

# Degree Regulations

---

## 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 and the Dean has certified completion of all degree requirements.

Students become eligible to graduate when they complete the requirements of the University, college or school, and major degree program according to the Undergraduate or Graduate/Professional Catalog in effect at the time they 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 7 years previously, the student must complete the requirements in a catalog that is no more than 7 years old.

Students must comply with any program changes that are enacted by the West Virginia University Graduate Council, West Virginia University Faculty Senate, West Virginia University Board of Governors, 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.

## HONORARY DIPLOMAS AWARDED POSTHUMOUSLY

West Virginia University honors the memory of deceased students who did not have the opportunity to complete their degree by awarding a posthumous honorary diploma. After approval of the Dean of the student's college, the diploma can be awarded to a student who has made progress toward a WVU degree.

## Time Limits

### IN THIS SECTION:

- Master's Degree (p. 1)
- Doctoral Degree (p. 1)
- Professional Degrees (p. 2)

## 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 students who exceed eight years following their term of admission are required to apply for readmission to the University and their graduate program.

Graduate coursework used to meet master's degree requirements must be satisfactorily completed within a period of eight years immediately preceding the conferring of the degree to ensure that students earning a master's degree have current knowledge 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 (e.g., a course completed in fall 2017 would fall within the limit for fall 2025 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 be required to complete specific activities, such as repeating all or some of the course or completing a set of readings.
- The instructor must assess the student's knowledge of course material through a written or oral examination, a paper, a project, or some other assessment and determine 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 of support describing the revalidation process and assessment results 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 to ensure that students earning a doctoral degree have current knowledge in their field. Admission to doctoral candidacy is normally expected to precede work on the dissertation (check program guidelines for exceptions to this expectation).

The five-year time limit begins with the start of the semester following the completion of a program's requirements for doctoral candidacy. Each student will be assigned the first full semester after they have completed their program's requirement to become a doctoral candidate (e.g. passing an exam,

being voted to candidacy, successfully defending a proposal or a different activity) as their semester of admission to candidacy. The semester of admission is used to calculate the five-year time limit, or deadline, for completing all graduation requirements.

Once a student has been assigned a semester of admission to doctoral candidacy, they must meet all graduation requirements no later than the term that precedes their deadline in five years' time. For example:

- A student who fulfills all requirements for doctoral candidacy in Fall of 2024 will have Spring 2025 as their semester of admission to candidacy. Their deadline must precede the Spring 2030 semester. At the latest, they must meet the graduation deadlines of Fall 2029.
- A student who fulfills all requirements for doctoral candidacy in Spring 2025 will have Fall of 2025 as their semester of admission to candidacy. Their deadline must precede the Fall 2030 semester. At the latest, they must meet the graduation deadlines of Summer 2030.
- A student who fulfills all requirements for doctoral candidacy in Summer of 2025 will have Fall 2025 as their semester of admission to candidacy. Their deadline must precede the Fall 2030 semester. At the latest, they must meet the graduation deadlines of Summer 2030.

Completion of the requirements for admission to doctoral candidacy must precede the semester of graduation.

In the event a student anticipates failing to complete the doctorate within five years after admission to candidacy, an extension of up to 12 months may be requested. Prior to requesting an extension, the student must repeat the program's candidacy examination or an alternate procedure (approved by the 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 ensure 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 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 ensure the student's academic competence and up-to-date knowledge in the field of study (repetition of the 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.

If 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.

## PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

Professional degree programs may set their own time limits for completion.

### In this section:

- GPA Standards (p. 2)
- Master's Degree Requirements (p. 2)
- Doctoral Degree Requirements (p. 2)

## GPA Standards

A minimum GPA of 2.75 based on all courses taken while a graduate student (including undergraduate level courses) 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.

## Master's Degree Requirements

Students in a master's program must complete a 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)) with a minimum of 30 total credits, of which at least 24 credits must be coursework other than research, thesis, project, internship, etc. 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 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 certain label in different programs) and by meeting other requirements specified by the 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 more than 5 years (refer to the section on time limits for the doctoral degree ([http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree\\_regulations/#timelimittext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/#timelimittext))).

