

Memo

To: Deans, Directors, and Department Chairs  
From: Mark Riley, Dean of The Graduate School  
Re: New and/or Revised Graduate Policies/Procedures  
Date: May 29, 2018

\*Please give careful attention to this memorandum. \*

### **New/Updated Graduate Policies:**

The following items were established as a new policy, or were updated in 2017-2018.

1. **Reduced Minimum Total Hours for Course-Type, Non-Thesis Master's Programs:**

**Effective Fall 2018, course-type master's program requirements are reduced from a minimum of 32 semester hours to a minimum of 30 semester hours. \*Note: Departments/units can set their own minimum requirements higher than this overall policy, but not lower than the minimum of 30 semester hours.**

Currently, at FSU, thesis-type master's programs require a minimum of 30 semester hours, but course-type master's programs require a minimum of 32 semester hours. The Graduate Policy Committee and Faculty Senate approved this change to be consistent with other Florida institutions who have a 30-hour minimum requirement for course-type master's programs (i.e., University of Florida (UF), University of South Florida (USF), University of Central Florida (UCF), Florida International University (FIU), etc.).

2. **Master's Degree- Graduate Credit Hour Requirement:**

**Effective Fall 2019, to qualify for a master's degree, a graduate student must complete a minimum of 30 semester hours of graduate credit (5000-level or above). For thesis-type programs, six of these credits must be thesis credits.**

This amendment clarifies for SACS purposes that for master's degrees, a minimum of 30 total semester hours need to be at the graduate-level (5000-level or above). Undergraduate courses at the 4000-level will no longer count in the minimum 30-total hour distribution. This does not mean that a student cannot take an undergraduate course at the 4000-level while enrolled as a graduate student. Nothing prevents or prohibits a graduate program from allowing a master's students from enrolling in an undergraduate course. For such cases in which a graduate student takes a 4000-level course, it would be considered supplemental to his/her degree requirements and not count in his/her minimum total hour distribution or graduate GPA calculation.

It should be noted that the GPC conducted extensive research on this policy change since 2015 and for the vast majority of the more than 100 master's degree programs on campus, this clarifying statement will not pose any problem. Units are encouraged to work with the University Curriculum Committee to co-list courses at the 5000-level to be in compliance with this policy prior to Fall 2019. Units are encouraged to update their sections of the Graduate Bulletin, Graduate Student Handbook, website, etc., if need be.

### 3. Combined and Joint Degree Pathways:

In response to new standards adopted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, the Provost's office has drafted a formal policy related to what is currently referred to as combined and joint degrees. This policy was developed by a workgroup that included Institutional Research, the Graduate School, Faculty Development and Advancement, the Registrar, and the Provost's Office to help ensure compliance. The full policy is attached and has been endorsed by UPC, GPC, Faculty Senate Steering Committee and Faculty Senate. The key points of the policy are noted below:

- I. Combined pathways involving an undergraduate and a graduate degree program must have at least 120 undergraduate credit hours and 30 graduate credit hours. Combined pathways may allow a maximum of 12 graduate credit hours to be counted toward the undergraduate program.
- II. Joint graduate/professional pathways require a minimum of 30 unduplicated credit hours for each degree program involved in the joint pathway. Credit hours in excess of these minimums may be shared between the degree programs included in the pathway.
- III. Shared hours for combined and joint graduate/professional pathways must be reviewed and approved by faculty committees, including department and college curriculum committees and UPC/GPC, as appropriate.

Instructions for transitioning current joint and combined degree programs to the requirements of the new policy are forthcoming.

## **Procedural Changes/Clarifications:**

### 1. Graduation Clearance:

**The Registrar's Office will no longer be contacting students directly regarding any graduation deficiencies that they have.**

The Graduation Staff will now email the Deans office representatives every Friday with deficiencies that were found of students on the graduation list that week. This email will contain the student and the deficiency (or deficiencies) identified. The Dean's office will email the student to their FSU account and the email will be placed in the student's record.

### 2. Procedures for Dismissing a Graduate Student:

**The procedures for dismissing a graduate student are detailed below. At a minimum, the following steps must be addressed and completed prior to dismissal.**

The University reserves the right to terminate enrollment in an academic program and dismiss a student whose academic performance is below the standards of the program, regardless of GPA, or whose

conduct is deemed improper or prejudicial to the interest of the University community. Dismissed students will not be permitted to register for graduate study, including registering as a non-degree student.

