
A series of new policies were approved by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) on October 11, 2013 and the University Academic Planning Council (UAPC) on October 24, 2013. Although prompted by the Higher Learning Commission’s (HLC) institutional accreditation criteria, these policy changes are one of the many ways in which our campus ensures the integrity of its degrees and the quality of the student experience. The approved vote items become effective Fall 2014.

To facilitate the implementation process, several resources are available in the Graduate School’s Admin KnowledgeBase (GSAdminKB) including these FAQ's. The KB and these FAQ’s will continue to be updated as clarifications are needed. While the Graduate School sets baseline requirements, in many cases, graduate programs can set more rigorous requirements. The FAQs are divided into the following categories and are hyperlinked so you can jump directly to that topic:

1. Minimum Graduate Residence Credit Requirement FAQs
2. Minimum Graduate Degree Credit Requirement FAQs
3. Minimum Graduate Course Work (50%) Requirement FAQs
4. Prior Course Work FAQs
5. Maximum Credits per Term FAQs
6. Implementation: Effective Dates and Affected Students FAQs
7. Implementation: Degree-Clearing and E-Warrant FAQs
8. Implementation: Program Changes FAQs
9. Higher Learning Commission (HLC) FAQs

1. Minimum Graduate Residence Credit Requirement FAQs

   a. How does the minimum graduate residence credit requirement differ from the minimum degree credit requirement?

   It is believed that the degree credit policy in place prior to Fall 2014 of 16 credits for a master’s degree, 24 credits for the MFA, and 32 credits for a doctoral degree in the Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures may have originally implied that these were the minimum number of credits a student must earn at UW-Madison while enrolled in the graduate career or in graduate residence. Over time, it appears this evolved into a degree credit policy.

   There is now a set of explicit graduate residency minima: 16 credits for a master’s degree, 24 credits for a MFA degree, and 32 credits for a doctoral degree. This definition of graduate residency includes any online courses, as well as any remote field experience, practicum, and research credits, taken as a graduate student at UW-Madison. Credits applied to the graduate residence minimum must be earned while enrolled as a graduate student at UW-Madison and can also count toward the new degree credit minimums (30 credits for a master's degree, 42 credits for the MFA, and 51 credits for a doctoral degree).

   b. Do students need to satisfy the graduate residence credit requirement in order for a student to achieve dissertator status?

   Yes, students must have completed all requirements for their doctoral degree except for the dissertation AND have satisfied the minimum graduate residence credit requirement in order to achieve dissertator status.
2. Minimum Graduate Degree Credit Requirement FAQs

a. Why shouldn't our institution have a master's degree credit minimum lower than 30?

Our peer institutions overwhelmingly require a minimum of 30 credits for the master's degree. The 16 credit minimum effective prior to Fall 2014 was an extreme outlier. Thus, we did not feel we had a good argument for having a minimum below 30. Furthermore, data (prior to the policy change) on student outcomes show that 92% of the practices of master's programs across campus is consistent with a 30 degree credit minimum.

b. What are the minimum degree credit requirements for master's degrees, MFA degrees, specialist certificates, and doctoral degrees?

There are new minimum degree credit policy changes at all degree levels (master's, specialist certificates, MFA, and doctoral degrees). The policy in place prior to Fall 2014, required a minimum of 16 credits for a master's degree, 24 credits for the MFA, and 32 credits for a doctoral degree. The Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) determined that requiring 30 credits for a master's degree and keeping the minimum MFA/specialist certificate and doctoral degree credit requirements unchanged was not reasonable. The body of work expected for an MFA or doctoral degree is substantially different from other master's degrees. Peer institutions have doctoral credit minimums that range from none to 96 credits at the doctoral level. Furthermore, data (prior to the policy change) on student outcomes shows that most practices of MFA and doctoral programs across campus is consistent with higher degree credit minimums.

The GFEC subcommittee has approved a new graduate degree credit minimum of 30 credits for a master's degree, 42 credits for a MFA/specialist certificate and 51 credits for a doctoral degree, with graduate residency requirements at 16, 24, and 32 credits respectively. The credits used towards a master's degree, a doctoral minor, or taken as a dissertator may count towards the related doctoral degree credit.

c. Are credits taken while a dissertator allowed to count towards the doctoral degree credit requirement? Do the minimum doctoral degree credits (51 credits) have to be taken before or after dissertator status?

Credits take while a dissertator can count towards the minimum doctoral degree credit requirement of 51 credits. The minimum doctoral degree credits (51 credits) can be earned before or after dissertator status. However, requirements for dissertator status remain the same including satisfying the minimum graduate residence credit requirement of 32 credits.

d. Why was 51 credits selected as degree credit requirement for doctoral students? For example, there could be cases where a student obtains the minimum 32 credits for the residence credit requirement (also needed for dissertator status) and then completes six semesters as a dissertator (with three credits each term) for a total of 18 dissertator credits. Thirty-two credits plus the 18 dissertator credits is one credit shy of the 51 credits required for degree credit requirement.

