Guidelines for Developing and Revising Graduate Degree and Certificate Programs

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Guidelines for Developing and Revising Rackham Graduate Programs

Introduction

The Rackham Graduate School reviews and authorizes proposals for new Rackham degree and certificate programs and revisions to existing programs. These guidelines concern:

- Proposals for new degree programs including dual degrees; certificates of graduate study; sequential, concurrent and accelerated undergraduate/graduate degree programs; distributed (online or distance) degree programs; and dual degree programs with other institutions.
- Revisions to existing programs.
- Admissions suspension, admissions moratorium, and program deactivation.

Detailed information about degree requirements are in the Graduate School Academic Policies.

Contact Assistant Dean John Godfrey (734-764-4400), for further assistance.

Stages of Proposal Development and Activation

The Rackham Executive Board reviews and approves new programs. Proposals may be received at any time, but it is the responsibility of the proposers to allow sufficient time for all stages of review, revision and approval before the program is activated. Coordinating calendars at each stage of approval requires careful advance planning. Successful development of a new program usually takes several months and, depending on the complexity of the proposal, may require up to a year. A new program cannot be advertised or admit students until final approvals have been obtained. Contact Assistant Dean John Godfrey for examples of successful proposals for new degree programs.

1. Development of the draft proposal. Faculty consult with Rackham in the early stages of preparing a draft proposal.

2. Preliminary submission to Rackham. Rackham Deans Group reviews the preliminary draft and gives feedback to help refine the proposal for submission to the Executive Board.

3. Unit review and approval. Dean(s) of the academic unit(s) where the program will be located—or which will contribute courses, faculty, or other resources for interdepartmental programs—review the proposal and provide written approval.
that includes any commitment of resources and confirms that the proposal has been reviewed and approved by faculty under the procedures of the school or college.

- In the College of Engineering, the Curriculum Committee reviews program proposals. Contact Jennifer Linderman for assistance.
- In LSA, the Dean’s Cabinet and Executive Committee review program proposals. Contact Paula Hathaway for assistance.

Directors or chairs of other units or graduate programs that contribute to the proposed program also review and provide written approval.

4. **Rackham Executive Board review.** The Rackham Executive Board reviews and approves all new programs. After a first review, the Board may have questions or comments that require additional information and revision before final approval is granted.

5. **Presidents’ Council of State Universities of Michigan.** Proposals for degree programs in new fields also must be submitted for approval to the Presidents’ Council of State Universities of Michigan. This final step must be completed for these programs before students can be recruited or admitted. The Presidents’ Council meets quarterly. Further information is available at the [Provost’s Office webpage](#). Proposals for master’s degrees in existing fields, dual or sequential programs between existing degrees, or certificate programs do not need this approval.

6. **Activation.** Following final approval by the Rackham Executive Board and, when required, by the Presidents’ Council, the Registrar assigns a new program code and the program will be open for admission.

**Content of Proposals**

Proposals for all new programs, including dual degrees, certificates of graduate study, and concurrent undergraduate/graduate degree programs, should provide the following information.

**Objectives and Rationale**

- Explain how the program complements and is defined in relation with other Rackham degree programs, and why a new program is needed rather than modifying an existing program.
- Discuss relative features and strengths of the proposed program in the context of similar programs at peer universities, and with similar programs at other Michigan universities.
- Show evidence of the need for the program, explaining how graduates will contribute to research, education, public service, or the private sector, and the anticipated demand and career paths of the graduates.
- Show evidence of the demand for the program and prospects of job availability.
- Discuss possible impacts or overlaps the program may have on other U-M programs and the career opportunities for graduates of those programs.

**Curriculum and Requirements**

Rackham Graduate School Academic Policies stipulate minimal coursework and other requirements for PhD degrees, master’s degrees, dual degrees, certificates, and sequential, concurrent and accelerated undergraduate/graduate degrees. Coursework requirements should be composed primarily of courses at the 500 level and higher. 400-level courses must be approved by the Registrar for graduate credit and require work appropriate for the graduate level.