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 ensure 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 or more members vote to fail the student, all or part of the candidacy examination must be repeated. A candidacy examination may not 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/advisingcoursesdegrees/advising\\_and\\_evaluation/#advisingtext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/advising_and_evaluation/#advisingtext))

The program of doctoral study ("plan of 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.

## PROFESSIONAL DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

Professional program degree requirements are determined by the program, and often are determined or guided by accreditation standards.

## Committees

### In this section:

- General Requirements for All Graduate Committees (p. 3)
- Master's Thesis Committees (p. 4)
- Doctoral Dissertation Committees (p. 4)

## General Requirements for All Graduate Committees

The chair of the graduate thesis or dissertation committee must be a regular member of the graduate faculty and a current WVU faculty member at the time of the defense. Co-chairs of committees are allowed, but at least one of the co-chairs must be a regular member of the graduate faculty and at least one of the co-chairs must be a current WVU faculty member at the time of the defense. The committee may include a nonmember of the graduate faculty, and associate members of the graduate faculty, as long as there is no more than one nonmember, and the nonmember and associate members together do not constitute the majority of the committee (i.e., the majority of the committee must be regular members 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 are normally 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 chair/director or designee of the department/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 membership role changes. 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 is subject to the rules of individual programs. It is recommended that such committees include a majority of graduate faculty members (regular or associate). The graduate faculty guidelines (<https://graduateeducation.wvu.edu/graduate-council/graduate-faculty-information/graduate-faculty-guidelines/>) can be found on the Graduate Education and Life webpage under the Graduate Faculty Information tab.

## 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. Programs may set their own standards for these "external" committee members. Qualified individuals from outside WVU are allowable, as long as the general requirements for committee membership are followed.

### 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 Committees section of this catalog (p. 3).

## DEFENSE

Only after the thesis or dissertation committee has tentatively approved the student's written thesis or dissertation, can the final defense be scheduled. If ensuring committee participation requires scheduling a defense further in advance, the committee must give its tentative approval of the document no less than two-weeks prior to the defense. Otherwise, the defense should not proceed. The defense is usually held in the term in which all other requirements for the degree are to be met. At the discretion 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 two 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. All committee members, including the chair, are considered equal voting members. Results of each defense must be reported to the college or school dean or designee within two business days. If the defense is not passed, a repeat of the defense may be scheduled only with approval from the college/school dean or designee.

The student and all committee members are normally expected to be physically present for a defense, but virtual participation in defense proceedings is permitted (with videoconferencing preferred). The mode of participation must be planned in advance and provided when the defense is scheduled. If a member needs to change their mode of participation after the defense is scheduled, the alteration should be recorded with the documentation of the defense results. Anyone attending the defense electronically must remain available and able to communicate 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 membership role 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 form indicating whether the student passed or failed the defense. 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/#committeetext](http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/advisingcoursesdegrees/degree_regulations/#committeetext)) 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 Electronic Theses and Dissertations (<https://etd.lib.wvu.edu/>) website. Information about formatting, submission, and approval of electronic theses and dissertations is provided at this website.

## IN THIS SECTION:

- Graduation (p. 5)
- Diploma Retention Policy (p. 5)

## GRADUATION

Students anticipating completion of all degree requirements by the end of a term must submit an Application for Graduation by the posted deadline for that term. The candidate must then 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. Information can be found on the Graduation & Diploma tab on the Office of the University Registrar website (<https://registrar.wvu.edu/graduation-diploma/>).

Colleges and schools are responsible for certifying that certificate, master's, doctoral, and professional 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 necessarily imply that all degree requirements have been met. Students who have completed all requirements for their degree may participate even if final degree certification is still pending at the time of the ceremony. The dean of the relevant college/school determines which students may participate in their college/school's commencement ceremonies.

In some cases, a student who is likely to complete all degree requirements in the academic term following the commencement ceremony *may* be allowed to participate with the dean's permission. However, when a ceremony for a certain degree includes hooding, only candidates for those degrees who have successfully defended their thesis or dissertation can participate in the ceremony. The dean may allow graduate students to participate and 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 only be held for a period of two years from the date of degree conferral. This includes diplomas that are retained in the office for financial holds, that have been returned to sender. After two years, any request for a diploma by the student will incur fees and fall under all policies associated with ordering a replacement diploma.