

Guidelines for Graduate Course Approval

Before submitting a new course for approval, a course modification, or a course deletion, departments should first read this guide. The guidelines have been established to identify those characteristics fundamental to the quality and appropriateness of a graduate course. The guidelines are available below. The Course Approval Process consists of the following steps:

1. Become familiar with these guidelines, if new to the course approval process.
2. Download and complete the [Course Approval Request Form](#).
3. Obtain all necessary signatures: Department Chair, Chair(s) of cross-listed department(s), and School/College curriculum committee if required.
4. Make copy of completed form for your department.
5. Send the completed form to:

Registrar's Office, Course Approval 1210 LSA Building
500 S. State Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1382 Phone (734) 763-2113
Fax: (734) 936-3148
E-mail: ro.curriculum@umich.edu

6. For Engineering, Contact [Kathleen Vargo](#), (734) 647-7111

These guidelines identify those characteristics fundamental to the quality and appropriateness of a graduate course. As such, they state the principles already followed in good practice. By their uniform application throughout the Graduate School, they help to ensure that graduate credit is justifiably and equitably awarded.

Recognizing the different needs and traditions of the various schools and colleges of The University of Michigan, the guidelines are designed to be flexible whenever possible. However, the Graduate School's responsibility for degree programs in seventeen different schools and colleges constitutes the necessity for a certain degree of uniformity. The following principles have been established to promote such uniformity across all schools and colleges within the Graduate School.

The Graduate School recognizes that there could be exceptions to the following rules. Some courses not covered under the Guidelines, after consideration, could meet with approval.

Course Content and Prerequisites

See Course Approval Form: Course description/ Prerequisites

1. A graduate course should be principally devoted to the study of some body of knowledge pertaining to the academic discipline, and should not be grounded exclusively in skills and practice. The course grade should be based primarily on tangible work, which permits the instructor to evaluate the student's competence in the subject matter of the course. Requirements and grading should not be based exclusively or principally on the student's class attendance, participation, and/or attitudes.
2. Introductory courses may be approved for graduate credit only if all of the following conditions are met:
 - The content is required by some graduate program;

- A satisfactory undergraduate preparation for that program does not ordinarily include such content; and
 - The course material is treated at a level of sophistication normally expected of graduate students.
3. Prerequisites serve a double function: (1) to ensure that all students in a given class will be “sufficiently alike in background, ability, and interest so that the objectives can be achieved and so that aimlessness can be avoided” (Michigan Council of Graduate Deans, 1975); and (2) to assist students and advisors in selecting appropriate courses and course sequences depending on individual needs and backgrounds. The following guidelines are felt to be appropriate for all courses:
 - Recognizing the radically different structures of the various disciplines, there are no set minimum prerequisites for any given course levels.
 - In the statement of course prerequisites (on the course approval form), specific courses or course levels should be given where possible, especially when statements such as “graduate standing” or “permission of instructor” are not felt to be sufficiently informative.
 4. The intellectual content of a course, including time spent in completing individual assignments, should be included within the term in which the course is offered. If the course extends beyond the scheduled term, it should be designated as a two-term sequence course, with the students registering for each term in which the course is in session. “Y” grades should be assigned for such officially sanctioned sequence courses only.

Qualifications of Instructor

See Course Approval Form: Instructor name/ Official Instructor Title

Rackham expects that the bulk of graduate level classes will be taught by tenured and tenure-track members of the faculty. However, departments may choose to support their curricula by offering a limited number of courses designed and/or taught by qualified adjunct members of the faculty.

Attracting and maintaining a highly qualified faculty is ensured through the University's hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. Persons not on the tenure track, such as lecturers and instructors, cannot be assumed to meet the criteria used in these decisions. For example, their professional duties do not usually require them to conduct an independent research program. Therefore, using Lecturers, Instructors, or other adjunct or guest faculty to teach graduate level courses should be the exception rather than the rule.

Assignment of Credit Hours

See Course Approval Form: Course Credit Type

Credit hours for graduate courses are based, in general, on contact hours. The ratio of credit to contact is shown below for each of the major course types offered at the graduate level for full term courses (13–14 weeks) and for courses of shorter duration. It is assumed that each hour of class time spent in a lecture or seminar will be accompanied by 2 to 3 hours of time spent in independent preparation (readings, papers, etc.).

Courses that do not appropriately fall within any of the categories described will be treated individually. The course description must explain the conditions for credit.

Courses may be offered for variable credit hours (either for a range of credits in a single term, or for a different number of credits from one term to another). The course proposal should clearly indicate one of the following course credit types:

Lecture

Definition

The instructor is principally responsible for the preparation of the subject matter and the conduct of the class, including one-way lecture and/or back-and-forth exchange of ideas.

Number of contact hours per week

One weekly class contact hour per credit.

Seminar

Definition

Students are principally responsible for preparing materials and leading class discussions. Emphasis is on individual research and peer exchange of knowledge.

Number of contact hours per week

For each seminar, the number of weekly class contact hours may range from 2/3 of an hour to 2 hours per credit.