All proposals should provide a comprehensive description of the curriculum and requirements, including a model term-by-term program of study and the expected time for degree completion.

Proposals for *master’s programs* should list required courses and credit hours, stipulating the minimum credit hours required for the degree. Discussion should explain distribution requirements and electives as well as theses, capstone projects, internships, fieldwork, practicums, and any requirements mandated by accrediting agencies. A master’s program may distinguish areas of concentration in two ways:

- A *sub-plan* designates a track of study that appears only on the transcript. A detailed discussion must explain the rationale, courses, credit hours, and other requirements for each sub-plan.
- A *plan*, less frequently used, designates a more formal track of study that appears on both the diploma and the transcript. A detailed discussion must explain the rationale, courses, credit hours, and other requirements for a plan.

Proposals for *PhD programs* should present requirements and the expected time-frame for achieving candidacy and completing the degree, including a list of required courses and credit hours, distribution and cognate requirements, electives, and any additional requirements for the acquisition or demonstration of competencies or skills such as language or research methods. Discussion should explain how readiness for candidacy will be assessed through written or oral exams, portfolios, or papers, as well as expectations for the dissertation, including other requirements during candidacy such as seminars accompanying dissertation research and writing. Proposed requirements should be compared with those of peer programs. A PhD program may distinguish areas of concentration by designating *sub-plans* that appear only on the transcript. A detailed discussion must explain the rationale, courses, credit hours, and other requirements for each sub-plan. Proposals should provide a master’s option for successful pre-candidates who leave the program without completing the doctorate. Proposals may also include a stand-alone master’s degree in the same field of study, providing a detailed discussion of
the requirements, which should approximate those for students exiting the PhD program with a master’s.

**Faculty Resources**

Proposals must provide evidence of sufficient faculty with records of research and graduate teaching, including:

- Names, rank and tenure status of faculty who have agreed to serve as regular participants in the new program.
- Evidence of the commitment by core faculty to provide leadership, to ensure that planned required courses are taught regularly, and to devote time to mentoring and advising.
- Evidence of funding sufficient to support the faculty time for upholding this commitment.
- PhD program proposals should include short CVs of participating faculty.

**Program Implementation**

Proposals should discuss:

- How the program chair will be selected, how the appointment will be made, and faculty available to provide future leadership.
- The formation, composition and duties of the faculty program committee.
- How faculty will be assigned teaching, advising, and other administrative responsibilities.
- How administrative support will be provided, including support for student services.
- How faculty will assess program goals, outcomes and quality.

**Admissions and Enrollment Planning**

Proposals should discuss:

- Enrollment targets, anticipated application and admissions activity, and desired steady-state cohort size.
- Application requirements, including credentials incoming students are required or expected to have, and the admissions review and decision-making process.
- Whether enrollments are expected to be incremental to those in other programs, or if these are expected to have an impact on enrollments in these programs.
- Measures that actively support the successful recruitment of a diverse pool of graduate students, including students traditionally underrepresented in the program or field.
Advising, Mentoring and the Student Community

Proposals should discuss how the program will support a climate for student success, including:

- Plans for academic advising, mentoring, annual reviews, and other steps to support degree completion and professional and career preparation.
- Steps for building and maintaining an inclusive academic community among students and faculty.
- Measures for ensuring the successful degree completion of students traditionally underrepresented in the program or field.

Finances, Space and Equipment

Proposals should outline funding arrangements to support a program of high quality. Rackham approval does not convey or imply funding for any costs associated with starting or maintaining a new program. Proposals should provide detailed information about:

- Start-up or bridging costs.
- Sources for supporting a five-year full-funding model for PhD programs and any funding for a master’s program, as well as anticipated needs and sources of additional funding for dissertation or thesis research required for students to meet program requirements.
- Administrative funding and other program costs.
- Specialized equipment or other resources for teaching or research.
- Space for program administration and operations.
- Firm commitments from the units that will provide resources to meet transition and ongoing program costs.

