Graduate Curriculum and Programs Policy

Abstract

This policy incorporates the policies and principles by which graduate curriculum should be developed and maintained.

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History

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- S20-126 Graduate Paired Courses Policy
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- S06-238 Graduate Program Quality and Sustainability, Indicators and Standards

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Table of Contents

1. Elements of Graduate Curriculum
2. Requirements for Graduate and Post Baccalaureate Degree Programs (degree programs, graduate certificates, doctoral programs)
   1. Culminating Experience (CE) requirements
2. Paired Courses
3. Independent Studies courses
4. Quality Standards
5. Graduate Faculty
6. San Francisco State Scholars Programs (FastTrack)

Policy

**Elements of Graduate Curriculum**

The Division of Graduate Studies provides guidance and implementation procedures for all elements of the Graduate Curriculum, including deadlines for the Graduate Council review of graduate curricular proposals and consultation with graduate programs on campus.

**Requirements for Graduate and Post Baccalaureate Degree Programs**

The requirements for graduate and post baccalaureate degree programs include those for degree programs, graduate certificates, and doctoral programs.

The minimum number of credit units for each type of degree program is:

- Master's degrees: 30 units
- Master of Fine Arts: 60 units
- Graduate certificate: 9 units
- Doctoral degrees: 60 units

**Interdisciplinary Master’s Degrees**

A degree in Interdisciplinary Studies is offered as a Master of Arts and a Master of Science to meet the unique needs and interests of students that cannot be met in a reasonable manner by one of the regularly offered graduate degree programs at San Francisco State University. Students pursuing an Interdisciplinary Studies program must develop a 30-36 unit plan of study that draws on courses from multiple disciplines with the intent to integrate the concepts, perspectives, and methodologies of those disciplines into a focused, central theme which may lead to new ways of looking at a subject, issue, or problem. Usually, courses must be selected from three departments bridging at least two colleges within the University.

The courses to be applied toward the major must be carefully selected for their interrelatedness and general applicability to the objectives of the unique major being proposed. Only major themes that can be supported with integrity by existing coursework and faculty expertise will be approved. Determination of degree designation as an M.S. or M.A. is the decision of the major advisor and the dean of Graduate Studies. This degree cannot be used to meet credential or licensing requirements. Students may not use courses from fields of study, such as nursing, physical therapy, or counseling which lead to licensure or certification unless a single course is specifically authorized by the department.

**Culminating Experience (CE) requirements**

The types of Culminating Experience options to meet degree requirements are determined by the programs with approval of the Division of Graduate Studies. Typical Culminating Experience options are:

Seminar: Culminating Experience Seminar (890)

The 890 culminating experience course is not available for most programs. Check the department/program Bulletin information or handbook. The seminar should require a culminating paper, presentation, or exam. This requirement must show evidence of the application of knowledge and techniques learned in the field of study. This course requires
additional supervision by the CE faculty. See the academic program handbook for information. Most departments or programs provide manuals or information about major-specific requirements. A Report of Completion form must be filed in Graduate Studies by the deadline date stated in the University calendar.

Supervised Field Internships (892)

A supervised field internship involves the placement of the student in a work experience situation culminating in a written report addressing the significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion. An oral defense of the report may be required by the department. A Report of Completion form must be filed in Graduate Studies by the deadline date stated in the University calendar.

Written Creative Work (893)

This Culminating Experience requirement is restricted to graduate students in the Creative Writing program and may consist of a short story, novel, series of poems, and/or play in which students demonstrate a unique style of writing. An annotation page must be completed and filed as a part of the final work. Students completing a written creative work should review and follow the Guidelines for Formatting and Submitting Written Creative Works. The written creative work is a published product and will be maintained on file in the library. Students must obtain a Receipt for Thesis or Written Creative Work form in Graduate Studies by the deadline date stated in the University calendar. Formatting of the written creative work must be reviewed by Graduate Studies in advance of the deadline so any adjustments in formatting can be made by the final date of submission for the graduating term.

Creative Work Project (894)

This Culminating Experience may be a musical composition, a group of paintings, a performance, a film, a learning module, a design project, or another creative endeavor by an individual student, as specified by the program. A Report of Completion form must be filed in Graduate Studies by the deadline date stated in the University calendar.

