Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees

Responsible University Officer(s):

- Executive Vice President and Provost

Policy Owner(s):

- Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Education

Policy contact(s):

- Karen Starry

Date Revised:
Jun 24, 2015

Effective Date:
Sep 7, 2011

Policy Statement

This policy governs the credit requirements for the following degrees:

- Master's Plan A degrees
- Master's Plan B degrees
- Master's Plan C degrees
- Doctoral degrees

Credit requirements for master's degrees
1. Master’s degrees must consist of the following minimum credits:
   1. Plan A degrees: 10 master’s thesis credits (xxxx8777) and a minimum of 20 graduate-level course credits.
   2. Plan B degrees: a minimum of 30 graduate-level course credits, including Plan B Project credits as defined by each program and approved by the college.
   3. Plan C degrees: a minimum of 30 graduate-level course credits.
2. No collegiate unit or program may require more than:
   1. 36 credits with a combination of course and thesis for a master’s Plan A
   2. 36 credits with a combination of course and Plan B project credits for a master’s Plan B, and
   3. 48 course credits for a master’s Plan C.
3. Master’s thesis credits (xxxx8777) may be taken for the master’s Plan A at any time during a student’s degree program.
4. A minimum of 6 graduate-level course credits is required for a master’s level minor.

Credit requirements for doctoral degrees

1. Doctoral degrees must consist of a minimum of 48 credits: a minimum of 24 graduate-level course credits and a minimum of 24 doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888).
2. No collegiate unit or program may require more than 72 credits with a combination of course and doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888) for the completion of the doctoral degree.
3. Programs have the discretion, with college approval, to determine when it is academically appropriate for students to take doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888).
4. A minimum of 12 graduate-level course credits is required for a doctoral level minor.

Exceptions

Collegiate deans or the appropriate campus Vice Chancellor may request exceptions from the Executive Vice President and Provost to items 1b and 2b based on accreditation requirements, national standards of the field, interdisciplinary nature of the program or similar arguments. Collegiate deans or the appropriate campus Vice Chancellor may petition the Provost for an exception to the 24 doctoral thesis-credit (xxxx8888) minimum in item 2a on behalf of doctoral programs that do not require dissertations. The petition should show that the exception conforms to national standards in the field and that appropriate additional credits (course credits, internships, project credits, etc.) will replace the 24 doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888).

This policy does not apply to the J.D., M.D., PharmD., D.V.M., D.D.S., L.L.M., and M.B.A (Twin Cities) degrees.

Reason for Policy
This policy establishes the minimum and maximum credit requirements for Master’s Plan A, B, and C degrees and for Doctoral degrees. It provides a framework for curriculum development that balances coursework, research training, and independent scholarly work.

**Procedures**

- [Early Doctoral Thesis Credit Registration Option](#)

**Forms/Instructions**

- UM 1760 - Request for Exception to the Maximum Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Degrees [um1760w.docx](#)

**Appendices**

- Implementation of Doctoral Thesis Credit Policy

**Frequently Asked Questions**

- FAQ: Credit Requirements for Master’s and Doctoral Degrees

**Contacts**

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**Definitions**

**Graduate-level Course Credits**  
Graduate-level course credits that are primarily numbered as 5xxx or above, excluding thesis credits. Graduate programs may choose to allow 4xxx-level course credits to be applied toward a graduate degree, up to the limit specified in Administrative Policy:  
[Application of Credits for Students Earning Graduate Degrees](#) [Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements](#)

**Plan B Project Credits**
Credits taken by the students in relation to their Plan B project as part of the degree requirements.

**Early doctoral thesis credit registration**
Registration for doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888) prior to passing the preliminary oral examination.

**Research-ready criteria**
“Research-ready” criteria for early doctoral thesis credit registration eligibility are expected to vary by discipline but may include the structure of the program’s curriculum (e.g., early research activities/requirements built into the curriculum), a specific baseline of prior research experience(s), or other criteria that can be identified and consistently applied.

**Thesis Credits**
Credits taken by students in relation to their research work as part of the degree requirements. These include: xxxx-8777 (master’s thesis credits) and xxxx-8888 (doctoral thesis credits).