Other Content Requirements for Certain Types of Programs

Certificates of Graduate Study

A Rackham certificate of graduate study is a non-degree credential for study and participation in a scholarly community around a focused topic of academic interest that provides a specialized set of courses to supplement a primary field of study. A certificate may include a non-credit experiential activity, such as an internship, practicum, or professional project or experience, equivalent to at least a three-credit hour course. The scope, duration, requirements and costs associated with certificate programs are not comparable to those for degrees. Certificate proposals accordingly require less detail, but must address each section required for all proposals.

Certificate proposals must include a clear statement of purpose and need, particularly how students will benefit from the certificate and where these students will come from.
The proposal should stipulate whether the certificate will only admit students already enrolled in Rackham or other U-M degree programs, or whether it will admit persons who are not otherwise U-M students.

**Dual Degree Programs**

Dual degree programs lead to two different degree citations on the transcript and two separate diplomas. A dual degree program allows students to undertake complementary programs of graduate study simultaneously through streamlined curricular arrangements with limited double-counting of courses. Rackham policy for double-counting is outlined in the Graduate School Academic Policies. Proposals should adhere to this policy. Exceptions will be considered only for unusual circumstances, and a proposal to exceed the one-sixth double counting rule must give a clear and convincing educational justification. Such exception, for instance, may be considered when two programs require identical or highly similar methodological coursework, but the dual degree otherwise maintains the distinctive integrity of each program. In no case may double-counting exceed one quarter of the total credits for the two degrees, and triple-counting is not allowed. Alternatively, proposals may reduce the required credit hours for each degree rather than use double-counting.

**Rackham Interdepartmental Degree Programs**

Rackham Interdepartmental Degree Programs (IDPs) are interdisciplinary in their academic focus and, by bridging the schools and colleges, connective in their structure. Rackham IDPs bring faculty from different academic units to work together with graduate students to study emergent fields of knowledge that cut across the disciplinary and structural organization of the University.

The Rackham Executive Board gives close attention to enrollment projections for a proposed program to determine if these indicate a likely level of sustainable activity. New Rackham IDPs will be approved for a three to five year pilot period. Enrollment will be assessed each year to see if the program is meeting its anticipated level of activity. Rackham Interdepartmental Programs that do not reach a level of activity appropriate for a degree program during the pilot phase may be converted to a certificate program or discontinued.

In addition to the requirements for all degree proposals, proposals for Rackham IDPs should discuss:

- The criteria and plan for the formal designation of faculty affiliates and a process for periodic review of their engagement and contributions.
- How the program director is to be appointed and reviewed.
- Which school or college will be the primary site of activity and provide oversight and responsibility for the administrative and programmatic budget.
• How the enrollment portion of tuition will be attributed to the academic units where most activity is located and most student and administrative/programmatic costs are incurred.
• How the director will discuss academic operations and planning annually with the Dean’s Office of the academic unit where the primary activity of the IDP is located.

Accelerated, Sequential or Concurrent Undergraduate/Graduate Programs

Through special arrangements in certain fields of study, undergraduates with an exceptional academic record may apply in their junior or senior year to work toward a master’s degree while fulfilling the remainder of their requirements for a bachelor’s degree. Students admitted to these programs are considered Rackham students, and master’s degree policies apply.

Such programs are not available to undergraduates pursuing a dual bachelor’s degree. Proposals may allow double-counting and/or transfer of up to half the credit hours of the master’s degree, not to exceed 15 credit hours, but no courses used to meet the requirements of the undergraduate major or concentration may be double-counted to meet the master’s degree. Proposals follow either of two models.

In the Sequential Undergraduate/Graduate Studies model (SUGS), or the Accelerated Master’s Degree Program (AMDP) in LSA, undergraduate students begin graduate-level coursework and double-count and/or transfer credits to their graduate record. Students do not enroll in Rackham until they have completed their undergraduate degree requirements or are within 6 hours of completing. Students must enroll in Rackham for two full terms (9 or more credits each term) within 12 months of completing the undergraduate degree.

