

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>**

**Graduate Education Policy Guide**

**Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees**

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## Policy Summary

### Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees

#### Policy Purpose

This policy governs minimum and maximum (total) credits for degree; minimum credits for minors; and thesis credits

#### Policy Location

<http://z.umn.edu/creditreqs>

#### Effective date

September 2011\*

## Highlights

- This policy establishes maximum credit requirements for master's (Plans A & B: 36 total credits; Plan C: 48 total credits) and doctoral degrees (72 total credits)
- Minimum requirements for master's related fields credits and for doctoral supporting program credits are no longer in effect; however, graduate programs may opt to retain requirements for credits outside the major field
- Graduate programs may need (wish) to make curricular changes related to this policy that necessitate review/approval by the college, SVPP, and in some cases, the BOR. Such changes must be proposed, reviewed, and approved using PCAS in time for the Fall 2013 implementation deadline
- Eligible graduate programs may wish to request exceptions to the new maximum course credit requirements and/or to the 24-doctoral thesis credit minimum. Exception requests must be proposed, reviewed, and approved in time for the Fall 2013 implementation deadline

## College Responsibilities

- Establish, communicate and execute the college's role related to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy
- Ensure that any program-specific criteria are consistent with U policy
- Collaborate with graduate programs as needed to ensure new/changed degree-requirement information is updated in PCAS (Program and Curriculum Approval System)
- Collaborate with graduate programs as needed to request an exception from the SVPP (Senior Vice President and Provost) to a) the maximum credit requirements for a master's or doctoral degree, and/or b) the minimum number of doctoral thesis credits (8888) required

## Program Responsibilities

- Ensure that degree requirements conform to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy, requesting SVPP exceptions/restructuring curriculum as necessary
- Collaborate with the college to request (if applicable) an SVPP exception to maximum credit requirement and/or minimum doctoral thesis credit (8888) requirement
- Collaborate with the college to ensure new/changed degree-requirement information is updated in PCAS
- Publicize U-wide and (if applicable) program-specific criteria related to this policy
- Advise students to ensure compliance with U-wide and/or program-specific policies
- Review/take action on students' Graduate Degree Plans to ensure compliance with U-wide and/or program-specific policies
- Establish and publicize protocol for reviewing and taking action on students' requests for exceptions to program-specific policy

## Graduate School Responsibilities

- Collaborate with SVPP Office in the review of proposals to change graduate programs' degree requirements
- Adjudicate academic student complaints related to this policy that are not successfully addressed at the local (program/college) level
- Coordinate consultative process for formal review of the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy

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## Policy Summary

### Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees (continued)

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#### Graduate Student Responsibilities

- Plan their coursework and (if applicable) thesis credits in accordance with the U-wide and/or program-specific criteria related to this policy
- Submit their Graduate Degree Plan for review and approval in a timely manner

#### SVPP Office Responsibilities

- Collaborate with graduate programs, colleges, and the Graduate School in the review of proposals to change graduate programs' degree requirements
- Review/take action on requests for policy exceptions regarding maximum credit requirements and minimum doctoral thesis (8888) credit requirements

#### Academic Support Resources Responsibilities

- Create and implement an online process to replace the existing Graduate Degree Plan form
- Maintain the Graduate Degree Plan form until transition to online process is implemented
- Maintain PCAS functionality
- Provide PCAS training

- \* **New academic programs: Effective September 2011**  
**Academic programs offered prior to Fall 2011: Deadline for policy compliance/approved exceptions is Fall 2013 (no later than August 31, 2013)**

## CHANGES TO THE POLICY - WHAT'S DIFFERENT

- **Master's-level maximum credits allowed:**
  - Plan A: 36 (combo course and 10 thesis)
  - Plan B: 36
  - Plan C: 48
- **Doctoral-level maximum credits allowed: 72 (combo course and 24 thesis)**
- **Doctoral-level *minimum* credits required: 48 (combo 24 course and 24 thesis)**
- **Doctoral dissertation credits (8888) can be taken at any time after admission to the doctoral program – eligibility determined at the program level**

## RESPONSIBILITIES AND ISSUES TO CONSIDER

### COLLEGE RESPONSIBILITIES

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#### Each college is responsible for:

1. Establishing, communicating, and executing the college's role related to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy
2. Ensuring that any program-specific criteria are consistent with U policy
3. Collaborating with graduate programs as needed to ensure new/changed degree-requirement information is updated in PCAS (Program and Curriculum Approval System)
4. Collaborating with graduate programs as needed to request an exception from the SVPP (Senior Vice President and Provost) to a) the maximum credit requirements for a master's or doctoral degree, and/or b) the minimum number of doctoral thesis credits (8888) required

### 1. Establishing, communicating, and executing the college's role related to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy

NOTE: The only policy exceptions allowed are program-wide exceptions to a) the maximum number of credits required for master's and doctoral degrees, and b) the minimum number of doctoral thesis credits (8888) required by doctoral programs that do not require dissertations (see College Responsibility #4, below).

