

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM

Graduate Education Policy Guide

Master's Degree: Performance Standards and Progress

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Policy Summary

Master's Degree: Performance Standards and Progress

Policy Purpose

This policy governs degree progress elements, progress reviews, continuous enrollment, time limits, GPA requirements and S/N limits

Policy Location

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

Effective date

July 2012 (*Applies to all students admitted after 01/01/2013**)

Highlights

- Students must complete and have the degree awarded within five calendar years after initial enrollment in the graduate program
- Colleges and graduate programs are responsible for reviewing and approving students' Graduate Degree Plans
- Program-wide exceptions to the University's five-year time limit for completing the master's degree are submitted to the SVPP for review and action

College Responsibilities

- Ensure appropriate review of coursework on students' Graduate Degree Plans (including any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan)
- Archive students' approved Graduate Degree Plans (and any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan) in the system of record
- Set the college deadline for students who are requesting an extension to the time limit for completing master's degrees
- Review and approve students' requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree
- Archive in the system of record students' requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree
- Collaborate with graduate programs as needed to request a program-wide exception to the U's time limit for completing the master's degree
- Archive in the system of record requests for program-wide requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

Program Responsibilities

- Ensure that program's student handbook clearly articulates current University, college, and program requirements for the master's degree
- Ensure that incoming master's students are assigned a temporary adviser
- Ensure that each student plans and appropriately completes the graduate program's requirements in a timely fashion
- Review and approve students' Graduate Degree Plans (including any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan)
- Determine whether to adopt the U's minimum GPA requirement of 3.000 (on a 4.000 scale) or to adopt a more stringent requirement
- Establish and publicize protocol for reviewing/taking action on students' requests for exceptions to program-specific policy
- Review their master's students' degree progress on an annual basis, and inform students deemed not in good standing of the results of the review in writing
- Ensure that each student receives training appropriate to the discipline in the responsible conduct of research and ethical teaching and scholarship (policy specifies this as the DGS's responsibility)
- Determine whether to establish a program-wide deadline for master's degree completion that is more restrictive than the five years allowed
- Determine whether to request a program-wide exception to establish a time limit beyond the U's five-year limit for completing the master's degree, and submit any such requests to the college for its review and action
- Review and approve students' requests for extensions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

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Policy Summary

Master's Degree: Performance Standards and Progress (continued)

Graduate Student Responsibilities

- Enroll every fall and spring semester from the time of matriculation until degree conferral. (Exception: Students granted a college-approved leave of absence are not required to register for the term(s) of the leave. Refer to the University's [Leave of Absence](#) policy for more information.)
- Be informed about their program's master's degree requirements
- Remain in good academic standing; i.e., meet minimum GPA requirement specified by the graduate program, or 2.800 on a 4.000 scale, whichever is higher
- Plan their program coursework to ensure that at least 2/3 of the course credits included are taken A/F
- Obtain required approvals and file the degree plan at least one term before the intended term of defense and/or application for degree clearance
- Declare a minor (should they choose to do so) when they file their Graduate Degree Plan
- Complete all degree requirements and be awarded the degree within the shorter of five calendar years after initial enrollment (or a more restrictive time frame, if specified by the graduate program)
- Request an extension of time limit if unable to complete the degree within the time limits due to extraordinary circumstances
- Initiate time extension requests, obtain required approvals, and submit their requests for review/approval in a timely manner

Graduate School Responsibilities

- Coordinate (with ASR) an on-going consultative process regarding policy effectiveness
- Adjudicate academic student complaints related to this policy that are not successfully addressed at the college level
- Coordinate the consultative process for formal review of this policy

SVPP Office Responsibilities

- Review/take action on program-wide exceptions requests (re: master's time limit)
- Communicate SVPP decision regarding exception request to stakeholders
- Archive requests/SVPP decisions centrally

Academic Support Resources Responsibilities

- Provide college staff with assistance related to the Graduate Degree Plan and adviser/committee assignment review/approval processes
- Create and implement an online process to replace the existing Graduate Degree Plan form
- Maintain the Graduate Degree Plan form until the transition to an online process is implemented
- Archive approved Graduate Degree Plans, and subsequent changes to those plans

*** Note: Students who matriculated before 01/01/2013 may elect to continue under the policies in effect when they initially matriculated in their graduate program.**