In the Concurrent Undergraduate/Graduate Studies model (CUGS), students have an undergraduate and graduate registration in the same term for the specific courses that count towards both the undergraduate and master’s degrees. CUGS programs must require a minimum of 15 graduate credit hours and at least one full term of Rackham-only registration, with a term defined as 9 credit hours.

In addition to the requirements for all degree proposals, proposals for Rackham combined undergraduate/graduate programs should also discuss:

• Minimum undergraduate GPA and other requirements for students to be admitted to combined program.
• Administrative coordination with the undergraduate program to facilitate recruitment, admission and successful transition to the master’s program.
• For a CUGS program, arrangements for managing student financial aid since students admitted to the program will pay graduate tuition and will be ineligible for undergraduate-only aid.
Distributed (Online or Distance) Degree Programs

Degree programs may use online or a combination of mechanisms to deliver half or more of required coursework through distributed learning—that is, by means that allow instruction and learning to occur independent of time and place. Proposals for these programs must provide assurance that the quality of education and access to student services maintains the high standards of all Rackham programs.

Proposals for new programs or revisions to existing programs that plan to offer half or more of required coursework through distributed learning must provide additional information that assures the maintenance of quality. Tenured and tenure-track faculty must participate actively in distributed degree programs; these programs may not rely solely on the distribution of recorded material that allow no or limited direct interaction with faculty.

Distributed degree programs must verify that all program and course materials are accessible to students with visual or other disabilities. Information and guidelines are available at the Office for Institutional Equity’s Web Accessibility website. Programs must also comply with the University’s copyright policy and federal export control restrictions on access by foreign nationals to certain regulated information or software.

In addition to information required for all new program proposals, distributed delivery proposals must also discuss:

- Faculty participation in design and delivery of instruction and provisions for assuring frequent and effective student interaction with instructors, including the opportunity for asking questions, and with other students.
- The qualifications of any adjunct faculty that may be used for teaching, and the extent of their contributions.
- Assessment mechanisms to be used to monitor curriculum and instruction and to assure that faculty are trained in the use of equipment and teaching techniques used in distributed learning, along with a description of refresher training to be made available as new distributed learning technologies emerge.
- Arrangements for students to have access to learning and research resources, including library, computing, laboratory and other facilities, necessary for successful completion of the program.
- Arrangements for the provision of student services.
- The organization of any proposed on-campus component of instruction.
- Mechanisms to ensure academic integrity, including authentication to assure that enrolled students do all required work themselves.
- The adequacy of technical and infrastructural resources for program delivery and student support, including providing students with technical support for hardware, software and the delivery system required in the program.
- Arrangements to ensure access for students with disabilities, to comply with University policies and legal and regulatory requirements for copyright, and to assure that federal export control regulations are observed.
Dual Degree Programs with Other Institutions

A dual degree program with another institution, sometimes called a sandwich or split program, is one in which the student completes the requirements for two separate degrees in different fields and earns two separate diplomas, one from the University of Michigan and the other from another degree-granting institution with which a formal collaborative agreement has been established.

Such dual degree programs entail residency and coursework at each institution, usually in alternating terms or years, and may include distributed delivery of learning. A dual degree program allows students to undertake distinct but complementary programs of graduate study simultaneously through streamlined curricular arrangements with limited double-counting of courses. See the Graduate School Academic Policies for rules regarding double-counting of credits. Proposals should adhere to this policy. Exceptions will be considered only for unusual circumstances, and a proposal to exceed the one-sixth double counting rule must give a clear and convincing educational justification. Such exception, for instance, may be considered when both programs require identical or highly similar methodological coursework, but the dual degree otherwise maintains the distinctive integrity of each program. In no case may double-counting exceed one quarter of the total credits for the two degrees.