**Responsibilities**

**Colleges and Programs**
Restructure program requirements to conform to this policy by the effective date.
Request exceptions from the Executive Vice President and Provost to items 1b and 2b based on accreditation requirements, national standards of the field, interdisciplinary nature of the program or similar arguments.

Determine whether to require doctoral students to pass the preliminary oral examination prior to thesis credit (xxxx8888) registration, or to provide the program’s “research ready” doctoral students the option to register for xxxx8888 prior to the preliminary oral examination.

Publicize the graduate program’s decision whether its doctoral students must pass the preliminary oral examination prior to thesis credit (xxxx8888) registration.

Determine and publicize the graduate program’s criteria for assessing its students’ eligibility (i.e., “research readiness”) to register for xxxx8888, if registration prior to passing the preliminary oral examination will be allowed.

**Related Information**
There is no Related Information associated with this policy.
History
Amended:
June 2015 - Comprehensive Review, Minor Revision: The changes provide greater clarity around the specific type of credits. Removed the effective date of the policy statement, which was inserted when this policy was first created.
Effective:
September 2011 - New Policy, Comprehensive Review. Establishes the minimum and maximum credit requirements for Master's Plan A, B, and C degrees and for Doctoral degrees. Provides a framework for curriculum development that balances coursework, research training, and independent scholarly work. Eliminates the requirement for outside coursework in view of the trend towards interdisciplinary curricula within many programs. Programs are given the option to require a minor or supporting program where warranted by educational objectives. Outlines a process by which collegiate deans may request exceptions.

Procedure:

Early Doctoral Thesis Credit Registration Option

Related Policy:

- Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees

Administrative Procedure

Graduate programs, in collaboration with their college, have the right and responsibility to

- require their doctoral students to register for doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888) no earlier than the term following their successful preliminary oral examination, or

Commented [5]: This document has been revised to provide updated information, including relevant information from the (to be-deleted) "Implementation of Doctoral Thesis Credit Policy" appendix.
Graduate programs opting to allow “research ready” doctoral students to register for xxxx8888 prior to passing the preliminary oral examination must:
· determine “research ready” criteria appropriate for their doctoral program,
· publicize the criteria (e.g., in the program’s student handbook), and
· apply the criteria consistently.

Instructions

Graduate programs that require all of their students to pass the preliminary oral examination prior to xxxx8888 registration:
· No action is needed in the Electronic Course Approval system (ECAS). This is the University’s default requirement for xxxx8888 registration.

Graduate programs that do not require any of their doctoral students to pass the preliminary oral examination prior to xxxx8888 registration:
· The xxxx8888 information must be edited in ECAS to reflect this decision.
The relevant changes are initiated in ECAS by staff assigned by the graduate program, and reviewed/approved via ECAS by the program’s college.

For graduate programs that review/approve registration prior the preliminary oral examination only for students who meet the program’s established and publicized eligibility criteria:

- The program assigns an “Early Thesis Credit Registration” (ETCR) student group to the student record of each student who meets the graduate program’s eligibility criteria. To do so, programs need to:
  - ensure that the ECAS consent requirement associated with their registration indicates “[Student’s major] PhD student and ETCR]”, e.g., “[EPSY PhD student and ETCR]”.
- The Graduate Student Services and Progress (gssp@umn.edu) is available for questions about selecting and entering the appropriate ETCR student group.

Graduate programs, with college approval, may offer “research ready” doctoral students in their program the option to register for doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888) prior to passing the
preliminary oral examination. Students are deemed to be “research ready” by their advisers and/or program’s director of graduate studies.

