NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES, MS

for the degree of Master of Science in Natural Resources & Environmental Sciences (on campus & online)

The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences is a broad and diverse department offering flexible M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. The mission of the department is to establish and implement research and educational programs that enhance environmental stewardship in the management and use of natural, agricultural, and urban systems in a socially responsible manner. The department is composed of approximately 24 faculty, 60 affiliates, and 160 graduate students. Offering education and research in a variety of disciplines, the department provides a systems-level perspective that few other departments can offer. Further illustrating the breadth of natural resources and environmental sciences, research areas include but are not limited to:

• agronomy/agroecology
• aquatic chemistry
• conservation ecology
• ecosystem science
• environmental education
• fish and wildlife ecology and management
• forest ecology
• humans dimensions of the environment
• landscape ecology
• microbial ecology
• natural resource economics
• natural resource policy
• plant ecology
• physiology and genetics
• restoration ecology
• quantitative and spatial analysis
• soil science and conservation
• sustainability

Admission

Thesis Program (on campus)

NRES graduate advisers are seeking students with strong letters of reference, evident motivation to undertake graduate study, relevant experience, and good preparation in prerequisite courses. Graduate applicants must have an undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 (A = 4.0) calculated on the last 2 years of undergraduate coursework to be admitted with full status. Ph.D. applicants must have earned an M.S. (or expect to be awarded the degree before beginning the NRES program) with a grade point average of at least 3.5. Applicants should have adequate preparation in the fundamental sciences and courses appropriate to their proposed field of study (applicants should talk with prospective advisers about the background they expect). Those without the necessary prerequisites may be accepted conditionally, and the undergraduate courses must be completed before the degree will be awarded. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is not required of M.S. and Ph.D. applicants. However, consideration for some fellowships does require GRE scores. Students whose native language is not English are required to submit the results of the TOEFL or IELTS as evidence of English proficiency. Official scores are required to be submitted directly from TOEFL/ETS or IELTS to the University. Please see Minimum English test scores (https://grad.illinois.edu/admissions/apply/begin/international/) and other information for international applicants. Applicants who are not U.S. citizens must also submit evidence that they have sufficient financial support for their program of study. Prospective graduate students are urged to apply for admission to the degree program as early as possible, preferably six to ten months before the beginning of the semester in which they expect to enroll. Prospective students must review important application information (https://nres.illinois.edu/academics/graduate-degrees/graduate-student-resources/). Applicants to the campus programs wishing to be considered for a university-level fellowship must apply for admission to the fall semester by December 15th, and, to be considered for any college or departmental funding, the application deadline is January 1st.

Non-Thesis Program (online)

Requirements and processes for application to the NRES Online M.S. program are available here (https://nres.illinois.edu/future-students/admissions/online-graduate-admissions/). The following application deadlines apply:

• Fall semester - June 15
• Spring semester - November 15
• Summer term - March 15

Graduate Teaching Experience

Although teaching is not a Graduate College requirement, experience in teaching is considered an important part of this graduate program, particularly for Ph.D. students.

Faculty Research Interests

Graduate degree programs in NRES are informed by the major areas of faculty research, which include:

• agronomy/agroecology
• conservation ecology
• ecosystem science
• fish and wildlife ecology and management
• forest ecology
• global environmental change
• human dimensions of natural resources and ecology
• landscape ecology
• microbial ecosystems
• natural resource economics
• natural resource policy
• plant ecology
• physiology and genetics
• quantitative and spatial methods
• restoration ecology
• soil science and conservation
• sustainability
• water/biogeochemistry
• wetland ecology

Financial Aid

Information listed in this catalog is current as of 12/2023
For full-time students pursuing the thesis option on campus, several sources of financial aid are available within the department:

- research assistantships, supported by federal and grant funds made available to the natural resources and environmental sciences faculty
- teaching assistantships
- departmental fellowships
- University fellowships
- College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
  Jonathan Baldwin Turner Fellowships
- waivers of tuition and fees

Most NRES graduate students with financial support have a research assistantship provided by the adviser. Appointments as research and teaching assistants and fellows provide a stipend and waive tuition and some fees.

Financial aid is granted on a competitive basis. Applicants are judged for academic potential based on past performance, experience, motivation, dedication to the designated area of interest and, where applicable, the potential to satisfy the objectives of a donor. Some fellowships have minimum GPA and GRE score requirements. Information about the current availability of financial aid can be obtained from the graduate coordinator or, in the case of research assistantships, directly from faculty members working in the area of interest.