Program terminations (dismissal for a reason other than GPA) are determined by the faculty at the academic program/departmental level and may occur for a number of different reasons, including but not limited to:

- Inability to conduct independent research in a fashion appropriate with the accepted norms of a discipline,
- Inability to function within a team environment to the degree that it negatively affects the learning, practice and/or research of fellow graduate students,
- Behavior that does not meet the professional standards of a discipline (typically clinical, social work or school settings, but also including Motion Picture Arts),
- Failure to meet one or more major milestone requirements,
- Inability to pass the diagnostic/preliminary examination/comprehensive examination (note that university policy limits preliminary examination attempts to two),
- Failure to complete the doctoral degree/make timely progress towards the dissertation, or
- Extensive petitions for candidacy extension.

Graduate program handbooks should provide information about failure to meet specific milestone or behavioral requirements and the appeals process. At a minimum, the following elements must be addressed.

**Step 1:** A graduate student is identified by his/her academic program/department as not making sufficient progress towards the degree, failing to complete the degree within the specified time-period, displaying substandard academic performance, regardless of GPA, or exhibiting unacceptable behavior(s) that are relevant to professional standards.

**Step 2:** The graduate student meets with his/her major professor and/or program director to develop a remediation plan for improvement.

- The department should provide a written remediation plan or written academic “warning” to the student containing specific information about improvement(s) needed to avoid dismissal.
- The remediation plan/academic warning should be developed by the department/program for the individual student and be documented accordingly. (For doctoral students, the annual evaluation is one opportunity to document unsatisfactory progress.) NOTE: programs should establish a reasonable timeline for the graduate student to respond to the remediation plan/warning. The length of time for remediation is dependent on the situation and is up to the program to decide.
- The academic dean, or appropriate designee, must also be notified of the situation, the deficiencies, and the remediation steps presented to the student.

**Step 3:** If the graduate student fails to resolve/remediate the specified and documented deficiency within a reasonable timeframe, the department may initiate a program termination. If the program chooses to terminate the academic progress of the student, the following steps must be completed **prior** to notifying the student.

- The academic unit must consult with the academic dean (or designated individual) regarding their plan to terminate. The consultation should include the unit’s handbook language, the remediation steps taken, the student’s efforts to date to resolve or address the deficiencies, and the grounds for the program termination.

- At the time of dismissal, the department chair/unit head may petition the academic dean for consideration of special circumstances that they believe justify an alternative resolution.
- The academic dean's office should inform the Registrar's Office and the Graduate School of its intent to move forward with program termination. In conjunction, the three offices will tailor a letter specific to the circumstances of the student. The dismissal letter must be sent to the student, but also sent to several offices for processing (see below).
- At this point, programs may offer the student the opportunity to change their degree program level within the same major/plan (i.e., PhD to EdS, PhD to MS, etc.) or change their academic plan to another degree program, but this is at the unit's discretion.

**Step 4:** A written letter must be sent to the graduate student being dismissed. The dismissal letter should be sent to the student and copied to the dean's office, the Registrar's Office (Kim Barber), the Office of Faculty Development and Advancement (Jennifer Buchanan), and the Graduate School (James Beck). The letter should specify the following information:

- The process followed to notify the student of their deficiencies and allow them an opportunity to rectify those deficiencies.
- The termination reasons,
- Benchmarks missed,
- The fact that dismissal from the program constitutes dismissal from the University,
- And an academic hold will be placed on registration to prevent future registration,
- Outlining alternatives, a student could request, e.g., graduating with a master's instead of Ph.D. (assuming coursework and degree requirements are met),
- Timeline to complete specific coursework, if any. For example, the letter needs to clearly articulate to the student that the courses in which they are currently enrolled need to be completed by the dismissal date in order to earn credit for them.
- Notification of the right to appeal and information about how to do so, and
- A deadline for any appeal submittal. \*See "[General Academic Appeals Process](#)" for more information.

### 3. Manuscript Clearance Online Submission Process:

**Since the beginning of Summer 2018, Manuscript Clearance has started a pilot study using the new Online Manuscript Clearance Portal for all forms related to dissertation/thesis/treatise clearance. Certain programs have been contacted and selected for this pilot study.**

### 4. Manuscript Deadline Name Changes:

**Effective Summer 2018, titles of the manuscript clearance deadlines have been changed slightly.**

The actual types of deadlines and dates are not affected; it is simply a clarification in the terms. The new deadline names are:

- Last day to submit doctoral dissertation or treatise for pre-defense format review
- Last day to submit master's thesis for pre-defense format review
- Last day for submission of the post-defense, content-corrected thesis, dissertation or treatise and required forms
- Last day for thesis, dissertation and treatise students to receive an email from Manuscript Clearance confirming final clearance