questions concerning the research proposal.

Following the examination, the dissertation committee confers to determine if the student is a suitable Ph.D. candidate based on his/her performance on the candidacy examination, as well as to determine if the student should be required to take additional coursework beyond the minimum required for the degree.

If the student successfully completes the candidacy examination by receiving an affirmative vote from the majority of the committee, the advisor notifies the student and the graduate school and the student is considered a Ph.D. candidate.

If the student does not successfully complete the candidacy examination, the committee determines whether the student will be permitted to retake the examination after a minimum period of six months or whether the student's Ph.D. program should be terminated.

The student must work with their advisor to select the members of their exam committee, and to identify which committee member will serve as exam chair, and to determine the date and time of the presentation.

A copy of the research proposal must be delivered to all members of the exam committee at least two full weeks prior to the oral defense date.

Students must contact the department's administrative assistant at least two weeks prior to the presentation date with the Date, Time and Location of the Exam and the selected Committee Members.

Candidacy examinations can be held in the CEE Conference Room (151A Link Hall) if available, or other space upon request.

At least 2 hours should be scheduled to allow sufficient time for questions.

43.0 What are the PhD Candidacy Exam Committee requirements?

The examination committee will consist of five members: the dissertation advisor and at least four other faculty members.

The majority of the committee membership shall be faculty members from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Syracuse University.

A copy of the research proposal must be delivered to all members of the exam committee at least two full weeks prior to the oral defense date. Any committee member who receives their copy fewer than 14 calendar days prior to the defense may ask for a postponement of the defense. The student should not distribute the final draft of the research proposal until the advisor is satisfied with it.

44.0 When is the PhD Dissertation Defense to be completed?

The Oral Dissertation Defense and submission of the dissertation document to the Syracuse University Graduate School are the final requirements of the PhD program. Defense paperwork must comply with Graduate School's [Guidelines](#), including formatting.

Preparation: It is recommended that the student meet with their defense committee to review dissertation progress at least three to six months in advance of the defense. The student should not distribute the final draft of the dissertation until the advisor is satisfied with it. Readers should be presented with a polished draft that has been proofread, paginated, and contains professional quality tables and figures with captions.

Students must defend their dissertation within 5 years of achieving All But Dissertation (ABD) status, or they will have exceeded their time to degree and will be required to register for 1 Credit of GRD 991 every semester until they graduate.

45.0 What are the deadlines for scheduling the PhD Dissertation Defense?

The official Request for Examination form must be signed and submitted to the Graduate School at least three full weeks prior to the oral defense date.

A copy of the dissertation document must be delivered to all members of the defense committee at least two full weeks prior to the oral defense date. Any committee member who receives their copy fewer than 14 calendar days prior to the defense may ask for a postponement of the defense.

The last day to submit a Request for Exam and the last day to submit the completed and approved dissertation are posted each semester on the Graduate School's [Deadline Page](#).

46.0 What are the PhD Dissertation Defense Committee Requirements?

The dissertation defense committee will consist of six members, including

- the research advisor;
- four tenured or tenure-track faculty members from the department; and
- the Chair of the Oral Examination Committee.

The Chair of the Oral Examination Committee must be a Syracuse University tenured or tenure-track faculty member from outside the department and program.

The student may substitute one committee member based on subject-matter expertise who does not satisfy the second bullet above and may be internal or external to Syracuse University. Additional external committee members may be allowed by petition.

47.0 What is the process for the PhD Dissertation Defense?

The dissertation defense is usually initiated with a 30-40 minute summary of the research. This is followed by open questioning from the audience. When this is completed, the candidate is questioned by the dissertation committee members.

For the candidate to pass the dissertation defense, a majority vote on the quality and originality of the research, the quality of the dissertation, and the performance of the candidate at the examination is required.

48.0 What are the Exceeding Time to Degree Requirements?

Exceeding Time to ABD Status (7 Years)

If the student has exceeded the seven-year limit for achieving ABD status, the student must register for GRD 991, which requires a minimum of one credit hour per semester, each fall and spring semester until ABD status is achieved. Students will be charged the tuition rate of one credit each semester for GRD 991. This cost will not be covered by the college or department. If the student fails to register for GRD 991, for a given term, the student will be withdrawn from the program.

Exceeding Time to Graduate Status (5 Years after ABD)

If the student has exceeded the degree completion limit of five years after achieving ABD status, the student must register for GRD 991, which requires a minimum of one credit hour per semester, each fall and spring semester until the completion of the doctoral degree. Students will be charged the tuition rate of one credit each semester for GRD 991. This cost will not be covered by the college or department. If the student fails to register for GRD 991, for a given term, the student will be withdrawn from the program.

49.0 I'm a PhD student. How can I change my advisor?

It is at the discretion of a faculty member to take on an advisee. You can ask a faculty member to take on the role of your dissertation advisor, but they are not obligated to accept. If you choose to leave a research group or are dropped from a research group and cannot find a new advisor, then you will be withdrawn from the program.

50.0 How do I get readmitted to one of the CEE graduate programs?

Submit the below form to [Nicholas Clarke](#)

[Application for Readmission/ Termination of Leave of Absence](#)