These projects must be described in a written document that summarizes the project’s significance, objectives, creative methodology, and a conclusion. An oral defense of the project may be required. The written portion of the Creative Work Project will be maintained on file electronically in the institutional repository of the University Library.

Field Study or Applied Research Project (895)

This Culminating Experience is a field study or research project by an individual student that incorporates the application of knowledge and techniques acquired in the student’s program of study. The field study or research project must be described in a written document which includes the project’s significance, objectives, methodology, and a conclusion. With faculty permission, the finished document may be formatted in the manner of a discipline-specific journal ready for publication.

An oral defense of the project may be required. A Report of Completion form must be filed in Graduate Studies by the deadline date stated in the University calendar.

Comprehensive Examination (896EXM)

The comprehensive examination is a written examination that is prepared and administered by the major department so students can demonstrate their ability to integrate the content knowledge, independent thinking, and critical analysis, and as may be appropriate, the accuracy of documentation. In most disciplines, students must also enroll in 896EXM (0 units), which is the marker that informs Graduate Studies that the comprehensive examination has been successfully satisfied. The results of the examination (pass or fail) must be reported to the Division of Graduate Studies on a Report of Completion form by the deadline date indicated in the University calendar.

Thesis (898)/Dissertation (998)

A thesis/dissertation is the written product of an original study by an individual student. It demonstrates clarity of purpose, critical and independent thinking, and accurate and thorough documentation. An oral or written defense of the thesis/dissertation may be required. Students completing a thesis/dissertation should review and follow the Guidelines for Formatting and Submitting a Master’s Thesis found on the Graduate Studies website. Thesis and dissertation formatting must be reviewed by the Division of Graduate Studies in advance of the deadline so any adjustments in formatting can be made by the final date of submission for the graduating term. The thesis/dissertation will be maintained on file electronically in the institutional repository of the University Library. Students must file a thesis/dissertation receipt form in Graduate Studies by the deadline date stated in the University calendar.

Joint/Group Culminating Experience Projects and Theses

The Culminating Experience is usually the expression of a single student’s work – a thesis (898), a dissertation (998), and a written creative work (893) must have a single author; however, the University recognizes that there are some circumstances that warrant joint/group projects. At no time will more than three students be able to submit a joint/group project.
Each student participating in the joint/group project must have separate responsibilities, and these must be reviewed, endorsed, and subsequently evaluated by the students’ Culminating Experience committee members. Each student must complete a separate Culminating Experience Proposal, but they must be submitted jointly for review. Each proposal must have an attachment that includes:

- A list of the separate research areas/responsibilities of each student.
- A statement of the identifiable written component of the work to be completed by each student.
- The signatures of each student and the committee chair.

A Joint Project Statement form is available on the Graduate Studies website.

If human or animal research is involved, students may submit one set of the research protocol documents but must list all participating students on the Protocol Approval Form.

Human and Animal Protections Review Requirement

Any research conducted by a student that involves humans, vertebrate animals, or biological specimens (e.g., tissues, stem cells/cell lines, blood) requires approval at SF State, even though that research may have been approved at another institution and/or takes place at another location. Approved protocols from another institution must be approved and registered with the Office of Human and Animal Protections (HAP). There are no exceptions. A student whose work involves humans, vertebrate animals, or biological specimens (e.g., tissues, stem cells/cell lines, blood) is not permitted to begin data collection without the explicit approval of the Division of Graduate Studies. Before beginning any research with humans, vertebrate animals, or biological specimens (e.g., tissues, stem cells/cell lines, blood), students must review the Human and Animal Protections (Office of Research and Sponsored Programs/HAP) website for institutional regulations. This is a federal requirement. If you are uncertain if your research involves human or animal subjects complete an Application for Determination of Exemption found on the HAP website.

Paired Courses

SF State programs offering graduate degrees must commit the resources needed for graduate education. Under limited circumstances, chairs and college deans may offer paired listed courses. A paired course is a graduate course paired with an undergraduate course covering similar content. The paired course is taught by the same instructor, on the same days and times, and in the same class environment.

