ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES - MASTER OF SCIENCE (MS)

The ENVS Master of Science degree is a research-based graduate program that allows students to conduct research and course work in a range of areas important for the environment and sustainability. For most students, the heart of the MS program is completion of a master’s thesis. For the two dual degree programs (see below), there also is an option to complete an internship in lieu of a thesis.

Dual Degree Programs

MBA/MS in Environmental Studies

This is a dual degree program offered in conjunction with the Leeds School of Business. It requires 36 credit hours of graduate work in environmental studies and 43 credit hours of MBA course work (with 12 credit hours of environmental studies course work applying toward the required 55 credit hours for the MBA). The MBA program will be considered the student’s primary program. For more information, visit the program’s MS/MBA (http://www.colorado.edu/envs/graduate-students/ms-phd-programs/masters-degree/msmba) webpage.

JD/MS or PhD in Environmental Studies

This is a dual degree program offered in conjunction with the Law School. The Law School will grant credit for acceptable performance in graduate-level environmental studies courses toward the JD degree for up to 9 (for MS students) or 12 (for PhD students) credit hours of the required 89 credit hours for the JD degree. Environmental studies will grant up to 9 (for MS students) or 12 (for PhD students) credit hours of acceptable performance in law courses. The JD program will be considered the student’s primary program. For more information, visit the program’s MS/Juris Doctor and PhD/Juris Doctor (http://www.colorado.edu/envs/graduate-students/ms-phd-programs/masters-degree/msjuris-doctor-and-phdjuris-doctor) webpage.

Requirements

Course Requirements

The degree requires completion of 36 credit hours, as follows:

- a common core consisting of two broad, introductory 3-credit courses (ENVS 5000 Policy, Science, and the Environment and ENVS 5003 Theory and Methods in Environmental Studies)
- two semesters of ENVS Colloquium (2 course credits)

All MS students must complete a guidance committee meeting and either an MS thesis or an internship. For most students, the final requirement is a thesis worth 6 of the 36 credit hours required for the MS degree. All ENVS graduate students are encouraged to include a 2-credit internship as part of their degree plan, even if doing a thesis.

Independent study credits may be included in the student’s MS degree plan with the approval of the faculty advisor.

Guidance Committee Meeting

During the first six weeks of each new student’s first semester (typically in the fall), a guidance committee of three faculty members will examine the student’s past course record (from undergraduate and past graduate work) and devise a program of course work for that student. Responsibility for convening these meetings falls on the advisor. However, the graduate director and graduate assistant will aid in the scheduling of these meetings and, if needed, intervene to ensure they occur on schedule. These committees and their meeting should be shaped by these considerations:

- The committee should be composed of the primary advisor and at least two other faculty members. To ensure breadth of viewpoints, one member of the committee will be assigned by the Graduate Committee and will be someone outside the student’s specific areas of research interest. The Graduate Committee must approve the composition of each committee to ensure that appropriate knowledge of ENVS procedures and history are represented.
- Before the committee meeting, the student should provide a brief overview of their intellectual interests and provide an assessment of their own weaknesses and strengths in training.
- The committee, working with the student, should devise a list of both suggested and mandated courses. Course work can be specified as either a single course or a type of course (e.g., “a course covering the use of multivariate statistics,” as opposed to a specific course number). In addition, the committee can suggest that the student take certain classes as another way of exposing them to particular fields; any such suggestions should consider the feasibility of the student actually being able to take such a course.
- The assigned course work should provide the student with depth of understanding in their research field(s) and ensure that the student has some breadth of training or experience in one or more other aspects of environmental studies.
- While the number of classes suggested or mandated will vary depending on each student’s past training and research plans, a typical list of required classes for an MS student should generally not exceed four 3- or 4-credit classes.
- This first-semester guidance committee’s work is finished after its one meeting, with no requirement that the members be on subsequent committees for a student.

MS Thesis or Internship

Thesis Requirements

Only students in the two dual degree programs (MS/MBA and MS/JD) may opt for the internship option (see below); all MS-only students must complete a thesis. The thesis is based on original research and written under the supervision of a faculty advisor.

There are several steps in conducting this research and then defending the thesis:

1. In conjunction with their advisor, the student must assemble a three-member thesis defense committee that normally will meet by the end of the student’s second semester of study. This committee must consist of at least three CU Boulder graduate faculty members and must include at least one rostered or associate ENVS faculty member.
At least two weeks before this committee meets, the student will submit a five-page research proposal to the committee members. During the meeting, the committee will question the student on the proposal and review the student’s progress on suggested and required course work and suggest changes. For a student to continue on in the program, their committee must approve their proposal and may require additional written revisions prior to approval.
2. A successful thesis must be an original research paper or report that is presented to the student’s thesis defense committee and defended
in line with the deadlines posted each semester by the Graduate School in order to be considered for graduation. The thesis represents 6 credit hours of work and must comply with the specifications for theses and dissertations available in the Graduate School.

The expectation is that a research-based master’s thesis would, at a minimum, be equivalent to a viable manuscript that could be submitted as one peer-reviewed research paper. For a client-based thesis, the report should meet the requirements of the stakeholder, agreed to at the time of writing the MS proposal.

See the Grad Alumni page for examples of past MS theses.

3. The candidate for the MS degree, with the approval of the faculty advisor, must assemble a three-member thesis defense committee that should include an outside member from the appropriate environmental field. The graduate coordinator reports the names of the committee members and the date of the thesis defense to the Graduate School on the master’s examination report form at least two weeks prior to the defense date.

It is important to stay in touch with the graduate coordinator about the committee composition, since all committee members need to be checked for graduate faculty appointments that take at least a month to process.

During the semester in which the student plans to complete the requirements for the MS degree, an admission to candidacy application must also be completed and approved by the advisor and graduate director, and submitted to the Graduate School by the posted deadline. A copy must be submitted to the graduate program assistant.

Dates and forms are available in the master’s packets for the thesis and non-thesis programs.

4. At the thesis defense meeting, the committee will question the student and review their work. The committee will also review the student’s completion of course work assigned in previous committee meetings.

A student may graduate without completing all the formally assigned course work, with the approval of the committee.

After the thesis has been successfully defended, the student must be sure that the signature page with the original signatures of the chair of the examining committee and at least one other committee member is submitted to the Graduate School. The student must also electronically submit the thesis to ProQuest according to the Graduate School instructions.

Internship Options for MS/MBA & MS/JD Students

Students pursuing one of the dual degree programs may complete 36 graduate credit hours, including a 2-credit Internship for which a substantial internship report is written, with no thesis required (see the Internship webpage for more information on internships).

Students who opt for this plan must be sure to complete a master’s course plan approval form in addition to the candidacy application by the posted Graduate School deadline. These forms require the signatures of the student’s advisor, graduate director and department chair. Copies of the forms must be filed with the graduate coordinator.