School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

Doctor of Philosophy in Geospatial Information Sciences

75 hours minimum beyond the baccalaureate degree

This degree program is jointly offered by the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (specifically in the Department of Geosciences) and the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science, and is administered by the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences.

Program Faculty

Professors: Carlos L. V. Aiken, Brian J. L. Berry, Denis J. Dean, John F. Ferguson, Daniel A. Griffith, James Murdoch, Hsing-Mean (Edwin) Sha, Robert J. Stern, Weili Wu

Associate Professors: Thomas H. Brikowski, Fang Qiu, Michael Tiefelsdorf

Assistant Professors: Yongwan Chun

Senior Lecturers: Bryan Chastain, Irina Vakulenko

Powerful technologies have emerged in recent years to collect, store, manage, analyze, and communicate information regarding the features of the Earth’s surface and to combine these with other types of environmental, social, and economic information. These technologies, which include geographic information systems (GIS), the global positioning system (GPS), and remote sensing, are used in many ways, including the production of digital maps in vehicles, the management and maintenance of city infrastructure, agriculture and forestry, the policing of communities, and the conduct of modern warfare. The PhD in Geospatial Information Sciences aims to develop individuals capable of advancing this field by developing new knowledge or capabilities relevant to it.

The degree program is jointly offered by the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (specifically the Department of Geosciences) and the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science. This unique structure reflects geospatial information science’s origins as the confluence of multiple disciplines including geography, computer science, engineering, geology, and various social, policy and applied sciences. It is anticipated that many students will enter the program with a bachelor’s or master’s degree (and/or work experience) in an application area (such as public administration, geology, or economics) or in a technical specialization (such as engineering, computer science, or statistics). These students may choose to pursue research projects that advance existing geospatial
information sciences practices within that application area. Alternatively, students may opt to pursue research that expands the technological or theoretical base of all the geospatial information sciences.

**Mission and Objectives**

The mission of the Doctor of Philosophy in Geographic Information Sciences program is to cultivate innovative researchers capable of advancing the frontiers of knowledge in the geospatial information sciences through improved theories, new technologies, innovative methodologies, sophisticated quantitative analyses, and integrative applications. Specifically, program graduates will:

- Demonstrate their knowledge of the fundamental theories and concepts underlying the geospatial sciences.
- Master the advanced methodologies and/or quantitative analyses used in at least one of three geospatial specialization areas: (a) computing and information management, (b) spatial analysis and modeling, or (c) remote sensing and satellite technologies.
- Produce innovative research that advances theory or methodology in the geospatial sciences.
- Participate at academic conferences, publish in peer-reviewed journals and find employment in research departments of public and private organizations and in major academic institutions.

**Facilities**

Students have access to state-of-the-art GIS computing facilities housed in the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences and at the NASA Center for Excellence in Remote Sensing in the Department of Geosciences. The University's extensive instructional computing facilities, including those in the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science, are also available. Facilities are open extended hours including evenings and weekends. Enrollment in hands-on courses is controlled to ensure that a computer workstation is available for every student. All major industry-standard GIS and remote sensing software is available. The University is a member of the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS).

**Admission Requirements**

The University's general admission requirements are discussed on the [Graduate Admission](catalog.utdallas.edu/2013/graduate/admission) page.

The PhD program in Geospatial Information Sciences seeks applications from students with a baccalaureate, Master of Arts, Master of Science or professional masters-level degree in any field relevant to geospatial information science including, but not limited to, computer science, economics, engineering, geography, geology, management information systems, marketing, natural resource management, public affairs and public administration, statistics, and urban and regional planning.
Applicants will be judged and evaluated by the existing admission standards as set forth by the University in its Graduate Catalog and by the standards set forth here by the Geospatial Information Sciences program. A bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution or its equivalent and fluency in written and spoken English are required. A grade average of at least 3.25 in undergraduate and graduate course work, and a combined verbal and quantitative score of 300 on the GRE are desirable. An analytical writing score of at least 4.5 in the GRE is considered desirable.

Applicants must submit transcripts from all higher education institutions attended, three letters of recommendation, and an essay outlining their background, education, and academic objectives as they specifically relate to a PhD in Geospatial Information Sciences.

Prerequisites

The following prerequisites/corequisites will also be required for admission to the PhD program: (i) college mathematics through calculus, (ii) competence in at least one modern programming language equivalent to GISC 6317 Computer Programming for GIS, MIS 6323 Object Oriented Programming, or their equivalents, and (iii) at least one course in inferential statistics through to regression analysis equivalent to GISC 6301 GIS Data Analysis Fundamentals, EPPS 7313 Descriptive and Inferential Statistics, or GEOS 5306 Data Analysis for Geoscientists. Graduate courses taken at UT Dallas to meet these prerequisites may be counted as electives toward the 75 credit hours required of students entering the PhD program directly from a BA or BS degree, but they shall not be considered substitutes for any other specified course.

Advising

Because of the cross-disciplinary nature of this doctoral program, to ensure adequate preparation and appropriate course sequencing, every doctoral student is required to consult with the student's designated advisor and/or the GIS Doctoral Program Director prior to registration in every semester. Students generally will not have a faculty advisor when they first enter the PhD program, but every student is required to select (with consent of the potential advisor) an advisor from the advising faculty by the end of his/her first academic year.

Degree Requirements

The University's general degree requirements are discussed on the Graduate Policies and Procedures page (catalog.utdallas.edu/2013/graduate/policies/policy).

