

## **Section 3: Master's Degree Program Timeline: Thesis or Professional Experience Track**

The typical sequence of milestones and timeline for progressing through the M.S. in Coastal Marine and Wetland Studies is outlined below and in Appendix A. Students should refer to this timeline to maintain progress toward graduation on time. The timeline and milestone tracking will be maintained by the student's Major Professor and filed with the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator. The milestone charts provide for input on potential causes of delays from maintaining the targeted progress through the program. Excessive delay in progress may jeopardize program resources, such as graduate Research Assistantships.

### **3.1 Choose Thesis or Professional Experience Track**

This choice should be made during the first semester.

### **3.2 Establish Major Professor for Program**

The Major Professor will help in the selection of at least two additional faculty members to serve on the Graduate Advisory Committee. Any SCMSS faculty and affiliated faculty member is eligible to serve as Major Professor if he/she has expertise in an appropriate field of research. Faculty from other universities or agencies may not serve as Major Professor but may serve on the Graduate Advisory Committee.

It is highly beneficial to have communicated with and identified during the admissions process a Major Professor who will commit to mentor the student's graduate work. Highly qualified students may be accepted to the program without an identified Major Professor. It is expected, however, that students will identify their Major Professor by the end of the first semester and or early in the second semester at the latest. A request to establish a Major Professor is to be submitted to the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator for approval (see the SCMSS Graduate Program Forms page: [www.coastal.edu/scmss/programs/msforms.html](http://www.coastal.edu/scmss/programs/msforms.html).)

#### **3.2.1 Establish Major Professor for Thesis Track**

A key role of the Major Professor is to assist in the selection and refinement of a thesis topic and to give advice in the design of the research program. The Major Professor will also give advice on and edit the thesis. This Major Professor, therefore, must have expertise in the appropriate area of research.

#### **3.2.2 Establish Major Professor for Professional Experience Track**

A key role of the Major Professor is to assist in the selection and establishment of an appropriate internship to accomplish the student's academic and professional goals. The Major Professor will give advice on and edit the professional experience proposal and final report. The Major Professor, therefore, must have expertise in the appropriate area of research. The SCMSS Graduate Student Services Coordinator may be a very helpful resource in identifying and establishing professional internship opportunities.

### **3.3 Establish Graduate Advisory Committee**

The Graduate Advisory Committee will assist in putting together the degree program and must approve program courses. It is important to carefully select the Graduate Advisory Committee members and close contact with each member should be maintained throughout the degree program. To ensure the Committee is up-to-date, it should be convened at least once each semester. There should be a close working relationship between the student, the Major Professor and the Graduate Advisory Committee with more frequent communication individually or as a group as needed. The Graduate Advisory Committee membership is submitted to the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator for approval (see the SCMSS Graduate Program Forms page: [www.coastal.edu/scmss/programs/msforms.html](http://www.coastal.edu/scmss/programs/msforms.html).)

#### **3.3.1 Graduate Advisory Committee in Thesis Track**

The Graduate Advisory Committee should be composed of faculty members who can provide access to additional expertise to aid in the design and execution of thesis research. They will also assist with the development of the research proposal and must approve the thesis proposal. The Committee may offer advice and counseling on any aspect of the degree program. The Committee will evaluate performance and determine whether the student passes or fails the thesis proposal and thesis defense requirements. Each Committee member will read, edit, and evaluate the thesis and must approve the final draft.

It is especially important to keep Committee members informed of progress on research and the thesis preparation and enlist their guidance to ensure efficient progress through the program to graduation.

Any SCMSS faculty member or affiliated faculty member is eligible to serve on the student's Graduate Advisory Committee if he/she has expertise in an appropriate field of research. Faculty members from other universities or agencies are not required to serve on the Graduate Advisory Committee, but the SCMSS recommends considering an outside expert in the field to serve on the Committee.

#### **3.3.2 Graduate Advisory Committee in Professional Experience Track**

The Graduate Advisory Committee will also assist with identification and approval of an appropriate professional internship experience to support the student's academic and professional goals. The Committee may offer advice and counseling on any aspect of the degree program. The Committee will evaluate performance and determine whether the student passes or fails the internship proposal, final report and final presentation requirements.

It is especially important to keep Committee members informed of progress on the internship and the final report preparation and enlist their guidance to ensure efficient progress through the program to graduation.

Any SCMSS faculty or affiliated faculty member is eligible to serve on the student's

Graduate Advisory Committee if he/she has expertise in an appropriate field of work. If the internship is with an outside agency or university, it is generally expected that the external professional supervising the internship will serve as a member of the Graduate Advisory Committee.