The graduate residence credit requirement and the graduate degree credit requirement are both minimum standards. Based on historical data, most doctoral students surpass these minimums. The Graduate Faculty Executive (GFEC) subcommittee considered various factors when determining the 51 credit requirement: appropriate time-to-degree, appropriate length of time as a dissertator, and credit requirements at peer institutions. The GFEC subcommittee was not necessarily calculating a formula that would allow students to graduate with the least amount of credits possible, but rather reflecting on the above factors. For example, a student could complete a doctoral degree in five years in a scenario such as 3-4 terms of 12 credits (total of 36-48 credits) to attain dissertator status and then 3-5 terms of 3 credits (total of 9-15 credits) as a dissertator. Some terms would include the summer term.
e. Can we consider providing degree credit for other required activities?

Yes, we advise programs to examine the expectations they have of their students and work to formalize any informal or non-credited work as credits within the standards of UW-Madison curriculum policies. Examples include providing credit for practicum experiences such as internships and field work, required research currently not bearing credit, and required seminar attendance. Additionally, if master’s credits are part of the total required for the associated doctoral degree, a program may consider moving some of the doctoral credits into the master’s requirement. For further details on course policy and the course approval process, please refer to the following website: http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm

f. Will the Graduate School impose a maximum number of degree credits allowed for research/independent study?

A new maximum on research/independent study credits is not part of these policy changes. Currently, there are no limitations on the number of research or independent study credits that a student can use towards a graduate degree (except in the case of the doctoral minor; see below), although programs may choose to have limitations. Current Graduate School policies and procedures detail minimum credit requirements, but do not distinguish between classroom course credits and thesis/research credits.

Credit policy for doctoral minors: Doctoral minors require a minimum of nine credits. A maximum of three credits can be independent study credits, and research and thesis credits may not be used to satisfy the minor.

g. Can a degree be research-only, with no course work? Is there a minimum number of degree credits required for course work vs. research?

The balance between course work and research is not dictated as a general principle. At a broad research university like University of Wisconsin – Madison, it is important to have the flexibility to construct degree programs in ways that achieve the learning outcomes established by the program. At the master’s level, this may range from a course-work-only master’s program to a research-based master’s program with minimal course work requirements. In some cases, programs may choose to adjust the number of required courses based on an individual student’s prior preparation.

h. Can courses taken from a professional career (VMED, MED, LAW, PHARM) be used towards a graduate degree? Are there any changes to dual graduate/professional degree programs?

Please note that dual degrees are two degrees that are each earned in a separate “career” as defined in ISIS. For example, a graduate/professional dual degree is where one degree is granted in a graduate program/career and the other in a professional program/career (e.g., M.D./MED, J.D./LAW, MPAS/MED, DVM/VET, D.Pharm./PHARM, MPH/MED). For students in a dual career programs, the program continues to have the latitude to determine which courses can be used toward the graduate degree.

Please see FAQs in the “Effective Dates and Affected Students” section for further details on impacts to dual degree students.

i. Will the GFEC/Graduate School decide on a maximum degree credit requirement for graduate degrees?

Some peer institutions do provide a maximum in addition to a minimum (e.g, University of Michigan: master’s degrees must be between 24 and 72 credits; Minnesota: master’s degrees must be between 30 and 48 credits). Although a maximum has not been set, it should be noted that a master’s degree is a body of work that is substantially different from a doctoral degree and the credit requirements of a program should reflect this difference.
3. Minimum Graduate Course Work (50%) Requirement FAQs

   a. Can programs meet the “50% graduate level course work” rule by changing their existing courses to higher numbers (above 700)?

   We recommend that, as a first pass, departments and programs focus on those courses that they need to create to provide credit for practicum experiences such as internships and field work, required research currently not bearing credit, and required seminar attendance, or revisions to existing courses that bring the number of credits assigned into alignment with expectations of the course.

   In many cases, programs have specifically designed courses for their master’s program and have numbered them at the 500 or 600 level. We do not expect that these courses be renumbered to the 700 level. It is an option to change course numbering, however programs may find that this will be a large-scale project that may take years to plan and complete given that some programs may find that they would want to renumber a significant fraction of their courses. No batch process is currently available to streamline this. Large scale course renumbering should only be done after consultation with the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research.

   New course approvals and course changes must go through the appropriate school/college Academic Planning Council(s) or Curriculum Committee, and then through the University Curriculum Committee coordinated by the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research. Please note that on July 1, 2013, administration of the course proposal process moved from the Office of the Secretary of the Faculty to the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research. For further details on the course approval process, please go to http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm

   b. What does “courses designed for graduate work” mean?

   The GFEC has interpreted “courses” here to signify credits, which includes both course work and independent/research credits. Several attributes have been defined to identify courses designed for “graduate work.” Graduate course work can include UW-Madison courses:

   • numbered 700 and above;
   • numbered 300-699 that are specifically designed for graduate students in a graduate program; or
   • numbered 300-699 that assess graduate students separately from undergraduate students.

   Additionally, on a semester by semester basis, an individual student may count credits from courses numbered 300-699 that have a graduate student enrollment >50% in that given semester. This must be assessed on a semester by semester basis and cannot be applied as a universal standard if true for one or multiple semesters. To be universally identified as a course designed for graduate work the course must meet one of the criterion bullets listed above.

   Courses taken as a University Special or a UW-Madison undergraduate student are not allowed to count toward the 50% graduate course work minimum unless taken at the 700 level or above. Please note that there are credit maximums for each of these categories of prior course work.

