Title: Graduate Master's Degree Programs
Category: Academic Affairs
Responsible Cabinet Member: Provost

Purpose: This policy establishes institutional standards governing master's degree programs to ensure academic quality, consistent expectations for students and faculty, and alignment with University regulations, accreditation expectations and best practices among peer research universities.

Definitions:

- Graduate Faculty: Faculty members appointed by the Graduate School under the authority of the Provost who are authorized to teach graduate courses, supervise graduate research and serve on graduate advisory committees.
- Program Faculty: Faculty members approved by the academic unit to participate in teaching and mentoring within a specific graduate program.
- Plan A (Thesis): A research-based master's degree requiring the completion of a thesis and a final oral defense.
- Plan B (Non-Thesis): A master's degree pathway requiring additional coursework and a culminating assessment such as a comprehensive exam, capstone project or portfolio.
- Continuous Enrollment: Registration each required fall and spring semester, as prescribed by the student's academic program and applicable University policy. Continuous enrollment requirements apply to Plan A (thesis) students as specified in this policy. Plan B (non-thesis) master's students are not subject to the same continuous enrollment requirement. See the Continuous Enrollment Policy.
- Residence Credit: Graduate coursework completed at the University that counts toward the minimum credit requirements of a graduate degree.
- ETD: Electronic Thesis or Dissertation submitted through the University's repository.

Policy Statement: The University awards master's degrees to students who demonstrate advanced knowledge in a discipline and successfully complete program and institutional requirements. Master's programs may be structured as thesis based/research (Plan A) or coursework based (Plan B) and must maintain consistent academic standards across programs, including clearly defined learning outcomes and culminating expectations aligned with the purpose of the degree.

Program Structure and Degree Requirements

- Each master's degree program must specify whether it offers a thesis (Plan A) and/or non-thesis (Plan B) pathway. The minimum requirement for a master's degree is 30 graduate credit hours, including any thesis or capstone credits required by the program. Programs should maintain a common curricular foundation while clearly identifying coursework unique to the thesis or non-thesis pathway.
- Programs must clearly communicate with students the University-approved curriculum requirements, advising structures and culminating assessments through the program handbook and Graduate School publications.
- Master's degree programs are designed to develop advanced disciplinary knowledge and, in thesis pathways, the capacity to conduct independent research.

Transfer and Prior Graduate Credit: Transfer credit from another accredited institution may be applied toward a master's degree with approval of the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). In extraordinary circumstances, courses older than 10 years may not normally be applied toward degree requirements without rationale from the DGS and approval from the Office of the Provost . Please see Graduate Admissions Policies for more information.

Coursework Requirements

- Master's degree requirements may be satisfied through graduate coursework, independent study, research, internships, practica, thesis credits and other curricular requirements approved through the University's curriculum approval process.
- At least two-thirds (2/3) of the minimum credit hours required for the degree must be earned through regularly scheduled graduate coursework.
- When determining graduate course-level requirements, thesis, practicum and internship credits are excluded from the calculation. At least one-half (1/2) of the remaining required coursework must be completed in 600- or 700-level courses.
- At least 50% of the credits applied toward the degree should be earned in the student's home program or other formally approved related disciplines, unless otherwise specified in the approved curriculum. (This requirement does not prohibit approved shared coursework between concurrent or dual-degree programs.)

Thesis Research and Residency Enrollment (Plan A Pathway): Students pursuing the thesis option may enroll in Residency Credit for Master's Degree (XXX-768) for one (1) to twelve (12) credit hours; the number of hours is prescribed by the approved program curriculum. These credits may count toward the minimum degree credit requirement as determined by the academic program.

Students must have an approved thesis topic and be in good academic standing prior to enrolling in thesis research credits.

- **Thesis Enrollment and Continuation:** Students who have completed all required coursework and minimum thesis research credits but have not yet completed the thesis are required to maintain enrollment while completing degree requirements.

  In limited circumstances, and at the discretion of the DGS with approval from the Provost or designee, alternative registration options (including reduced or zero-credit enrollment) may be permitted such as XXX-748. These options are intended for administrative continuity of enrollment and are not the standard mechanism for degree progression.

Continuous Enrollment Requirement
Students in thesis-based master's programs (Plan A) who have completed required coursework and minimum thesis research credits, and who continue to use faculty time or University resources, must maintain enrollment each fall and spring term until degree completion, unless granted an approved leave of absence.

Continuous enrollment may be satisfied through:

- Thesis research credits, or

- Other approved registration mechanisms consistent with University policy (see Continuous Enrollment Policy).

Plan B (Non-Thesis) Enrollment: Students pursuing Plan B (non-thesis) master's degrees are expected to maintain continuous enrollment during the coursework phase of their degree program, consistent with program requirements and approved academic progression expectations.

Upon completion of all required coursework, students are not required to maintain continuous enrollment solely while independently preparing for a culminating academic requirement, such as a comprehensive examination, capstone project, or final portfolio.

Students must be enrolled during any academic term in which an academic action occurs, including the completion, submission, evaluation, or defense of a culminating requirement, a final examination, or degree conferral. This exception does not alter applicable enrollment requirements, degree-completion time limits, or readmission requirements.

Time Limits for Degree Completion
Students must complete all requirements for the master's degree within six (6) years of initial enrollment. Extensions may be granted by the Provost upon recommendation from the program's DGS. Please see the Academic Standing policy for specifics on student progression through research coursework. Periods of non-enrollment for Plan B students do not automatically extend the time limit for degree completion.

Thesis and Non-Thesis Options

- Plan A — Thesis Option: Students complete a thesis demonstrating original research or creative work under the supervision of a member of the Graduate Faculty. The thesis must comply with Graduate School formatting requirements and must be submitted electronically. A final oral defense conducted by the advisory committee is required for completion of the thesis.
- Plan B — Non-thesis Option: Students complete additional graduate coursework and a program-defined culminating assessment in lieu of a thesis. Each program must establish, publish and consistently apply the requirements for successful completion of the non-thesis option, including the nature, evaluation criteria and successful completion standards for the culminating assessment. Acceptable culminating assessments may include a comprehensive examination, capstone project, professional portfolio, practicum or other culminating academic experience appropriate to the discipline.

Advisory Committees
Master's students must have an advisory committee consisting of at least three Graduate Faculty members, and at least two members of the advisory committee must be from the student's major program. Advisory committees should be recommended by the DGS and approved by the Office of the Provost. The committee is responsible for approving the program of study, supervising research where applicable and administering the final examination.

Final Examination

The final examination may consist of a thesis defense (Plan A) or a comprehensive exam or capstone evaluation (Plan B). The final examination must be scheduled in accordance with the published academic calendar. The DGS must submit the examination request and final examination results to the Office of the University Registrar.

- Students must not be on scholastic probation and must have resolved all incomplete grades prior to sitting for the final examination (see the policy on Academic Standing for more information).
- A student who fails the final examination may be permitted one reexamination with the recommendation of the DGS and approval of the Office of the Provost. A third examination is not permitted.

Program Oversight: The Provost (or designee) retains final authority for academic policy, exceptions and program requirements to ensure consistency and compliance across graduate programs.