1. If a graduate program wants to change its existing policy for doctoral thesis credit registration, the program faculty must vote.
2. If the graduate program faculty vote to allow their “research ready” doctoral students to register for doctoral thesis credits (xxxx 8888) prior to passing the preliminary oral examination, the program must decide the nature of adviser consultation needed prior to their students’ xxxx8888 registration. In addition, the graduate program staff assigned by their program must:
   ○ use ECAS to enter the relevant changes to their program’s xxxx8888 registration policy, submit the changes to their college for review, and ensure their college’s approval of the xxxx8888 changes; and
   ○ collaborate with graduate program faculty as needed to ensure that the graduate program’s student handbook reflects the faculty’s decision regarding the change in xxxx8888 registration policy.
3. The graduate program’s college must have its designated ECAS approver review and approve xxxx8888 ECAS changes submitted by the college’s graduate programs.
4. Permission numbers cannot be used to control doctoral thesis credit registrations (xxxx8888).
5. Unless a graduate program opts to allow all of its doctoral students to register early for doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888), the program must assign the “Early Thesis Credit Registration” (ETCR) student group to each student in the program who has been deemed to be “research ready” (in consultation with the student’s adviser and/or the program’s DGS) but who has not yet passed the preliminary oral examination. Programs that wish to enable early thesis credit registration using the ETCR student group should update the ECAS consent requirement associated with their 8888 course to indicate “[Ph.D. student in the major and ETCR]” or “[Ph.D. student in the major and DOCT].” (Note: The Doctoral Candidate student group, “DOCT,” is centrally assigned to students once they pass the preliminary oral examination. For questions about the use of the ETCR student group, contact the Graduate Student Services and Progress office at gssp@umn.edu.)

The Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) staff will continue to collaborate with graduate programs to ensure the accuracy of students’ accumulated doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888), as well as to monitor the Full-Time Equivalent Status (xxxx8444) and “post-auditing” xxxx8444 registrations to assure compliance with Federal requirements. The Graduate School is available for consultation as needed.
Appendix:

Implementation of Doctoral Thesis Credit Policy

Appendix to Policy

Effective Fall 2011

Effective fall semester 2011 (but no later than fall 2013), graduate programs have the right and responsibility to decide

1. to continue to require program doctoral students to register for doctoral thesis credits (xxxx-8888) no sooner than the term following their successful preliminary oral examination;
   OR
2. to provide "research ready" doctoral students in their program the option to register for xxxx-8888 prior to passing the preliminary oral examination and upon consultation with their advisor.

What does this mean for your college and its graduate programs?

1. The graduate program faculty must vote to
   ○ continue to require successful completion of the preliminary oral examination for xxxx-8888 registration, or
   ○ allow their "research ready" doctoral students to register for xxxx-8888 prior to passing the preliminary oral examination and decide the nature of advisor consultation needed prior to their students' xxxx-8888 registration.
2. If the graduate program faculty vote to continue to require successful completion of the preliminary oral examination for xxxx-8888 registration, no further action is needed.
3. If the graduate program faculty vote to allow their "research ready" doctoral students to register for xxxx-8888 prior to passing the preliminary oral examination, the graduate program staff assigned by their program must
— enter into ECAS the relevant changes to their program’s xxxx-8888 registration policy, submit to their college, and ensure college approval of the xxxx-8888 ECAS changes, and
— collaborate with graduate program faculty as needed to ensure that the graduate program’s student handbook reflects the faculty’s decision regarding xxxx-8888 registration policy.

4. [Note: Permission numbers may not be used to control registration for xxxx-8888. Unless a program opts to allow all of its doctoral students to register early for doctoral thesis credits, the program must assign the “Early-Thesis Credit Registration” (ETCR) student group to each student in the program who has been deemed to be “research ready” (in consultation with the student’s advisor) but who has not yet passed the preliminary oral examination. Programs that wish to enable early thesis credit registration using the ETCR student group should update the ECAS consent requirement associated with their 8888 course to indicate “[Ph.D. student in the major and ETCR] or [Ph.D. student in the major and DOCT]”—for example, “[EPsy Ph.D. student and ETCR] or [EPsy Ph.D. student and DOCT].” (The Doctoral Candidate student group, “DOCT,” is centrally assigned to students once they pass the preliminary oral exam.) For questions about use of the ETCR student group, contact gssp@umn.edu.]

5. The graduate program’s college must have its designated ECAS approver review and approve xxxx-8888 ECAS changes submitted by the college’s graduate programs.

