

Chapter 8

Master's Programs

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A. The A.M. and M.S. Programs

The A.M. and M.S. programs require a minimum of 30 units of degree credit, at least 24 of which must be graded coursework, and a final examination administered by the student's M.A. or M.S. committee. Some master's programs require more than 30 units, but 30 is the minimum Graduate School requirement. In addition, three full terms of tuition must be paid (e.g. Fall, Spring and Summer I/II, or Fall, Spring, Fall). The enrollment cap is 12 units of graduate credit per semester. In addition, for students starting in 2013-14 and thereafter, Master's candidates must have completed training in Academic Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR). The current requirement is a four-hour training session held during orientation week. Documented completion of RCR training for PhD students will also suffice. Students whose first language is not English and who do not place high enough on the placement exam administered during orientation week are required to take English language courses as determined by their placement scores.



Do the credits listed for Continuation (CTN) on a student's transcript count toward the 30 units necessary for an M.A. or M.S.?

No, they do not.



Do the credits listed for Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) orientation and workshops (GS 710, GS711, GS712) on a student's transcript count toward the 30 units necessary for an M.A. or M.S.?

No, they do not.



Do the credits listed for Graduate School (GS) English language courses on the student's transcript count toward the 30 units necessary for an M.A. or M.S.?

They cannot count toward required graded units, but if, for example, the M.A. or M.S. program requires less than 30 graded units, they can count as "Ungraded Research." Note that the Graduate School requires a minimum of 24 graded units in M.A. and M.S. degrees (with the exception of certain dual J.D-M.A./M.S. degrees), and thus English language courses could never account for more than 6 ungraded units.



Do credits listed for GS700, GS701, or GS702 on a student's transcript count toward the 30 units necessary for an M.A. or M.S.?

They can be counted in the same way as the GS720A, GS720B, GS721A, and GS721B are counted, as units of "Ungraded Research" under the circumstances described above for the case of English language courses.



Summary: None of the GS courses discussed above can ever count toward the required graded course units in any degree program; in other words, they can never be substituted for required core courses or for required elective courses.

Master of Science programs generally require some formal write-up of a student's research, whether it takes the form of a thesis or a more informal research paper. All M.A./M.S. degrees must conclude with some form of completion exercise (see below).

Master's examination committees must have at least three members, all of whom should be members of the graduate faculty (the rare exceptions to this policy should be explained when the committee is proposed; such candidates will be considered for appointments to the Graduate Faculty and may serve if approved). One committee member should represent the department of the student's minor or a clearly differentiated area of research in the major department or program. The Director of Graduate Studies recommends the committee and its chair, using the appropriate form, to the Associate Dean for approval. The final committee must be approved at least one month prior to the final examination. In exceptional cases a shorter timeframe may be requested by the DGS. The date of the Associate Dean's signature on the committee approval form serves as the official date of record for committee approval.

For master's examination committees, the chair may be a term faculty member, if eligible and approved for this role by the Associate Dean. Term faculty eligible to chair master's committees are Duke faculty members who have extensive and demonstrable experience in the graduate teaching and research training activities of the graduate degree-granting department or program, including prior service on four or more graduate examination committees. These qualifications should be documented in a letter of support for the potential committee chair, signed by the DGS and/or program chair or director. The Graduate School will maintain a list of Duke term faculty members approved to chair master's examination committees. The period of approval for a term member to chair master's committees in a given program will coincide with the remainder of the term appointment to the Graduate Faculty.

B. Time Limits

At least three terms of tuition must be paid, and no more than 12 units of credit may be taken per term without permission of the associate dean. Thus the minimum time necessary is three terms, but this can include fall, spring and summer terms. Master's candidates who are in residence should complete all requirements within two calendar years of their first registration. All requirements for a master's degree must be completed within six calendar years from the date of first registration. Such requirements met more than six years before will not count toward graduation.

C. Transfer of Credit

A maximum of 6 units of graduate credit may be transferred from an accredited school if it is not extension coursework, correspondence course credit, or credit taken before the bachelor's degree is earned. A minimum grade of "B-" (or the equivalent) must have been earned on any work proposed for transfer credit. After a student has completed 12 units of coursework at Duke, the proposed transfer of credit must be approved by the DGS and by the Associate Dean. Requests for transfer should be submitted on the appropriate Graduate School form (go to: [Academic Policies and Forms](#)) and are recorded only upon presentation

of an official transcript. Transfer credit may not be over six years old at the time requirements for the Duke degree program is completed.

Transferring course work does not reduce the minimum of 30 units at Duke required for a master's degree, and thus students are required to register for units at Duke equivalent to the number of transferred units. This registration may consist of additional coursework or it may be "Ungraded Research" in preparation for their thesis or final exam.

