



AOP 12.08: REQUIREMENTS FOR DEGREES, ACADEMIC MINORS, CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS, AND ACADEMIC CONSORTIAL/CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Academic Operating Policy (AOP) is to establish requirements for different degrees and to provide the basis for establishing and maintaining academic minors and certificate programs which both recognize successful completion of course work area(s) other than a student's academic major.

POLICY/PROCEDURE

- 1. Degree Programs.** A degree program is defined by the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning as a course of study with a prescribed set of requirements which a student must complete. It is identified by a specific degree title and a specific major subject matter area. Mississippi State University (MSU) offers baccalaureate, master's, educational specialist, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Education, and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degrees. All courses and curricula are subject to the review and approval of the University Committee on Courses and Curricula; additionally, the Graduate Council will review and approve courses and curricula at the graduate level. Faculty members representing all of the MSU colleges serve on these committees. All courses and curricula are also subject to review and approval by the Academic Deans Council.

Undergraduate degrees. All baccalaureate degrees offered by MSU must comply with the guidelines established by the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning. All undergraduate degree programs must have a minimum of 120 semester hours and typically no more than 124 hours. Exceptions for exceeding the 124 can be requested based on discipline-specific accreditation and licensing standards and other standards in certain disciplines. All baccalaureate programs must meet or exceed the university's general education requirements.

Graduate Degrees. The five graduate degrees have length requirements as follows:

All master's degrees at MSU must have a minimum of 30 semester hours. The master's degree with a thesis option requires 24 hours of graduate course work and 6 hours of earned research/thesis hours. Any non-thesis master's option must contain a minimum of 30 hours of graduate course work.

- The educational specialist degree requires 30 semester hours of graduate credit above the master's degree. The educational specialist degree with a thesis option requires 24 hours of graduate course work and 6 hours of earned research/thesis hours. Any non-thesis educational specialist option must contain a minimum of 30 hours of graduate course work.

- The Doctor of Philosophy degree requires at least three academic years beyond the bachelor's degree to meet the course requirements. Also required for the Doctor of Philosophy are a dissertation and a minimum of 20 semester hours of research for the dissertation. Each academic unit which administers a degree program leading to the Doctor of Philosophy will determine, if any, the research and special skill requirements for the degree. The academic unit will notify the Dean of the Graduate School of any new skill requirements or any changes in current requirements.
- The Doctor of Education degree requires at least three academic years beyond the bachelor's degree or a minimum of 90 semester hours beyond the bachelor's degree to meet the course requirements. Also required for the doctorate of education are a dissertation and a minimum of 20 semester hours of research for the dissertation.
- The Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree is a professional degree, and it requires a minimum of the equivalent four academic years, including two academic years of hands-on clinical education.

2. Minors. An academic minor is a designation of a group of courses in an approved academic area in which a student can gain recognition for the completion of a required number of credit hours. Minors are optional at the undergraduate level but may be required in certain graduate degree programs. Minors can only be granted concurrently and in conjunction with the granting of a degree from Mississippi State University.

The following conditions apply to minors:

- A minimum of 15 credit hours is required for an undergraduate minor and a minimum of 9 credit hours is required for a minor at the master's level and 12 credit hours at the doctoral level.
- At least one-half of the hours in the undergraduate minor and two-thirds of the hours in a graduate minor must be taken at MSU.
- A minimum grade point average of 2.0 is required in all courses taken as part of an undergraduate minor, while a minimum 3.0 is required in all courses taken as part of a graduate minor.
- A department or academic unit granting a minor may specify majors for which students cannot earn that minor. Otherwise, students are free to pursue any approved minor.
- Academic units can establish additional requirements that go beyond those specified in this policy.

The establishment of all undergraduate minors must be approved by the University Committee on Courses and Curricula and by the Provost and Executive Vice President.

