Geography

Degrees Offered

- Master of Arts
- Doctor of Philosophy

Nature of the Program

Geography is a diverse and innovative field of study that bridges humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Geographers engage with the most pressing issues of our time, including global environmental change, social inequality and transformations of our economy, politics, ecology and culture in the shifting terrain of the 21st century. Our geographers are trained in cutting-edge approaches to understand and make a difference in our rapidly changing world.

West Virginia University offers master's and doctoral degrees in geography. Our graduate program has a large faculty with expertise in the sub-disciplines of **human geography**, **environmental geography, sustainability,** and **geographic information science**. Using qualitative and quantitative research methods, our faculty research in South American, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean ("Latin America), sub- Saharan Africa, North Africa and Southwest Asia ("the Middle East"), and the U.S., including Appalachia.

Our interdisciplinary learning environment featuring state-of-the-art computing and spatial analysis facilities offers students the chance to develop innovative research projects and learn valuable skills to help solve some of the major challenges facing our world today.

The Graduate Program in Geography has been designated a program of excellence by the West Virginia University Board of Governors since 1998. This award is given to superlative degree programs in recognition of their contribution to higher education in West Virginia and national recognition.

Research

Students who are interested in pursuing research in an area other than these may do so provided the research area matches the interest of a faculty member in the department who agrees to supervise the student's program. The Graduate Program in Geography at WVU has strong links with the University's Regional Research Institute, the State GIS Technical Center, the Geology Program, the Water Research Institute, the International Studies Program, the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey, the Center for Women's and Gender Studies, and the Center for Resilient Communities.

Computing Facilities

The Geography program has extensive computing facilities housed in Brooks Hall, a modern 98,000 square foot building dedicated exclusively to geography and geology. Brooks Hall has five computer laboratories dedicated to teaching and research. The department has ESRI ArcGIS, ERDAS Imagine, and ENVI site licenses. In addition, the faculty teach several programming languages for GIS and data science including R, Python, and Bash. Faculty engaged in qualitative data analysis teach using tools including Nvivo and Atlas.ti. The department's geovisualization research group operates an immersive four-wall 3-D display environment or CAVE. The remote sensing program operates an ASD full-range portable spectroradiometer.

FACULTY

CHAIR

- Brent McCusker - Ph.D. (Michigan State University)

ASSOCIATE CHAIR

- Joseph Lebold - Ph.D. (West Virginia University)

PROFESSORS

- Kathleen Benison - Ph.D. (The University of Kansas)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Sedimentary Geology - Planetary Geology
- Dengliang Gao - Ph.D. (Duke University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Exploration Geophysics, Petroleum and Structural Geology
- Amy Hessl - Ph.D. (University of Arizona)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Biogeography, Forest Ecosystems, Climate Variability
- Brent McCusker - Ph.D. (Michigan State University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Livelihood Systems & Climate Change, Africa, Policy Making
- Brenden McNeil - Ph.D. (Syracuse University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - GIS, Environmental modeling, Forest Ecosystem Services
- Shikha Sharma - Ph.D. (University of Lucknow)

Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Isotope Geochemistry

- Jaime Toro - Ph.D. (Stanford University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Structure and Tectonics
- Dorothy Vesper - Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Aqueous Geochemistry, Hydrogeology

ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS

- Jamison Conley - Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Spatial Analysis, Geocomputation, Health Geography
- Karen Culcasi - Ph.D. (Syracuse University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Geopolitics, Identity, Middle East
- Cynthia Gorman - Ph.D. (Rutgers University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Gender, Migration, Human Rights, Refugee Communities
- James Lamsdell - Ph.D. (The University of Kansas)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Regular Graduate Faculty, Paleobiology, Arthropods, Macroevolution, Heterochrony, Paleoecology, Phylogenetics
- Rick Landenberger - Ph.D. (West Virginia University)
  Geography Program - Forest ecology, Land use Management and Restoration
- Joseph Lebold - Ph.D. (West Virginia University)
  Geology Program - Paleoecology, Paleontology, Regional Geology
- Aaron Maxwell - Ph.D. (West Virginia University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology and Geography Programs - Geospatial Instruction, Remote Sensing, Image Analysis, Spatial Modeling
- Maria Alejandra Perez - Ph.D. (University of Michigan)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Cultural Geography, Science & Technology Studies, Speleology, Latin America and the Caribbean
- Amy Weislogel - Ph.D. (Stanford University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geology Program - Sedimentology
- Bradley Wilson - Ph.D. (Rutgers University)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Social Movements, Local/Global Food Systems, Food Justice

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

- Michael Harman - Ph.D. (West Virginia University)
  GIS Program - 3D visualization, modeling complex landforms and processes, GIS
- Jacob Hileman - Ph.D. (University of California, Davis)
  Regular Graduate Faculty, Geography Program - Environmental Science, Sustainability
- Lisa Lohr
  Geology Program - Hydrogeology

