

**College of the Atlantic
Graduate Student Handbook
Version 3.3
August 2022**



Welcome to the Graduate Program at COA. This program is a Master of Philosophy in Human Ecology. This unofficial handbook is our attempt to produce a document to help guide any graduate student or advisor through the process. The general guidelines for the graduate program are outlined here but policies can be found on the website <http://www.coa.edu/academics/graduate-program/index.php> and in the course catalog also available on the COA Registrar page: <https://www.coa.edu/live/files/510-course-catalog> (the newest catalog (22-23) isn't up yet, but this will get you there).

This document was produced by the Graduate Director with assistance from past graduate director Chris Petersen, the graduate students starting in 2016-2017, and Judy Allen, Sean Todd, Mindy Viechnicki and Karen Waldron.

General rule #1: If you have any questions, please contact the Graduate Director or your advisor.

Overview

The Masters of Philosophy in Human Ecology at College of the Atlantic is designed as a two-year thesis degree, with nine credit units of coursework and nine credit units of research. The program is small and selective; recently we have had 5-12 students in the program. Students applying to the program need to reach out to faculty early in the process – applications must indicate that students have two faculty members willing to sign on as an initial committee. In addition, an application includes an outline for a thesis and an outline of their program, including classes they would be interested in taking and possible independent studies they are interested in designing. The graduate program application is available on the COA website. <https://www.coa.edu/academics/graduate-program/application-process/>

Graduate student timeline

Entering: As a new student, you should have a first term of classes approved by your advisor, start attending graduate seminar, and work with your advisor and your other committee member(s) to develop your study and thesis plans. Students should enter with a thesis project idea, with most students having a strong outline of their project already in place.

Your committee: All students entering should have two COA faculty identified as committee members, with one chair or the two as co-chairs. We slip back and forth in language, sometimes calling the chair of your committee your advisor, because the reality is that the same person serves both roles. Ultimately, you will have a committee of at least three individuals. Your committee members should have expertise that can be applied to your thesis and should serve as a source of knowledge and aid to your thesis. All three can be COA faculty, but if you think you can have a stronger committee by substituting an academic from another institution or a professional outside academia that just needs to be approved by your advisor. On rare occasions, students can have one COA faculty and two outside professionals as a committee; this is possible by petitioning to the Graduate Director with support from your committee chair. You can also have more than three committee members, although this isn't typically done.

End of first term: By the end of the first term, you should have tentatively identified a committee, including at least two COA faculty and a third individual who can be either a COA faculty or a professional (faculty, researcher, or other professional) with expertise in the thesis area. This is a good time to reassess the graduate plan that you wrote as part of your application, and revise if needed with your committee.

Meeting with the chair and committee members: There is no fixed schedule for how often a student should meet with their advisor or their committee. Some might need to meet as often as weekly with their advisor, where for others 1-2 meetings a term with the advisor and less frequently with the committee may be appropriate. Graduate students should initiate meetings as often as appropriate to their study. At the end of every term, the student and advisor should meet to talk about progress and next steps in the degree.

End of year 1: A thesis proposal should be defended in a public presentation to a full committee by the end of the first year, although many professors encourage this to happen in term 2 of year 1, as one of your thesis credits. Committee members should have had time to comment and provide feedback on the proposal before the meeting, so that the meeting should at most require minor revisions of the proposal. When completed a signed MPhil Thesis Proposal Defense form (<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/825-masters-thesis-proposal-defense>) should be turned into the registrar. Some advisors require a literature review sometime during the first or second term as a lead-in to the thesis proposal. The literature review is a comprehensive report on the literature relevant to your thesis. Writing the literature review before the proposal can serve to guide the ideas of the thesis proposal and can be used as the introduction to the proposal. By the fall term of your second year you will also need to submit the MPhil Intent to Graduate form: (<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/824-intenttograduateform-mphil>).