Graduate programs have the authority/responsibility for reviewing and taking action on their students' Graduate Degree Plans, *based on the criteria established by this U-wide policy*.

#### Things to consider:

- **While this U-wide policy states that decision-making authority is within the purview of the graduate programs, colleges and programs may determine that some level of collegiate involvement is advantageous**
  - It is important to note that no final review of students' Graduate Degree Plans will be done by Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP), aside from required PeopleSoft data elements

- Ensuring accuracy of the student’s Graduate Degree Plan when it is approved by the program is a key factor in minimizing – if not eliminating entirely – last-minute policy compliance problems at the time of the student’s degree clearance
- How will the college and its programs collaborate to determine whether, in what ways, and for what purpose the college will be involved? How will those decisions be communicated to stakeholders?
- **Involvement could be, for example**
  - Graduate programs sharing their students’ approved Graduate Degree Plans with the colleges so the colleges can
    - Spot check – or review all – submitted Graduate Degree Plans to ensure compliance with U-wide policy, and
      - follow-up with the graduate program if any Graduate Degree Plans are out of policy compliance; collaborate on resolution
      - use routine spot checks/reviews to monitor trends in programs’ decisions
  - Colleges assisting graduate programs as needed with regard to policy implementation/compliance

## 2. Ensuring that any program-specific criteria are consistent with the U-wide policy

Things to consider:

- **Graduate programs have the authority to adopt program-specific criteria more stringent than – but consistent with – this U-wide policy**
- **It is the college’s responsibility to know their programs’ criteria so that**
  - The college can collaborate with the graduate program, as needed, to ensure program-specific criteria are within compliance of U policy
  - The college is familiar with the programs’ criteria
    - Particularly useful when the college plays a role in the review of students’ Graduate Degree Plan forms
    - Useful when the college assists graduate programs with policy-related problem solving

## 3. Collaborating with graduate programs as needed to ensure new/changed degree-requirement information is updated in PCAS.

NOTE: See *Adding, Changing, or Discontinuing Academic Plans* for related U policy and administrative procedures for such changes. Refer to **One Stop** for more information regarding PCAS.

Things to consider:

- **Graduate programs may need (or wish) to make curricular changes related to the new policy that necessitate review/approval by the college, SVPP, and in some cases, the Board of Regents (BOR). Such changes must be proposed, reviewed, and approved using PCAS.**
  - What is the college’s internal process and time line for reviewing graduate programs’ proposals?
  - Who in the college is responsible for working with graduate programs regarding internal review/approval processes that run prior/parallel to the college, SVPP, and/or BOR review/approval? What does that responsibility entail?

- Who in the college is responsible for working with the SVPP office regarding proposals? What does that responsibility entail (e.g., connecting SVPP to the appropriate individuals? Working directly with the SVPP office to problem solve?)
- Who is the designated PCAS college approver for graduate-level proposals (i.e., the individual who works directly in PCAS, for example, to forward college-approved proposals to the SVPP office)?

#### 4. Collaborating with graduate programs as needed to request SVPP exception to maximum credit requirements, and/or the minimum number of doctoral thesis credits (8888) required

NOTE: The “Request for Exception to the Maximum Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Degrees” is available in the Forms/Instructions section of this **policy**.