D. Courses Below 500-Level for Master's Degree Credit

With the approval of their Director of Graduate Studies, master's students may enroll in undergraduate courses at Duke University to round out their programs of study. Students pursuing a master's degree are limited to **two** undergraduate courses, and **they must receive a grade of B- or better to have such courses counted** as part of their earned graduate credit.

E. Retroactive Credit

Credit for graduate courses taken at Duke (but not taken as an undergraduate) before admission to the Graduate School or while registered as a non-degree student may be carried over into a graduate degree program if (1) the action is recommended by the Director of Graduate Studies and approved by the Associate Dean; (2) the work is not more than two years old; (3) the amount of such credit does not exceed 12 units; and (4) the work is of "B-" level or better. A request for retroactive credit may be made on the Graduate School Retroactive Transfer Form: [Academic Policies and Forms](#). This option is open to students who have taken their work at Duke through Continuing Education, within the Graduate School as non-degree students, or in the summer session as unclassified students.



Can I request transfer credits and retroactive credits for the same master's student?

Yes, provided the appropriate criteria have been met.

F. Final Examination

All master's students must have a final oral examination, which normally occurs in the final term of enrollment. It is the responsibility of the Director of Graduate Studies to schedule the examination and to inform both the student and the committee of its place and time. Normally the candidate's advisor will serve as chairperson and presiding officer of the examining committee. The committee is composed of term and full members of the Graduate Faculty previously approved for this role by the associate dean. The committee must be approved 30 prior to the student's exam. The student's committee administers the examination and certifies the student's passing or failing by signing the master's examination card. All committee members must participate in the examination and all members present must sign the exam card. The DGS may petition the Associate Dean for a committee member (other than the chair) to participate remotely via videoconference (e.g. Skype) if necessary for the examination to proceed, but a majority of the committee must be physically present in any case. A remote participant must document his/her vote in writing to the Graduate School, via a signed PDF statement forwarded from the DGS or DGSA. An

examiner who fails the student must sign the examination card and clearly write “Fail” next to his or her signature. At least three (3) graduate faculty members must vote to pass the candidate. Consequently, if the committee is composed of only three (3) graduate faculty members, a single negative vote fails the candidate. If the committee is composed of four (4) or more graduate faculty members, then a single negative vote, provided it is not the vote of the committee chair, does not fail the candidate. Two (2) or more negative votes always fail the candidate. Students may, with committee approval, retake the examination not earlier than one (1) month from the date of the original examination, and the retake must be administered by the same committee. The Committee chair must sign the examination card on the line indicating that a retake has been approved, and the retake must then be approved by the Associate Dean.

G. Master’s Thesis

The final examination for most master’s students is based on an original thesis prepared entirely by the student that presents his or her research, its context, and its conclusions. Basic requirements for preparing the thesis are prescribed in the Duke [Guide for the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations](#), available on the Graduate School’s web site. For more specific aspects of form and style, the student may consult to use **A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations** by Kate L. Turabian or some other approved manual of style.

The thesis must be submitted electronically to ProQuest and reviewed by the Graduate School Office **at least two weeks** before the scheduled date of the examination and on or before the announced deadline for the semester of graduation (see [Graduation Deadlines](#)).

The examination card is provided by the Graduate School to the student when the master’s thesis is approved for defense. If the candidate passes the examination, each member of the committee signs one copy of the thesis title page and the abstract page, which accompany the signed exam card when it is returned to the Graduate School. If the candidate is judged to have passed the examination except for minor revisions in the thesis, the examiners may sign with the understanding that the prescribed revisions will be made to the satisfaction of the thesis supervisor, who will later certify to the Graduate School completion of the revisions. The candidate will have one month to make changes in the thesis requested by the Committee. If the student needs a period longer than one month to make changes in the thesis, an extension may be requested by the DGS to the Associate Dean. The period of one month after the examination for submitting the final version of the thesis to ProQuest **cannot apply if the examination occurs just prior to the end of the summer term, or the fall or the spring semesters. At those times the corrected copies of the thesis must be returned as quickly as is necessary in order to meet specified deadlines for the awarding of the degree.** If, at the end of the semester or term, the student cannot meet these deadlines and needs longer than one month to return the thesis, the student will be required to register for the ensuing term or semester (with corresponding fees) in which the degree will be awarded.

H. Non-Thesis Examination

Non-thesis examinations take several different forms across the Graduate School, but the committee voting rules are the same as for a thesis examination. The most common examinations are the following: written or oral exams on a prescribed reading list or body of material; oral exams on a paper or set of papers submitted by the student; or oral exam on a research project or memo. The doctoral preliminary examination may also serve as the final examination for the master's degree. You should inform the Graduate School which type of examination the department will use for any given student.