PROFESSOR EMERITI

- Timothy Carr - Ph.D. (University of Wisconsin - Madison)
- Joe Donovan - Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University)
- Greg Elmes - Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University)
- Trevor Harris - Ph.D. (University of Hull)
- Thomas Kammer - Ph.D. (Indiana University)
- Steven Kite - Ph.D. (University of Wisconsin)
- Kenneth C. Martis - Ph.D. (Michigan University)
- Henry Rauch - Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University)
- Robert C. Shumaker - Ph.D. (Cornell University)
- Richard Smosna - Ph.D. (University of Illinois)
- Timothy Warner - Ph.D. (Purdue University)
- Thomas Wilson - Ph.D. (West Virginia University)

Admissions for 2026-2027

The Geography program admits students to either the M.A. or the Ph.D. program. GRE scores are not required for admission to any of these programs.

M.A. IN GEOGRAPHY

All applicants are strongly encouraged to contact potential faculty advisors prior to submitting their application. Prospective students who establish these connections typically have much stronger applications. All M.A. applicants are all required to name potential advisor(s) in their statement and application.

In addition to the university's general admission requirements (http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/graduateeducationatwestvirginiauniversity/#classificationstext), applicants to the M.A. program in must have a bachelor's degree in geography or a related field with a an overall GPA of at least a 3.0.

PH.D. IN GEOGRAPHY

All applicants are strongly encouraged to contact potential faculty advisors prior to submitting their application. Prospective students who establish these connections typically have much stronger applications. All Ph.D. applicants are all required to name potential advisor(s) in their statement and application.

In addition to the university's general admission requirements (http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/graduateeducationatwestvirginiauniversity/#classificationstext), applicants to the Ph.D. program must hold an M.A. or M.S. degree in geography or a related field with an overall GPA of at least 3.0 in their previous graduate work. Students with degrees in other non-geography disciplines are encouraged to apply but may be asked to make up deficiencies in geography during their first year in the program.

List of Admission Requirements for both programs:

- See the steps to apply for admissions and access the application here (https://graduateadmissions.wvu.edu/how-to-apply/).
- A two-page statement of purpose describing the applicant's interest in geography, career intentions, and the name of potential advisor(s) in the department who are regular members of graduate faculty and teach within the Geography program.
- Letters of recommendation from people who are familiar with the applicant's preparation for graduate study (two for the M.A., three for the Ph.D.).

International Applicants:

- See the steps to apply for admissions and access the application here (https://graduateadmissions.wvu.edu/how-to-apply/).
- International applicants should view additional requirements here (http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/graduateeducationatwestvirginiauniversity/#internationaltext) and here (https://graduateadmissions.wvu.edu/information-for/international-students/).
- Language proficiency is required in order to hold a graduate teaching assistantship. See here (https://elli.wvu.edu/testing-resources/english-proficiency-gtas/).

Application Deadlines:

- The Geography program admits students for the Fall and Spring semester semesters.
- The priority review deadline for all application materials for fall admission is January 15th.
- The priority review deadline for all application materials for Spring admission is August 15th.
- Completed applications for admission may be considered after the January 15th deadline on a space-available basis.
- Exceptional applicants may be nominated by the Geography Program for competitive University Fellowships. Qualified applicants will be notified if they are nominated. More information on WVU fellowships can be found here (https://graduateeducation.wvu.edu/finances/fellowships/).

Assistantships

All applicants will be considered for financial support in the form of graduate teaching assistantships (GTAs) and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs). Graduate research assistantships are sometimes available through funded faculty member research. Students who qualify for available research assistantships will be contacted by the relevant faculty member with details.

Certain application requirements may be waived based on a preliminary review of an application by the program.

MA Major Code: 1444

PhD Major Code: 1476

For specific information on the following program, please see the link to the right:

- Geography, M.A.

For specific information on the following program, please see the link to the right:

- Geography, Ph.D.

Degree Progress

All graduate students enrolled in at least one credit hour during the academic year must be provided with a written evaluation from their program following the end of each spring term. This requirement may be waived for students in good standing who are expected to graduate in spring or summer. Specific processes and timelines for each program's evaluation can be found in the graduate handbook. Annual evaluation may result in probation for students either not making adequate degree progress or failing to uphold professional standards.

MASTERS DEGREE:

- By the end of year 1, students should have completed their thesis proposal.
- By the end of year 2, students should have completed all coursework and defended their thesis.

DOCTORAL DEGREE:

- By the end of year 2, students should have completed their comprehensive examinations.
- By the end of year 3, students should have completed all coursework and their dissertation proposal.
- By the end of year 4, students should have completed their dissertation defense.