



RUTGERS-NEW BRUNSWICK

Landscape Architecture

School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

Graduate Student Handbook

2025

Stewardship of the environment requires creative attention and collective action, so we actively commit to work with other disciplines, communities, and groups. Knowledge, experience, and exploration foster creative solutions, so we enthusiastically encourage new ways of teaching and learning. Change requires discipline and courage, so we fearlessly embrace the challenges of the future.

RULA Common Values



RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK

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LA Graduate Student Handbook

In addition to the Graduate School Handbook, the Landscape Architecture Graduate Student Handbook develops policies and guidelines for successful completion of the Rutgers MLA program.

The Department of Landscape Architecture

The Department of Landscape Architecture at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey is situated within the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. We are physically located on Rutgers' historic Cook Campus.

Our Landscape Architecture program offers a graduate level professional Landscape Architecture degree (MLA) in addition to our undergraduate professional degree (BSLA). These professional programs are nationally accredited by the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board (LAAB), offering licensed professional degrees.

Course offerings cover a diverse range of subjects including site planning and design, design implementation and construction, CAD and other graphic communication, history, plant ecology, social factors in design, and landscape architectural theories and research methods.

Our Mission Statement and Goals & Objectives provide additional information about the educational philosophy and objectives of the Landscape Architecture program. For further information see [the web page](#).

Overall, in the department there are about 150 undergraduate and graduate students in Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning.

The Graduate Program of Landscape Architecture

The Landscape Architecture Graduate Program is a unit of the Rutgers Graduate School of New Brunswick. The master's program was established in 2010, building upon the longstanding BSLA. Program faculty are a multidisciplinary group of 12 core faculty members and additional graduate faculty from: Mason Gross School of The Arts; Geography; Art History; Human Ecology: Ecology, Evolution and Natural Resources; and Plant Biology.

At the graduate level, our department offers three options. The accredited Master of Landscape Architecture 1 (MLA1) serves students without accredited undergraduate degrees. The MLA2 is designed for landscape architects seeking to specialize. Our 5-year Dual Degree master's program allows students to merge their undergraduate and graduate studies.

See the [Master's Degree Learning Goals and Assessment page](#) on our website.

The Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture Overview

Program Director (3-year term faculty member)

- Representative of Program students and faculty to the Graduate School-New Brunswick and the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences.
- Sets policy for the program in consultation with the faculty.
- Maintains academic standards and quality of program.
- Appoints Graduate Committees (such as Admissions; Scholastic Review; Curriculum)
- Signs many necessary forms such as Master's Candidacy forms, credit transfer forms, Change of Status forms, Extension forms.
- Serves as primary academic advisor.

Program Administrator

- Support and contact person for all graduate students and faculty.
- Support to Program Director.
- Distributes many necessary forms for graduate students as named above and has Special Permission Numbers for courses and Preliminary Proposal Forms, among others.

Student Representatives to the Program

- Three students: one representative of each class.
- Term runs for academic year – fall and spring.
- Voting power in all matters except faculty appointments and retention, student advancement, examination, or accreditation.
- The bylaws are available by request.

The Graduate Faculty

[Graduate Faculty](#) - Complete list of full and associate members of our graduate faculty.

Contact People and their relationship to you as students.

<i>Name & Position</i>	<i>Email</i>	<i>Telephone #</i>
Holly Nelson, Program Director	holly.nelson@rutgers.edu	848-932-9311
Alanna Menoutis, Department Administrator	Alanna.menoutis@rutgers.edu	848-932-9311
Michelle Martel, IT Systems Administrator	martel@sebs.rutgers.edu	848-932-8487
RUPD – non-emergency		848-932-7211
Facilities reporting		848-445-1234

Funding

For information about Awards, Internships & Financial Aid please visit: [Awards and Scholarships Page](#)

Academic Integrity

The graduate program in landscape architecture maintains a high standard in academic integrity. All graduate students are responsible for understanding and upholding the academic community's standards. Without a commitment from all members of the community to work honestly and fairly, intellectual inquiry will suffer. A high standard of honesty and integrity is expected of you—as a student, as a researcher, and as a teacher.

All students are expected to be familiar with the university policy: [Academic Integrity Policy](#)

Ignorance of the policy is not considered an excuse.

Advising

Because of the flexibility of the program, faculty advising is essential. All full-time and part-time students must see the program director once per semester. In addition to these formal advising sessions, all members of the graduate faculty are available for conversations which will facilitate awareness of ongoing projects and potential thesis committee members.