### **3.4 Proposal**

#### **3.4.1 Thesis Track Proposal**

Research and the resulting thesis are unique experiences of graduate study. The design of a realistic and well-defined research project should be considered the highest priority. A detailed proposal outline helps the student achieve this goal by explaining the steps in developing a review of pertinent literature and a written narrative of the direction the thesis will take. The proposal is used by both student and Graduate Advisory Committee for evaluating and overseeing progress of the research. Research provides an opportunity to make a contribution to science and thesis writing is an important step to that contribution. The thesis should present research findings evaluated within the context of previously published works. It is usually a common goal of student and advisor to publish results of the thesis research. There are several possible arrangements between the student and advisor concerning authorship of a manuscript to be submitted for publication and this should be discussed and clarified with the Major Professor and Graduate Advisory Committee as the research progresses.

A thesis proposal prepared early in the academic program is essential to promote a firm and mutual understanding of expectations for educational and research activities. The proposal should be completed by the beginning of the second semester and the end of the first academic year at the latest. It will be retained as a part of the student's CMWS graduate file. The proposal will consist of the cover sheet, literature review and research proposal. There must be a clearly identified section in the proposal that describes the relationship between the proposed research and the material covered in the core classes CMWS 601, 602 and 603. Students are required to present their proposals to the Graduate Advisory Committee and the presentation may be open to the public at the discretion of the Committee and Graduate Programs Coordinator. Once approved by the Graduate Advisory Committee, the cover page will be signed by the Committee and filed with the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator.

The proposal is a research plan, and as such may be modified as the research progresses. Significant changes in the proposed research plan should be approved by the Graduate Advisory Committee and filed with the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator.

The SCMSS is committed to leverage its resources to help ensure student success. Students may work with their Major Professors and Graduate Advisory Committee to submit an itemized budget for potential basic support (e.g., supplies, conference travel, etc.) The budget should include prioritized, real projected expenses (including the use of boats) not covered by research grants and other support for the student's research. The budget is endorsed by the Graduate Advisory Committee and submitted simultaneously with the thesis proposal. The SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator will review the budget requests and available funds in consultation with the SCMSS Graduate Programs

Committee and notify the student and the Major Professor of what, if any, of the SCMSS resources may be committed to from the request. The Major Professor is responsible for administering the budget and ensuring all expenditures and enabling paperwork are properly submitted to the SCMSS and university financial processes.

### **3.4.2 Professional Experience Track Proposal**

Although coursework is important, professional application of the discipline is a critical component of the professional experience. The design of a realistic and well-defined internship project should be considered the highest priority. A detailed proposal outline will help the student achieve this goal by explaining the steps in developing a review of pertinent literature and a written narrative of the direction the internship will take. The proposal is used by both student and Graduate Advisory Committee for evaluating and overseeing progress of the internship. Professional internships provide an opportunity to practice the discipline within state or federal agencies, universities, non-governmental organizations or the private sector in line with the students' professional ambitions and goals.

An internship proposal prepared early in the academic program is essential to promote a firm and mutual understanding of expectations for educational and professional activities. The proposal should be completed by the beginning of the second semester and the end of the first academic year at the latest. An internship proposal must be completed and approved by the student's Graduate Advisory Committee and the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator before the internship is started. It will be retained as a part of the student's CMWS graduate file. The proposal will consist of the cover sheet, literature review and internship proposal. There must be a clearly identified section in the proposal that describes the relationship between the proposed internship and the material covered in the core classes CMWS 601, 602 and 603. Students are required to present their proposals to the Graduate Advisory Committee and the presentation may be open to the public at the discretion of the Committee and Graduate Programs Coordinator. Once approved by the Graduate Advisory Committee, the cover page will be signed by the Committee and filed with the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator.

The proposal is an internship plan, and as such may be modified as the project progresses. Significant changes in the proposed internship plan should be approved by the Graduate Advisory Committee and filed with the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator.

The SCMSS is committed to leverage its resources to help ensure student success. Students may work with their Major Professor and Graduate Advisory Committee to submit an itemized budget for potential basic support (e.g., supplies, conference travel, etc.) The budget should include prioritized, real projected expenses (including the use of boats) not covered by research grants, internship programs and other support for the student's internship work. The budget is endorsed by the Graduate Advisory Committee and submitted simultaneously with the proposal. The SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator will review the budget requests and available funds in consultation with the SCMSS Graduate Programs Committee and notify the student and the Major Professor of what, if any, of the SCMSS resources may be committed to from the request. The Major Professor is responsible for administering the budget and ensuring all expenditures and enabling

paperwork are properly submitted to the school and university financial processes.