For the Master of Science in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (on campus & online)

Two options are open to students who wish to pursue a Master of Science degree in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences. The M.S. Thesis Option program helps students develop into researchers. Coursework is no longer the primary focus, and students learn how to create, plan, and carry out independent research. The M.S. Non-Thesis Option program guides students in the acquisition of professional expertise beyond the undergraduate degree. The program requires a culminating/capstone experience, which may be satisfied in one of three ways: an individual investigative project, a collaborative, possibly interdisciplinary, group project, or a professional internship experience. The Non-Thesis Option may also be appropriate in special cases where a student executes a major special project which is equivalent to a M.S. thesis, but which does not lend itself to the thesis format. Students on campus are admitted into the thesis option and, under certain conditions, may be allowed to transfer into the non-thesis option by petitioning the Department.

The online M.S. graduate program in NRES enables students to continue their education in disciplines related to natural resources and environmental sciences through part-time study at locations away from the Urbana-Champaign campus. This program meets the needs of persons currently working or wanting to work in the areas of conservation, ecology, restoration ecology, soil science, sustainable development, urban ecology, urban forestry, urban wildlife management, and water resources management. Students can enroll in individual courses for professional and/or academic advancement, or apply for admission to the M.S. degree program. All online M.S. students are admitted to the non-thesis option, though, under certain conditions, a degree-seeking online student may petition the Department to transfer to the thesis option. Application deadlines and other important information are available online (https://nres.illinois.edu/future-students/admissions/graduate-admissions/).

For additional details and requirements refer to the department’s Graduate Handbook (https://nres.illinois.edu/academics/graduate-degrees/graduate-student-resources/) and the Graduate College Handbook (http://www.grad.illinois.edu/gradhandbook/).

This degree program can be completed either on campus or online; with or without a thesis, the requirements are listed below:

### Thesis Option

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRES 594</td>
<td>NRES Professional Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td></td>
<td>19-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRES 599</td>
<td>Thesis Research (min/max applied toward degree)</td>
<td>4-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Completion, defense and deposit of thesis:

| Total Hours | Thesis Option | 32 |

### Non-Thesis Option

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRES 594</td>
<td>NRES Professional Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select one of the following:</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRES 503</td>
<td>Capstone Research Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRES 505</td>
<td>Capstone Internship Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRES 507</td>
<td>Capstone Group Research Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td></td>
<td>23-28</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Written final examination; preparation, presentation, oral exam, and approval of a capstone project report:

| Total Hours | Non-Thesis Option | 32 |

### Other Requirements

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other requirements may overlap</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum 500-level Hours Required</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall:</td>
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<td>Minimum GPA:</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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</table>
for the Master of Science in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (on campus & online)

Thesis

1. Student has ability to design and implement research that integrates core knowledge related to their discipline.
2. Student can apply the research tools and techniques, data analysis techniques, and professional skills necessary for their subject matter.
3. Student has written and oral communication skills appropriate for their disciplinary field.
4. Student exhibits professionalism through leadership, well-developed problem solving abilities, and ethical thinking.
5. Student has skills necessary for effective teaching and/or mentoring.

Non-Thesis

Completing the non-thesis M.S. program requires a broad grasp of current scholarly understanding of natural resources and environmental sciences. In particular, students are responsible for demonstrating adequate mastery in four core areas of study:

1. Statistics and Research Design,
2. Spatial Analysis and Modeling,
3. Ecosystem Science and Conservation Biology, and

Students must take at least one course in each of these four areas and pass a final written exam that covers them.

In order to graduate, students must demonstrate, at a masters level, the following learning objectives:

1. Broad grasp of current scholarly understanding of natural resources and environmental sciences,
2. Understanding and application of the scientific process,
3. Skills in the analysis and interpretation of relevant scientific information, and
4. Proficiency in communicating scientific information

Progress of each student is evaluated through course performance, a written final examination, the capstone paper, and a final oral examination.

Graduate Degree Programs in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences

- Graduate Majors:
  - Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, MS (on-campus & online) (p. 1)
  - Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, PhD (http://catalog.illinois.edu/graduate/aces/natural-resources-environmental-sciences-phd/)
- Joint Degree Program:
  - Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, MS and Law, JD (http://catalog.illinois.edu/graduate/aces_law/joint-degree/natural-resources-environmental-sciences-ms-law-jd/)

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