Thesis defense: Once a committee gives tentative approval of the final thesis (generally near the end of the second year), the student will arrange a public presentation of his/her thesis a minimum of two weeks prior to the expected date of graduation. All thesis committee members are expected to attend this presentation, and the student will be examined on the form and content of the thesis. A member of the COA graduate committee is also present and approves all defenses, but a thesis committee member can serve both roles. After the defense, the committee can approve the thesis, ask for minor revisions, or ask the student to do a major revision, usually with another defense. To date virtually all defenses have resulted in approval pending minor revisions.

Note on process: Writing a thesis is not like writing a final paper for a class; it involves a lot of revision and rewriting with input from colleagues and committee members. It can be months from the first completed draft of a thesis to a defensible product. By the time you have a thesis ready to defend, it should have been reviewed thoroughly by all of the committee and they should be comfortable with the idea of you moving to a defense.

Turning in the final thesis: Master's thesis submission guidelines are given here: <https://www.coa.edu/live/files/1276-mphil-submission-guidelinespdf>.

The exact form of a thesis is up to the student and their committee. Three copies of the final version of the thesis, each on thesis bond paper, must be submitted (bound or unbound) to the Graduate Committee prior to graduation. One copy must be

submitted for permanent placement in the COA archive; see the library archivist for information on formatting this copy, due at the end of week nine. A copy of the signed signature form (<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/1275-mphil-signature-formpdf>) must also be submitted to the Registrar. In addition a release form or delayed-release form (available at <https://www.coa.edu/live/files/1276-mphil-submission-guidelinespdf>) must be turned into the archivist when the thesis is submitted. Once completed, the student needs to turn in a signed certification of degree requirements form to the registrar (<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/79-certificationofdegreerequirementsmpilpdf>).

Timing of graduation and the graduation ceremony. Students completing the paperwork for the Master's Thesis at least one week prior to the June graduation ceremony are able to take part in graduation. Degrees are awarded by the COA Board of Trustees, and degrees can be conferred at any board meeting, provided that they all documents are submitted in two weeks prior to the board meeting. The board typically meets quarterly in July, October, January, and April.

Students that have finished all of their units, and have scheduled a defense date before graduation can stand at the graduation ceremony. In order to stand, students must complete a MPhil standing contract (<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/1487-standingcontractmphil>). This should be arranged ahead of time with the graduate director and the registrar. Once the student completes the thesis and turns in all of the necessary forms, the degree will officially be awarded at the next scheduled trustee meeting.

Completing your degree

The MPhil is designed as a two-year program. After two years, if you still have work to do to finish a thesis, you should develop a timeline with your advisor and share the approved document with the Graduate Director. After you have finished taking all of your credits, you will no longer be eligible for a Graduate Assistantship, but you also will not have to pay any more tuition.

The time limit for completing a thesis (up to and including submission of a final, approved and signed draft) is four years after the student has started. Students can petition beyond that time to the Graduate Director, but students should not expect to take this long to finish.

Courses

Students are required to take nine course credits in their thesis program. They need to be at least 3000 level courses (intermediate and above), and students should meet with each instructor and determine how the student can push the course by adding or adjusting the assignments to meet the student's educational goals. Students can take a course that is under a 3000 level by working with the instructor and turning the course into an independent study, i.e., taking the course and doing

additional work arranged by the student and instructor. In addition to traditional courses, students can do independent studies or residencies and count them towards graduate course credit. Both require forms with signatures and are available on the registrar main page (<https://www.coa.edu/registrar/>). The expectation is that students will front load courses and finish their program with more of their thesis credits in the later terms.

Graduate research units

In addition to nine course credits, students are required to take nine research units to complete the requirements for the degree. Students can take them any term, although most students put more of them in the second year of their program. These units are all taken as Credit/No Credit, and advisors can give credit after every term they are taken with a short narrative of what progress was made on the thesis. We are considering changing the registration so that signing up for these units does not require written advisor approval.