To receive the PhD in Geospatial Information Sciences, students must complete the Geospatial Science Core (15 hours) to achieve a mastery of appropriate Geospatial Information Science technologies and theory, have a Geospatial Specialization Area (15 hours), have a Specific Application area or Technical field (12 hours), evidence research skills through successful completion and defense of a PhD dissertation, and take related electives as necessary for a total of 75 semester credit hours. In addition, students must satisfy a set of exams and qualifiers. Other courses may be substituted for those listed below with the written permission in advance of the Director of the GIS Doctoral program.
Geospatial Science Core: 15 hours

Students must earn a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 across the following five courses:

- **GISC 6381** Geographic Information Systems Fundamentals
- **GISC 6382** Applied Geographic Information Systems
- **GISC 6384** Spatial Analysis and Modeling
- **GISC 6385** GIS Theories, Models and Issues
- **GISC 7310** Regression Analysis with GIS Applications

Geospatial Specialization Area

Students must select from one of the following, with a minimum of 15 hours. Courses selected must include at least three at successively advanced levels.

I. Geospatial Computing and Information Management

- **CS 6359** Object-Oriented Analysis and Design
- **CS 6360** Database Design
- **CS 6364** Artificial Intelligence
- **CS 6366** Computer Graphics
- **CS 6375** Machine Learning
- **CS 6378** Advanced Operating Systems
- **CS 6381** Combinatorics and Graph Algorithms
- **CS 6384** Computer Vision
- **GEOS 5303** Computing for Geoscientists
- **GISC 6317** Computer Programming for GIS
- **GISC 6388** GIS Application Software Development
- **GISC 7363** Internet Mapping and Information Processing
- **MIS 6326** Database Management

II. Spatial Analysis and Modeling

- **ECON 6309** Econometrics
- **ECON 7309** Econometrics II
- **EPPS 7318** Structural Equation and Multilevel (Hierarchical) Modeling
**Application Area or Technical Field (12 hours)**

Twelve semester-credit hours of specialized coursework in an *application area or technical field* relevant to GIScience. Normally, these will derive from the student's Master's degree. These hours may be transferred from another institution, or taken at UT Dallas in an existing master's program area and may be applied toward a master's degree in that area.

1. May not be used in conjunction with certain other courses. Consult GIS Doctoral Program Director.

https://catalog.utdallas.edu/2013/graduate/programs/nsm/geospatial-information-sciences
Application area examples: planning, public affairs, criminal justice, health and epidemiology, geoscience, forestry, hydrology, marketing, real estate, economics, civil engineering, etc.

Technical field examples: statistics, computer science, software engineering, management information systems, image analysis, operations research/location science, instrumentation.

Research and Dissertation (variable hours)

All students must complete the following two classes as part of the research and dissertation requirement:

**GISC 7387** GIS Research Design  
**GISC 7389** GIS PhD Research Project

In addition, students must complete sufficient additional research and dissertation credit hours to bring the total number of hours they have earned within the UT Dallas doctoral program (or transferred into the UT Dallas doctoral program) to 75 semester credit hours, the minimum required to earn a doctoral degree. Additional research and dissertation hours above and beyond those required to reach the 75 credit hours minimum may be required at the discretion of the student's PhD advisor. Additional research and dissertation hours can be earned through any of the following classes:

**GISC 6387** Geographic Information Systems Workshop  
**GISC 6389** Geospatial Information Sciences Master's Research  
**GISC 7367 (GEOS 7327)** Remote Sensing Workshop  
**GISC 8V29** Research in GIS  
**EPPS 6310** Research Design I\(^2\) and **EPPS 6342** Research Design II\(^2\)  
**GISC 8V99** or **GEOS 8V99** or **CS 8V99** Dissertation

2. May not be used in conjunction with certain other courses. Please consult GIS Doctoral Program Director.

Other Related Elective Courses (0 to 24 hours)

Students may choose up to 24 hours in related electives (from CS, GEOS, GISC, etc.) with consent of their advisor or the GIS Doctoral Program Director.

Exams and Qualifiers

A student must be registered for at least three semester credit hours of graduate coursework during the semester in which any major degree examination, such as the Qualifying Examination, Final Written Examination, or Final Oral Examination, is taken. A student must also be registered for at least three semester credit hours of graduate coursework during the semester in which the Dissertation Proposal is submitted for approval (see the [Policy on Procedures for Completing a Graduate Degree](https://catalog.utdallas.edu/2013/graduate/programs/).)
Qualifying Examination

The GISC PhD Qualifier Examination is administered in May of a doctoral student's first year, following the completion of the first academic year (i.e. fall and spring semester) by the student. This exam comprises four parts, each based upon one of the following core courses:

- **GISC 6382 (GEOS 6383)** Applied Geographic Information Systems
- **GISC 6384** Spatial Analysis and Modeling
- **GISC 6385** GIS Theories, Models and Issues
- **GISC 7310** Regression Analysis with GIS Applications

A student must pass three of the four parts to pass the exam. If a student fails his/her exam, s/he may retake only the parts they failed in the subsequent August. If s/he does not pass a cumulative total of three parts after the August exam date, then s/he fails the Qualifier Examination, and is withdrawn from the GIS doctoral program.

Defense of Proposal

After completing the GIS Research Project class, doctoral students must successfully present and defend a dissertation proposal through an oral examination, according to uniform guidelines established by the GIS program.

Grade Point Qualifier

Doctoral students must have GPAs of at least 3.25, and preferably 3.5, in courses taken at UT Dallas at the time they register for **GISC 7389** GIS PhD Research Project, or they must petition the GIS faculty for an exemption for extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control.

Defense of Dissertation

A dissertation must be prepared and defended successfully following the procedures established by the Dean of Graduate Studies.