Timeline for MLA 1 Students

Year 1

Introductory course work. Getting to know the program and the field. Mastering basic skills and concepts.

Year 2

Advanced course work. Developing research skills and interests. At the end of the second year if the student decides on the thesis option, each student will then identify their thesis or design project topic and advisory committee. The committee must consist of three members of the graduate faculty, additional external members are allowed.

Year 3

Capstone course work during the fall semester while working on the thesis research or design. The third-year spring is focused on individual research or the completion of a capstone project.

Timeline for MLA 2 Students

Year 1

Advanced course work. Developing research skills and interests. At the end of the first year each student has identified their thesis or design project topic and advisory committee. The committee must consist of three members of the graduate faculty, additional external members are allowed.

Year 2

Capstone course work during the fall semester while working on the Thesis or Design Project. The second year spring is focused on individual research or the completion of a capstone project.

For further information see the [MLA 2 Information and Requirements page](#) on our website.

Timeline for 4+1 Students

Dual-degree students are Rutgers undergraduates who want to continue to a master's degree after completing their BSLA.

Undergraduate Senior Year

Admitted students will be advised to take 21 graduate credits in the MLA Program over the course of their senior year of undergraduate study. 8 of these graduate credits completed during their senior year will be applied toward the graduate degrees. To count for the graduate degree, class performance and grades will be evaluated according to graduate program standards. Upon completion of the BSLA degree, students will automatically matriculate into the graduate program with advanced standing.

Developing research skills and interests. At the end of the first year each student has identified their thesis or design project topic and advisory committee. The committee must consist of three members of the graduate faculty, additional external members are allowed.

Graduate Studies Year

Based upon the completion of a full design studio sequence, Dual Degree students are expected to engage in individual design and research. Capstone course work begins during the fall semester while working on the thesis or design project. The graduate year spring is focused on individual research or the completion of a capstone project.

MLA Final Project

Graduate students will propose, develop, present, and submit an original work that explores, researches, and disseminates strategies salient for the design field. The work needs to support, justify, and document, a visual, aesthetic, or material exploration. The final project explores several avenues for a different kind of intellectual product created by the student.

The final project may be pursued as a thesis or a graduate project. Both options follow the same timeline and deadlines, oral and written components, and registration for research development. More details will be provided in Research Methods and in the MLA Final Project Section. As a general framework consider the following:

Visual Components

- Background and Context for the project
 - Relevant precedent studies and influences on your work
 - Site or project context
- Research and Design Methods
 - Images explaining the key elements of your work including medium and techniques used.
 - Images documenting your process. These might include relevant photos of how you researched, documented, and worked with the site, medium, and/or community in your design process.

Written Components

- Background and Context for the project
 - Describe the sources and inspiration for your work.
 - Explain how your work fits in with current projects and discourses in landscape architecture theory or practice.
- Designer statement
 - What did you create?
 - How did you create it?
 - Why did you create it?
- Project Goals
 - What is the intent and purpose of your project?
 - Who is the intended audience?
- Research and Design Methods
 - Explain the context of your work - medium, process, techniques, and influences.
 - Describe the process of engaging with the study site, topic, or community you worked with.

Thesis Committee Structure and Guidelines

Role of the Thesis Committee Chair

The committee chair will determine a schedule of meetings directly with the student. The minimum number of meetings is two times per semester.

The committee chair will guide student research or design work, meet frequently with the student, and read drafts of student work regularly. The committee chair will set up expectations directly with the student.

The student will be expected to meet with their full committee in the fall semester of the 3rd year to present the development of their research or design work and describe their progress to the committee. At this meeting the committee will evaluate the progress and agree on a timeline for completion. The student has at this meeting the final opportunity to decide between completing the thesis and opting for a final capstone studio.

This meeting will be followed by a brief closed meeting with the committee members, when the committee chair will set up and describe expectations for them. At this time a determination might be made to reorganize the structure of the committee to work with these established expectations. After this meeting the committee will send the student a summary of their recommendations going forward.

Role of committee members

Committee members are expected to be available for committee meetings as determined in discussion with the Committee Chair.

Committee members are expected to read a draft of the thesis and make comments prior to revisions and final submission of the thesis. This draft must be submitted by the student at least one week before expected comments and arranged in clear communication with all committee members.

There will be different expectations for any outside committee members such that their participation in the thesis committee will align with their disciplinary norms.

MLA Guidelines on Time for Review and Assessment of Qualifying Papers and Thesis Work

For both degrees offered, the professional three-year MLA 1 and the post professional two-year MLA2, students are required to conduct original scholarly work or creative design.