Graduate Assistantships

Financial aid is limited for graduate students, but many students work as graduate assistants after their first term at the college. Graduate Assistants may perform teaching assistant duties for a class, research duties for a professor, or clerical duties for a college office. The GA offers a small stipend and a reduction in tuition, outlined in Appendix 1. There are also a few small funds that support student research. Students with an emphasis in education can apply for the Rothschild Scholarship, and individual professors sometimes have other grant funds to help support student work. In addition, students should be actively working to seek outside grants for their research with help from their advisor, and can receive support to attend professional meetings in their areas of interest.

Graduate student seminar

The graduate students meet every term, typically at least five times a term at a time that works for everyone. At this point the seminar is a non-credit obligation, and graduate students on campus are expected to attend. The graduate seminar is overseen by the Graduate Director, and meetings range over a diverse set of topics:

- The first meeting of the term is typically a new student orientation, checking in, giving updates, setting an agenda for the term, answering questions
- Works in progress by graduate students
- Defining the scope of a graduate thesis and developing a thesis proposal
- Proposal defenses sometimes take the place of the seminar for a week
- Thesis defenses sometimes take the place of the seminar for a week
- For 2022 –2023, we hope to have some seminars run by faculty, on topics ranging from how to write a thesis proposal, to critiques of relevant papers, program development, and grant writing.

Important offices that you need to know about

Business office: On the first floor of Turrets, this is where you can pay bills, including tuition bills, but it is also where you will turn in timesheets for any work as a graduate assistant. You will have to get on the payroll system, which will require filling out forms, and providing identification, so do that well ahead of time. Any term you are working as a graduate or teaching assistant, the business office should have that information from the graduate director before the bills go out for that term.

Financial aid: You should always double check and make sure that you are being charged the right amount for a term. The financial aid office produces a document every year outlining your tuition, and the discounts that you get for being a graduate assistant. The most recent copy is attached here as Appendix 1.

IT: Information Technology, on the first floor of the old Arts and Sciences building, is where you can go to make sure your computer is set up to work on the network, and where you can bring various tech questions. Among other things, COA students have access to free versions of Microsoft office, and the college has a license for some additional software packages. More software packages may be available for you to purchase if necessary to your thesis, depending on funding from your advisor or the Graduate Director.

Internship and Career Services: Third floor of Turrets. This office helps all students with things such as writing resumes and cover letters, as well as researching potential employment opportunities.

Registrar: The registrar's office on the third floor of Turrets is where class registration forms, independent study proposals, and other forms will need to be turned in. You must register for classes by the end of the add/drop period of any term. Pre-registration is done electronically through a student internet portal – accepted students will receive information from the registrar on how to access their portal, register for classes, and check for grades, evaluations, and progress towards their degree.

Graduate Director: The director of the Graduate Program starting 2022-23 is Reuben Hudson, rhudson@coa.edu, whose office is on the second floor of the CHE Building. Please feel free to ask Reuben any questions as they come up.

COA Staff in the Graduate Program

Staff at College of the Atlantic occasionally join the graduate program while maintaining their employment status at COA. Staff apply to the program with the permission of their direct supervisor, and go through the same application process as other prospective students and must meet the same standards as other graduate

students to be accepted into the program. Application fees are waived.

Staff in the graduate program can take up to one class per term towards their degree. The course tuition fees are waived, although they are charged any additional fees associated with courses.

In addition to the nine courses towards their degree, staff are also required to complete 1350 hours of work towards a thesis (an additional 9 thesis units – one year full-time student equivalent). Unless this work overlaps with their job responsibilities, this work must be done in addition to their normal job. Staff are allowed to use any relevant part of their work towards their thesis work if it is approved as part of their job by their direct supervisor.

Because of the constraints of holding a job while in the program, staff are expected to develop a 3-5 year program to complete their master's degree. This plan should be outlined as part of the graduate application and must be approved by the academic advisor and the direct supervisor. Staff that take longer than six years to complete their program will need to apply for continued enrollment with the graduate director.