CHANGES TO THE POLICY - WHAT'S DIFFERENT

- Students must complete and have the degree awarded within five calendar years after initial enrollment in the graduate program
- Coursework completed S/N that is only offered on the S/N grading basis is not counted in the S/N limit

RESPONSIBILITIES AND ISSUES TO CONSIDER

COLLEGE RESPONSIBILITIES

Each college is responsible for:

1. Ensuring appropriate review of coursework on students' Graduate Degree Plans (including any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan)
2. Archiving students' approved Graduate Degree Plans (and any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan) in the system of record
3. Setting the college deadline for students who are requesting an extension to the time limit for completing master's degrees
4. Reviewing and approving students' requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree
5. Archiving in the system of record students' requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree
6. Collaborating with graduate programs as needed to request a program-wide exception to the U's time limit for completing the master's degree
7. Archiving in the system of record requests for program-wide exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

1. Ensuring appropriate review of coursework on students' Graduate Degree Plans (including any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan)

Things to consider:

- **Other U-wide policies (e.g., Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements) indicate that decision-making authority regarding the review/action on students' Graduate Degree Plans is within the purview of the graduate programs. Colleges and programs will need to determine how to balance the programs' authority with the colleges' responsibility (as stated in this policy) for ensuring appropriate review of students' Graduate Degree Plans.**
 - Decision-making authority to approve or not approve students' Graduate Degree Plans is based on the criteria established by this and related U policies, and to any program-specific criteria consistent with U policies. Exceptions that do not meet U-wide policy criteria are not considered.
 - It is important to note that no review of students' Graduate Degree Plans will be done by Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) at the time of submission, aside from required PeopleSoft data elements.
 - Ensuring accuracy of the student's Graduate Degree Plan at the time 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 and meet its responsibilities regarding students' Graduate Degree Plans? 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. Archiving students' approved Graduate Degree Plans (and any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan) in the system of record

Note: There currently is inconsistency among the University's graduate education policies regarding the responsibility for archiving students' Graduate Degree Plans and other information related to students' degree progress, as well as the need to reconcile these policies with current and future processes. Until these inconsistencies can be reconciled, approved Graduate Degree Plans and related degree progress information will be forwarded to Academic Support Resources (ASR) for archiving.

3. Setting the college deadline for students who are requesting an extension to the time limit for completing master's degrees

Things to consider:

- **Students are advised to initiate the time extension petition with their adviser(s), DGS, and college at least six months prior to the expiration of their degree-completion deadline (per instructions on the Master's Degree: Request for Extension to the Maximum Time Limit form.**
 - Will the college adopt the time-extension petition's guideline (i.e., student initiates the time extension petition at least six months prior to the expiration of their degree-completion deadline) as its deadline, or establish a different deadline?
 - Who has the authority to decide what the deadline will be?
 - College administrators only?
 - College administrators and graduate program representatives? Program, faculty, staff, and/or students?
 - New or existing college committee charged with developing college-wide policies?
 - The deadline should balance the advantage of flexibility with the need to ensure that students do not face last-minute obstacles to degree-clearance.

4. Reviewing and approving students' requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

Things to consider:

- **What are the college's priorities/principles with regard to time extensions?**
 - Priorities might include:
 - Equity among graduate programs and students in those programs
 - A fair and transparent process
 - Impact of the time extension on students' degree progress and degree completion
 - Impact of the time extension on students' financial support
 - Impact of time extensions on international students' visas
 - Other?
- **What circumstances would the college accept/not accept as an argument for a time extension?**
- **Who in the college office will be responsible for informing programs of the college's established deadline and circumstances under which a time extension request would be considered?**
- **Who in the college office will review/take action on time extension petitions? An individual? A committee?**
 - If an individual is responsible, how much lead time will s/he need – given other job duties – to ensure timely review of/action on the time extension request?
 - If a committee is responsible, what is their meeting schedule? Will meeting the college's established deadline ensure the committee's timely review/action?
- **Who in the college office will be responsible for communicating the college's decision to the graduate program, and for responding to any resulting questions regarding the college's decision? (Note: Graduate programs are responsible for communicating the decision and related information to the student – see #11, Program Responsibilities, below.)**

5. Archiving in the system of record students' requests for exceptions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

Note: There currently is inconsistency among the University's graduate education policies regarding the responsibility for archiving students' Graduate Degree Plans and other information related to students' degree progress (e.g., time extension requests) as well as the need to reconcile these policies with current and future processes. Until these inconsistencies can be reconciled, approved time extension requests will be forwarded to Academic Support Resources (ASR) for archiving.

