Graduate Degree Regulations

Information in the “Degree Regulations” section applies to all master’s degrees and to all other research doctoral degrees (Ph.D., Ed. D. etc.). Professional doctoral degrees have separate guidelines.

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TIME LIMITS

In this section:
• Master’s Degree
• Doctoral Degree

Master’s Degree

Master’s degree students are permitted to continue in a program for a maximum of eight years following their term of admission to the program. Students who have been inactive for two or more years or who exceed eight years following their term of admission are required to apply for readmission to the University and their graduate program.

Graduate course work used to meet degree requirements must be satisfactorily completed within a period of eight years immediately preceding the conferring of the degree. Courses completed in the same term as degree conferral (fall, spring, summer) 8 years previously are considered to fall within the 8-year limit. A course completed more than eight years prior to the term of degree conferral must be revalidated if it is to be used toward meeting degree requirements. Revalidation can be accomplished through the following procedure:

• The current instructor of the course determines the method used to revalidate the course. The student may, for example, be required to complete specific activities (such as repeating all or some of the course or completing a set of readings). The instructor then assesses the student’s knowledge of course material (through such means as a written or oral examination, a paper, a project, or some other assessment) and determines if the student’s knowledge is adequate to justify revalidation of the course.
• The instructor submits a description of the revalidation method and results of the assessment to the college or school dean or designee.
• The college or school dean or designee submits a letter describing the revalidation process and supporting the revalidation to the Associate Provost for Graduate Academic Affairs.
• The Associate Provost informs the Office of the Registrar that the course has been revalidated.
Doctoral Degree

Doctoral candidates are allowed no more than five years in which to complete the remaining requirements of their program after being admitted to doctoral candidacy. The rationale for this limit is to insure that students earning a doctoral degree have current knowledge (no more than five years old) in their field. In the event a student fails to complete the doctorate within five years after admission to candidacy (calculated from the beginning of the academic term following admission to candidacy), an extension may be requested. The extension may be requested before or after the candidacy period expires, but only after the student repeats the program’s examination for admission to candidacy or an alternate procedure (approved by the student’s college or school dean or designee) for assessing the student’s academic competence and current knowledge in their field of study. If appropriate, the student may be expected to retake or revalidate courses (using the procedure described for master’s students) in order to insure that the student’s subject knowledge is up-to-date. A request for an extension of time in order to complete degree requirements must be submitted by the student’s college or school dean or designee to the Associate Provost for Graduate Academic Affairs and must include the following:

- A statement documenting the circumstances that justify the request. Include information about any leaves of absence approved for the student.
- A description of the procedures followed to insure the student’s academic competence and up-to-date knowledge in the field of study (repetition of the admission to candidacy examination or alternate procedure).
- A timeline by which the student is expected to complete remaining degree requirements, including a final deadline by which all degree requirements must be completed.
- Evidence of endorsement of the request from the student’s advisory committee and the office of the dean.

COMMITTEES

In this section:

- General Requirements for All Graduate Committees
- Master’s Thesis Committees
- Doctoral Dissertation Committees

General Requirements for All Graduate Committees

The majority of the members of any graduate thesis or dissertation committee must be regular members of the graduate faculty, including the chair of the committee. No more than one person may be a nonmember of the graduate faculty. No family member may serve on the graduate committee of his or her relative. All graduate thesis and dissertation committees are subject to the approval of the chairperson or designee of the department/division and the dean or designee of the college or school. Once a graduate thesis or dissertation committee has been officially established, it will not be necessary to alter it if the graduate faculty status of a member of the committee is downgraded. Any changes in the membership of a graduate thesis or dissertation committee require approval of the dean or designee of the college or school. Depending on circumstances and the judgment of the dean or designee, replacement of the chair may require that activities already completed (such as a prospectus approval meeting) be repeated.

Membership of graduate committees other than thesis or dissertation committees are subject to the rules of individual programs. It is recommended that such committees include a majority of graduate faculty members (regular or associate).