In addition to information required for all new degree programs, proposals for dual degrees must include a draft of the proposed agreement with the partner institution which discusses:

- Arrangements for joint governance and oversight, including specific provisions for ongoing monitoring and assessment of the effectiveness of the program.
- Standards and arrangements for admitting students and evaluating their progress.
- The commitment to diversity, including the participation of students traditionally underrepresented in the programs or fields of study.
- Financial commitments for student support, including tuition, stipend, and health insurance.
- The availability to students of library, computing, laboratory and other research facilities.
- Interaction with program faculty and the provision of student services, including academic advising, mentoring, career development and job placement.
- Provisions for managing the resolution of disputes involving students and faculty.
- Plans for addressing the responsible conduct of research and scholarship.
- For PhD students, arrangements for supervision of research for both degrees and the composition of dissertation committees.
- Administrative responsibilities and arrangements to meet associated costs.
- Arrangements for all other operational costs, including travel and housing for faculty and students visiting partner institutions.
- The duration of the agreement and arrangements for regular formal evaluation, extension, or termination.
After the Rackham Executive Board has approved the dual degree, the draft agreement should be brought to the Office of the General Counsel for final institutional review and authorization by the Provost or other designated University officer.

Final approval of both the new dual degree and the institutional agreement are required before the new program can recruit or admit students.

**Changes to Existing Rackham Programs**

In order to ensure that degree audits and published program information are accurate, the Graduate School must be informed of revisions to program curriculum and changes to requirements. Major changes require review and approval by the Graduate School before they can be implemented.

**Major Changes**

The Graduate School must review and approve requests for substantive revisions to program curriculum and requirements. Such changes affect the scope or nature of the degree or certificate program. Extensive revisions may require review by the Rackham Executive Board. Major changes include:

- A new mission or focus, including change of the program name.
- Modifications to admission requirements.
- Any change that has implications for the level or nature of student career prospects.
- Change in the number of required credit hours.
- Addition of a new plan or cancellation of an existing one.
- Alteration of candidacy requirements for PhD programs.
- A revision to provide half or more of instruction through distance learning.
- A relaxation of requirements for training in quantitative methods.
- The end of the participation of a collaborating program, or the participation of a new department or program in an interdisciplinary graduate program.

To seek approval for a substantive change, submit a detailed explanation that discusses the difference between the existing and revised programs, the rationale, anticipated results, and the process used to seek faculty approval. Directors or chairs of other programs involved in the program must be informed of the proposed changes and provide written approval to the Graduate School. Requests and supporting documentation should be sent to Assistant Dean John Godfrey.
Minor Changes

Consultation is available for minor changes to program curriculum but review is not required. Changes that must be reported to Rackham Academic Records and Dissertations for degree audit purposes but do not require review and approval include:

- Revisions to cognate requirements.
- Changes in foreign language requirements.
- Revisions to thesis/capstone project requirements for a master’s program.
- Addition of a new sub-plan or cancellation of an existing one.

Minor changes that can be made without reporting include:

- Introduction of a new core course to replace an existing one.
- Changes in courses that do not affect the number of required credit hours.
- Minor curriculum changes in response to recommendations by an external review or to meet accreditation requirements.

Admissions Suspension, Moratorium and Program Closure

These policies concern procedures for suspending admissions to a program for a year, for placing an admissions moratorium on a program for up to five years, and for closing a Rackham graduate degree or certificate program. Requests for these actions are currently handled by Assistant Dean John Godfrey (jgodfrey@umich.edu; 734-764-8221).

One-Year Admissions Suspension

Program faculty may recommend to the Rackham Dean that admissions to a graduate program be suspended for one year. The purpose of an admissions suspension is usually to allow a program to address short-term issues such as over-enrollment in a given year, the need for curricular re-design, or to resolve temporary financial pressures.

Approval by the Rackham Dean is required to suspend admissions. A request should include the reasons for the suspension, the term and year it is to take effect. It should be submitted in sufficient time to allow the Graduate School to consider and act on the recommendation before applications open: requests should be submitted by August 1 for an admissions suspension to take effect in the fall and winter term of the following year.

