

# Degree Regulations

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Information in the "Degree Regulations" section applies to all master's degrees and to doctoral degrees (Ph.D., Ed. D. etc.) that require a dissertation or similar terminal project. Professional doctoral degrees have separate guidelines. See individual program listings.

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## Statement on Awarding Degrees

All degrees are conferred by the WVU Board of Governors as recommended by the faculties of the various colleges and schools. A degree is granted at the end of the semester or summer term in which a student completes all the requirements for that degree, provided the student has submitted an application for graduation at his or her major department's academic dean's office and the dean has certified completion of all degree requirements.

A student becomes eligible to graduate when he or she completes the requirements of the University, college or school, and major degree program according to the Graduate Catalog in effect at the time the student first entered WVU, although these requirements are subject to change at any time with reasonable notice provided to students. With the consent of the student's advisor and dean, a student may choose to meet the conditions published in a later catalog. If a student entered WVU more than seven years previously, the student must complete the requirements in a catalog that is no more than seven years old.

Students must observe any program changes that are enacted by the West Virginia University Graduate Council, West Virginia University Faculty Senate, West Virginia University Board of Governors, West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, or by local, state, or federal law.

WVU will not issue a diploma or a transcript to any student until payment of all tuition, fees, and other indebtedness to any unit of the University is made.

## In this section:

- Master's Degree (p. 1)
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## 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 master's degree requirements must be satisfactorily completed within a period of eight years immediately preceding the conferring of the degree. The rationale for this limit is to ensure that students earning a master's degree have current knowledge (no more than eight years) in their field. Courses completed in the same term as degree conferral (fall, spring, summer) eight years previously are considered to fall within the eight-year limit (for example, a course completed in fall 2008 would fall within the limit for fall 2016 degree conferral). 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. Admission to doctoral candidacy must occur at least one semester prior to graduation, and normally is expected to precede work on the dissertation (check program guidelines for exceptions to this expectation).

In the event a student anticipates failing 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 of up to 12 months may be requested. Only one extension is allowed. Once the initial candidacy period expires, a student will be changed to non-degree status and must be readmitted to the program before an extension can be requested. Prior to requesting an extension, the student must repeat 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, including 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. The extension may not exceed 12 months.
- Evidence of endorsement of the request from the student's advisory committee and the office of the dean.

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- Master's Degree Requirements (p. 2)
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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 solely on the accumulation of credit hours. The requirements of the degree are admission to candidacy, residency, completion of the program of doctoral study (plan of study ([http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/advising\\_and\\_evaluation/#Plan\\_of\\_Study](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/advising_and_evaluation/#Plan_of_Study))), and completion and defense of a 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. Admission to doctoral candidacy must occur at least one semester prior to graduation, and normally is expected to precede work on the dissertation (check program guidelines for exceptions to this expectation).

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 ([http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree\\_regulations/#timelimitstext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/#timelimitstext))).

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 ensure 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 submitted in writing, approved by the college or school dean or designee, and placed in the student's program file.

## PROGRAM OF DOCTORAL STUDY ( PLAN OF STUDY ([HTTP://CATALOG.WVU.EDU/GRADUATE/ADVISINGCOURSESEGREES/ADVISING\\_AND\\_EVALUATION/#ADVISINGTEXT](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/advising_and_evaluation/#advisingtext)))

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.

## 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.

## GPA Standards

A minimum GPA of 2.75 based on all courses taken while a graduate student (including undergraduate level courses) or transferred to a student's graduate transcript is required for conferral of a degree (although some professional programs use different grading systems and standards; see individual listings). Individual academic units may designate a higher GPA or other academic standards required for students to receive a degree.

A minimum GPA of 2.75 based on courses applied to a certificate is required for the award of a certificate. Some certificates may have higher or additional standards.

## 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](http://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.

Participation in commencement ceremonies is a public recognition of students' academic efforts and accomplishments, but does not imply that all degree requirements have been met. Students may be allowed to participate in commencement ceremonies ("walk") if the college/school has sufficient evidence that the student is highly likely to complete all degree requirements in the academic term following the commencement ceremony. The dean may allow

graduate students to be hooded if they have successfully defended the thesis or dissertation work, even if all follow-up work has not yet been completed, as long as the dean believes that the work will be completed in the academic term following the commencement ceremony. Students should be hooded by an individual who holds the same or higher degree as that being awarded. Other individuals may hood or assist with hooding only if approved by the dean of the student's college or school.

## Diploma Retention Policy

Diplomas retained by or returned to the Office of the University Registrar will be held for two years. This includes diplomas that are retained in the office for financial holds, have been returned to sender, or shipped to the office for pick up. After two years of the conferral date, any request for a diploma by the student will incur fees and fall under all policies associated with ordering a replacement diploma.

### In this section:

- General Requirements for All Graduate Committees (p. 4)
- Master's Thesis Committees (p. 4)
- Doctoral Dissertation Committees (p. 4)

## 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. Co-chairs of committees are allowed, but at least one of the co-chairs must be a regular member of the graduate faculty. No more than one committee member may be a nonmember of the graduate faculty. No family member may serve on the graduate committee of his or her relative. Committee members who are not graduate faculty members normally are expected to hold the same or higher degree (or equivalent professional experience) as that sought by the student. All graduate thesis and dissertation committees are subject to the approval of the chairperson/director or designee of the department/or program 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. However, at the time of the defense, the chair or at least one co-chair must be a current WVU faculty member. 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/program.

## Doctoral Dissertation Committees

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

### In this section:

- Theses and Dissertations (p. 4)
- Defense (p. 4)
- Submission (p. 5)

## 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 doctoral 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. ([http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree\\_regulations/#committeestext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/#committeestext))

## 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 and must be posted on the University calendar by the college or school dean or designee.

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 attend the defense as a substitute for one of the committee members, provided that the original committee member was not the chair. There can be no substitute at the defense for the chair. Only one substitute at the defense is allowed, and the request for a substitute must be made in writing to the dean or designee prior to the defense. The request for a substitute at the defense 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. This paragraph applies only to a substitution for a committee member at the defense; see the section on General Requirements for All Graduate Committees ([http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree\\_regulations/#committeestext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/#committeestext)) for information on changing the formal membership of a committee.

## **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](http://thesis.wvu.edu).