The Director of Graduate Studies provides the student's committee with the Non Thesis Master's Examination Card used to indicate completion, or failure to achieve completion, of all requirements for the degree. (For blank cards, please contact Susan Williford at 681-3248 or susan.williford@duke.edu.) After the final examination, the DGS should see that the properly signed card is returned to the Graduate School.



Do we have to schedule a formal examination for a non-thesis master's degree?

Yes, all master's degrees require a final examination conducted by a graduate faculty committee of at least three members, approved in advance by the Associate Dean.

I. Apply for Graduation

The Apply for Graduation Form must be filed by the student no later than January 25 for a May degree, June 15 for a September degree, and October 15 for a December degree. The form is filed online in ACES.

After each deadline, a list of degree candidates, who have applied to graduate, will be provided to the degree program. **The program should review the list carefully and report any errors to the Graduate School.** Failure to include a student on the graduation list may lead to an additional required semester of registration, a significant hardship for a student intending the graduate.

J. Dual or Joint Master's Degree Programs

The Graduate School currently offers a variety of joint and dual degree programs, most of which involve students enrolled in professional degrees who also wish to earn a master's in the Graduate School at the same time. Joint degrees are those in which there is a hybrid set of requirements and blended tuition, with each degree being mutually dependent on the other. Dual degrees are two different degrees pursued by a single student, with each having its standard requirements and tuition. Dual degrees are not mutually dependent. The most familiar of such joint degrees are the JD-MA/MS degree programs now being offered by the Law School in conjunction with certain Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Public Policy programs. The MD/PhD is a well-known dual degree combination. Proper advising of the joint/dual degree students can be complex, and attention should be paid to their requirements and the timing of their degree work in order to avoid degree auditing problems that might compromise a candidate's chance to graduate with each degree.

Departments wishing to develop a joint or dual degree program should follow the procedures listed in Chapter 10 under New Program Proposals. In dual-degree programs, students are admitted to the master's units under the normal Graduate School mechanisms explained in the Admissions chapter of this manual.

The most common individualized dual-degree program is the concurrent pursuit of a master's degree by a Ph.D. student pursuing his or her doctoral degree. The Graduate School currently allows such PhD students to earn one concurrent master's degree without additional charge. Concurrent programs may be approved by the Graduate School on an ad hoc basis where it can be shown that sufficient academic reason exists for the combination of course and research interests. Doctoral students wishing to pursue a master's degree in any department other than the one to which they were originally admitted must apply to and be granted admission into the master's program. **Please be aware that Ph.D. students who receive a disciplinary master's degree en route to their Ph.D. cannot pursue a master's degree in another department without paying for an additional 30 units of graduate credit.**



Can students switch from a master's program to a Ph.D. program?

No. Master's students must formally apply to the doctoral program. If a student originally applied to your Ph.D. program, but was accepted for a master's degree program, the same rules apply: the student must re-apply for the Ph.D. program. Consult the Graduate School in all instances where questions arise.



Must I notify you of a student who is switching from a Ph.D. program to a terminal master's?

Yes, our records must reflect the degree being pursued (and there could be a significant difference in the tuition charges). The Graduate School should be notified no later than the beginning of the semester in which the student intends to complete the terminal master's. Please consult Academic Affairs in the Graduate School before making this degree program change, however, because there may be unexpected consequences.



Although my department does not offer a master's degree en route to the Ph.D., may we on occasion offer a terminal master's to doctoral students who will not continue to the Ph.D.?

*Yes, provided that the Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty has formally approved a terminal master's in your program, that the Graduate School is appropriately notified, and that the students has completed all the Graduate School requirements for such a degree (e.g., 30 units, 24 hours of graded coursework, etc.). This means that you should pay particular attention to the number of **graded** course units being accumulated by students whose continuation toward the Ph.D. is in some question. Moreover, hastily switching a student from a Ph.D. program to a terminal master's track when credit units required for the master's are not completed often has a significant financial impact on the student, because the student will have to pay tuition for any additional terms required.*



Can my Ph.D. students earn a master's degree in another discipline en route to their Ph.D.?

Yes, in principle. Permission to take concurrent master's and doctoral degrees, as well as arrangements for the tuition owed for those degrees, must first be obtained from the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. Where formal joint or dual master's programs have been approved by the Graduate School, students must still apply and be accepted by the department or program from which they wish to receive the master's degree. The DGS of the student's home program must also approve pursuit of the concurrent degree. Please refer to forms and procedures found here: [Academic Policies and Forms](#).



Things to Note:

*Please note that doctoral students pursuing a master's degree en route to the Ph.D. in the same department or program would normally incur additional tuition charges for any additional concurrent master's degree in a different department or program. **The principle is that no Ph.D. student can receive more than one master's degree en route to the Ph.D. without incurring additional tuition charges.***