   Some course numbering changes may be appropriate, which will require governance action through the course approval process. For further details on the course approval process, please go to http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm In the short term, programs identified and documented their decisions in the Graduate Catalog. However, in the long term, via the Graduate Course Attribute Implementation Project and new course proposals, subject owners will determine which courses are allowed to count toward the 50% graduate work policy using the above criteria. Since subject owners have authority over courses, please note that the graduate course attribute lists provided by subject owners will override any lists previously provided by graduate programs.

   Further details on institutional policy regarding course numbering can be found here: https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=24556
Further details on institutional policy regarding the graduate course attribute can be found here: [https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=39841](https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=39841)

c. For courses in the 300-699 range that we want to deem as graduate-level, what do we need to prepare or consider to be in compliance? For example, should the pre-requisite be “graduate standing only”?

Currently, there is no need to restrict 300-699 courses to only graduate students for them to be considered to be “designed for graduate course work.” Some programs have existing pre-requisites on these courses and others do not. This may or may not be advisable depending the wishes of the program, but it is not an explicit requirement (pre-requisite changes must go through the course approval process; for further details on the course approval process, please go to [http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm](http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm)).

Generally, the GFEC felt that determining which 300-699 courses are specifically designed for graduate work is a program faculty decision. Graduate programs know the content of their courses and whether they meet the bar of graduate-level work. The important point is that graduate programs and subject owners have discussions about which courses should be included on the “courses designed for graduate work” (50% graduate course work) list. The agreed upon list needs to be officially documented in the program’s Graduate Catalog page and by subject owners via the [Graduate Course Attribute Implementation Project](http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm). In addition, it should be included in the program’s handbook/website and known to staff/faculty for advising purposes. Since subject owners have authority over courses, please note that the graduate course attribute lists provided by subject owners will override any lists previously provided by graduate programs.

d. Obviously, all courses 700 or above are graduate-level. Is there an easier way for programs to track and identify which courses numbered 300-699 are graduate-level?

In Spring 2014, the University Curriculum Committee approved a request from the Graduate School to create an official graduate course attribute/flag for courses “designed for graduate course work.” The Graduate School and the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research (APIR) in partnership with the Registrar’s Office are taking steps to make this available beginning Spring 2016. The plan is that APIR and the Graduate School will initiate the [Graduate Course Attribute Implementation Project](http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm) by contacting subject owners to identify/approve eligible courses, these courses would be reviewed/approved both at the school/college and the University Curriculum Committee (each governance body reserves the right to request a syllabus from any course that requests the attribute). These approved courses would then be codified accordingly by the Registrar’s Office. Since subject owners have authority over courses, please note that the graduate course attribute lists provided by subject owners will override any lists previously provided by graduate programs.

The presence of this graduate course attribute is what students, programs, and the Graduate School will use to determine whether a course may be counted toward the minimum graduate course work (50%) requirement. Beyond that, the quality and integrity of the graduate-level work of graduate programs continues to be a point of evaluation within institutional program review (required every 10 years).

e. Prior to implementation of the graduate course attribute in campus systems (a term prior to Spring 2016), which resource identifies what courses have been identified as “graduate level”?

Graduate students may fulfill the graduate level coursework (50%) requirement with courses that are documented as graduate-level coursework during the term which they took the course.

For students taking coursework through the fall 2015 term, the official University record which identifies programs’ documented “graduate level” coursework is each program’s Minimum Degree Requirements and Satisfactory Progress chart in the [2014-2016 Graduate School Catalog](http://apir.wisc.edu/courses.htm).
For coursework taken in the spring 2016 term and beyond, the official University documentation of “graduate level” coursework will be identified with the graduate course attribute (“G50%”) in the University’s Course Guide and Class Guide.

f. Where can I learn more about the Graduate Course Attribute Implementation Project?

A website has been created that explains this project in detail: http://apir.wisc.edu/grad_attribute.htm

Further details on institutional policy regarding the graduate course attribute can be found here: https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=39841

g. What credit number should the 50% be applied to?

Because the HLC wording states that “at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work,” the GFEC has interpreted this to be 50% of the credits designed by the program for the degree. For instance, if a program determines that students must complete a minimum of 40 credits for their M.S. degree, then 20 of those credits must be graduate work as defined above. For a program designed at the 30 credit minimum, 15 of those credits must be graduate work.

h. Subject owners are identifying courses eligible for the graduate course attribute. Where can I find a list of all the subject owners on campus?

The campus list of subject owners can be found here: https://courseproposals.wisc.edu/proposals/propAdmin/viewDirectory

Since subject owners have authority over courses, please note that the graduate course attribute lists provided by subject owners will override any lists previously provided by graduate programs.
4. Prior Course Work FAQs

a. How is prior course ("transfer" credits) handled?

