Graduate Program

“The graduate student research program is a wonderful opportunity for students to create meaningful socio-environmental synthesis work on their own terms. As a graduate student, I know that a whole host of competing demands limit our ability to participate in elective and extracurricular research. The interest and excitement this program generates is a testament to the unique model for research that SESYNC promotes. Students would never participate if they didn’t feel they would be energized and engaged in a substantive way.”

- Katherine Johnson, Graduate student, University of Maryland, College Park

Graduate Student Research Program

Because graduate students are among the most energetic and committed scholars interested in finding solutions to socio-environmental (S-E) problems, the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC) has implemented a program to foster and support interdisciplinary, team-based synthesis research specifically for advanced graduate students. Our commitment to this work stems from recognition of the potential for important contributions by graduate student researchers—contributions that are often made more difficult by the challenges of more traditional, disciplinary-focused programs and the very real demands of their academic work. We also feel that engagement at this career stage will be integral in developing a cohort of researchers committed to S-E synthesis work.

SESYNC’s program provides opportunities for doctoral students to network across multiple scholarly disciplines, gain skills in conceptualizing S-E systems and in proposal writing—all leading to the opportunity to conduct original, team-based S-E synthesis research in SESYNC’s unique learning environment.
Elements of the Program

Graduate networking and skill-building workshop
Graduate students are offered the opportunity to build knowledge and skills needed to conduct S-E research by participating in a highly interactive workshop with peers from around the world. Attendees are selected from applicants from natural and social science graduate programs, giving all the chance to develop new networks and research collaborations. The workshop includes plenary talks on S-E systems from noted scholars, discussions of how knowledge can lead to decision making, and interactive sessions on team science and proposal writing. Many who attended the first workshop went on to write successful proposals to conduct synthesis research at SESYNC.

For students interested in applying, there is a Facebook Group [1] for Grad Student Pursuit Collaborations. The intention of this Facebook group is to foster collaboration amongst potential SESYNC Grad Student Pursuit applicants. Check out the Facebook group here [1].

Graduate research opportunities
Graduate student research is initiated through a competitive request for proposals that is open to students from the U.S. and international institutions of higher education. Research is conducted over a 12–18 month period by small teams (5–7 scholars) who will meet at SESYNC three times over the course of their projects. All proposals are reviewed by SESYNC’s Scientific Review Committee. Proposals determined to have the highest potential to develop exceptional synthesis results in a feasible manner are offered support.

Fully integrated support for research projects
Graduate research teams receive the full suite of support services [2] offered to all teams at SESYNC. This includes assistance with project design and agenda planning and more extensive assistance with team science issues and meeting facilitation as required. The complete portfolio of computational support [3] is available to graduate research teams, including consultation and advanced technical support for database development, statistical and analytical approaches, and GIS and other visualization approaches. In addition to technical support, leaders of the research teams meet together prior to the start of their projects and once again at the conclusion of their work. These sessions are designed to help in the formulation of projects and to share and assess progress and challenges experienced over the course of the research. Each graduate project team is closely monitored and provided with mentorship where appropriate to help them succeed in their goals.

2014–19 Graduate Projects

To date, SESYNC has supported 28 graduate research teams [4]. Team members come from around the U.S. and across the globe and are tackling a range of critical issues.
Current & Upcoming Opportunities

Click here for all current opportunities at SESYNC [5] or email Nicole Motzer at nmotzer@sesync.org [6] or Jonathan Kramer at jkramer@sesync.org [7] for further information.

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