Policy

All paired courses will be reviewed through the Academic Program Review process. To ensure integrity of the graduate degree, approval to offer a paired course is subject to the following conditions:

- Faculty teaching the paired course must be eligible to teach in the graduate program, as defined in the Bulletin.
- The undergraduate course in the pair must be an upper division course. General education and GWAR courses may not be paired with graduate level courses.
- Undergraduate students must have upper division status and have a GPA of at least 3.0 or consent of instructor.
- To facilitate graduate-level discourse, paired courses should be designed as graduate courses.
- To facilitate graduate-level discourse graduate student seats in the graduate paired courses would ideally exceed undergraduate seats.
- Thesis, creative work, internship, research, and special study courses may not be used as part of a pairs arrangement.

Credit earned in the undergraduate level of a pair and used for the undergraduate degree may not be counted toward a subsequent graduate degree.

To ensure rigor in graduate paired courses, the following steps must be taken:

- When a new paired course is proposed, the proposal must include a justification for including the paired course, syllabi for both the undergraduate and the graduate sections of the course, and student learning outcomes for both the undergraduate and graduate sections of the course. To be approved, the graduate portion of the pair must clearly exhibit it has the rigor expected of a graduate course.
- When a new graduate degree or certificate is proposed that includes paired courses, the proposal must include a justification for including the paired course, syllabi for both the undergraduate and the graduate sections of the course, and student learning outcomes for both the undergraduate and graduate sections of the course. To be approved, the graduate portion of any paired course must clearly exhibit the rigor expected of a graduate course.
- Beginning with the 8th cycle of Academic Program Review, all degree self- studies must include the syllabi and student learning outcomes for both the undergraduate and graduate sections of any paired course in the curriculum, along with a description and evaluation from the department on how the graduate portion of the paired courses are being implemented and how graduate-level discourse and graduate-level experience for graduate students in those courses are being maintained. The Academic Program Review Committee should include the review of the
implementation of paired courses and of the experience of graduate students within paired courses as part of its review of each degree program.

As part of the Academic Program Review process, graduate paired courses may be continued for reasons such as:

- The university budget prevents programs from offering a full complement of graduate elective courses that lead to the degree.
- The university budget prevents programs from offering a full complement of graduate elective courses that lead to the degree.
- The programs requesting to offer the course are strategically maintained by the college dean at low admission and enrollment levels.
- The program is new and in the development stage of generating enrollment.
- Electives are taught in paired format to address emerging information in the discipline, but the graduate course does not meet the course enrollment expectations set by the university.

All proposals for the pairing of courses, as well as any exceptions to the provisions of this policy, shall be reviewed by the Graduate and Undergraduate Deans and the Graduate Council. As with all courses of the University, the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs and/or designees shall have the responsibility for final approval.

It shall be the shared responsibility of the Graduate Dean, Undergraduate Dean, Graduate Council, and the departments offering the paired courses to ensure that the above-stated conditions are satisfied and that, in all instances, use of paired courses preserves or enhances the quality of both graduate and undergraduate programs of the University.

Academic Planning is responsible for designing processes to implement the portion of this policy concerning paired courses.

**Independent Studies Courses**

Independent Study Courses

Most graduate programs have an 899 Independent Study course. Typically, this is an intensive study of an identified problem or subject that is carefully planned in advance, developed, and completed under the direction of a tenured/tenure-track faculty member (see Faculty Teaching in Graduate Programs in the *Bulletin*).

While each department may establish specific criteria for enrollment in an 899, the following are basic requirements and guidelines:

- The independent study is usually of a research or creative nature.
- The student must have a cumulative post-baccalaureate GPA of 3.25 or better.
- An independent study course is available only to students who have already completed coursework in the department and is restricted to conditionally classified or classified graduate students in the program. In unusual cases, a student in a complementary major may enroll in an 899 in another department, provided there is a clear association with the student’s degree plan.
- Prior to enrollment in the course, the student, with the support of the faculty member, must develop a written plan of study detailing the focus of the independent study, the assignments required, and the manner of assessment of the work completed in the form of a project, examination, or performance.
- The course may not be used to replace required program-specified Advancement to Candidacy (ATC) core courses or to satisfy additional coursework requirements required as a consequence of a seven-year time extension to complete requirements for a master’s degree.

**Quality Standards**

(previously from policy S06-238: Graduate Program Quality & Sustainability, Indicators & Standards Indicators and
Standards of Graduate Program Quality and Sustainability. All units with graduate programs will be expected to demonstrate whether University-wide and program-specific indicators and standards of program sustainability and quality are being met. Indicators are areas of evaluation used to identify and determine the quality and sustainability of a university, department or program. Standards are those levels of performance towards which the university, department or program seeks to strive.

