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**SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES  
GRADUATE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

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## **Section 1 – Admission/Procedures/Requirements/Status Test Required**

### **1.0 Admission for Program Enrollment**

**1.1 Eligibility for Admission:** A person who has a Bachelor's or higher degree, awarded by an accredited institution of higher education, may apply for admission. Refer to the Graduate Admissions website for current requirements.

**1.2 Application for Admission:** An applicant for a Master's program needs to submit items to the Office of Graduate Admission (See Section 1.3).

**1.3 Graduate Admission Application:** Refer to the Graduate Admissions website for current requirements.

**1.3.1 Grad Application Form:** A completed Graduate Admission Application form is required (either paper or online format).

**1.3.2 Official Transcript:** An official transcript from an accredited college or university stating a Bachelor's Degree or higher has been completed. An official transcript must bear the seal of the university and the signature of the registrar. SMSU transcripts need not be requested.

**1.3.3 Application Fee:** A non-refundable application fee is required.

**1.3.4 Program Specific Requirements:** Each Graduate program may establish additional admission policies. Refer to the Graduate Admissions website for current requirements.

**1.3.5 Testing Requirements:** Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Students who do not use English as their first language must demonstrate ability to study in English by submitting a score of at least 550 on the written test, 213 on the computer-based test, 79/80 on the web-based exam, or scores of 6 or better on the International English Language Testing Services (IELTS).

## **Section 2 – General Programs and Policies**

### **2.0 General Program Policies and Procedures**

#### **2.1 Program Overview**

**2.1.1 Course Numbering:** Graduate courses are numbered at the 500 or 600 level. Some 500 level courses may be cross listed with 400 level courses. Courses numbered 600 or higher are Graduate level only.

**2.1.2 Programs:** Descriptions of the Master degree programs are located in the SMSU catalog.

**2.1.3 Credit Requirements:** Master's programs require a minimum of 34 credits.

**2.1.4 Coursework Level:** Students need to successfully complete one half of the coursework at the 600 level or a minimum of 17 credits.

## **2.2 Steps for Pursuing a Degree**

**2.2.1 First Semester:** An advisor is assigned to the student by the Director. Individual student program plans are developed by the student and the student's advisor. The plan is reviewed at the end of each semester.

**2.2.2 Third Semester:** The student submits a **Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) report** and degree review to the Graduate Office.

**2.2.3 Third Semester:** The student files a Graduation Application for Graduate Students with the Registrar's Office at the beginning of the term in which the candidate will complete all degree requirements.

## **2.3 Academic Standing**

**2.3.1 Grade Point Average (GPA):** A minimum GPA of 3.0 must be maintained throughout the Graduate Programs, Degrees and/or Certificates. If a student falls below the minimum GPA, the student will be placed on probation. A grade of "C-" or below will not apply toward a Graduate Program, Degree or Certificate. A maximum of two (2) Cs will be allowed.

**2.3.2 Academic Probation:** If the student raises the GPA to 3.0 or higher within the next academic term, the student will be moved to full academic status.

**2.3.3 Repeatability of Coursework:** A student may repeat a course. The new grade will replace the original grade.

**2.3.4 Dismissal:** A student may be dismissed for academic reasons upon recommendation and approval of the Dean. A student on academic probation who does not achieve the 3.0 minimum cumulative GPA during the next academic term will be dropped from the Graduate program.

**2.3.5 Readmission to the Graduate Program:** A student may be readmitted to the Graduate program when approved by the Graduate Council. To be readmitted, the student must meet all application requirements specified for the program. The student must submit a Graduate Readmit Form.

## **2.4 Graduation**

**2.4.1** The candidate must meet all program requirements as specified in the Academic Catalog in effect at the time that the Program Plan was approved by the Graduate Director of the degree program. The Graduate Director and the Registrar will certify that all requirements have been met.

**2.4.2 Graduate Application for Degree:** The candidate must file a Graduation Application for Graduate Students with the Graduate Office by the beginning of the term in which the candidate will complete all degree requirements, including any required research component.

**2.4.3 Date of Record of Graduation:** A candidate will be recorded as "Graduated" in the term in which all program requirements are completed.

**2.4.4** Candidates are allowed to participate in the Graduation Ceremony if the students have completed all but 9 credits of their degree program.

**2.5 Websites:** Each department offering a Graduate program maintains a website with the most current information on the program.

**2.6 Elective Professional Development Courses/Non Degree Status:** These courses will be assigned a specific number and do not fulfill Graduate degree requirements.

**2.7 Academic Honesty:** Graduate students will follow SMSU's Academic Honesty Policy.

**2.8 Non-Specified Policies:** Anything not specified in these policies and procedures will be governed by University policies and procedures.

### **Section 3 - Transfer Credit/Petitions**

#### **3.0 Transfer Credits**

**3.1** A limited number of credits earned from another accredited institution may be accepted for credit toward a Graduate degree at SMSU.