##### Things to consider:

- **This policy establishes maximum credit requirements (master’s Plans A and B: 36 total credits; master’s Plan C: 48 course credits; doctoral: 72 total credits).**
  - College deans review graduate programs’ exception requests, and recommend SVPP approval *only* when requests are based on accreditation requirements, national standards of the field, interdisciplinary nature of the program, or similar arguments.
  - What will be the college’s process for reviewing/recommending action of requests for program-wide exceptions to the above? For example,
  - Who in the college will be responsible for
    - responding to inquiries from graduate programs regarding exception requests
    - receiving graduate programs’ *Request for Exception to the Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Degrees* forms, and forwarding these to the collegiate dean for his/her review, recommendation, and signature
    - forwarding signed forms to the SVPP office for final review/action
    - responding to SVPP inquiries regarding exception requests
    - communicating SVPP’s decision to the graduate program
- **This policy allows doctoral programs *that do not require a dissertation* to request a program-wide exception to the 24-thesis credit minimum**
  - College deans review graduate programs’ 24-thesis credit exception requests, and recommend SVPP approval *only* when such an exception conforms to national standards in the field and that appropriate additional credits (course credits, internships, project credits, etc.) will replace the 24 thesis credits.
  - What will be the college’s process for reviewing/recommending action of requests for program-wide exceptions to the above? For example, who will be responsible for
    - Responding to inquiries from graduate programs regarding exception requests
    - Receiving graduate programs’ exception requests, and forwarding to collegiate dean for his/her review, recommendation, and signature
    - Forwarding signed exception requests to the SVPP office for final review/action
    - Responding to SVPP inquiries regarding exception requests
    - Communicating the SVPP’s decision to the graduate program

## PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

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### Programs are responsible for:

1. Ensuring that degree requirements conform to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy, requesting SVPP exceptions/restructuring curriculum as necessary
2. Collaborating with the college to request (if applicable) an SVPP exception to maximum credit requirement and/or minimum doctoral thesis credit (8888) requirement
3. Collaborating with the college to ensure new/changed degree-requirement information is updated in PCAS
4. Publicizing U-wide and (if applicable) program-specific criteria related to this policy
5. Advising students to ensure compliance with U-wide and/or program-specific policies
6. Reviewing/taking action on students' Graduate Degree Plans to ensure compliance with U-wide and/or program-specific policies
7. Establishing and publicizing protocol for reviewing and taking action on students' requests for exceptions to program-specific policy

### **1. Ensuring that degree requirements conform to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy, requesting SVPP exceptions and/or restructuring curriculum as necessary**

Note: Deadline for policy compliance/exceptions for *existing* academic programs: prior to Fall 2013 (no later than August 2013).

Only the following policy exception requests will be considered: program-wide exceptions to a) the maximum number of credits required for master's and doctoral degrees, and b) the minimum number of doctoral thesis credits (8888) required by doctoral programs that do not require dissertations.

### Things to consider:

- **The new policy establishes the following minimum credit requirements:**
  - Masters Plan A – 20 graduate-level course credits and 10 thesis credits
  - Master's Plan B – 30 graduate-level course credits
  - Master's Plan C – 30 graduate-level course credits
  - Master's-level minor – 6 graduate-level course credits from the minor field
  - Doctoral degrees – 24 graduate-level course credits and 24 thesis credits
  - Doctoral-level minor – 12 graduate-level course credits from the minor field
- **The new policy does not include a minimum major-field credit requirement for master's degrees (previous policy required a minimum of 14 major course credits).**
  - Does your program wish to retain a major field requirement for your master's students?
    - How is the determination regarding the need for a minimum major field requirement made, and by whom?
    - Would students be (dis)advantaged by being required to complete a minimum number of major field credits? If so, why or why not?

- Depth/breadth of knowledge?
  - Opportunities to form relationships with faculty and student peers?
- If the program chooses to retain a major field credit requirement, how many major field credits will be required? Why?
- **The new policy does not include a related fields requirement for master's degrees (previously, a minimum of 6 course credits in one or more fields outside the major was required).**
  - Does your program wish to retain a related field requirement for your master's students?
    - How is the determination regarding the need for a related field requirement made, and by whom?
    - Would students be (dis)advantaged by being required to complete a minimum number of related field credits? If so, why or why not?
      - Depth/breadth of knowledge?
      - Opportunities to form relationships with faculty and student peers?
    - If the program chooses to retain a related field requirement, how many related field credits will be required? Why?
- **The new policy requires doctoral students to complete a minimum of 48 graduate credits, 24 of which must be graduate course credits (previously, no such minima were required), and 24 of which must be thesis credits.**
  - What, if any, curriculum changes to your doctoral program are necessitated by this new policy?
    - How are decisions regarding curriculum changes made, and by whom?
    - After any changes to the curriculum are made, what will be the total number of graduate credits required? How many, if any, 4xxx-level credits will be allowed? Why?
- **The new policy allows for doctoral thesis credits to be taken at any time after matriculation in a doctoral program (previously, doctoral students were not eligible for thesis credit registration until the term after passing the preliminary oral examination).**
  - How are decisions regarding eligibility requirements for doctoral thesis credit registration made, and by whom?
  - What, if any, eligibility requirements for doctoral thesis credit registration will the graduate program establish (e.g., matriculation in the doctoral program; completion of specific milestone, such as the preliminary written or oral examinations; other)? On what basis will these eligibility requirements be established?
  - What advantages are afforded to the student by the established eligibility requirements?