A notice of suspension will be placed on the Rackham Admissions website and the program’s own website. During the period of suspension, the faculty and staff remain responsible for the providing the appropriate curriculum and resources for the education of currently enrolled students.

At the end of the approved suspension, a moratorium will be placed on admissions, unless the program provides information about the capacity and interest of the faculty in
reopening the program to new applications. If the faculty make a request to the Rackham Dean showing that they are ready to take applications and admit students after the end of the one year suspension, the suspension will be lifted and applications will be reopened for the following academic year.

**Admissions Moratorium**

Program faculty, the Dean of the school or college where the program is located, or the Rackham Dean may recommend to the Rackham Executive Board that an admissions moratorium be placed on a graduate program. The purpose of a moratorium is to allow faculty time to re-assess the purpose and goals of the program and to address issues such as declining and insufficient enrollments for a sustainable and successful student community; deficiencies in resources, including funding or faculty availability; or other areas that require planning and recalibration of resources to ensure that the program can be successful. An admissions moratorium may be in place for up to five years.

Information that may be considered in deciding to recommend an admissions moratorium may include whether faculty resources and leadership are sufficient to ensure that required courses are available and that students are being mentored and advised; whether applications, admissions, enrollment or placement data indicate demand sufficient for the program to maintain a strong student community; and the adequacy of student funding support and other resources necessary to sustain the viable operation of the program.

Approval of the moratorium by the Rackham Executive Board is required. A request should include reasons and the term and year it is to take effect, and should be submitted in sufficient time to allow the Graduate School to consider and act on the recommendation before applications open: requests should be submitted by March 1 for an admissions moratorium to take effect in the fall or winter term of the following year.

The program will be removed from the Rackham Admissions website during the moratorium and a notice should be placed on the program’s own website. The program will be responsible for informing current students about the moratorium, and for continuing to provide appropriate curriculum, advising and resources to currently enrolled students.

Program faculty may ask the Rackham Executive Board to lift an admissions moratorium by providing a written request that discusses in detail the reasons for the moratorium and the steps that have been taken to address these, any revisions to the program curriculum and requirements, and a plan for reopening the program to admissions. The Dean of the school or college where the program is located must provide a letter of approval that includes any commitments for funding, staffing and space. The program may not advertise or admit students before the moratorium is lifted. The Executive Board will agree to lift the moratorium only if it is satisfied that the program can be offered at a level of educational quality appropriate for a Rackham degree, and that this quality can be sustained on an on-going basis, given the faculty, staff and financial resources available to the program.
After an admissions moratorium has been in place for five years, a program will automatically be considered for closure unless the Rackham Executive Board has received and approved a request to lift the moratorium.

**Program Closure**

Program faculty, the Dean of the school or college where the program is located, or the Rackham Dean may recommend to the Rackham Executive Board that a graduate program be closed because enrollment activity has stopped or because the program is no longer viable for lack of resources, qualified faculty, student demand, or commitment by faculty or the school(s) or college(s) where it is located. Before the Rackham Dean recommends to the Board that a graduate program be closed, the program will be asked to provide the Board with a written response to this proposed action.

Approval by the Rackham Executive Board is required to close a program. The Board will approve the closure if it is satisfied that the program is inactive (no enrollment for five years or more, or very intermittent enrollment over a ten year period) or if it concludes that the program cannot be offered at an acceptable level of educational quality under the current circumstances. A request to close a program must include the reasons, the term and year when it is to take effect, and a plan for faculty to provide courses, advising, and support for current students until they graduate, transfer to another program or leave the University. A request for closure that comes from program faculty should be accompanied by a letter of approval from the Dean of the school or college where the program is located.

The program will be closed officially only after all currently enrolled students have completed the degree, transferred to another program, or left the University, when the Registrar will deactivate the program. The program may no longer be advertised or admit students and will be removed from Rackham Admissions and program websites.

A request to re-open a program that has been closed, even if it is to have the same name as the one that was closed, must contain all information and supporting letters required for new program proposals. Approval by the Rackham Executive Board is required to re-open a program.