**3.2 Transfer Credits Allowed:** The total number of transfer credits allowed is determined by each program.

**3.2.1** No more than nine (9) semester hours of credit may be transferred into a SMSU Graduate program.

**3.2.2** Only grades of C (2.0) or higher are accepted for transfer. A maximum of two (2) Cs may be transferred in.

**3.3 Accredited Institutions:** The transferring institution must be accredited for granting Graduate degrees.

**3.4 Official Transcripts:** An official transcript must be on file in the Graduate Office.

**3.4.1** The credits must be certified as Graduate credits by that institution.

**3.4.2** The course grade earned was the equivalent of a "B" (3.0) or higher.

**3.4.3** The course credits were earned within the last seven years (See Section 5.0 Seven-Year Limit Rule).

**3.4.4** A Graduate transcript must include:

- Student's complete scholastic record
- Official seal of the granting institution
- Signature of the issuing officer

### **3.5 Petition Process for Transferring Credits:**

**3.5.1** An **Official Petition Form**, available on the SMSU website, must be completed and submitted to the appropriate department for each petitioned course.

**3.5.2** A course description (syllabus preferred) must be submitted with the petition.

**3.5.3** Transfer credits must be approved by the appropriate SMSU Graduate Department, the Dean, and the Registrar.

**3.5.4** Upon petition departments may approve additional transfer credits.

### **3.6 International Transfer Credit:**

**3.6.1.** Course credits toward a Graduate degree may be transferred from those international institutions with which SMSU has entered into a formal transfer agreement.

**3.6.2** Students who wish to transfer Graduate level credits to SMSU from accredited international universities must submit their transcripts to an approved foreign credential evaluation service.

**3.6.3** Credits from other international institutions with Graduate degree programs but which SMSU has not entered into a formal transfer agreement, must be approved by the Department and Graduate Council, or the Department and the Dean of Graduate Studies.

**3.6.4** All other transfer credit criteria apply.

## **Section 4 - Full-Time Status/Normal Load**

**4.0 Full-Time Graduate Course Load:** Each program shall determine the number of credits required for a student to be classified as full time for purposes other than Financial Aid.

**4.1** A Graduate student is required to take at least one course each Fall and Spring semester to maintain student status in the Graduate program (See Section **4.4 Policy on Continuous Enrollment**) unless the student has been granted an official leave of absence (See Section **4.6 Policy on Medical or Military Leave of Absence**).

### **4.2 Graduate Student Maximum Load Limit**

**4.2.1** A Graduate student may enroll in a maximum of 12 credits per term.

**4.2.1.1** A student may apply to his or her Department for an exception to the maximum load limit in unique and specialized circumstances, for example: an upcoming enlistment in the U.S. military service.

**4.2.1.2** If a student is granted an exception to the maximum load limit, the 3.0 (B) grade point average (GPA) still applies.

- 4.2.1.3 Overloads will not be granted when a student's grade point average (GPA) is below 3.0 (B).
- 4.2.1.4 Overload requests must be approved by the student's Advisor and either the Program Director or the Department Committee.
- 4.2.1.5 The auditing of graduate courses does not count in the student's maximum load limit.

**4.3 Satisfactory Academic Progress:** Beginning with the first attempted credit, graduate students must have a cumulative minimum grade point average of 3.0.

4.3.1 If a Graduate student is identified as having a cumulative grade point average lower than 3.0, the Department will allow the student an opportunity to explain any special circumstances.

4.3.1.1 If the student fails to provide an acceptable explanation, the Department may drop the student from the Graduate program. Then the student would have to reapply for admission to the University and into the Graduate program. Readmission to the Graduate program is not guaranteed.

4.3.1.2 If the student does provide an acceptable explanation, the Department may exercise its discretion in determining whether to (a) allow the student's Graduate advisor to help him or her update the student's Graduate degree completion plan, or (b) recommend the student complete an application for a Leave of Absence.

Such a recommendation does not guarantee the acceptance of a Leave of Absence request (See Section 4.6 **Policy on Medical or Military Leave of Absence**) by the Department or the Graduate Council.

#### **4.4 Policy on Continuous Enrollment**

4.4.1 Beginning with acceptance into a Graduate program, all students must maintain continuous enrollment, and pay tuition and fees, every Fall and Spring semester of every academic year until graduation. Summer courses are not required to maintain continuous enrollment.

4.4.2 For continuous enrollment registration and payment of associated expenses (tuition and fees) must take place by the fifth class day of the semester.

4.4.3 If a student fails to maintain continuous enrollment, the student will be dropped from the program.

4.4.4 If a student is dropped from the program, the student must apply for readmission and must pay the appropriate fee.

4.4.4.1 Readmission to the program is not guaranteed. If a student is dropped from the program and completes another application for admission, such application is reviewed by the Graduate Council and the Department

before a determination is made to accept or deny readmission to an SMSU Graduate program.

**4.4.4.2** A student who does not maintain continuous enrollment will not have access to resources provided by student fees and tuition.