Units with graduate programs that do not meet a specific University-wide standard will need to explain how they are working towards the standard or why these normative expectations are not applicable to their particular degree program. These explanations and justifications should be included in the department or program’s self-study to the APRC.

If a program does not meet any particular criterion, it will not necessarily be interpreted as a statement about the program’s quality or sustainability. Instead, this should provide an opportunity for the program’s faculty and external reviewers to explain program-specific circumstances and/or to discuss actions that are being or can be taken for program improvement, including, if necessary, a demonstrable need for the investment of additional resources. The APRC will consider all explanations and justifications and compose a concluding action memorandum that either approves relevant exceptions or requires that the unit work toward meeting the standards.

Based on the content of the concluding action memorandum, departments and programs are encouraged to work in collaboration with deans and university administrators to accomplish the goals of the memorandum and to meet the resource needs outlined in the memorandum.

The specific indicators of program sustainability and quality set forth in this policy are divided into two general categories. The intent of the two separate categories is to establish standards—either University-wide or program-specific—against which to measure program quality and sustainability.

**Category A** in which the Academic Senate specifies the indicators and sets the expected minimum University-wide standards and

**Category B** in which the Academic Senate specifies the indicators and requires the program to set the expected minimum program-specific standards

Such discussion and explanation will provide APRC with the necessary information to produce a well-informed action memorandum at the conclusion of the review process.

**Category A.**

**University-Wide Indicators and Standards of Graduate Program Quality and Sustainability**

1. **Admission requirements:**

Admission requirements are set out in S21-294: Graduate Admissions Policy and in subsequent procedures laid out by the Graduate Division.

2. **Program requirements:**

These standards reduce the possibility of subjective decision-making and creates an atmosphere where all can work together towards a common goal—the excellence of our graduate programs. Excellence in our graduate programs is to be determined through multiple measures rather than relying upon any one indicator of achievement. No single measure should be used to judge the quality or sustainability of a program. Instead, a composite pattern of information and achievements should be used to inform any judgment of program quality or sustainability.

1. Number of course offerings per semester: A minimum of two graduate-level courses (exclusive of supervisory and independent study courses)
2. Frequency of course offerings: Courses required for graduation shall be offered at least once every two years.
3. Path to graduation: Programs shall prepare and publicize course schedules that clearly state a path to graduation that enables students to graduate within five years.
4. Advancement to Candidacy (ATC) Requirements: Advancement to Candidacy (ATC) requirements are laid out in S21-295: Policy on Requirements for Graduate Students.
5. Class size: A program’s typical graduate class size should be determined by pedagogical factors, but ideally should be between 8 and 30. Seminar classes should be maintained at no more than 15 and no less than 5.
6. Number of graduates: The average number of students graduating from a degree program or going on to a doctoral program in a related field per year over a five-year period shall be at least five.

3. Faculty requirements:

1. Number of faculty in graduate programs: Each graduate program shall have a minimum of two tenure/tenure track faculty, or affiliated tenure/tenure track faculty, holding a terminal degree or equivalent and a full-time faculty member serving as Graduate Coordinator. Colleges and departments should monitor, recognize and value the work and contributions of graduate coordinators.

2. Faculty per concentration: Each concentration within a program shall have at least one tenure/tenure track faculty member who has demonstrated expertise in and commitment to the field represented by the concentration.

Category B.

University-wide indicators with Program-Specific Standards

In addition to the University-wide standards, each program should also develop standards for its own programs that allow it to measure each program’s unique qualities. The areas in which these standards should be established are described below. This list does not imply that programs cannot or should not develop their own standards in other areas of achievement. The University supports the development of program specific standards in all areas of department and program activities.

1. Program planning and quality improvement processes. Each program shall outline the processes through which they plan for their degree program’s future and use the results of student learning outcomes assessments and the review of the standards indicated in this document to enhance the quality of their degree programs. The Self-Study should include specific examples of ways the program planning and assessment process is used to enhance degree program quality.