## 2. Collaborating with the college to request (if applicable) an SVPP exception to maximum credit requirement and/or minimum doctoral thesis credit (8888) requirement

Note: Deadline for exception requests is Fall 2013 (no later than August 31, 2013)

### Things to consider:

- **Do your master's/doctoral degrees currently require more than the maximum number of credits now allowed by the new policy (i.e., Plan A and B: 36 total credits; Plan C: 48 course credits; doctoral: 72 total credits)? If so,**

- Do circumstances (e.g., accreditation requirements, national standards of the field, interdisciplinary nature of the program) argue for a program-wide exception to the maximum?
  - How is the determination regarding the need for a program-wide exception made, and by whom?
  - Who will be responsible for preparing and submitting exception request(s) to the college for review/recommendation?
  - Who will be responsible for fielding any SVPP questions regarding the exception request(s)?
- Has there been a change in the circumstances that previously necessitated a higher number of required credits? If so, does the program wish to opt for reducing the number of required credits to be within the new maximum allowed by policy, rather than request an exception?
  - How is the determination regarding the reduction in required credits – versus an exception request – made, and by whom?
  - How are decisions regarding curriculum changes themselves made, and by whom?
  - After any changes to the curriculum are made, what will be the total number of graduate credits required? How many, if any, 4xxx-level credits will be allowed? Why?
- **Does your doctoral degree require a dissertation?**
  - If so, 24 thesis credits are required, and no exceptions will be considered.
  - If your doctoral degree does *not* require a dissertation
    - Do circumstances (e.g., national standards) argue for a program-wide exception?
    - If the program wishes to require fewer than 24 thesis credits, how many, if any, *would* be required?
    - What appropriate additional credits (course credits, internships, project credits, etc.) would replace the thesis credits?
  - How is the determination made regarding a reduction in the number of required thesis credits? By whom is it made?
  - How are the additional credits that will be required in lieu of those thesis credits be identified? By whom is it made?
  - Who will be responsible for preparing and submitting exception request(s) to the college for review/recommendation?
  - Who will be responsible for fielding any SVPP questions regarding the exception request(s)?

### 3. Collaborating with the college to ensure new/changed degree-requirement information is updated in PCAS

NOTE: See *Adding, Changing, or Discontinuing Academic Plans* for related U policy and administrative procedures for such changes. Refer to **One Stop** for more information regarding PCAS.

#### Things to consider:

- Graduate programs may need (or wish) to make curricular changes related to the new policy that necessitate review/approval by the college, SVPP, and in some cases, the BOR. Such changes must be proposed, reviewed, and approved using PCAS.

- What is the graduate program’s internal process and time line for developing and recommending proposals for approval?
- Who in the graduate program is responsible for working with the college regarding internal review/approval processes that run prior/parallel to SVPP, and/or BOR review/approval? What does that responsibility entail?
- Who in the graduate program is responsible for working with the SVPP office regarding proposals? What does that responsibility entail?
- Who is the graduate program’s designated PCAS approver for proposals (i.e., the individual who works directly in PCAS)?

#### **4. Publicizing U-wide and (if applicable) program-specific criteria related to this policy**

Things to consider:

- Where will you include University and program-specific policy information on your graduate program’s web site?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining that information?
- Who will be responsible for ensuring that student handbook information regarding program requirements is accurate?
- Who is responsible for providing information regarding degree requirements at new student orientation? How will the accuracy of program information at orientation sessions be assured?
- Other?

#### **5. Advising students to ensure compliance with U-wide and, if applicable, program-specific policies**

Things to consider:

- Who in your graduate program is responsible for advising students on degree requirements (adviser, DGS, and/or program staff)?
- How will the program ensure that individuals responsible for advising students have accurate information about the program’s degree requirements?
- Is there someone in your graduate program assigned to advise students regarding complex program-requirement issues that may arise? If so, how do students, faculty, and staff know whom to contact?