#### **4.5 Exception to Continuous Enrollment**

**4.5.1** If a leave of absence is granted, the student will be readmitted to the program upon return. The student will be required to complete a re-admit form at that time. (See Section 4.6 **Policy on Medical or Military Leave of Absence**).

**4.5.1.1** To resume Graduate studies after a leave of absence, the student must notify the Director of Graduate Office and register by the fifth class day for the upcoming fall or spring semester. Failure to register by the fifth class day for the upcoming Fall or Spring semester will result in the student being dropped from the program.

**4.5.1.2** If a Graduate student is denied a Medical or Military Leave of Absence, and failed to register by the fifth class day for the upcoming Fall or Spring semester, the student will be dropped from the Graduate program.

**4.5.2** If a Graduate student has completed coursework, except for a Master's Thesis or required research project, the student must maintain continuous enrollment in a Graduate level "Continuing Studies" course and pay the associated fees to entitle him or her to access graduate faculty assessment and advising, or to use University facilities and electronic resources.

**4.5.2.1** If a Graduate student has completed coursework, except for a Master's Thesis or required research project, but fails to maintain continuous enrollment, such student may, at the Department's discretion, be dropped from the Graduate program.

**4.5.2.2** If a Graduate student has been dropped from the Graduate program for failure to maintain continuous enrollment, the student must reapply for admission to the University and into the Graduate program. Readmission to the Graduate program is not guaranteed.

**4.5.2.3** Whether a Graduate student is maintaining continuous enrollment or was dropped due to failure to meet that requirement, the seven-year time limit remains in effect (See Section 5.0 **Seven-Year Limit Rule**).

#### **4.6 Policy on Medical or Military Leave of Absence**

**4.6.1** Graduate students who have begun coursework in a University Graduate program may apply for a Medical or Military Leave of Absence of one or more continuous semesters at the Office of the Registrar.

**4.6.2** An application for a Medical or Military Leave of Absence should be made before the beginning of the upcoming Fall or Spring semester.

**4.6.3** Examples of a Medical Leave of Absence include, but are not limited to: the death of a family member requiring arrangements and/or estate/executor responsibilities, miscarriage or difficult birth requiring continuing medical and/or psychological intervention, or a life-threatening accident or illness for the Graduate student or an immediate family member.

**4.6.4** Examples of a Military Leave of Absence include, but are not limited to: deployment of a member of the U.S. National Guard, enlistment, or draft into a branch of the U.S. military service.

**4.6.4.1** In specific situations, such as an upcoming 18-month deployment, a Military Leave of Absence may be granted or extended.

**4.6.5** Requests for leaves of absence other than medical or military will be referred to the Graduate Council for review and recommendation (Back to Table of Contents)

## **Section 5 – Time Limitations**

### **5.0 Seven-Year Limit Rule**

**5.1** The student must complete all course credits earned toward a Graduate degree within a seven-year time period from the date of the first enrollment, including any required comprehensive exams, Thesis paper, or required research project.

**5.1.1** This seven-year time limit includes courses taken at other Graduate degree granting institutions and transferred to SMSU for credit toward a Graduate degree.

**5.2 Recourse/Remediation:** If a Graduate degree is not completed within a seven-year time period, the following avenues of recourse/remediation may apply:

**5.2.1 Retaking Courses:** Course credits which have expired (are older than seven years) must be retaken for credit; this includes any transferred credits which are older than seven years.

**5.2.2 Leave of Absence:** In the case of compelling circumstances, such as an official leave of absence for medical causes or military service, refer to **MN statute 192.502 Protections**.

## **Section 6 - Graduate Grade Appeals Process**

**6.0 Graduate students are afforded the right to appeal grades awarded, using the following steps:**

**Step One:** A student who believes a grade has been determined improperly must confer with the instructor within two weeks of the beginning of the next semester (not including summer sessions).

**Step Two:** The student may contact the Graduate Office to obtain a **Grade Appeals Petition Form**, which will be completed by the student and submitted to the Chair of the Graduate Council for review. A copy of the appeals form will be sent to the instructor of record by the Chair of the Graduate Council.



Step two must take place within two weeks of step one (the conference with the instructor).

**Step Three:** The Graduate Council should resolve the appeal within two weeks of step two. If the contested grade is “F”, the Council **may recommend** letting the grade stand or changing the grade to “IP” or “I” during the appeals process.

**Step Four:** The student may request the Graduate Dean review the Graduate Council decision within two weeks of that decision. The Graduate Dean will provide a written justification for his/her recommendation.

**Step Five:** The student may request the Provost review the Graduate Dean decision within two weeks of that decision. The Provost will provide a written justification for his/her final decision.

**Note: For specific policies of Departments with Graduate Programs refer to Graduate Department websites.**

**Note: The Graduate Programs at SMSU are committed to a policy of nondiscrimination in employment and education opportunity in compliance with all MNSCU and Federal policies.**