As a graduate student, all other aspects of the program apply equally to staff as they would to other graduate students. This includes attending graduate student meetings, maintaining grade levels, giving a public thesis proposal defense as well as a public thesis defense.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Financial aid document for 2022-23

Appendix 2. FAQs about earning a M.Phil. at COA while working toward teaching certification

The master's degree forms are a bit buried on the COA webpage, they can all be found on the graduation forms and guidelines page here:

<https://www.coa.edu/registrar/graduation-forms-guidelines/index.php>

Here are the links to the critical forms:

MPHIL proposal defense form

<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/825-masters-thesis-proposal-defense>

Intent to Graduate Form

<https://www.coa.edu/live/files/824-intenttograduateform-mphil>

Certification of degree requirements

[certificationofdegreerequirementsmphilpdf](#)

Appendix 1. Financial aid document 2022-23

COA's school code is **011385**

Dear Graduate Student,

The following is intended to give you an explanation of graduate charges and financial aid at COA so that you can try to anticipate potential discounts and expenses.

Graduate students are given a tuition waiver equal to 1/3 of the normal undergraduate charge. After the first trimester you may be eligible for a graduate assistantship (GA) that would further reduce your tuition by a new 1/3 in any given term. In addition, a GA position pays up to a \$1,400 stipend for 100 hours of work, further offsetting your costs. Because TAs are often determined only weeks in advance of a new term, graduate charges and aid are usually calculated on a term-by-term basis.

You are generally eligible to borrow against the full cost of attendance ("CoA"; includes tuition, basic fees, living expenses, books and miscellaneous personal expenses) using the Stafford loan program to a maximum annual amount of \$20,500. You must file a FAFSA in order to qualify for these funds (Free Application for Federal Student Aid; www.fafsa.gov). We also require a copy of your 2018 federal tax form (the 1040 and schedules 1, 2, and 3 if applicable.).

You may also utilize the federal Graduate Student PLUS Loan Program should you determine that you need additional funds. Unlike the Stafford loan program, you would have to be credit approved before you could receive any PLUS funds and they carry a higher fixed interest rate. Information can be found at www.studentaid.gov

Important note: your total student loans for the year cannot exceed the cost of attendance figure.

Estimated CoA – one trimester:

With no GA: \$13,970

Of this, you will be billed approximately **\$10,023** in basic tuition and fees (you may incur lab fees or other incidental charges as well)

The rest, **\$3,947**, represents estimates for living expenses, books and miscellaneous personal items. Your figures may vary widely, but this is the official figure used to determine loan eligibility – it is based on our room, board and other charges for on-campus students. Many students may find their expenses are lower in reality when living off campus.

CoA with a GA: \$10,507

This is the estimated cost with the reduced tuition. The billed amount is approximately

\$6,560 and the estimated figure for non-billed items remains **\$3,947**. A **\$1,400** stipend, paid to the student, reduces borrowing eligibility by the same amount (i.e., \$1,400).

Generally there is no scholarship or grant aid available directly from the school but you may want to inquire with the Graduate Director and/or your faculty of interest. There is one endowed fund targeted towards graduate students doing work in education and faculty may be able to suggest some outside funding sources you could pursue. Additionally you can look for outside scholarships through free web-based search sites. See our financial aid page for information and suggestions:
<http://www.coa.edu/outside-scholarships.htm>.

To summarize, you can generally borrow up to the full cost of attendance in any one term with no more than \$20,500 of Stafford loan for the year. You can also apply for a Graduate PLUS loan *if* you have additional, demonstrated need.

In any given year it seems that some students don't borrow at all, some borrow to cover the bill only, and some borrow more than the billed amount to help them with their living expenses as well.

While I can't make explicit guarantees, I believe that most graduate students can get GA positions in most if not all terms after the first trimester if they are seeking them. If that were the case in your first year it would present you one "without GA" and two "with GA" cost scenarios and three "with GA" in your second year. That would suggest a *billing* scenario of \$10,023/6,743/6,743 in the first year for a total of \$23,509, not including ancillary fees (note that it is a bit above the \$20,500 annual Stafford limit). You may want to estimate your own living expenses given that there's a good chance you could live at lower cost off campus than the figures we provide for estimates. If, in the second year, your research work takes you off-campus, you will need to talk to the Graduate Director about whether GA possibilities exist.