Master’s Thesis Committees

Master’s thesis committees consist of no fewer than three members. It is recommended that at least one member of the committee be from outside the student’s department.

Doctoral Dissertation Committees

Doctoral dissertation committees consist of no fewer than five members. At least one member of the committee must be from a department other than the one in which the student is seeking a degree.

REQUIREMENTS

In this section:

- Master’s Degree Requirements
- Doctoral Degree Requirements
- Foreign Language Competency
- Multiple Graduate Degrees
- Previous Courses and Credits
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**Master’s Degree Requirements**

Students in a master’s program must complete a minimum of 30 total credits, of which at least 24 credits must be coursework other than research, thesis, project, internship, etc. credits. Many programs set requirements for higher numbers of coursework credits to earn the master’s degree. Some, but not all, master’s programs require completion of a thesis.

**Doctoral Degree Requirements**

The doctorate is a research or performance degree and does not depend on the accumulation of credit hours. The three requirements of the degree are admission to candidacy, residency, and completion and defense of a dissertation. The program of doctoral study is planned with the student’s graduate advisor and committee to combine any or all of the following: graduate courses of instruction, special seminars, independent study, supervised research, and supervised training designed to promote a broad and systematic knowledge of the major field and to prepare the student to complete the requirements for admission to candidacy and to successfully complete the dissertation.

**ADMISSION TO DOCTORAL CANDIDACY**

Admission to graduate study and enrollment in graduate courses do not in themselves imply acceptance of the student as a candidate for a doctoral degree. Admission to doctoral candidacy is accomplished only by satisfactorily passing a candidacy examination (which may have a different label in different programs) and by meeting other requirements specified by the program. The doctoral student’s competency is generally assessed and verified through a candidacy examination in a reasonable period of time after acceptance into a program. Because the candidacy examination attests to the academic competence of the student and is the formal mechanism for admitting the student to candidacy, it cannot precede the conferring of the degree by too long a period of time (refer to the section on time limits for the doctoral degree).

The candidacy examination typically assesses the student’s knowledge of the important issues in their field of study, as well as their ability to engage in research. The examination is intended to determine whether the student has the academic competence to undertake independent research in the discipline and to insure that the student possesses a thorough grasp of the fields outlined in the plan of study. The exam is generally taken after a student has completed the major portion of the program course requirements and other program-specific requirements (such as the acceptance of a prospectus, a grant exercise, or other forms of student evaluation).

Candidacy examinations are evaluated by a faculty examining committee consisting of at least three members. If two members vote to fail the student, all or part of the candidacy examination must be repeated. Academic tradition does not allow a candidacy examination to be administered more than three times; many programs limit administration to two times.

**RESIDENCY**

Doctoral education involves many learning experiences that take place outside the formal classroom setting. These involve observing and participating in activities conducted by the graduate faculty, using departmental and University libraries, attending lectures presented by visiting scholars, informally debating other students, and similar activities. To insure that graduate students experience this kind of informal learning, doctoral programs at WVU generally require at least two semesters in residence on campus. However, an individual student or graduate committee may propose an alternative plan by which the student can gain equivalent educational experience. This plan must be approved by the college or school dean or designee.

**Foreign Language Competency**

Competence in one or more foreign languages may be a requirement in some graduate degree programs. The faculty in the program specifies the language or languages and the level of competence to be demonstrated. Students should contact their graduate program coordinator or chair for more information.

**Multiple Graduate Degrees**

University policy permits students to obtain more than one graduate degree. Except in the case of some approved dual master’s degree programs, a separate application is required for each program. Each application must be accompanied by payment of a nonrefundable application fee.

A student desiring to obtain more than one graduate degree with the same degree conferral date may simultaneously apply up to twelve credit hours to more than one graduate degree program. Individual graduate units may allow a smaller maximum number of shared credit hours to be applied to their program as a general rule and may determine which courses and credits may or may not be applied to their program by an individual student. The student must complete all specific program requirements for each degree.