The Graduate School does not articulate transfer credits (in other words, these credits do not appear on the graduate portion of the transcript). Programs may desire to accept prior work from post-baccalaureate graduate courses taken at other institutions and/or use credits from the UW-Madison while the student was enrolled as an undergraduate and/or University Special student toward the graduate degree requirements. The new policy for prior work allows for all of these explicitly with some limitations on the number of credits and to which minimum requirements they apply. However, course work earned five or more years prior to admission to a master's degree or course work earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not be allowed to satisfy requirements. A summary of the prior course work policies and additional FAQs are provided below. Please note that an individual graduate program may choose to be more restrictive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum Graduate Residence Credit Requirement</th>
<th><strong>Prior Graduate Course Work from Other Institution(s)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Course Work from Undergraduate Career at UW-Madison (up to 7 credits total)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Transfer from University Special Student Career at UW-Madison (up to 15 credits total)</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>*Allowed up to 15 credits numbered 300 or above if difference in tuition is paid.</td>
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<td>*Allowed</td>
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* Fulfillment of requirements is allowed in these instances only if approved by the student’s graduate program up to any stated maximum.

** Course work earned five or more years prior to admission to a master’s degree or course work earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements.

b. Can prior course work be allowed to satisfy a program’s minor requirement?

If a graduate program has a minor requirement, prior coursework can be used toward the minor requirement in accordance with the policies listed in the above chart. If courses toward the minor are taken while the student was enrolled as a University Special student, the difference in tuition must be paid. As is true now, course work earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy minor requirements.

c. Are there limits for how many credits a student may use to fulfillment requirements with post-baccalaureate graduate course work taken from other institutions? For example, can we count a large number of graduate-level credits from a master’s degree earned at another institution?

Some departments/programs already limit how many credits a student may use to fulfill requirements from post-baccalaureate graduate work completed prior to attending graduate school at UW-Madison. Currently, there are no Graduate School policy concerning limits on how many post-baccalaureate graduate-level credits from other institutions a student may use to fulfill program requirements as long as there is adherence to the following related policies: the minimum graduate residence requirement, no course work older than five years from admission to a master’s degree or ten years from admission to a doctoral degree, or any program-level restrictions.
For many programs, the allowance of prior course work to fulfill program requirements will need to be reviewed on an individual basis with an evaluation of syllabi, course descriptions, and/or transcripts. In other programs, it may be permissible to review prior course work in the aggregate assuming specific guidelines (and the rationale for them) are made clear and transparent in their program website and handbook. For example, a program might allow prior course work from an accredited master’s degree in specifically identified fields from another institution to count toward a doctoral degree.

d. Can programs accept prior course work earned several years ago?

Please note that course work earned five or more years prior to admission to a master’s degree or course work earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements. In certain instances, a program may appeal and justify the use of credits that exceed these restrictions if specific criteria for remaining current in the field can be identified and defended. For example, if an accredited master’s degree/course work is over five years old, the program might allow the prior course work to satisfy program requirements if the student can demonstrate how they have remained current in the field through continuous certification. The program would need to state clear guidelines (and the rationale for them) in their program website and handbook.

e. Are there limits for how many credits a student may use to fulfill requirements with graduate-level courses taken as a UW-Madison undergraduate?

Some departments/programs already limit how many credits a student may use to fulfill requirements from work done prior to attending graduate school at UW-Madison. For well-prepared advanced UW-Madison undergraduate students, the program may choose to count up to seven credits numbered 300 or above (as detailed above) to satisfy minimum degree credit requirements. If courses are numbered 700 level and above they can count toward the graduate course work (50%) minimum. In contrast to the senior-grad category (which is eliminated as of Fall 2014), these credits may “double-count” towards both the undergraduate and graduate degrees for well-prepared advanced UW-Madison undergraduate students.

Thus, there is now explicit guidance on the number of UW-Madison undergraduate credits (7 credits) that can be allowed to count towards the graduate degree credit minimum. As with all prior course work, the fulfillment of requirements is allowed only if approved by the student’s graduate program. In addition, course work earned five or more years prior to admission to a master’s degree or earned ten or more years prior to admission to a doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements.

f. May a program allow prior course work taken as an undergraduate from an accredited undergraduate program count toward a UW-Madison accredited graduate program?

The new approved policies only allow seven credits of graduate level courses from a UW-Madison undergraduate degree to fulfill graduate degree requirements. An exception to allow up to seven credits from an undergraduate degree earned at a non UW-Madison institution to count toward a UW-Madison graduate degree can be requested on a program-by-program basis when the following two conditions are met:

i) students have received their undergraduate degree in the same discipline as they are pursuing graduate work, and

ii) the undergraduate degree has been granted from a program which is accredited by the same accrediting body as the UW-Madison program.

Should a program decide to request an exception to this policy, it must provide the Graduate School with information requested in the undergraduate credit exception form to be eligible for consideration. Please note submission of an exception request does not provide assurance of its approval.
g. **Is graduate course work taken as an undergraduate at another institution eligible to be counted as prior course work? Or must all prior course work from another institution be graduate course work earned while post-baccalaureate student?**

Graduate course work taken as an undergraduate at another institution is not eligible to be counted as prior course work. The two possible exceptions include if the graduate course work was taken as a UW-Madison undergraduate or if the course work was from an undergraduate program accredited by the same accrediting body as the equivalent UW-Madison program.

Beyond these two exceptions, all graduate course work to be counted as prior course work must be earned as a post-baccalaureate student.

h. **Our program reviews prior course work for students in order to determine which (if any) program learning goals have been met. In turn, this informs the type of course work these students should take at UW-Madison for the program. In addition, sometimes the prior course work reviewed is outside of the new stated parameters listed in the new Prior Course Work requirements. How should this be handled/considered?**

The Prior Course Work requirements indicate what is permissible to count towards a program’s degree (not necessarily, the program). Programs may decide to allow prior course work to count towards the program’s learning goals that are outside the parameters of the Prior Course Work requirements (e.g. courses taken as an undergraduate at another institution), but that course work is not allowed to count towards the minimum graduate residence requirement, the minimum graduate degree requirement, or the minimum graduate course work requirement.