2. Student experiences:

1. Assessment of Student Learning: Chief among these program-specific standards should be student learning outcomes. The cumulative, programmatic assessment of student learning has been identified as a major educational priority by the University, the CSU system, and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. In response, each graduate program shall engage in and report on its assessment of student learning. Such assessment shall include the following:
   1. The establishment of programmatic learning objectives to be placed within the context of the planning process discussed in the current Guidelines for program review
   2. The determination of where in the curriculum those objectives are being attained
   3. The development and implementation of assessment strategies to measure their attainment
   4. The use of findings from the assessment endeavor to structure curricular improvement and enhance student learning

Program review self-studies shall include a section describing an instructional unit's assessment endeavors for each of its graduate degree programs and concentrations and show how the results of those endeavors are leading to program improvement.

1. Advising: With the goal of fostering outstanding academic advising, each program shall identify its standards for high quality advising (e.g., frequency, content, outcomes) and evaluate its degree of success in meeting these standards.

2. Writing proficiency: The University has an explicit goal that the institution “ensures that its graduates write proficiently.” Self-studies should focus attention on how this is occurring in each academic program being offered. As the 2005-2010 strategic plan indicates, this should include setting forth “criteria, at all levels including the master's thesis [and all other culminating experiences], that define performance expectations for writing” and measuring “students' proficiency in writing and their capacity to reflect critically on work in their chosen discipline.”

3. Culminating Experience: A central component of the assessment endeavor at the graduate level is the evaluation of the quality of the student’s culminating experience. Each program shall have explicit program-specific standards for the culminating experience and determine the extent to which these standards are being met. Although collaborative projects may may involve up to three persons, each student’s role in culminating experiences shall always be individually defined. Every collaborative culminating experience shall include a writing component for each student.

3. The Program and the Community:
1. Professional Engagement of Students and Alumni: It is essential that academic programs foster the professional engagement among their students and alumni, developing relationships with regional stakeholders and community partners.

2. Civic Engagement: Given the University’s commitment to community service learning and civic engagement on the part of students, faculty, and staff, graduate programs should strive to contribute to such a commitment being realized.

3. Equity and Social Justice: The University is committed to equity and social justice and departments should demonstrate their responsiveness to this goal.

4. Internationalization: Internationalization is an important component of the educational experience at San Francisco State and departments should strive to incorporate elements of an international experience.

4. Faculty experience:

a. Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (RSCA): There is an innate connection between professional development and graduate education, as faculty use their research, scholarly activities, and creative activity in teaching students and as students frequently participate in faculty research, scholarly activities, and creative activity. Units with graduate degree programs should describe their faculty’s RSCA, their connection to teaching graduate students, and the other benefits that graduate degree programs receive from RSCA accomplishments.

b. Colleges and departments shall monitor, recognize, and value faculty supervision of culminating experiences as a central component of faculty members’ workload.

c. Programs shall articulate the discipline-specific standards for teaching graduate courses and the extent to which these standards are met.

d. Interdisciplinarity: Given the university’s commitment to interdisciplinary approaches to learning, if an academic program considers itself to be interdisciplinary, it should describe its interdisciplinary philosophy and how the faculty shapes the curriculum to reflect that philosophy. It should also evaluate the effectiveness of any interdisciplinary collaboration with allied programs across the campus.

5. Resource support: Given the critical importance of resource support to program sustainability and quality, each instructional unit shall determine the resources—internal and external— it requires to support high-quality graduate education. The need for resources, and potential strategies for identifying their sources, should be specified in the program planning process.

1. Internal support. The unit should carefully determine whether it has a sufficient number of qualified faculty to coordinate the program, deliver its curriculum and properly serve students; how many students it should regularly admit; and its needs in terms of, for example, clerical staff and technical support, equipment and supplies, and space (offices, classrooms, laboratories, studios, etc.).

2. External support. Additionally, each unit shall evaluate its needs, capabilities and results regarding extramural funding. Here, the unit will need to clarify its capacity to pursue extramural funding and the availability and relevance of such funding to support activities in its academic area.

San Francisco State Scholars Programs (Blended Program)

The San Francisco State Scholars program provides undergraduate students with an accelerated pathway to a graduate degree. Students in this program pursue a bachelor’s and master’s degree simultaneously. This program allows students to earn graduate credit while in their junior and/or senior year, reducing the number of semesters required for completion of a master’s degree. San Francisco State Scholars students will obtain classified graduate degree status at the end of the semester in which they earned 120-semester units.

Signed Memo: S22-300 memo