

Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Graduate Student Handbook 2025-2026

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1. Purpose of This Handbook

This handbook provides clear, concise guidance for graduate students enrolled in the Civil Engineering (CE) Graduate Program offered by the Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering (CCEE) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). It outlines academic expectations, degree milestones, university policies, and departmental procedures for both Master of Science in Civil Engineering (M.S.C.E.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs.

2. Degree Programs

The UAB CE Graduate Program offers four broad areas of specialization: construction engineering management, environmental engineering, structural engineering, and transportation engineering. Each of these areas has requirements for the M.S.C.E. and Ph.D. degrees. Common to each specialization is a set of core courses, supplemented by specialty courses. The student's Faculty Advisor guides the student on tailoring an individualized degree plan based on the student's research project and career aspirations. To meet coursework requirements, students may take courses throughout the university that are appropriate to their Degree Plan.

3. Key Personnel

The CCEE administrative staff are available to provide assistance and guidance in day-to-day operation of the CE Graduate Program.

3.1. CCEE Department Chair: Dr. Avinash Unnikrishnan, Professor

GH 5249, (205)-934-9855, aunnikri@uab.edu

Dr. Unnikrishnan is the Chair of the Civil, Construction, and Environmental Department and provides oversight of the CE Graduate Program.

3.2. CCCE Graduate Program Director: Dr. Nasim Uddin, Professor

GH 5286, (205) 934-8432, nuddin@uab.edu

Dr. Uddin signs graduate student forms, provides Registration Access Codes (RAC) for course registration, approves elective courses, reviews and approves Degree Plans, Thesis/Dissertation committees, and related forms, as well as offers additional support as graduate students progress through the milestones of their degree in consultation with the student's faculty advisor and committee members.

3.3. CCCE Program Manager: Ms. Scarlett Naftel

GH 5248, (205) 934-8430, snaftel@uab.edu

Ms. Naftel provides administrative support for the CE Graduate Program. She is the primary contact for all questions related to the CE Graduate Program, including tuition and payroll questions. All required CE Program documentation and forms must be submitted to the CE Program Manager, with the Graduate Program Director copied on all correspondence.

3.4. CCEE Graduate Program Committee

The **CCEE Graduate Program Committee** consists of the following members, any of whom are available to assist you when questions arise:

- **Dr. Nasim Uddin**, Graduate Program Director
- **Dr. Virginia Sisiopiku**
- **Dr. Muhammad M. Sherif**
- **Dr. Moiz Usmani**

The CCEE Graduate Program Director acts as CE Graduate Program Committee chair.

Information regarding the graduate faculty in the CCEE Department can be found in the [UAB Civil, Construction and Environmental Engineering Faculty Page](#).

4. **Key Resources**

- UAB Graduate School:
<https://www.uab.edu/graduate/>
- Graduate Catalog:
<https://catalog.uab.edu/graduate/schoolofengineering/civilconstructionandenvironmental/>
- Thesis & Dissertation:
<https://www.uab.edu/graduate/students/current-students/theses-dissertations/your-thesis-and-dissertation>
- Format for Thesis & Dissertation:
https://www.uab.edu/graduate/images/documents/resources/current_students/FormatManual.pdf
- Graduate Program Forms:
<https://www.uab.edu/graduate/students/current-students/academic-policies-progress/forms>

5. **Registration Requirement**

Each student receiving a stipend, fellowship, or assistantship must register for 27 credit hours per year (9 credit hours per semester) except where this requirement is superseded by the Graduate School requirements. This requirement can be met by a combination of course work and research credit hours.

In addition to the Graduate School requirements, international graduate students must meet registration requirements to maintain F-1 status. Students receiving a stipend cannot accept outside employment without permission of the Graduate Dean.

In rare instances, where a student has completed all coursework requirements and must be registered to graduate in their final semester, the student may register during the last semester for only one credit hour with the permission of the CE Graduate Program Director, the CCEE Department Chair, and the UAB Graduate School Dean. The form is available at the following

website: <https://www.uab.edu/global/students/international-students/current-students/course-enrollment-and-vacation-semesters>

6. Financial Support

Graduate students in the CCEE Department may be supported by:

- a) Graduate Research Assistantships (GRA) funded through research advisors' grants or contracts; or
- b) Graduate Fellowships offered by UAB or external agencies.

For responsibilities and qualification criteria, see [UAB Graduate Catalog](#) and [Graduate School](#) website. First year doctoral students pursuing a traditional doctoral degree (not remote), may be eligible for [Blazer Graduate Research Fellowship](#) awards.

7. Academic Performance Requirements

Students must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0 to remain in good academic standing in the CE Graduate Program. If financial support is provided, the student should perform their assigned duties and remain in good standing to continue receiving financial support.

