

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for DE Advisors and Students

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1. What are the Soil Science Department's policies for DE Masters students?

The Distance Education (DE) Masters program is a part of the department's graduate program, and **DE graduate students must adhere to all requirements expected of graduate students**. Policies can be found in the department's Graduate Student Handbook:

<http://www.soil.ncsu.edu/academic/documents/gradbook.pdf>

In particular, students must:

a. Demonstrate proficiency (have taken classes) in at least four of the five core areas of soil science (soil physics, soil chemistry, soil fertility, soil microbiology, and soil classification). Graduate-level classes must be taken for the core areas, but graduate classes taken when the student was an undergraduate would count toward meeting this requirement.

b. Complete a "Plan of Work". A template can be found at:

http://www.fis.ncsu.edu/grad_publicns/gars_forms/mr_pow.doc

c. Be advised by an advisory committee that consists of at least three faculty. All three members of the advisory committee may come from the Soil Science Department. Having one member of the advisory committee being from outside the department is permissible as long as the person is a member of NCSU's Graduate Faculty.

2. What annual reports must DE advisors submit to the Director of Graduate Programs?

As with all graduate students, advisors of DE students should submit annual progress reports to the graduate secretary. Students are also encouraged to complete a CV that is kept on file. Forms for the annual report and CV are found at:

<http://www.soil.ncsu.edu/academic/gradforms/>

3. What are the basic requirements of the DE Masters of Soil Science?

Basic Requirements for the DE Masters of Soil Science are found at:

<http://courses.soil.ncsu.edu/dlmasters/>

Briefly, the requirements are:

- a. 12 hours of Soil Science classes (excluding seminar)
- b. 1 hour of Seminar
- c. 6 hours of a Masters project
- d. 2 hours of field classes to obtain practical skills (these are 4 to 5 days long)
- e. 3 hours of a statistics class (recommended)
- f. 12 hours of electives
- g. 36 hours total required

--Typical Plan of Work for MSS students can be found at:

<http://courses.soil.ncsu.edu/dlmasters/curriculum/>

--Available SSC classes can be found at:

<http://distance.ncsu.edu/courses>

--All NCSU distance education courses

<http://distance.ncsu.edu/courses/spring08/index.html>

4. Once enrolled in the MSS program, do students have to take courses each Fall and Spring semester?

Yes. Once enrolled as a DE Masters student, the student must maintain continuous enrollment until graduation.

5. How many classes should a student take each semester?

- a. 36 credits are required for the degree
- b. Students should take about 3-6 credits per semester (1-2 classes) to graduate in 3 or 4 years.
- c. Students must complete the degree within 6 years. The earliest course listed on the "Plan of Work" is used to establish the first day for when the 6-year period begins.

6. Is the Masters Project the same as a thesis?

The Masters Project is not intended to be a thesis. It is shorter, does not require the collection of as much data as in a thesis, and is not intended to be a publishable document. The topic is selected by the student and approved by the advisory committee. It can take the form of a term paper.

7. Do Masters students ever have to come to the NC State campus?

Students must come to campus and visit the Soil Science Department to:

- a. Give a seminar on their masters project, and
- b. Take a final oral exam to be administered by the advisory committee

Both “a” and “b” can be completed during the same visit.

NOTE that students also have to take TWO field classes that will involve travel. More information on these is given in question 14 below.

8. Who do I contact for questions on graduation requirements, admission requirements, and general issues related to the DE program?

Contact one of the following to get questions answered:

For information on:	Contact	Office in Williams Hall	Email	Phone number (919 area code)
General Graduate Procedures, Forms, Deadlines, etc.	Dee Ann Cooper	2321	Deeann_Cooper@ncsu.edu	513-4409
Admission requirements, exceptions to policies, etc.	Dr. Jot Smyth	3104	Jot_Smyth@ncsu.edu	515-2838
DE Program Requirements	Dr. Mike Vepraskas	3413	Michael_Vepraskas@ncsu.edu	515-1458

9. What are the first steps that the advisor and student need to do during the first year?

Steps for Advising DE students in the First Year:

- a. Contact the student by email to introduce yourself (Dee Ann keeps an email list of all students).

- b. Determine when the student wants to begin taking classes. Classes begin on the same day used for regular classes. Academic calendars are found at:
<http://www.ncsu.edu/registrar/calendars/>
- c. If no soil science classes have been taken, then the student is “required” to take our introductory soils class SSC 200 for no graduate credit.
- d. SSC 570, Wetland Soils, may be a good class to begin with because the instructors do not expect much soil science background.
- e. Have the student begin to develop a plan of work
- f. Select an advisory committee of three faculty members to approve the plan of work
- g. Have the plan of work approved and submitted by the end of the first year.
- h. Ask the student to recommend topics for the Masters Project.
- i. Have the project by the advisory committee during the first year to ensure adequate time for completing the project.

10. When do the DE classes start and end?

Classes start and end on the same days as regular semester classes. Grades must be submitted according to the same schedule used for our regular classes.

11. How often are DE classes offered?

All graduate classes in Soil Science are offered at least once a year in either the Fall or Spring semesters. Some classes such as Wetland Soils (SSC 570), are offered each semester, with most others being offered once per year, in either the Spring or Fall Semesters.

12. How long do students have to complete a DE class once they have started one?

Ideally, all classes should be completed during the same semester in which they are begun. This can be difficult for some students who work fulltime. Incomplete grades can be given to students who need more time to complete a class. Students have one additional semester to complete the class before the incomplete grade is automatically changed to an F. **Incomplete grades are given at the discretion of the instructor.**

13. Do all DE classes taken have to have a number of 500 and above (i.e. SSC 570)?

All Soil Science classes must be graduate classes. At NC State University this means that all Soil Science classes used for the DE Masters must have numbers of 500 or above. Different numbering systems are used by different universities, but regardless all Soil Science classes must be graduate level.

On the other hand, courses taken outside of the Soil Science Department (e.g. Forestry or Statistics) will count as graduate courses if they carry a number of 400 or above at NC State.

14. Are the field classes required, and what do they involve?

Yes, all students must complete two field classes. These classes will teach you skills that we believe can only be done through face-to-face training with an instructor. Classes require students travel to the location of the class, for the 4 to 5 days that each class requires. Students are responsible for all expenses. NC State offers such classes, but similar classes are available from other universities. For an idea of the NC State opportunities see:

<http://courses.soil.ncsu.edu/dlmasters/requirements/>

Information on a schedule of field course offerings can be found at:

<http://www.soil.ncsu.edu/wetlands/training.htm>

General information about future field course offerings can be obtained by contacting David Lindbo at:

David.Lindbo@ncsu.edu