Earth Sciences

Degree conferred
Master of Science in Earth Sciences
Universities of Fribourg and Berne

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 master programme 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. 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 characterising 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...
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's 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.