Expenses listed are for the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year and do not project possible cost increases for 2021-2022.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at amcintire@coa.edu or at 207.801.5645.

Sincerely,
Amy McIntire
Director of Financial Aid

FAQs about earning a M.Phil. at COA while working toward teaching certification

1) Is it possible to complete teaching certification requirements while earning a M.Phil. at COA?

The short answer is yes. The longer answer is it depends on what you have done during your undergraduate degree program and in terms of work experience. COA has a Maine Department of Education (MDOE)-approved *undergraduate* educator preparation program, therefore graduate students would need to undergo transcript analysis (see our guide for those students seeking certification through this MDOE process and the MDOE's website for further information) to determine what, if any, previous courses and any courses completed while at COA would meet MDOE requirements for initial certification. If you have completed most or all content requirements (courses in the subject you wish to teach), then it is much more likely you would be able to complete methods courses required for certification. Reviewing your undergraduate transcript with an education faculty/staff will allow you to determine more specifically the feasibility of completing both simultaneously. It's important to keep in mind that if you wish to complete student-teaching with a COA supervisor, then you will need to take the required methods course(s) at COA (six COA course credits for elementary candidates and three for secondary candidates).

2) What makes COA's MDOE-approved educator preparation program unique?

COA's Educational Studies conceptual framework (CF) informs our MDOE-approved program, which emphasizes the interconnection, interdependence, and interaction between mind and body; self and other; human and environment; school and community; personal experience, school subjects, and academic disciplines; and theory and practice (see a full elaboration of this CF here). This multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary framework ensures that educators who receive their preparation here understand the contexts in which they teach and serve their schools and communities. It means that they become multilingual in the languages of diverse academic disciplines that inform and enrich our understanding of what it means to learn and teach in a particular place and time among a particular group of people. It fully recognizes and values the importance of identity, emotions, cultural heritage, place, and the complex and dynamic relationships in which teachers work and the power and responsibilities teachers hold. And most importantly, it means our education students practice the various roles that teachers play from their first education class with local students, teachers, and community partners, learning to hone the kind of tacit knowledge that only experienced teachers can access after years of reflective practice.

3) What are some graduate theses completed by students who also completed coursework toward certification?

Previous theses have included a novel written by a graduate student who completed requirements to earn a secondary English Language Arts teaching credential who has taught at the Met in Providence, RI, the Universal American School of Kuwait, and now teaches at Norwalk High School in CT; a program evaluation of an outdoor environmental and experiential program for urban youth led by a secondary Life Science teaching candidate who is now teaching middle-school science in the Lakes region of Maine; and a summer farm-based academic enrichment program for middle-school students designed, led, and evaluated by an elementary teaching candidate now teaching fifth grade in Northport, Maine.

4) What do you advise graduate students who would like to complete a teaching certification while at COA?

Because the graduate program requires two years in residence at COA and many courses are only offered in a two-year rotation (in some cases, even less frequently), we cannot understate the importance of advance planning together with key faculty with whom you wish to study. Be sure that if you do not have all the required content courses for your intended area of certification, that there are content courses offered at COA that will fulfill this requirement. Furthermore, the more your thesis project complements or aligns with your goals to complete teaching certification requirements, the easier it will be to earn both simultaneously. Finally, bring in as much experience teaching pre-K through 12 students, whether in schools or elsewhere as possible. If you don't already have classroom experience, we encourage you to apply to teach as a substitute teacher at your local district, work as a counselor or instructor in summer educational camps, and volunteer in educational programs in your community.

5) *Is there financial aid for graduate students?*

Graduate students may apply for financial aid. In addition, graduate students may meet financial need through research and teaching assistantships with faculty. Some graduate students may work part-time in their area of expertise if their experience and interests match available employment opportunities in the area.