### **3.5 Admission to Candidacy for Degree**

See section 2.4 and Appendix A

### **3.6 Completion of CMWS Course Requirements**

See section 2.2 and Appendix A. Core courses should be completed during first two semesters of study. All coursework and research credits should be completed by the end of the fourth semester.

#### **3.6.1 Thesis Track**

Completion of coursework for the Thesis Option requires a total of 6 credits of CMWS 700 (Thesis Research). This course may be taken as variable credit (1-6 credits per semester) as best fits the student's degree plan. Close consultation with the student's Major Professor is encouraged in planning enrollment in these credits.

#### **3.6.2 Professional Experience Track**

Completion of coursework for the Professional Experience requires 6 credits of CMWS 701 (Internship). This course must be completed during the semester in which the internship is undertaken. This is not a variable credit course.

Prior to beginning the internship, students must complete and file an internship learning contract (see Appendix A).

### **3.7 Submittal of Thesis or Professional Experience Final Report**

#### **3.7.1 Thesis Track**

The results of the student's research are submitted electronically as a formal thesis at: [www.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=464](http://www.etdadmin.com/cgi-bin/school?siteId=464). Detailed presentations of methods and data should be in appendices and should be sufficient to allow future students to duplicate the work or to make comparisons between the data and newly-gathered information. In general, the thesis should be in the format of a manuscript ready for submission to an appropriate science journal.

The student should contact the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator early in the thesis-writing process to find out if there are any changes in thesis guidelines and any relevant deadlines. The thesis does not fulfill the degree requirement until the Director of Graduate Studies has signed it. The thesis title and date of approval must be filed in the Office of Graduate Studies before the degree requirement is officially met.

#### **3.7.2 Professional Experience Report**

The results of the student's internship work are submitted as a formal report. CMWS internship guidelines are available from the SCMSS Graduate Student Services Coordinator. If applicable, the report should be in the format of a manuscript ready for submission to an appropriate science journal or technical report for the organization that supported the experience.

The student should contact the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator early in the report-writing process to find out if there are any changes in internship report guidelines, and any relevant deadlines. The report does not fulfill the degree requirement until the Director of Graduate Studies has signed it. The report title and date of approval must be filed in the Office of Graduate Studies before the degree requirement is officially met.

### **3.8 Thesis Defense or Professional Experience Presentation**

#### **3.8.1 Thesis Defense**

Approximately two months before the desired date for the thesis seminar and defense, the student should submit a thesis draft (including figures and tables) to his/her Major Professor. The Major Professor will read and edit the draft and return it for revisions. After revisions are made, it is submitted to other members of the student's Graduate Advisory Committee and the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator. Each Committee member should study and edit the thesis before the defense. The SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator reviews the thesis for formatting, and, upon approval, the student may schedule the presentation and defense. The defense of the thesis shall be conducted at a date and time mutually agreed upon by the student and Graduate Advisory Committee. Normally, the defense of thesis immediately follows the public presentation. At the conclusion of the defense, copies of the thesis containing each Committee member's suggestions for changes are returned to the student. After Committee deliberation on the quality of responses to questions, oral performance, and condition of thesis, the student will be notified of whether he/she passed or failed. If passed, the student must prepare a final copy of the thesis based on the written and oral comments provided by the Committee. If failed, the Committee will schedule a second defense allowing for further study and/or revision. Typically, a period of three months is provided for the revision.

#### **3.8.2 Professional Experience Presentation**

Approximately two months before the desired date for the professional experience seminar and defense, the student should submit a report draft to his/her Major Professor. The Major Professor will read and edit the draft and return it for revisions. After revisions are made, it is submitted to other members of the student's Graduate Advisory Committee and the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator. Each Committee member should study and edit the report before the defense. The final draft report is submitted to the SCMSS Graduate Programs Coordinator who reviews the report for formatting, and, upon approval, the student may schedule the presentation and defense. The defense of the internship shall be conducted at a date and time mutually agreed upon by the student and Graduate Advisory Committee. Normally, the defense of internship immediately follows the public presentation. At the conclusion of the defense, copies of the report containing each member's suggestions for changes are returned to the student. After Committee

deliberation on the quality of responses to questions, oral performance, and condition of report, the student will be notified of whether he/she passed or failed. If passed, the student must prepare a final copy of the report based on the written and oral comments provided by the Committee. If failed, the Committee will schedule a second defense allowing for further study and/or revision. Typically, a period of three months is provided for the revision.

### **3.9 Submittal of Documentation**

In addition to a final version of the thesis or final report, students or their Major Professor must submit a defense report form and a program assessment form. All forms are available at the SCMSS Graduate Program Forms page: [www.coastal.edu/scmss/programs/msforms.html](http://www.coastal.edu/scmss/programs/msforms.html). Students should double check the Degree Program Timeline and Completion Checklist.