In spring of MLA 1 year 2, thesis proposals are presented and discussed with LA graduate faculty in the class 16:550:582 Research Methods, enabling to align thesis topics with faculty research interests, supporting the formation of thesis advisory committees. Generally, students are advised to start information gathering (site visits) during the summer and schedule regular thesis advising meetings during fall and spring of their final year. As a general rule, material (draft of text and or pdf/jpg of drawings) will be submitted by the student at least two weeks before an advising meeting and at least two weeks (but not more than four weeks) should be allowed the faculty member for informing students of the assessment. At the advising meeting, scale prints of drawings are required.

Because thesis work is a two-way relationship between faculty and student, appropriate review times will be built into the timeline for thesis year. Final work must be submitted a minimum of 6 weeks for paper review before grad school submission, allowing faculty review and student revision.

Deadlines Master's Final Project (Thesis and Graduate Project)

For May graduation:

- Late March: Exam presentations according to graduate school guidelines 5.5.II
- April 1st: Diploma form deadline.
- Includes signature from committee and GPD that work will be sufficient for May graduation.
- April 15th at 4:30 pm: Upload of all forms and final thesis.
- Late April, early May: Public presentation of boards.

For October Graduation:

- The Diploma form can be reused. You don't have to register again.
- Late April, early May: Public presentation of boards.
- October 1st: Upload of all forms and final thesis.

Graduation Requirements Master of Landscape Architecture

In addition to the requirements of the Graduate School of New Brunswick, students of the accredited first professional degree (MLA 1) must prove professional competence and engage original scholarly work, while students of the post -professional degree (MLA 2) are expected to show leadership of their individual scholarly work from day one.

Professional competence MLA 1

Design Competence

- 16:550:531 Studio One (Fundamentals), 5 cr.
- 16:550:532 Studio Two (Urban/Suburban Design), 5 cr.
- 16:550:535 Studio —Housing and Open Space, 5 cr.
- 16:550:536 Studio —Special Topics, 5 cr.

Visualization Competence

- 16:550:541 Representation I—Drawing, 2 cr.
- 11:550:337 2D Digital Design and Drafting, 3 cr.

Environmental Planning Competence

- 16:550:545 Introduction to Geomatics, 3 cr.
- 16:550:533 Studio—Geodesign, 5 cr.

Construction Competence

- 11:550:341 Construction II —Materials and Assemblies, 4 cr.
- 16:550:561 Construction III —Design Documentation and Administration, 4 cr.
- 11:550:435 Professional Practice, 1 cr

Plants/Ecology Competence

- 11:550:233 Landscape Plants, 3 cr.
- 16:550:548 Landscape Plants II—ID & Design, 2 cr.

History/Theory Competence

- 16:550:552 Case Studies in Landscape Architecture, 3. Cr.
- 16:550:553 Theories of Landscape Architecture, 3 cr.
- 16:550:582 Research Methods, 2 cr.
- 16:550:572 Colloquium Landscape Architecture, 3cr.
- 16:550:538 Master's Research Project fall semester
- 16:550:539 Master's Research Project spring semester
- 16:550:701 Thesis Research fall semester, 3 cr.
- 16:550:702 Thesis Research spring semester, 3 cr.
- Coursework focused on individual scholarly interest Electives, 9cr.

Required Graduate Courses 49 cr. Required Undergrad Courses 15 cr. Electives 9 cr.

Total number of credits – (typical of M.L.A. 1 programs) 73 cr.

Design research focus MLA 2

The 30-credit program is tailored for professionals interested in developing skills and knowledge on a specific topic or exploring advancements in the practice of Landscape Architecture.

The MLA 2 takes advantage of Rutgers' vast academic resources; however, each student is required to develop an interdisciplinary course of study that must be approved by the program director.

Required Courses:

- Research Methods 2 credits
- Thesis Research 6 credits
- Colloquium 3 credits
- Expertise Courses: 19 credits in graduate level courses

Academic Progress

In order to graduate, each student must have a minimum 3.2 GPA and no more than 1 C or C+ (This includes the required electives and undergraduate classes). Any additional C or C+ grade necessitates retaking the class. The calculated GPA will include any undergraduate courses taken as a graduate student at Rutgers. Students failing to satisfy this requirement would be unable to graduate until they improve their grades sufficiently to comply. Students with extenuating circumstances (e.g., extended chronic illness) would require a vote of the graduate committee to override this requirement.

If, over any one semester, a student earns below a semester 2.8 GPA or earns a C or C+ in a required class, they will automatically be placed on probationary status.