The Graduate Student Services and Progress (GSSP) staff will continue to collaborate with graduate programs to ensure the accuracy of students’ accumulated xxxx-8888 thesis credits, as well as to monitor the Full-Time Equivalent Status (xxxx-8444) and “post-auditing” xxxx-8444 registrations to assure compliance with Federal requirements. The Graduate School is available for consultation as needed.

Issues to consider:

▲ Budgetary implications of thesis credit registration
▲ Recognition of faculty workload
▲ Student effort at early and later stages of the student’s degree program
▲ Advising effort at early and later stages of the student’s degree program
▲ Compliance with federal requirements for eligibility to register for Full-Time Equivalent Status (xxxx-8444)
▲ Relationship of doctoral “pre-thesis” credits (xxxx-8666) to doctoral thesis credits
FAQ
Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees

Related Policy:

- Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can graduate programs determine that it is not appropriate for their doctoral students to take thesis credits prior to passing the preliminary oral examination?
   Yes. Graduate programs may choose not to allow their students to take thesis credits prior to passing the preliminary oral examination.

2. Can graduate programs that choose to allow their doctoral students this option determine on a case-by-case basis when it is appropriate for individual students to take thesis credits?
   Yes. Graduate programs are expected to apply fair and consistent standards and should ensure appropriate consultation with the doctoral student’s advisor and director of graduate studies with the DGS before allowing students to enroll early for thesis credits.

3. Do xxx8888W credits count toward the 24 thesis credit requirement for the doctoral degree?
   Yes.

4. My graduate program would like to issue permission numbers for doctoral students who have not yet passed the preliminary oral examination but who are ready to begin their research and register for our program’s xxx8888W (doctoral thesis credits) course. Can we issue permission numbers for this purpose?
   No. Permission numbers are not allowed for early xxx8888W thesis credit registration; rather, the graduate program assigns an "Early Thesis Credit Registration" (ETCR) student group to the student record of each student who meets the graduate program’s eligibility criteria.

Commented [7]: No longer a registration option.

No. In order for a program to allow its students who are "research-ready" to register for doctoral thesis credits prior to passing the preliminary oral examination, the program faculty must first vote to extend this option to its students and then replace the current course prerequisite in ECAS with an alternative prerequisite that reflects the program's intent (e.g., Ph.D. student in
The program, consultation with advisor recommended, advisor consent, etc.). The graduate program's college must also approve the change. The change in the course prerequisite clearly indicates the program's intent to allow students who are ready to register for doctoral thesis credits prior to passing the prelim oral exam. The program must also publicize its position with respect to early thesis credit registration. The procedures for modifying doctoral thesis credits (xxxx8888) are specified in the Procedures section of this policy. Registration via the use of permission numbers may be reversed or cancelled.

5. **My major program is in CEHD. Am I required to register for thesis credits in CEHD?**
   Yes. Students must register for thesis credits that correspond to their collegiate unit AND their major program.

6. **Can I take more than the maximum number of xxxx8888 credits as required and specified by my graduate program?**
   Yes, individual students, under certain circumstances, may benefit from taking more than the maximum number of required credits in order to gain the necessary knowledge to prepare them for more advanced courses and/or to support their research and scholarly work.

7. **Can I include more than the maximum number of credits as required by my program on my degree plan?**
   Yes, degree plans are subject to program and collegiate approval. For master's students, please refer to the Master's Degree: Completion policy for the minimum GPA required for courses included on the degree plan for degree clearance. For doctoral students, please refer to the Doctoral Degree: Performance Standards and Progress policy for the minimum GPA required to remain in good academic standing.

8. **Can colleges or graduate programs require coursework outside of the program or supporting-field credits?**
   Yes, graduate programs, with collegiate approval, may require coursework outside of the program or supporting-field credits as part of the program requirements as long as the total number of required credits conforms with the Credit Requirements for Master's and Doctoral Degrees policy.

9. **Can graduate programs require pre-thesis credits (8666)?**
   Yes, graduate programs can require pre-thesis credits (8666); however, those credits will not be counted toward fulfilling the graduate-course credit requirements or the doctoral thesis credit requirements. For students changing from the doctoral status to the master's status in the same program, xxxx8666 may be applied toward the master's Plan A thesis requirement, subject to program approval.