Earth Sciences

Degree conferred
Master of Science in Earth Sciences (BEFRI)

Options
Five options available:

- Earth and Life Evolution
- Earth Materials
- Environmental and Resource Geochemistry
- Geology
- Pure and Applied Quaternary Sciences

Languages of study
Study in English

Commencement of studies
Commencement of studies in the Autumn Semester (September) or in the Spring Semester (February)

Access to further studies
Ph.D.

This programme of study in Earth Sciences consists of a joint programme run by the Department of Geosciences at the University of Fribourg and the Institute of Geological Sciences at the University of Bern. Students profit from the expanded number of lecturers and researchers, and from the specialised geological know-how and facilities at both institutions. Taught in English, it includes a choice from five options: 1. Earth and Life Evolution (an exploration of the evolution of the geosphere and the biosphere); 2. Earth Materials (a multidisciplinary approach to geology and material sciences); 3. Environmental and Resource Geochemistry (the chemical and physical interaction between aqueous fluids and the solid substrate); 4. Geology (the understanding of geological processes and the results thereof in space and time, ranging from unconsolidated soil to solid rock on both small and large scales); 5. Pure and Applied Quaternary Sciences (an integrated approach to quaternary sediments).

Profile of the study programme
Have your Bachelor’s studies infected you with a fascination for Geology? Do you wish to train for an exciting career in research or industry? The Master of Science in Earth Sciences (BEFRI) is a joint programme run by the Institute of Geological Sciences at the University of Bern and the Department of Geosciences at the University of Fribourg within the framework of the inter-university «BEFRI» Convention. With only a twenty minute train trip separating the two universities, students profit from the expanded number of lecturers and researchers, and from the specialised geological know-how and facilities at both institutions. The merger of capabilities allows an exciting and varied curriculum to be offered in a two-year degree taught in English.

Highlights of the Master include a choice from five options:

1. Earth and Life Evolution
   This option explores two complementary aspects of earth sciences – the evolution of the geosphere and that of the biosphere – linked by a common theme: the processes and the unique history that have produced our life-sustaining planet. It is a curriculum dominated by curiosity-driven pure science, based on the subdisciplines of paleontology, sedimentology, and geochemistry. The breadth of the training acquired in this option leads to a wide choice of professional opportunities in academia at universities, research institutions, museums, space agencies, as well as in applied earth sciences such as hydrocarbon exploration and resource management.

2. Earth Materials
   Main aspect of this option is multidisciplinary between geology and material sciences. The intention of this option aims to provide skills for investigating and characterizing minerals, rocks, and crystalline solids in general, with special emphasis on their properties. This also includes developing models on formation and stability of rocks and minerals, synthesis of corresponding materials under laboratory conditions, and testing possible applications in technology and ecology. In the past, graduates specialised in this field accepted positions in industry and research institutes dealing with refractories, glass, cement, gem stones, or other crystalline solids of technological importance.

3. Environmental and Resource Geochemistry
   This option has become a large sector of professional activity for Earth Science graduates. The reason for this development is that virtually any exploitation of geological resources or disposal of solid waste impacts the environment. From a scientific point of view, the impact is mainly due to the chemical and physical interaction between aqueous fluids and the solid substrate (rock, solid waste etc.). The curriculum spans this realm of «water-rock» interaction, in order to prepare students to tackle the huge variety of problems that are encountered in professional practice. Experts are particularly sought in fields such as exploration of mineral and energy resources, geochemical assessment and protection of groundwater reserves, geological disposal of toxic or radioactive wastes, clean-up of contaminated sites, development of geothermal energy and underground storage of anthropogenic CO2.

4. Geology
   The option spans the entire realm from unconsolidated soil to solid rock, on both small and large scales with a common theme: the understanding of geological processes and the results thereof in space and time. Due to this breadth, natural overlapping with the other four options is inevitable. A careful selection of courses can provide a widely based education, with certain areas of increased expertise, thus
preparing the students to tackle the huge variety of 
problems that are encountered in professional practice. 
Industry and government agencies throughout the world 
have a considerable demand for scientific experts in sectors 
such as resource supply, disposal of waste, geotechnical 
aspects of construction projects or mining operations, or as 
assessing risk and ecological compatibility.

5. Pure and Applied Quaternary Sciences
This option represents an integrated approach for training 
students in all aspects of quaternary sediments, which cover 
most of the Earth surface. The heavily populated areas in 
the world are found in geological environments dominated 
by such unconsolidated rocks. As a consequence, most 
challenges regarding geohazards such as mass movements 
and mud flows, environmental geology and geotechnology 
are linked to such sediments. Courses in sedimentology, 
anthropogenic impacts on earth surface processes, dating 
of sedimentary sequences, glaciology and geomorphology, 
as well as physical properties of unconsolidated rocks 
guarantees a fundamental education that will enable 
graduates to face everyday challenges regarding 
unconsolidated sediments. Experts in this field are engaged 
by companies and public agencies working in the field of 
engineering geology, hydrogeology or natural hazards.

Studies organisation

Structure of studies
120 ECTS credits, 4 semesters

Curriculum
http://studies.unifr.ch/go/xZPll (French) 
http://studies.unifr.ch/go/z3FE1 (German) 

Admission

Master’s degree programmes are built on the knowledge and 
abilities that were acquired when obtaining a bachelor’s degree.

Holders of a bachelor’s degree awarded by a Swiss university are 
admitted to a master’s degree programme without any 
preconditions if they have earned 60 or 90 ECTS credits – 
depending on the chosen master’s degree programme – within the 
corresponding discipline. However, additional requirements can be 
required. The same applies to holders of a bachelor’s degree 
awarded by a foreign university, provided that the bachelor's degree 
is recognised and considered equivalent by the University of 
Fribourg.

Holders of a bachelor's degree awarded by a Swiss or a foreign 
university, provided that the bachelor’s degree is recognised and 
considered equivalent by the University of Fribourg, who do not fulfill 
this condition can be admitted to a master’s degree programme with 
preconditions (which must be successfully completed before 
starting the master’s degree programme) and/or additional 
requirements (which can be completed during the master's degree 
programme). The preconditions and/or additional requirements may 
not exceed 60 ECTS credits in total. The same applies to holders of 
a bachelor's degree awarded by a Swiss university of applied 
sciences, according to existing agreements.