This document is intended to help you advise your incoming Integrative Conservation (ICON) student. In designing the ICON program, we opted for having a student’s program of study decided primarily by that student’s Advisor, ICON Representative and Committee rather than have a large number of required courses. ICON students should, however, finish their graduate education with a novel skillset, different than traditional students in your department. What follows is an explanation of the goals of the program, what courses are required, what we suggest you consider in helping students choose other courses, and what additional resources are available to enhance their educational experience.

An integrative approach
As global environmental change proceeds at an unprecedented pace, the practice of conservation is adapting to a complex set of new challenges. Responding effectively to these challenges will require that the next generation of practitioners and scholars not only develop expertise in specific fields but also have the conceptual tools to work across disciplines. The University of Georgia's Integrative Conservation Ph.D. program (ICON) is designed to meet that need by ensuring that students gain disciplinary depth while also learning to collaborate across disciplines and fields of practice to seek integrative solutions to complex conservation challenges. Students in this program choose one of four disciplinary focuses - Integrative Conservation and Anthropology; Integrative Conservation and Ecology; Integrative Conservation and Forestry and Natural Resources; or Integrative Conservation and Geography - each will ensure that students receive rigorous theoretical and methodological training in a traditional discipline, while also working integratively at the intersections of multiple disciplines.

Committee formation and ICON Representative
ICON committees should include five faculty members, including two faculty members from outside the student’s home department and disciplinary perspective. Though we expect many of the student’s committee members will be affiliated with ICON, the student must designate one member to function as the ICON Representative. Students should plan to select their ICON Representative as soon as possible after confirming their major advisor. The ICON Representative should do more than simply review documents after they are completed; instead, they should actively work with the student and Advisor in a way they all see fit to achieve the integrative component of the research. ICON Representatives should play a role in coursework selection, committee constitution, pre-proposal development, proposal writing, comprehensive exams, and dissertation writing. A student’s Advisor cannot serve as his/her ICON Representative. Please refer to the ICON Representative policy for more details.

Expectations of the Advisor in relation to ICON Representative
While the ICON Representative plays a special role on an ICON student’s committee, the other committee members, and especially the student’s advisor, also are important for helping achieve the goals of the ICON program.

- Advisors should be aware of the key ICON policies and procedures as they relate to students’ ability to meet both their disciplinary and ICON requirements.
- Advisors are responsible for communicating information about the comprehensive exams process to the rest of the committee (define time frame, question formats, etc.).

Please note that the ICON program defers to the student’s home department in regards
to comprehensive exam process and policy. The ICON program acknowledges that comps exams may differ across departments.

- Also, advisors should feel welcome to reach out to the ICON Graduate Coordinator if ever they are unclear on procedures or want extra insight into the goals of the program.

The ICON program of study

Year 1
Students must take one core ICON course, one Ecology seminar, and one bridge seminar. The first of these, Integrative Conservation I (ICON 8001) – 3 credit hours, offered each fall – provides the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the development of an integrative perspective, critically examining the theory and practice of integrative work. This team-taught course examines impediments to integrative thinking, both between disciplines and between the academic domain and the world of practice. The Ecology seminar, Perspectives on Conservation Ecology and Sustainable Development (ECOL 8400) – 2 credit hours, offered each fall – hosts a series of lectures by conservation faculty and practitioners. The bridge seminar, Field Planning and Preparation (ICON 8110) – 1 credit hour, offered each spring – provides an opportunity for students to prepare for the upcoming 8002 course. Specifically, students will use ICON 8110 to formulate a research question and make logistical decisions for ICON 8002 (taken in the fall of year 2).

Year 1 will also be dedicated to gaining a strong foundation in the students’ home disciplines, and the rest of their programs of study will be determined by their committees, with the goal of ensuring sufficient breadth to complement the disciplinary rigor achieved in the home department. To help guide committees, we have envisioned the ICON curriculum as a “pie” with three slices representing (1) the natural sciences, (2) the social sciences, and (3) law, economics, and policy. Students will be encouraged to take at least two courses from the suggested electives list in the 'slices' outside of their home department or discipline. A suggested course electives list is available on the ICON website.

Year 2
Year two includes Integrative Conservation II (ICON 8002) – 3 credit hours, offered each fall – a team-taught course that challenges students to work in teams with local stakeholders on a real conservation issue. Previous 8002 classes have worked with local stakeholders in Sapelo Island, GA, Franklin, TN, and Tybee Island, GA. The rest of year 2 is dedicated to finishing departmental course requirements and electives. Throughout the second year, students will continue to develop their dissertation proposal.

Because a key goal of this program is to train practitioners who are comfortable in the academic world and academics who can collaborate with practitioners, students will be required to complete an internship (Integrative Conservation Internship, ICON 8111/E, 3-8 credit hours, offered fall, spring and summer) for course credit. A map of completed internships is available on the ICON website. We encourage students to complete their internship before the end of year 2. (See the ICON Internship policy for more details).

Year 3
During year 3 students will solidify their plans for dissertation research projects and formalize their proposals as they work with their committees to ensure a proper balance between disciplinary depth and integrative learning. Students will be required to demonstrate the application of an integrative approach and strategic communication skills in their dissertations.

5/22/2017
Years 4 and 5
The length of a student’s program may depend on his or her home department/school. During years 4 and (potentially) 5 students will complete dissertation research and write and defend their dissertation.

Integrative Mechanisms
Because the literature on interdisciplinary education shows that students tend to fall back into “disciplinary silos” as they progress through their programs (Hackett & Rhoten 2009), the ICON program includes a series of “integrative mechanisms” designed to encourage inter-cohort exchange throughout the program. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in all of these activities, which include but are not limited to workshops, brown bags, peer review groups, or reading groups.

*Exceptions to requirements listed in this handbook can be sought through consultation with the ICON Curriculum Committee. Contact the ICON Graduate Coordinator (iconphd@uga.edu) for further details.