At the end of the probationary semester, the student must have earned at least a 3.2 GPA and have no incomplete grades or grades less than a B during the semester. If a student fails to satisfy this requirement, they will be eligible for dismissal from the program at the discretion of the program director.

While on probation, the student will meet with the graduate director every other week. The graduate director will make further determinations about reducing course load, meetings with individual instructors, and alternative courses to pursue.

For the purposes of this policy incomplete grades will be treated as equivalent to F grades.

This policy is similar to the Grad School standards: Only one C can count toward the 30 credits required for graduation.

Original Scholarly Work MLA1 and MLA2

For both degrees offered, the professional MLA 1 and the post-professional MLA2, students must conduct original scholarly work resulting in a rigorous master's thesis which can focus on creative design or scholarly research. This original scholarly work can also be performed as an individual contribution within the context of a capstone studio.

Rigorous Design in Landscape Architecture

Provides evidence of the iterative design process illustrating the deeper understanding of site-specific problems and larger questions of the field. It is a thorough exploration of form and space as a response to site inventory and analysis while applying technical skills acquired and expressing the student's own creative voice. The steady production of sketches, diagrams and models is part of a consistent work ethic allowing the student to create knowledge through design that advances the state of the art in landscape Architecture.

Rigorous Research in Landscape Architecture

Brings design into the research, starts to investigate the visual and spatial implementations using graphic expression. It is theoretically informed and empirically grounded, drawing on knowledge of pertinent literature, while developing a focus leading to appropriate research questions.

Daily writing is one important aspect of a consistent work ethic which will help the student to advance knowledge in the field.

Master Final Project Requirements

The faculty feels strongly that graduate students should be given utmost flexibility to conduct their individual scholarly endeavors while ensuring academic rigor. Therefore, students can select between two alternatives:

- Option 1 is an **individual thesis**. The topic will be developed in the class 16:550:582 Research Methods. The outcome of that class is a research proposal which applies the formatting requirements of the graduate school. It is the responsibility of the student to select a committee of three faculty, two of them must be members of the Landscape Architecture Graduate Faculty, the third can be chosen freely according to the topic. The thesis follows the RU thesis guidelines and submission dates. Students will register for 550:701 (fall, 3cr.) and 550:702 (spring, 3cr.) Research in Landscape Architecture. Or 550:702 in the spring, 6 cr.
- Option 2 is a **graduate/ research project**. All final graduate projects require a written paper component that states the process and outcomes of the research. Students will register for 550:538/600 (fall, 3cr.) and 550:539/600 (spring, 3cr.) Independent Study.

Registration Information

To maintain full-time status, students must register for 9+ credits. Students may register for up to 16 credits. Students who were granted a Teaching Assistantship have to register for 6 E credits (16:550:877). Although those credits count toward the 16-credit limit, TAs may obtain a credit limit override. These TA credits do not count toward the MLA degree requirement for Landscape Architecture.

Please note that some classes may fill up quickly; however, graduate students have the benefit of registering earlier than undergraduates. Speaking with your advisor and identifying required and elective classes before the registration period starts will help you to take full advantage of that benefit.

If you are taking a 300-400 level course for graduate credit, be sure to use the G prefix.

Matriculation Continued requires a Special Permission number and is only used in cases where, after completing the two thesis classes 701 and 702 or 538 and 539, the thesis project must be extended. You can register for Matriculation Continued for a maximum of two semesters.

You must remain registered every fall and spring semester to maintain an active student status. Application for readmission is possible.

Incomplete Grades

Incomplete grades are only given when special circumstances hinder the student from completing the course work on time. To receive credit, the course work must be completed within one year (i.e., an incomplete in the fall semester must be completed by the end of the next fall semester). This is a policy of the Graduate School of New Brunswick.

Change in Address, Phone or E-mail

The Program Administrator should always have your most current contact information, both on and off campus.

Studio Culture

Studios provide an effective but also intense learning environment, and all of us must feel encouraged to support a studio culture that provides space for every individual to unfold their creativity.

Common Lecture

Every semester the department sponsors a series of speakers from the University and externally to present their work. The Common Lecture Series is an ideal way to learn about the diversity of Landscape Architecture and related fields, aid in the professional development of students, network with other designers, and enhance the program as an intellectual community. All students registered for studio are required to attend. All other students are strongly encouraged to attend.

Parking at Rutgers

[Rutgers Parking & Transportation Services](#) (DOTS) administers campus parking. Early August DOTS will send an invitation to buy campus parking. Students are not authorized to park at Blake Hall, except for registered Teaching Assistants (TA). See the program administrator for more information.