If a student fails to meet the criteria for good academic standing at the end of any semester, the student will be placed on academic probation. Such students must re-establish good academic standing within the next two semesters.

Students who do not achieve this level of performance will be dismissed from the CE Graduate Program.

8. Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is essential to build the trust needed among faculty and students for a university to nurture intellectual growth and development. Academic misconduct undermines the purpose of education and research missions of the university and is a serious violation. CCEE faculty holds academic integrity as one of the highest characteristics necessary for success in graduate school. CE Graduate Students are expected to abide by the [UAB Academic Integrity Code](#) at all times and avoid engaging in behavior that is or that may be perceived as academic dishonesty.

Students must uphold the UAB Academic Integrity Code. Violations (e.g., plagiarism, cheating, fabrication) can lead to severe penalties. Learn more at: <https://www.uab.edu/ethics>

9. Registration & Email Communication

Upon entry into the program, each student will be required to create and register a BlazerID, and receive an official UAB e-mail address. UAB e-mail address must be used for all official correspondence from the department and the university.

Students should use BlazerNET to register and check class schedules and CANVAS course pages.

10.M.S.C.E. Program

10.1. M.S.C.E. Pathways

Students have two pathways for the MS program: Plan I (Thesis) and Plan II (Non-thesis).

10.1.1. *Plan I (Thesis)*

Plan I (Thesis) requires 24 credit hours of graduate coursework plus 9 credit hours of thesis research (CE 699). Out of the 24 credit hours of graduate coursework, a minimum of 18 credit hours should be graduate courses in civil engineering. No more than 6 combined credit hours of Special Topics (690/790) courses and Individual Study (691/791) courses will be applied to the degree without appeal to and prior approval from the Program Director.

10.1.2. *Plan II (Non-Thesis)*

Plan II (Non-Thesis) requires 30 credit hours of graduate coursework plus 3 credit hours of non-thesis research (CE 698). Out of the 30 credit hours of graduate coursework, a minimum of 24 credit hours should be graduate courses in civil engineering. No more than 6 combined credit hours of Special Topics (690/790) courses and Individual Study (691/791) courses will be applied to the degree without appeal to and prior approval from the Program Director. Students must register for at least 1 credit hour of CE 698 (Non-Thesis Research) prior to their final semester.

10.2. M.S.C.E Anticipated Timeline

10.2.1. *Plan I (Thesis)*

First Month	Choose Faculty Advisor
First Semester	Formulate preliminary degree plan with Faculty Advisor and submit to the CE Graduate Program Director for approval.
First Year	Arrange to take the required 6 modules of Responsible Conduct of Research: Collaborative research; Research, ethics, and society; Research misconduct; Data management; Plagiarism; and Authorship. Information is available at: https://www.uab.edu/medicine/mssrp/responsible-conduct-of-research-rcr-training .
Second semester	Choose Master's Thesis Committee members (3 minimum) in collaboration with Faculty Advisor and complete and submit the Committee Form to the Graduate School.
Years 1 and 2	Complete Coursework.
Third Semester or earlier	In collaboration with your Faculty Advisor, select a research project title. Prepare a scope of research document (atleast 2 pages, per the advisor requirement) summarizing project statement, project objectives, methodology, expected research outcomes and impact. Submit to Master's Thesis Committee and update document based on their feedback.

Third Semester or earlier	After the Master's Thesis Committee approves the scope of research document, complete the Candidacy Application form to the Graduate School by the deadline .
Year 2 or earlier	Complete a minimum of 9 hours of thesis research (CE 699) in candidacy. Meet with your Faculty Advisor frequently to discuss research progress.
Beginning of final semester	Complete an Application for Graduate Degree form and turn it in to the Graduate School before deadline.
Final Semester	<u>Four weeks before</u> the defense, submit a complete, thoroughly proofread, and properly formatted draft of your thesis to your Faculty Advisor. Revise the thesis as needed.
Final Semester	Schedule thesis defense.
Final Semester	<u>Two weeks before</u> the defense: (i) present the thesis committee with a copy of the thesis; (ii) notify the CE Graduate Program Director; and (iii) submit the online Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form Request form.
Final Semester	Present and defend the thesis in a public presentation before the Graduate School deadline. Bring 3 copies of the Master's Thesis Defense Evaluation Form to your Thesis Defense.
Final Semester	Submit the final version of the thesis approved by the Thesis Committee and the CE Graduate Program Director to the Graduate School <u>no later than two weeks</u> (10 business days) following the public defense. Also submit online the UAB Publication Agreement.