- There may be *fewer* class contact hours per week for seminars based on students' original research. (Example: A 3-credit seminar course that meets 2 hours per week.)
- There may be *more* class contact hours per week for seminars based on students' experiences and/or case studies. (Example: A 3-credit seminar course that meets 4 hours per week.)

Recitation

Definition

The instructor is principally responsible for the preparation of the subject matter and leading students in a two-way analysis of presented material. A Recitation is a stand-alone course, distinct from a Discussion (see below), which usually supplements a lecture course.

Number of contact hours per week

One weekly class contact hour per credit.

Laboratory

Definition

Students engage in exercises and/or investigations under the direction and supervision of the instructor.

Number of contact hours per week

Two to four weekly class contact hours per credit.

- There may be *fewer* class contact hours per week for labs presenting material not associated with related course lectures, or for labs requiring students to put in additional time before or after class for preparatory research and/or writing reports. (Example: A 1-credit lab that meets 2 hours per week.)
- There may be *more* contact hours per week for labs presenting supplementary exercises to another course, or for labs that are self-contained and involve no preparation or reporting outside of lab time. (Example: A 1-credit lab that meets 4 hours per week.)

Discussion

Definition

Students and instructor engage in two-way communication usually based upon the contents of a lecture.

Number of contact hours per week

One weekly class contact hour per credit.

Independent Study

Definition

Students receive individual consultation and guidance from the instructor. Total student effort should be comparable to that involved in lecture or seminar courses.

Number of contact hours per week

Contact between instructor and student is required, but not necessarily on a weekly basis.

Experiential

See Course Approval Form: Course Component(s) / specify under "Other"

Definition

The student's main effort takes place in a work, clinic, or research setting, other than the usual classroom, laboratory, studio, or library, and under the supervision of a member of the graduate faculty. The instructor's supervision is generally less direct or less intensive than in a laboratory course, and the work is generally oriented more toward practice and less toward research. A paper or other product should be prepared that brings the academic point of view to bear on the experience and permits the instructor to evaluate the breadth and depth of understanding achieved.

Number of contact hours per week

Four to eight weekly contact hours in the setting per credit.

- *Fewer* contact hours in the setting will be necessary for an experiential course in which a considerable amount of the student's time is devoted to reading, research, and other academic activities to which the field experience is supplemental. *More* contact hours will be necessary if the academic component involves a less significant proportion of the student's time.
- *Fewer* contact hours in the setting will be necessary for an experiential course in which the student receives a significant amount of supervision and instruction from a regular member of the graduate faculty. *More* contact hours in the setting will be necessary if the student receives less direct supervision, or less time devoted to instruction, from the graduate faculty.

Special Topics Courses

Departments may wish to reserve an open number of courses which will be of special interest or satisfy a special need for students. Such courses are typically those that departments are uncertain will be offered more than once or where the course content may vary. For such reasons, approval may be requested for a course for which title, content, specific credit hours, etc., are not specified.

- In the original request for approval, the department should describe the kind of course they expect to offer under the special topics number, which students are expected to enroll in such courses, and what faculty will teach them. If the course may be repeated for credit, the course proposal should so state.
- A special topics course number will be approved only on the condition that any course offered under that number would meet the guidelines for graduate credit.
- For special topics courses in which the content varies, the department should review the proposed contents of the course with respect to level, appropriateness, and extent of content and teaching method.
- A one-term course modification may be submitted for the special topics number in order to permit a descriptive title to be recorded on students' transcripts (and in the Time Schedule, if the modification is sent early enough).

“Short Courses”

Not on Course Approval Form

These may be off-campus or on-campus courses of shorter duration than the regular full or half term offerings. They provide departments with flexibility in designing their curricula, although Rackham expects that such courses will be designed only when there are sound academic reasons for doing so. Short courses are expected to be as academically rigorous as courses that extend for the full length of the term. The following guidelines will be used to determine the appropriate credit to be assigned to shorter courses approved for graduate credit:

- Short courses that are predominantly lecture or seminar and which require readings, written assignments and/or examinations must consist of a minimum of 14 contact hours for each credit.
- Courses which are predominantly laboratory, studio or experiential (field work, practicum, clinical, etc.) and in which the emphasis is on the instructor's supervision of the student's work, must consist of a minimum of 18 contact hours for each credit.
- All short courses including lectures, seminars, workshops, laboratories or experiential based courses should extend for at least five days, and consist of at least three separate meetings for each credit.
- Because students will have the option of using “short course” credits toward a Master's degree and because many elect these courses with the specific intent of doing so, proposals for “short courses” must specify the provisions that will be made for formal academic advising. Although this might take the form of written materials, some mechanism should also be documented in the course description, which guarantees that off-campus students will have easy access to an academic advisor in order to plan a coherent academic program.

Course Duration

See Course Approval Form: Credit Hours/ Full Term/ Half Term

In general, courses should correspond to the University calendar; that is, classes should extend for the full term or half term. The duration of the course is defined by the duration of regularly scheduled class meetings.

Courses offered for a shorter duration than the regular full or half term offerings are listed as “short courses” (see above). While courses may vary in the scope of content or in delivery format, they must adhere to the principles set forward above for the assignment of credit hours.