6. Collaborating with graduate programs as needed to request a program-wide exception to the U's time limit for completing the master's degree

Note: This policy establishes (for students admitted January 1, 2013 and later) a master's degree-completion deadline of five calendar years after initial enrollment in the graduate program.

Graduate programs wishing to establish a program-wide exception to establish a time limit beyond the U's five-year limit must obtain approval from their college and the SVPP. (It is within the graduate program's purview to establish a program-wide time limit for master's degree completion that is more restrictive than the five years allowed by U policy.)

Things to consider:

- **Colleges review graduate programs' exception requests, and recommend SVPP approval only for programs requesting exceptions 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 on requests for program-wide exceptions to the U's master's degree-completion deadline? For example,**

- Who in the college will be responsible for
 - responding to inquiries from graduate programs regarding exception requests?
 - receiving graduate programs' Master's Degree: Program-Wide Exception to the Maximum Time Limit forms, and forwarding them 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?

7. Archiving in the system of record requests for program-wide **University** time limit for completing the master's degree

Note: The process to support this college responsibility is being reviewed by the SVPP office and the Graduate School. Colleges and programs will be notified if/when the process is modified, and this policy guide will be updated as needed.

PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

Programs are responsible for:

1. Ensuring that the program's student handbook clearly articulates current University, college, and program requirements for the master's degree
2. Ensuring that incoming master's students are assigned a temporary adviser
3. Ensuring that each student plans and appropriately completes the graduate program's requirements in a timely fashion
4. Reviewing and approving students' Graduate Degree Plans (including any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan)
5. Determining whether to adopt the U's minimum GPA requirement of 3.000 (on a 4.000 scale) or to adopt a more stringent requirement
6. Establishing and publicizing protocol for reviewing/taking action on students' requests for exceptions to program-specific policy
7. Reviewing their master's students' degree progress on an annual basis, and informing students deemed not in good standing of the results of the review in writing
8. Ensuring that each student receives training appropriate to the discipline in the responsible conduct of research and ethical teaching and scholarship (policy specifies this as the DGS's responsibility)
9. Determining whether to establish a program-wide deadline for master's degree completion that is *more restrictive* than the five years allowed
10. Determining whether to request a program-wide exception to establish a time limit *beyond* the U's five-year limit for completing the master's degree, and submitting any such requests to the college for its review and action
11. Review and approve students' requests for extensions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

1. Ensuring that the program's student handbook clearly articulates current University, college, and program requirements for the master's degree

Note: See Graduate Program Student Handbook: Guidelines for suggestions about items to include in graduate program student handbooks.

Things to consider:

- Who in the graduate program will be responsible for creating and maintaining handbooks, and for ensuring their accuracy?
- What will be the production cycle to ensure up-to-date handbooks are available for incoming master's students?
- Will the handbook be available on the program's web site? If so, who is responsible for ensuring that the online version is up-to-date?

2. Ensuring that incoming master's students are assigned a temporary adviser

*Note: See **Appointments to Graduate Examination Committees** for U policy on eligibility requirements for serving as an adviser.*

Things to consider:

- **At what point will students be assigned an adviser?**
 - At the time of admission?
 - Upon matriculation in the program?
 - As part of incoming students' program orientation?
 - Other?
- **On what basis will temporary advisers be assigned?**
 - DGS assigned to all incoming master's students?
 - Best fit, based on student's application materials?
 - Other?
- **At what point will permanent advisers be assigned, and on what basis?**

3. Ensuring that each student plans and appropriately completes the graduate program's requirements in a timely fashion

Things to consider:

- **U policy specifies that this is the responsibility of the student's adviser and DGS**
 - How will this responsibility be shared between the adviser and DGS?
 - If complex degree requirement issues arise, how will the adviser and DGS share responsibility for assisting the student?
 - What role will the Plan Level Coordinator (DGS assistant) play, if any, with regard to supporting the adviser and DGS with their responsibilities related to this policy?
 - How will the program ensure that individuals responsible for advising students have accurate information about program, college, and U requirements?
 - How will advising responsibilities of the adviser and DGS be applied to the review/approval of students' Graduate Degree Plans? To the required annual student reviews?

4. Reviewing and approving students' Graduate Degree Plans (including any subsequent changes to an approved Graduate Degree Plan)

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 students' 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 is the graduate program's contact person for students who have inquiries related to their degree requirements and/or status of their Graduate Degree Plan?