A student desiring to obtain a subsequent graduate degree after conferral of another WVU graduate degree may apply up to twelve credit hours earned prior to the conferral of the prior degree to the subsequent degree. Individual graduate units may allow a smaller maximum number of prior credit hours to be applied to their program as a general rule and may determine which courses and credits may or may not be applied to their program by an individual student. The student must complete all specific program requirements for the subsequent graduate degree.
Previous Courses and Credits

Graduate programs may accept up to 12 credits from another institution as transfer graduate credit by requesting that the Office of the Registrar post the transfer credits to the student’s record. Individual graduate units may have lower limits. Non-degree graduate students are not permitted to transfer credit to WVU from another institution.

Up to 15 credits of graduate course work completed at WVU through the senior petition process (see the Undergraduate Catalog) may be applied to graduate program requirements.

Individual graduate units may allow a smaller maximum number of previously earned credit hours to be applied to their program as a general rule and may determine which courses and credits may or may not be applied to their program by an individual student.

GPA Standards

A minimum GPA of 2.75 is required for graduation. Individual academic units may designate a higher GPA or other academic standards required for students to graduate.

Graduation

Students anticipating completion of all degree requirements by the end of a term must complete an Application for Graduation (see registrar.wvu.edu/current_students) by the posted deadline for that term. The candidate must complete all requirements by posted deadlines. If the degree is not earned during that term, the student must submit a new Application for Graduation by the posted deadline for the term in which completion is again anticipated.

Colleges and schools are responsible for certifying that master’s and doctoral students meet the minimum requirements of the University as well as any additional college or school requirements.

THESES & DISSERTATIONS

In this section:

- Theses and Dissertations
- Defense
- Submission

Theses and Dissertations

Many master’s degrees and all research doctoral degrees require the completion of a research project under the direction of the faculty of the University on some topic in the field of the major subject. The thesis must present the results of the master’s degree candidate’s investigation. The dissertation must present the results of the candidate’s individual investigation and must embody a definite contribution to knowledge. Regulations concerning the constitution of thesis and dissertation committees are in the section on graduate committees.

Defense

After the thesis or dissertation committee has tentatively approved the student’s written thesis or dissertation, the final defense can be scheduled. This defense is usually held in the term in which all other requirements for the degree are to be met. At the option of the faculty responsible for doctoral degree programs, a comprehensive final written examination also may be required of doctoral students.

The student’s committee chairperson must obtain approval of the time, place, and committee members for the defense from the college or school dean or designee at least three weeks before the defense date. All dissertation defenses are open to the public and the university community.

The student cannot be considered as having satisfactorily passed their defense if there is more than one unfavorable vote among members of the committee. Results of each defense must be reported to the college or school dean or designee within twenty-four hours. If the defense is not passed, a repeat of the defense may not be scheduled without approval by the college or school dean or designee.

The student and all committee members are expected to be physically present for a defense. In extraordinary circumstances, and only with the approval of the college or school dean or designee, an individual may attend by audio or videoconference (with videoconferencing preferred). Anyone attending the defense electronically must remain available during the entire time of the defense.

In extraordinary circumstances, the dean or designee may permit another person to substitute for one of the committee members during the defense, provided that the original committee member was not the chair. There can be no substitute for the chair. Only one substitute is allowed, and the request for a substitute must be made in writing to the dean or designee prior to the examination. The request for a substitute should be signed by the committee chair, the student, and both the original member (if available) and the substitute member. A substitute committee member must have the same or higher graduate faculty status as the original committee member and represent the same academic discipline or specialization. If a substitute committee member attends the defense, the substitute signs the shuttle sheet; however, the original committee member should provide written comments to the
student on the thesis or dissertation and sign the Thesis and Dissertation Signature Form required for submission of the document to the University Libraries.

**Submission**

Once approved by a student’s graduate committee, the final version of all WVU theses and dissertations must be submitted electronically through the University Libraries. Information about formatting, submission, and approval of electronic theses and dissertations is available at thesis.wvu.edu.