10.2.2. Plan II (Non-Thesis)

First Month	Choose Faculty Advisor
First Semester	Formulate preliminary degree plan with Faculty Advisor and submit to the CE Graduate Program Director.
Year 1 and 2	Complete Coursework.
Year 2 or earlier	Choose Project Committee Members (3 minimum) in collaboration with Faculty Advisor and complete and submit the Committee Form to the Graduate School.
Year 2 or earlier	Complete a minimum of 3 hours of non-thesis research (CE 698). Register for at least 1 credit hour of CE 698 (Non-Thesis Research) <u>prior to your final semester</u> . Meet with your Faculty Advisor frequently to discuss research progress.
Beginning of the final semester	Complete an Application for Graduate Degree form and turn it in to the Graduate School before deadline (beginning of the final semester).
Final Semester	<u>Four weeks before</u> the defense, submit a complete, thoroughly proofread, and properly formatted draft of your written report to your Faculty Advisor. Revise the report as needed.
Final Semester	Schedule project defense.
Final Semester	<u>Two weeks before</u> the defense, submit your written report to the faculty advisor and committee.
Final Semester	Present and defend the project in a public presentation before the Graduate School deadline. Bring 3 copies of the Master's Project Defense Evaluation Form to your defense.
Final Semester	Submit final version of the written report to the CE Graduate Program Director.

11. Ph.D. Program

Our doctoral program is a cooperative doctoral program with University of Alabama at Huntsville (UAH). The cooperative doctoral program will provide students with enhanced educational experience by leveraging the research strengths and course offerings of two UA campuses.

11.1. Program Pathways

Students have two pathways for the Ph.D. program:

- Hold a B.S.: Minimum 72 credit hours (45 hours coursework + 3 hours of GRD 717 + 24 hours of dissertation credits); or
- Hold a M.S.: Minimum 51 credit hours (24 hours of coursework + 3 hours of GRD 717 + 24 hours of dissertation credits)

11.2. Degree Requirements

- 1) For students entering the Ph.D. program with a bachelor's degree (B.S.) only, complete 45 semester hours of graduate coursework beyond the bachelor's level and 3 hours of GRD 717 (Principles of Scientific Integrity) prior to candidacy. A maximum of 12 credit hours of Non-Dissertation Research (CE 798) may be applied toward regular coursework degree requirements without prior approval.
- 2) For students entering the Ph.D. program with a master's degree (M.S.), complete 24 semester credit hours of coursework beyond the master's coursework and 3 hours of GRD 717 (Responsible Conduct of Research) prior to candidacy. A maximum of 6 credit hours of Non-Dissertation Research (CE 798) may be applied toward regular coursework degree requirements without prior approval.
- 3) To the extent possible doctoral students are expected to take 600/700 level graduate civil engineering courses in consultation with their research advisor. A list of available course offerings can be found at:
<https://catalog.uab.edu/graduate/schoolofengineering/#courseinventory>
- 4) MEng courses (i.e., CECM, CESC, CESE) can be applied toward PhD degree requirements.
- 5) Students may take approved courses from UAH through the UA System Cooperative Exchange Program (which count towards transfer credit) with permission of the Graduate Program Director.
- 6) No more than 6 combined credit hours of Special Topics (690/790) courses and Individual Study (691/791) courses will be applied to the degree without appeal to and prior approval from the Graduate Program Director.
- 7) Students must register for 24 hours of dissertation credits and successfully complete a comprehensive examination (written and oral) and a final dissertation defense. Up to 12 credit hours of Non-Dissertation Research credits (CE 798) may be applied toward dissertation credit requirements.

11.3. Comprehensive Examination

- 1) Establish a Graduate Study Committee which includes a minimum of five graduate faculty members. UAH faculty members can serve as one of the five members if they are listed

on the UAB Grad School School's Graduate Faculty website. Non-faculty professionals from the industry that hold a PhD can serve as external members (6th member).

- 2) Complete the dissertation proposal report that includes Faculty Advisor feedback and submit to the Graduate Study Committee for review. The actual format of the proposal will vary based on advisor and committee members' preferences. However, the dissertation proposal is expected to contain an abstract, comprehensive literature review, section on significance of the research, specific aims/research hypothesis/questions, theoretical framework, description of experimental design/methodologies/data collection plan, preliminary results, anticipated problems, timeline, and reference section.
- 3) Pass the written and oral portion of the comprehensive examination.
- 4) The written portion of the comprehensive examination tests the student's knowledge on the subjects related to their specialization to ensure that the student has the skills required to complete a dissertation. The written comprehensive examination is administered by the research advisor in collaboration with the student's Graduate Study Committee.
- 5) During the oral portion of the examination, the student presents the dissertation proposal to the Graduate Study Committee.
- 6) Apply for candidacy after successfully passing both portions of the comprehensive examination.