#### **6. Reviewing/taking action on students’ Graduate Degree Plans to ensure compliance with U-wide and, if applicable, program-specific policies**

Things to consider:

- Based on the outcome of discussions between the college and its programs regarding the college’s role in the review and approval of Graduate Degree Plans
  - who will ensure that program-approved Graduate Degree Plans are routed to the college?
  - who will be responsible for communicating with the college if/when the college has questions about a student’s Graduate Degree Plan?

- Who will be responsible for routing a student's approved Graduate Degree Plan to ASR for archiving?

## 7. Establishing and publicizing protocol for reviewing/taking action on students' requests for exceptions to *program-specific* policy

### Things to consider:

- **What are the graduate program's priorities with regard to their program-specific degree requirements, and of those which (if any) are non-negotiable?**
  - Being clear about priorities will help the individual(s) responsible for taking action on exception requests to make decisions that support the program's priorities
  - How will exception requests be reviewed, and by whom?
  - How will consistent review/action on exception requests be assured?
  - Does the program wish to publicize information regarding graduate program-specific exceptions? If so, this information needs to include
    - Contact information for individual(s) within the graduate program responsible for responding to inquiries
    - Contact information for individual(s) within the graduate program responsible for the review/approval of exception requests
      - Where and how do students submit the exception requests?
      - Whom do students contact if they have questions about the status or outcome of the exception request?

## STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

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### Graduate students are responsible for:

1. Planning their coursework and (if applicable) thesis credits in accordance with the U-wide and/or program-specific criteria related to this policy
2. Submitting their Graduate Degree Plan for review and approval in a timely manner

## GRADUATE SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

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### Graduate School is responsible for:

1. Collaborating with SVPP Office in the review of proposals to change graduate programs' degree requirements
2. Adjudicating academic student complaints related to this policy that are not successfully addressed at the local (program; college) level
3. Coordinating consultative process for formal review of the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy

## SVPP OFFICE RESPONSIBILITIES

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### SVPP Office is responsible for:

1. Collaborating with graduate programs, colleges, and the Graduate School in the review of proposals to change graduate programs' degree requirements
2. Reviewing/taking action on requests for policy exceptions regarding maximum credit requirements and minimum doctoral thesis (8888) credit requirements

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT RESOURCES RESPONSIBILITIES

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### ASR Office is responsible for:

1. Creating and implementing an online process to replace the existing Graduate Degree Plan form
2. Maintaining the Graduate Degree Plan form until transition to online process is implemented
3. Maintaining PCAS functionality
4. Providing PCAS training

## POLICY COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

POLICY STATEMENT	EXCEPTION?
Master's Plan A requires 10 thesis credits	No
Master's Plan A thesis credits can be taken at any time upon matriculation	N/A
Master's Plan A requires minimum 20 graduate-level course credits	No
Master's Plan A maximum – 36 graduate-level credits (course/thesis credit combo)	Yes <sup>1</sup>
Master's Plan B requires minimum 30 graduate-level course credits	No
Master's Plan B maximum – 36 graduate-level credits (course/Plan B project credit combo)	Yes <sup>1</sup>
Master's Plan C requires minimum 30 graduate-level course credits	No
Master's Plan C maximum – 48 graduate-level course credits	Yes <sup>1</sup>
Master's-level minor requires minimum 6 graduate-level course credits	No
Doctoral degree requires minimum 24 graduate-level course credits	No
Doctoral degree requires minimum 24 thesis credits	Yes <sup>2</sup>
Doctoral degree maximum – 72 graduate-level credits (course/thesis credit combo)	Yes <sup>1</sup>
Doctoral thesis credits can be taken at any time upon matriculation	Yes <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Program-wide exceptions to exceed maximum credit limits for master's and doctoral degrees can be requested by the college dean. The Provost (SVPP) reviews and takes final action on such requests. For forms and information, refer to the Forms/Instruction section of the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy (<http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAPHDDEGREEREQ.html>).

<sup>2</sup> Graduate programs offering doctoral degrees that do not require dissertations can petition their college dean to reduce/eliminate the 24-doctoral thesis credit requirement. The request and college dean's recommendation are reviewed by the SVPP, who then takes final action on such requests. For more information, refer to the *Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees* policy (<http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAPHDDEGREEREQ.html>).

<sup>3</sup> Graduate programs can establish program-specific eligibility requirements for doctoral thesis credit registration.

Doctoral-level minor requires minimum 12 graduate-level credits	No
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