For example, perhaps a student has taken a Statistics course as an undergraduate from a different institution that you would like to recognize in the program. The program may do so, but that course work would not be allowed to count towards the minimum graduate residence requirement, the minimum graduate degree requirement, or the minimum graduate course work requirement. Thus, the student may need to take additional credits (from more advanced course work or research credits) to achieve the minimums.

i. **How are “University Special” student credits earned at UW-Madison handled?**

Generally, students are encouraged to enter a graduate program as early as possible and not to “try out” the program as University Special students. If students are interested in a graduate program, they should seek admission as quickly as possible. Officially entering the program allows the student to receive appropriate advising and be fully integrated into the program structure. If University Special student credits are accepted by a program to fulfill program requirements, it is done on occasion as an exception (on a case-by-case basis) and is subject to the approval of the program. The new policy limits the number of credits that may transfer from a UW-Madison University Special student career to a UW-Madison graduate career to no more than fifteen credits numbered 300 or above. This must be initiated and approved by the program. Programs may choose to be more restrictive or disallow University Special student credits to count toward their graduate degrees.

Students using courses taken as a UW-Madison University Special student to count toward the minimum graduate degree, residence, or minor credit requirements have to pay the difference in tuition between graduate and University Special student tuition for the terms in question (already a historically established practice for the minimum graduate residence requirement). In addition, these courses are not allowed to count toward the 50% graduate work minimum unless taken at the 700 level or above. Those credits earned in such a semester still appear in the transcript history as “University Special” student, but the Registrar’s Office (as is the historical practice) adds a statement in the beginning of the transcript “All credits taken in [term] as a University Special student have been accepted by the Graduate School toward a degree program” after the student has paid the difference in tuition.

j. **The prior course work policy stipulates that course work earned five or more years prior to admissions to a master’s degree or course work earned ten or more years prior to admission to a**
A doctoral degree is not allowed to satisfy requirements. Does this apply only to identified prior course work categories or also to any course work taken while enrolled as a UW-Madison graduate student?

If students are continuously enrolled in a graduate program, all the UW-Madison credits they earn as a graduate student are eligible to count toward their graduate degrees. This assumes compliance with Graduate School policies including but not limited to degree time limits as well as the approval of the student’s graduate program.

If students break enrollment from their graduate program they risk losing all credits earned prior to their absence. More specifically, master’s students who have been absent five or more years and doctoral students who have been absent ten or more years risk losing all degree credits earned prior to their absence unless a successful petition is submitted to the Graduate School.

For example, a program may wish to appeal on behalf of a student who has been practicing in the field. In this case, the program should clearly demonstrate how the student has remained current in the field, such as through continuous certification. All appeals must be made by the program on behalf of the student. The request should come from the student’s advisor and/or program chair and be sent to the Graduate School’s Assistant Dean of Admissions and Academic Services. The appeal should include sufficient justification for the request and any supporting documentation. Please note submission of an appeal does not provide assurance of its approval.

Please note that individual graduate programs may choose to be more restrictive than Graduate School policy. In addition, after any absence, all students are required to seek readmission to the Graduate School and apply through normal methods set by their graduate program.

k. How much prior course work can be allowed to count toward all/any degrees in the graduate career?

The credits used towards a master’s degree and the prior course work used toward it may also be applied to a related doctoral degree. However, if the prior course work credit maximums were already reached for the master’s degree (specifically, seven UW-Madison undergraduate credits and/or fifteen University Special student credits), then no more prior course work credits are permissible for the doctoral degree.

5. Maximum Credits per Term FAQs

a. What is the maximum number of credits a student is allowed to enroll for fall/spring terms?

After considering past student performance and peer institution policies, a change in the maximum number of credits allowed for fall/spring terms was approved and becomes effective Fall 2014. The policy in place prior to Fall 2014, allowed a graduate student to enroll in a maximum of 12 graduate-level credits per term. The new policy increases this maximum to 15 graduate-level credits for fall/spring terms. The maximum number of credits allowed for summer terms continues to be 12 credits. Dissertators are still required to enroll in exactly 3 credits related to their dissertation per term. The increase in maximum number of credits for fall/spring terms is expected to mitigate any concerns about increased time to degree given the new credit minimums.

The Graduate School considers graduate-level credits as those courses numbered 300 or above, taken for a grade (not pass/fail and audits). The enrollment system counts all credits in determining maximum credit loads. An overload request is required if a student wishes to exceed the maximum number of credits they are allocated as a graduate student. Even though pass/fail courses, audit courses, and 100- or 200-level courses are not considered graduate-level credits, they are counted in a total credit load.

If a student wishes to enroll in more than the maximum allowed credits per term, they must submit an overload request to the Graduate School, which is considered by an Associate Dean in the Graduate School.
b. What is the maximum number of credits a student is allowed to enroll for summer terms?