11.4. Candidacy

- 1) Complete a minimum of 24 credit hours of dissertation research (CE 799 Dissertation Research) over the course of at least two semesters.
- 2) Up to 12 hours of CE 799 may be substituted with non-dissertation research (CE 798 Non-Dissertation Research) taken before candidacy.

11.5. Dissertation and Oral Public Defense

- 1) Complete dissertation draft according to the [Graduate School formatting guidelines](#), revise draft based on Faculty Advisor feedback, and submit it to the Graduate Study Committee for review.
- 2) Present an oral public defense of the dissertation prior to the Graduate School deadline and obtain Graduate Committee approval.
- 3) Complete the requested revisions, forward to the research advisor and submit the approved document to Graduate School within ten working days.

11.6. Anticipated Timeline

First Semester	Choose Faculty Advisor
First Year	Formulate preliminary Degree Plan after BS or Degree Plan after MS with your Faculty Advisor and submit to the CE Graduate Program Director for approval.
Second semester	Choose Dissertation Committee Members in collaboration with Faculty Advisor. Fill out and complete and submit the Committee Form to the Graduate School
Annually	Submit a 1-page document to the Dissertation Committee (once a year) to discuss your research progress and activities planned for the following year.

1-2 years (after MS) 2-3 years (after BS)	Complete Coursework.
Year 2 (after MS) Year 3 (after BS)	Schedule and complete Comprehensive Exam (written part).
Year 3 (after MS) Year 4 (after BS)	Schedule and complete dissertation proposal defense (Comprehensive Exam – oral part). Apply for Candidacy.
Year 4 (after MS) Year 5 (after BS)	Complete a minimum of 24 credit hours of dissertation research (CE 799 Dissertation Research) over the course of at least two semesters.
Beginning of Final Semester	Complete an Application for Graduate Degree form and turn it in to the Graduate School before deadline.
Year 4 (after MS) Year 5 (after BS)	<u>Four weeks before</u> the defense, submit a complete, thoroughly proofread, and properly formatted draft of your dissertation to your Faculty Advisor. Revise the dissertation as needed.
	Schedule dissertation defense. Comply with the Graduate School deadlines for that semester.
	<u>Two weeks before</u> the defense: (i) present the Dissertation Committee with a copy of your draft dissertation; (ii) notify the CE Program Administrator; and (iii) submit the Request for Dissertation Approval Form .
	Present and defend your dissertation in a well-publicized, public Final Examination before the Graduate School deadline. Bring copies of the Doctoral Dissertation Defense Evaluation Form to the defense.
	Complete the revisions, submit to advisor and forward the approved document to Graduate School within ten working days. Submit online the UAB Publication Agreement.

11.7. Remote Option for PhD

Students who are residing in the United States and have a MS in Civil Engineering or any relevant disciplines can obtain their doctoral degree remotely. The requirements are the same as the post MS pathway for on-campus doctoral students: Minimum 51 credit hours (24 hours of coursework + 3 hours of GRD 717 + 24 hours of dissertation credits). For more information, visit the CCEE Graduate Page: <https://www.uab.edu/engineering/civil/graduate>

12. Time Limits

We follow UAB Graduate School Policy for completing degree requirements. “Graduate students are generally expected to complete all degree requirements within 5 years of matriculation for Master’s and certificates, and 7 years of matriculation for doctoral students.”

Based on: [Academic Progress | Catalogs | The University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)

The time limits may be extended by submitting a justification, completion plan, and Faculty Advisor endorsement to the Graduate Program Director.

13. Transfer Credit

We follow the UAB policy for allowing transfer courses to satisfy the minimum course requirements. "Previously earned graduate credit with a grade of B or above while enrolled at another regionally accredited graduate school may be eligible for transfer into the student's current degree program if it has not been applied toward another degree (either at UAB or elsewhere). All transfer credit requests must be initiated by the student and require the approval of the graduate program director and the Graduate School. No more than 12 semester hours of graduate credit can be transferred to UAB."

Based on: [Academic Progress | Catalogs | The University of Alabama at Birmingham](#)

14. Graduation Checklist

- ✓ Submit Application for Degree at the start of final semester
- ✓ Follow Graduate School deadlines for defense and submission
- ✓ Complete Graduate School Exit Survey (Ph.D.)
- ✓ Attend hooding/graduation ceremony

This document is a summary. Students must consult the full UAB Graduate Catalog and department website for detailed policies and updates. For questions, contact the CCEE Graduate Program Director. Always check deadlines and policies through Graduate School.