1. If a course is to be offered in a half term, the following conditions must be met:

- If the course content is the same as for the full term course, the same number of credits can be allotted.
 - If less material is covered in the half term course, fewer credits should be allotted.
 - If the modified version of the course differs substantially from the original course, it should be offered under a separate course number.
2. All short courses including lectures, seminars, workshops, laboratories or experiential based courses should extend for at least five days, and consist of at least three separate meetings for each credit.

Course Numbering

See Course Approval Form: Catalog Number

The following guidelines are generally assumed for the purpose of Graduate School review, selection of cognate courses, and communication to people outside the University who receive and evaluate transcripts (e.g., employers and other graduate schools). Departments, schools, and colleges should bear these in mind as they assign course numbers.

400 Level Courses

400 level courses are assumed to be primarily for undergraduates. If the course material is described as sufficiently advanced, graduate credit may be granted upon approval of the Graduate School. Requests for graduate credit for 400 level courses must provide information to verify that the course material is at the graduate level for all students, or that graduate students are required to do additional work beyond the level required of undergraduates in the course.

500 Level Courses

500 level courses are assumed to be primarily for first-year graduate students; senior majors may also take them or others by special permission.

600 Level Courses

600 level courses are assumed to be for master's and doctoral students (or second year students in professional schools), and only rarely for exceptional undergraduates.

700 Level Courses

700 level courses are assumed to be for master's and doctoral students (or third-year students in professional schools)

800 And 900 Level Courses

800 and 900 level courses are assumed to be primarily for doctoral work, beyond the master's level.

Courses in Which Graduates and Undergraduates May Be Enrolled Simultaneously

Course Requirements

For each course that is open both to graduate and to undergraduate students, the course proposal and all pertinent publications should specify whether or not graduate students will be required to perform more advanced work. The course proposal may specify any one of the following credit types (see Course Approval Form: Course Credit Type):

- Rackham Graduate (no undergraduates may enroll, except by special arrangement).

- Non-Rackham Graduate.
- Undergraduate or Rackham Graduate.

Credit Hours

Normally, all students in a course are expected to meet the same requirements and receive the same number of credits. When it is felt to be appropriate to award a different number of credits to graduate students, the teaching unit may ask the Graduate School for an exception. All exceptions will conform to Section C. above, "Assignment of Credit Hours."

Cross-Listing of Courses

See Course Approval Form: Cross-Listings

- A cross-listed course must have the same title, prerequisites, credit hours, description, and course requirements as the home department or "owner" of the course.
- The Graduate School recognizes that different departments may have different numbering conventions. Therefore, it is not required that a cross-listed course share the same course number as the home department or other cross-listings. However, the selected course numbers must remain within a 100 level range (e.g., 500 and 600 is acceptable, but 500 and 700 is not). Cross-listed courses should not be numbered at different levels if the discrepancy represents a disagreement about the true level of the course.
- A cross-listed course that is approved for graduate credit must be designated by each participating program department as carrying graduate credit for at least some group of graduate students (however, one or more of the participating programs may designate the course as a service course for graduate students in other fields, and not permit their own graduate students to elect it). If any participating program chooses to stipulate that the course cannot be taken for its own graduate degree(s), the course proposal must include the reasons for wishing to limit the credit, as described in Section H below.

Off-campus Course Offerings

See Course Approval Form: Class Location

- If a regular campus course is to be offered off-campus, it must be offered with the same course content, level, prerequisites, resources, credit hours, and instructor qualifications. Off-campus courses using approved special topics course numbers must be reviewed as described in Section C. above.
- If an off-campus course is not also offered on-campus in the same form, it must be proposed, reviewed, and approved in accordance with regular procedures for standard campus courses. In addition, the program offering the course must state why the course should not be offered on-campus as well.
- Courses proposed for off-campus in the Flint or Dearborn areas should complement courses at the Branch Campuses. Both course content and instructional assignments should be coordinated with the appropriate instructional units on those campuses.
- Courses regularly proposed for off-campus must document mechanisms for academic advising.

Graduate Courses in Non-Rackham Programs

See Course Approval Form: Graduate Courses in Non-Rackham Programs

It is possible for Rackham students, with the approval of their departments, to apply non-Rackham course credits toward Rackham degree requirements. They may do so by completing courses offered by non-Rackham graduate or professional programs. Such courses are usually intended to serve as cognates. For a list of applicable non-Rackham courses see, "[Graduate Courses in Non-Rackham Programs](#)." For courses to be included on that list, they must meet the academic standards outlined in these guidelines and be taught by either a regular member of the faculty or an instructor whose credentials qualify them to teach at the graduate level.

Some of the courses on the list are offered by Rackham programs but cannot be applied toward their own graduate degree requirements. These courses are considered by the Rackham home department to be graduate level work only for students in other departments – because they expect their own students to have mastered the course material previously (e.g., as undergraduates). Please note that graduate credit will not be granted simply on the argument that some graduate students wish or need to know the material.

Inclusion on the list of non-Rackham courses in the Bulletin does not guarantee that the student's department will count the credits toward the student's degree requirements. Therefore, students intending to apply a non-Rackham course must always check with an advisor and the department before enrolling.