The maximum number of credits allowed for summer terms continues to be 12 credits. Generally, the maximum 12 credits in the summer is achieved by students completing 3 credits during the 3-week intersession at the end of May and into early June; and then an additional 9 credits during the 8-week DHH summer session. Completing 12 credits outside of these standard times most likely requires an overload request given the existing policy that states that the number of credits a student can enroll in cannot exceed the span of weeks in any short session during the summer (except for dissertators). Sometimes this is referred to as the “no more than 1 credit per week” rule (the one exception is the 8-week DHH session which allows 9 credits).

It should be noted that for students that enroll over the summer, the average number of credits taken is 3 credits. In addition, logistically, 12 credits is the maximum that is possible within the standard summer sessions and is aligned with what is academically wise and reasonable for students. If a student wishes to enroll in more than the maximum allowed credits per week/term for the summer, they must submit an overload request to the Graduate School, which is considered by an Associate Dean in the Graduate School.

c. What implications does the “maximum credits per term” have with respect to tuition?

Graduate students enrolling for 8 or more credits during a semester are charged a flat tuition rate. There is no expectation that the tuition plateau level will change as a result of the new policies.

6. Implementation: Effective Dates and Affected Students FAQs

a. When do the new requirements take effect? Do the new policies apply to continuing students, or just incoming students after the requirements take effect?

The new policies approved by GFEC become effective at the beginning of Fall 2014.

The new policies apply to all incoming students beginning in Fall 2014.

Master’s students enrolled prior to Fall 2014 have the option to complete under the old policy requirements if they can complete all degree requirements and graduate BEFORE Fall 2016. Students enrolled in a MFA, specialist certificate, or doctoral degree prior to Fall 2014 have the option to complete their degree under the prior policy requirements.

A student who chooses to discontinue their degree program for a semester or more (and thus, is not continuously enrolled) must return under the new policy requirements. A student who advances from the master’s level to the doctoral level beginning Fall 2014 is subject to the new requirements. Summer enrollment is not required for meeting the standard of continuous enrollment.

Appeals are considered in exceptional cases.

b. What happens to master’s and doctoral students enrolled prior to Fall 2014 that have a break in enrollment? Are they then under new policy requirements?

All doctoral students enrolled prior to Fall 2014 must maintain continuous enrollment to have the option to complete their degree under the old policy requirements. The same holds true for master’s students as well with the added caveat that they must also complete all degree requirements and graduate BEFORE Fall 2016. Summer enrollment is not required for meeting the standard of continuous enrollment.

c. There are some students completing master’s degrees in Summer 2014 and continuing as doctoral students for Fall 2014. Are these new doctoral students under the new requirements?
Any degree/program started or added on or after Fall 2014 is under new policy requirements. This includes those continuing on from a master's degree to a doctoral degree, all types of add/change programs, and re-entry students. Continuing from a master's program to the doctoral program is considered adding a program/degree. In these instances, the doctoral program is added effective the term after the master's degree is awarded.

d. **How are degree completion fee students, re-entry students, compensatory master's students (those unsuccessful obtaining their doctoral degree), or students who add/change a program impacted? Are these students under the new requirements?**

Degrees added on or after Fall 2014 are under new policy requirements. This includes students who add/change programs, re-entry students, and compensatory master's students. Effective Fall 2014, degree completion fee students are under new policy requirements.

e. **How do new policies impact double degree students?**

Degrees added on or after Fall 2014 are under new policy requirements. It continues to be true that double degrees (two degrees, two programs) should have no more than 25% credit overlap between degrees, based on the lower credit requirement of the two programs. It is possible that a student could have one of their double degrees under old policy requirements and the other under new policy requirements.

Given the nature of new institutional accreditation standards, any historical double degree arrangements that do not adhere to the 25% standard will no longer be honored. Double degrees are reviewed manually during the degree clearing process.

For a definition and other details regarding double degrees please refer the following policy: https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/#doubledegrees

f. **How do new policies impact joint degree students?**

Doctoral joint degree students (one degree, two programs) who add the second program prior to fall 2014 and maintain continuous enrollment have the option to complete their joint degree under the old policy requirements. The same holds true for master's joint degree students as well with the added caveat that they must also complete all degree requirements and graduate BEFORE Fall 2016. Summer enrollment is not required for meeting the standard of continuous enrollment.

Joint degree students who add a program on or after Fall 2014 are under new policy requirements – even if the original program was added prior to Fall 2014. Since joint degrees represent a single degree, the additional program added on or after Fall 2014 triggers new policy requirements for the single degree award.

Joint degrees are reviewed manually during the degree clearing process. For a definition and other details regarding joint degrees please refer the following policy: https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/#jointdegrees

g. **How do new policies impact dual degree students such as undergraduate/graduate dual degrees (or accelerated degrees) and graduate/professional dual degrees?**

Given the nature of new institutional accreditation standards, undergraduate/graduate dual degrees (also known as accelerated degree programs) or the senior-grad category no longer exist as formal structures. However, the spirit of these arrangements is operational within the new prior course work policy. More specifically, programs may allow up to seven credits of UW-Madison undergraduate course work numbered 300 or above to count toward graduate degree requirements.