5. Determining whether to adopt the U's minimum GPA requirement of 3.000 (on a 4.000 scale) or to adopt a more stringent requirement

Things to consider:

- **Does your program wish to adopt a minimum GPA requirement higher than the U's 2.800 minimum?**
 - How is the determination whether to adopt a more stringent requirement made, and by whom?
 - Would students be (dis)advantaged by being required to maintain a GPA higher than 2.800? If so, why or why not?
 - If the program chooses to adopt a minimum GPA requirement higher than 2.800, what would that minimum be? Why?
 - Who in the program will ensure that information regarding the minimum GPA (whether 2.800 or higher) is included in the program's student handbook?

6. 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 for those that are non-negotiable (if any)?**
 - 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 students submit the exception requests
 - Whom students contact if they have questions about the status or outcome of exception requests

7. Reviewing their master's students' degree progress on an annual basis, and informing students deemed not in good standing of the results of the review in writing

Things to consider:

- **For information regarding annual progress reviews, please refer to the [Annual Student Reviews: Guidelines](#)**

8. Ensuring that each student receives training appropriate to the discipline in the responsible conduct of research and ethical teaching and scholarship (policy specifies this as the DGS's responsibility)

Things to consider:

- For reference, see the Office of the Vice Provost for Research's Research Education and Oversight, and the Board of Regents Code of Conduct

9. Determining whether to establish a program-wide deadline for master's degree completion that is *more restrictive* than the five years allowed by U policy.

Note: This policy establishes (for students admitted January 1, 2013 and later) a master's degree-completion deadline of five calendar years after initial enrollment in the graduate program. It is within the graduate program's purview to establish a program-wide time limit for master's degree completion that is more restrictive than the five years allowed by U policy.

Things to consider:

- What will be the program's process for determining whether a more restrictive deadline for master's degree completion is appropriate? Who will be involved in the process?
- What would be the program's more restrictive deadline? Why?
- Would students be (dis)advantaged by being required to complete their master's degree in under the five years allowed by U policy? If so, why or why not?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that the program-specific deadline is publicized in the program's student handbook?

10. Determining whether to request a program-wide exception to establish a time limit *beyond* the U's five-year limit for completing the master's degree, and submitting any such requests to the college for its review and action

Note: This policy establishes (for students admitted January 1, 2013 and later) a master's degree-completion deadline of five calendar years after initial enrollment in the graduate program.

It is within the graduate program's purview to establish a program-wide time limit for master's degree completion that is more restrictive than the five years allowed by U policy (see #9 Program Responsibilities, above). Graduate programs wishing to establish a program-wide exception to establish a time limit beyond the U's five-year limit must obtain approval from their college and the Provost (SVPP).

Things to consider:

- Colleges review graduate programs' exception requests, and recommend SVPP approval only for programs requesting exceptions based on accreditation requirements, national standards of the field, interdisciplinary nature of the program, or similar arguments.
- What will be the program's process for determining whether a program-wide exception is appropriate? Who will be involved in the process?
- What would the proposed time limit for master's degree completion be? Why?
- Would students be (dis)advantaged by having a master's degree-completion *beyond* the five years allowed by U policy? If so, why or why not?

- **Who in the program will be responsible for**
 - Forwarding the graduate program's completed **Master's Degree: Program-Wide Exception to the Maximum Time Limit form** to the college for the dean's review, recommendation, and signature?
 - Responding to inquiries from the college and/or SVPP regarding the exception request?

11. Review and approve students' requests for extensions to the time limit for completing the master's degree

Things to consider:

- **What are the graduate program's priorities/principles with regard to time extensions?**
 - Priorities might include:
 - Equity among students in the program
 - A fair and transparent process
 - Impact of the time extension on students' degree progress and degree completion
 - Impact of the time extension on students' financial support
 - Impact of time extensions on international students' visas
 - Other?
- **What circumstances would the program accept/not accept as an argument for a time extension?**
- **Who in the program office will be responsible for forwarding program-approved petitions to the college for its review/approval?**
- **Who in the program office will be responsible for responding to any questions the college may have about the program's decision, and/or resulting questions regarding the college's decision?**

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Graduate students are responsible for:

1. Enrolling every fall and spring semester from the time of matriculation until degree conferral (Exception: Students granted a college-approved leave of absence are not required to register for the term(s) of the leave. Refer to the **Leave of Absence policy** for more information.)
2. Being informed about their program's master's degree requirements
3. Remaining in good academic standing; i.e., meeting minimum GPA requirement specified by the graduate program, or 2.800 on a 4.000 scale, whichever is higher
4. Planning their program coursework to ensure that at least 2/3 of the course credits included are taken A/F
5. Obtaining required approvals and filing the degree plan at least one term before the intended term of defense and/or application for degree clearance
6. Declaring a minor (should they choose to do so) when they file their Graduate Degree Plan
7. Completing all degree requirements and being awarded the degree within the shorter of five calendar years after initial enrollment (or a more restrictive time frame, if specified by the graduate program)
8. Requesting an extension of time limit if unable to complete the degree within the time limits due to extraordinary circumstances

9. Initiating time extension requests, obtaining required approvals, and submitting their requests for review/approval in a timely manner

GRADUATE SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

Graduate School is responsible for:

1. Coordinating (with ASR) an on-going consultative process regarding policy effectiveness
2. Adjudicating academic student complaints related to this policy that are not successfully addressed at the college level
3. Coordinating the consultative process for formal review of this policy

SVPP OFFICE RESPONSIBILITIES

SVPP Office is responsible for:

1. Reviewing/taking action on program-wide exceptions requests (re: master's time limit)
2. Communicating SVPP decision regarding exception request to stakeholders
3. Archiving requests/SVPP decisions centrally

ACADEMIC SUPPORT RESOURCES RESPONSIBILITIES

ASR Office is responsible for:

1. Providing college staff with assistance related to the Graduate Degree Plan and adviser/committee assignment review/approval processes
2. Creating and implementing an online process to replace the existing Graduate Degree Plan form
3. Maintaining the Graduate Degree Plan form until the transition to an online process is implemented
4. Archiving approved Graduate Degree Plans, and subsequent changes to those plans.

POLICY COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

POLICY STATEMENT	EXCEPTION?
Programs must provide incoming master's students with a current graduate program handbook that includes requirements and policies governing successful degree completion	No
Programs must assign incoming master's students with a temporary adviser	No
Programs must review the progress of each master's student annually	No
Programs must notify students deemed not to be in good standing, in writing, of review results	No
Master's students must have an approved Graduate Degree Plan on file in the college, and archived in the system of record, in order to defend and/or apply for degree clearance	No
Master's students must declare their intention to pursue a minor prior to their final examination/defense (if an exam/defense is required), or prior to filing for degree conferral (if no exam/defense is required)	No
Master's students are required to enroll every fall and spring semester from the time of matriculation until degree conferral	No ¹
DGSs are responsible for ensuring that each master's student receives training appropriate to the discipline in the responsible conduct of research and ethical teaching and scholarship	No
All requirements for the master's degree must be completed and the degree awarded within the shorter of five calendar years after initial enrollment in the graduate program, or the more restrictive time frame specified by the graduate program	No ^{2,3}
Master's students may petition the program and college for an extension of up to 12 months	No
Master's students must be informed, in writing, of the outcome of their time extension petition. If approved – expectations articulated; if not approved – informed of dismissal from the master's program	No
Master's students must meet the graduate program's minimum GPA requirement, or the University's minimum of 2.800 (on a 4.000 scale), whichever is higher	No ⁴
Master's students must have a 2.800 GPA for courses included on the Graduate Degree Plan at the time of degree clearance	No
A minimum of 2/3 of the course credits included on a Graduate Degree Plan must be taken A/F.	No

¹Students who obtain a college-approved Leave of Absence are not required to register for the terms specified by the leave. See the University's [Leave of Absence](#) policy for more information.

²The five-year time limit applies to students admitted after January 1, 2013. For students who first matriculated in their graduate program prior to January 1, 2013, the previous master's time limit (seven years from earliest coursework included on the Graduate Degree Plan) may be applied.

³Programs with a distinctive student population or approved joint-degree programs may request a program-wide exception to the five-year time limit for earning the master's degree.

⁴Students with an approved master's Graduate Degree Plan should maintain a 2.800 for courses included on the plan. Students who have not yet filed a Graduate Degree Plan must maintain an overall GPA of 2.800. Graduate programs may require a higher GPA for individual major fields. Graduate programs may apply the GPA requirement to the overall GPA rather than only to Graduate Degree Plan coursework. Students who fall below the graduate program's minimum GPA may be terminated from the program.