

Title: Professional Degree Programs — Doctoral, Master and Certificate

Category: Academic Affairs

Responsible Office: Office of the Provost

Scope

This policy governs professional doctoral, professional master's and professional certificate programs administered by academic units of the University. It clarifies program structure, admissions authority, curriculum requirements and student progression and operates in conjunction with ARASA and accreditation requirements.

Applicability

Applies to colleges, programs, faculty and administrators responsible for professional degree and certificate programs.

Definitions:

- **Professional Practice Doctoral Degree:** A professional practice doctoral degree is awarded upon completion of a program that provides the knowledge and skills required for entry into a recognized profession and, where applicable, licensure or certification. These programs require a total time to degree equivalent to at least six (6) full-time academic years, including both pre-professional and professional preparation.
- **Professional Master's Degree:** A post-baccalaureate graduate program designed to prepare students for professional practice or advancement within a field. These programs typically include applied or experiential components such as internships, practica or capstone experiences and may align with industry, licensure or professional standards.
- **Professional Certificate:** A focused credential that provides specialized knowledge or skills aligned with professional practice or advancement. Certificates may be offered at the post-baccalaureate or post-graduate level and should clearly indicate the intended audience and prerequisite level of prior education.

Policy Statement: The University offers professional degrees and certificates aligned with workforce, licensure and accreditation requirements. Programs must define curriculum, admissions criteria and completion requirements consistent with University and accrediting standards. Professional programs operate within decentralized academic units but require consistent institutional oversight to ensure alignment with academic policy, accreditation standards and regulatory requirements. Central oversight ensures equitable application of policies governing admissions, progression and completion across programs.

Curriculum and Credit Requirements: Programs must define minimum credit requirements, applied learning components and culminating assessments. Credit structures must align with University and accrediting standards. Courses applied to one awarded degree may not be reused for another degree except where explicitly permitted under University policy (e.g., dual degree or approved combined programs).

Curriculum Changes: Programs may modify curriculum through the University curriculum approval process; however, changes must not extend time-to-degree for students making satisfactory progress.

Professional Degree Programs: Professional degree programs require a professional component that may include internships, practica or clinical placements, emphasizing professional decision-making and critical analysis in problem solving. The educational content of the professional degree is distinct from a graduate research degree. Professional degree programs are distinct from research-oriented graduate programs (e.g.,

Ph.D.) in that they are designed primarily to prepare students for professional practice rather than the generation of original research.

- **Professional Practice Doctoral Degree:** A professional practice doctoral degree is awarded upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential or license required for professional practice.
- **Professional Master's Degree:** A professional master's degree is a post-baccalaureate program designed to prepare students for professional practice or advancement within a field. These programs emphasize applied learning and may include internships, practica, capstone experiences or other experiential components aligned with industry, licensure or professional standards.
- **Professional Certificate Programs:** A professional certificate is a post-baccalaureate or post-graduate credential designed to provide advanced, concentrated training in a specific discipline or area of professional practice. Professional certificates may include clinical, applied or interdisciplinary components. The content is typically designed in collaboration with employers, professional associations or licensing bodies and should align with institutional, state or national workforce priorities. Professional certificates may prepare individuals for board eligibility or licensure or to meet clearly defined workforce needs in specialized or emerging fields, and they can be developed to meet employer-driven demands in high-skill, non-licensure areas. For additional information on professional certificate requirements, see the Certificate Programs policy.
- **Program Oversight:** Oversight of professional programs resides with the Office of the Provost in coordination with the appropriate academic units. The Provost (or designee) retains final authority for academic policy, program approval and exceptions to ensure consistency, compliance and alignment with institutional and accrediting standards.