Graduate/professional dual degree students who add a graduate program/degree prior to fall 2014 and maintain continuous enrollment have the option to complete their graduate degree under the old policy
requirements (if the graduate degree is a master’s degree they must also complete all degree requirements and graduate BEFORE Fall 2016). Summer enrollment is not required for meeting the standard of continuous enrollment. Graduate/professional dual degree students who add a graduate program/degree after fall 2014 are under new policy requirements for their graduate degree.

Dual degrees are reviewed manually during the degree clearing process. For a definition and other details regarding graduate/professional dual degrees please refer the following policy: https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/#dualdegreesgradprof

h. Master’s students enrolled prior to 2014 must maintain continuous enrollment and graduate BEFORE Fall 2016 to be under old policy requirements. What happens when a continuously enrolled master’s student with a start date prior to 2014 uses the Fall 2016 degree window period for graduation? Is the student under the old or new policy requirements?

Students using the Fall 2016 degree window period receive their degree award effective Fall 2016. Thus, these students would be under new policy requirements given their degree is not awarded BEFORE Fall 2016. Students using the Summer 2016 or earlier degree windows receive their degree award prior to Fall 2016. Thus, a continuously enrolled master’s student with a start date prior to 2014 who uses the Summer 2016 (or earlier) degree window would be eligible to complete the degree under old policy requirements.

For additional details regarding degree deadlines and degree windows, please refer to the following policy: https://grad.wisc.edu/currentstudents/degreedeadlines/

i. What is the process for appeals?

Appeals are considered in exceptional cases. For example, a program may wish to appeal on behalf of a part time student, and in that case, the specific plan of study developed early in the program for this student would need to accompany the request. All appeals must be made by the program on behalf of the student.

The request should come from the student’s advisor and/or program chair and be sent to the Graduate School’s Assistant Dean of Admissions and Academic Services. The appeal should include sufficient justification for the request and any supporting documentation. Please note submission of an appeal does not provide assurance of its approval.

7. Implementation: Degree-Clearing and E-Warrant FAQs

a. How does the degree-clearing and e-warrant process work with the new policy requirements?

A series of new steps are built into the e-warrant process to reflect new policy requirements. Some of these steps are based on the manual review of information entered by the program and others are automated audits. Programs should be prepared to provide the necessary details for how each of their students has met the new policy requirements.

b. How does the e-warrant process check for the minimum graduate residence credit requirement?

This is an automated audit within the e-warrant system. The audit checks that students have met the graduate residence credit requirement with credits earned throughout their graduate career. The graduate resident credit minimums are 16 credits for a master’s degree, 24 credits for a MFA/specialist certificate and 32 credits for a doctoral degree.

As an example, if a student earns 30 credits for a master’s in Sociology and continues for a doctoral degree in Sociology, all 30 credits from the master’s degree count toward the 32 credit graduate residence requirement for the doctoral program. The same would be true if a student earns 30 credits for a master’s in Sociology and continues for a doctoral degree in Population Health.
Please note that meeting the graduate residence credit requirement is a requirement for achieving dissertator status.

c. How does the e-warrant process check for the minimum graduate degree credit requirement?

This is an automated audit within the e-warrant system. The audit checks that students have met the minimum graduate degree credit requirement with credits earned throughout their graduate career. The graduate degree credit minimums are 30 credits for a master’s degree, 42 credits for a MFA/specialist certificate and 51 credits for a doctoral degree.

This means all credits earned while enrolled as a graduate student may count towards the minimum graduate degree credit requirement. If there are not enough credits earned throughout a student’s graduate career to meet the graduate degree credit minimum, it will need to be addressed in the prior course work section of the e-warrant.

d. How does the e-warrant process check for the minimum graduate course work (50%) requirement?

This is a step where programs need to enter information within the e-warrant system.

It is expected that programs have structured their curricula in ways that are aligned with the related criteria/courses programs supplied to the Graduate School, and in turn, ensure their students meet the 50% graduate course work requirement. Programs are asked to identify how their students have met this requirement in the e-warrant system by plan, and can consider any credits earned while enrolled as a graduate student or accepted as prior course work (as long as they meet related policy requirements).

Please see FAQs in the minimum graduate course work (50%) section for further details on this requirement as well as future plans on creating a graduate course attribute/flag.

e. How does the e-warrant process check for prior course work requirements?

This is a step where programs need to enter information within the e-warrant system.

All programs have supplied their prior course work requirements to the Graduate School. It is expected that programs have structured their administrative processes in ways that are aligned with the prior course work information they supplied to the Graduate School. In addition, programs should always check to make sure their students actually need prior course work credits for graduation. It could be the student already has sufficient credits to achieve the Graduate School minimum degree requirements without the need to provide evidence of prior course work. As needed, programs are asked to provide details for each prior course work category of their students:

1. Other Graduate Course Work from Other Institution(s) – If applicable/needed, enter name(s) of institutions, years taken, and number of credits allowed for each student.
2. UW-Madison Undergraduate Career Course Work – If applicable/needed, enter subject name(s), course number(s), number of credits, and year taken allowed for each student (up to maximum of 7 credits). These credits count toward program/degree course work, but not toward the Minimum Graduate Residence Credit Requirement.
3. UW-Madison Special Student Career Course Work – If applicable/needed, enter subject name(s), course number(s), number of credits, and year taken allowed for each student (up to maximum of 15 credits). Please see other required processes for University Special student credits.

Please see FAQs in the prior course work section for further details on this requirement including the time limit on eligible courses and how each of these prior course work categories fulfill Graduate School minimum requirements.
f. The new policy allows for the transfer of up to 15 UW-Madison University Special Student credits (numbered 300 or above) if difference in tuition is paid. How does the request and payment process work?

Please refer to the following policy for details on the transfer process for University Special Student credits: https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/#specialstudentstatus

Of course, to the degree possible/appropriate, it may be helpful to encourage prospective students to apply to the program instead of enrolling in UW-Madison University Special Student courses and/or to be mindful of which courses are best for prospective students to take as UW-Madison University Special Student.

g. How does the e-warrant system know if I have a student under new or old policy requirements?

Each warrant request is for a specific plan (such as M.S. in Computer Science or Ph.D. in Geography). The e-warrant system will look at the most recent start date of the plan to determine if a student is under new or old policy requirements.

Some programs have chosen a more rigorous “effective date” for their continuing students. For example, some programs have determined that all continuing graduate students are under some or all of the new policy requirements (with no “grandfathering” of policies). In these cases, programs will need to locally monitor and enforce these more rigorous effective dates.

h. Do the other Graduate School requirements for graduate degrees remain the same?

The following items in the current Graduate School policy have not changed:

* Courses must be taken as a graduate student
* Courses must be 300 and above
* Course grades must be A, AB, B, or S
* Course grades of BC or C only count if there are equal credits of AB and A respectively in non-research courses
* Course grades of P only count for research courses
* Students must maintain a 3.00 GPA
* Students absent for 5 or more years lose all degree credits earned before absence (for master’s students only)

For a student to be awarded a graduate degree, the Graduate School’s e-warrant system and degree coordinators complete a series of automated and manual audits. However, the programs also play a role confirming compliance with Graduate School policy prior to and during the e-warrant request process so that the process proceeds smoothly.

i. How do we handle minors with respect to these new policy requirements?

For doctoral programs satisfying the breadth requirement with a minor, students need to complete both a program and a minor and there should not be any overlap in credits between the two (as is the expected practice now). In addition, as is stated in current policy, students must complete minor credit requirements before achieving dissertator status.

However, assuming the observance of all other Graduate School requirements, credits for the minor may be allowed to count towards the minimum graduate residence requirement, the minimum graduate degree requirement, or the minimum graduate course work (50%) requirement. Put another way, doctoral degrees have distinct program and minor requirements and combined they constitute the degree; and many of the new policy requirements are reflective of minimums for the degree as a whole (inclusive of both the program and minor requirements).
Programs that are interested achieving breadth in ways other than through a minor requirement can seek approval to opt-out of the minor requirement through the process described here: https://kb.wisc.edu/gsadminkb/page.php?id=31615

8. Implementation: Program Changes

a. Our program completed the HLC template and updated content for the 2014-16 Graduate Catalog. However, now our program is interested in making additional curricular or policy changes to our program. What is the process for those changes (after May 1, 2014)?

Changes in the policies documented in the Graduate Catalog or any changes to program curricula should be approved by the program’s Executive Committee (or equivalent body) and by the relevant school/college Academic Planning Council or Curriculum Committee. Each school/college handles this process differently. Some formally review all such requests for a vote at a school/college-level governance body; while others simply want school/college academic planners to be notified. Contact your school/college academic planners for the process in your school/college.

Regardless of the process in your school/college, the Graduate School requires notification of any changes in program curricula. The Graduate School has these minimum expectations:

- evidence that the changes have been approved by the program’s Executive Committee,
- school/college academic planners have acknowledged receipt/approval of the changes,
- a proposed effective date of changes,
- whether changes apply to all or new students, and
- a proposed communication and implementation plan (including how changes will be tracked).

The Graduate School verifies that proposed changes comply with Graduate School policies, shares changes with relevant Graduate School staff, informs programs of feasibility and any implications, and offers best practices. The Graduate School will also remind programs to be mindful of their proposed changes in their next program review and advise on the timing of updates to their Graduate Catalog program pages.

9. Higher Learning Commission FAQs

a. Why must our campus comply with the Higher Learning Commission’s “Criteria for Accreditation”?

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is the federally recognized accrediting agency for degree-granting higher education organizations for the North Central region of the U.S. Compliance with federal requirements by both institutions and the HLC is necessary to ensure that institutions accredited by the HLC are eligible for federal financial aid. The “Assumed Practices” within the “Criteria for Accreditation” are considered to be minimum standards to which all institutions are expected to comply (failure to comply with Assumed Practices is an automatic institutional sanction).

Although prompted by the Higher Learning Commission’s criteria, these efforts are seen as one of the many ways in which our campus ensures the integrity of its degrees and the quality of the student experience. When data on our recent historical practices are considered, we find that the vast majority of students are completing their degrees well over the new degree credit requirements while enrolled in their graduate programs. In many instances, programs find that the new requirements are in alignment with their current practices and expectations of students.

b. Some of these proposed policies do not seem to go far enough to ensure the quality and rigor for our graduate program. Can graduate programs have more rigorous requirements than those proposed in these new Graduate School policies?
In many cases, graduate programs can set more rigorous requirements than the Graduate School’s baseline requirements. Please contact the staff in the Graduate School’s Office of Academic Planning and Assessment for additional guidance.

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