- A student must declare intent to complete requirements for a minor prior to the declaration to graduate.
- Completion of a minor will be noted on a student's academic transcript.

3. Certificate Programs. An academic certificate program is a thematic grouping of courses in which students can attain recognition for the completion of a required number of credit hours. It is distinct from a minor in that it is not necessary for the granting of a certificate to be tied to the granting of a degree although individual certificate programs may make that requirement. Unlike minors, which tend to be in areas where there are majors, certificate programs can be interdisciplinary and are often in areas in which the university offers no major.

The following conditions apply to certificates:

- A minimum of 12 credit hours in a program are required for a certificate.
- At least 50% of the hours earned in a certificate program must be taken at MSU.
- A minimum grade point average of 2.0 is required in all courses taken as part of an undergraduate certificate program, while a minimum 3.0 is required in all courses taken as part of a graduate certificate program.
- Certificate programs can be established with additional requirements that go beyond those specified in this policy.
- A committee or oversight body must be established that administers the certificate program.
- The establishment of all certificate programs must be approved by the University Committee on Courses and Curricula, the Provost and Executive Vice President, and the Assistant Commissioner of the Institutions of Higher Learning for Academics and Student Affairs.
- A certificate may be granted independently of a degree or in conjunction with a degree if so specified by the certificate program.
- Completion of a certificate program will be noted on a student's academic transcript.

4. Review and Approval of Courses and Curricula

Any addition, modification, or deletion of a course, or a degree program, or any formal and coherent grouping of courses (to include concentrations, minors, and certificate programs) is subject to the review and approval of the University Committee on Courses and Curricula and the Academic Deans Council. These changes are subject to the review of the Graduate Council when offered at the graduate level.

The following definitions shall be used to determine if review is required:

- **Degree:** The most general designation assigned to a graduate or undergraduate program of study. The degree is usually awarded by a College or School.
- **Major:** A subdivision of a degree. The major usually resides within a Department.
- **Degree Program:** The combination of degree and major.
- **Concentration:** A subdivision of a major. It is a formal and coherent grouping of courses beyond the core of the major that allows a student to focus on a specialty area.
- **Emphasis:** An informal grouping of courses within a concentration that provides a direction for advisors and students wishing to pursue a particular aspect of their chosen concentration. Emphases are not tracked or indicated on the student's transcript.

- **Minor:** A formal and coherent grouping of courses primarily outside the major designed to provide the student with specialized training. Minors are offered, and administered, by a department in an already-established area of study (recognized by the existence of a major, or course prefix), and are not generally available to students pursuing a major within the same department.
- **Certificate:** A formal and coherent grouping of courses taken outside the context of a degree program. If completed within a degree program it is usually considered a minor.

5. Academic Consortial/Contractual Agreements. Agreements which allow students to obtain academic credit which broadens their educational experience, while aligning with the mission of Mississippi State University.

- A. Consortial relationship—formal arrangement between Mississippi State University and one or more institutions of higher learning to share the responsibility for delivery of courses/programs meeting mutually agreed upon academic quality standards.
- B. Contractual agreement/formal arrangement between Mississippi State University and another institution(s) of higher learning for receipt of courses, programs, or other academic credit delivered by the other institution(s).
- C. All academic consortial/contractual agreements must be approved by the Provost and Executive Vice President. The agreements will be on file in the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President.
- D. The Associate Provost for Academic Affairs will be responsible for a periodic review of the academic consortial/contractual agreements to ensure compliance and alignment with the university's mission.
 - Agreements which specify an evaluation date will be reviewed accordingly.
 - Agreements which do not specify a review cycle will be evaluated biannually.

REVIEW

This AOP will be reviewed every four years or whenever circumstances require an earlier review by the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs (APAA) with recommendations for revision to the Provost and Executive Vice President.

REVIEWED:

/s/ Peter L. Ryan
Associate Provost for Academic Affairs

02/03/2020

/s/ David R. Shaw
Provost and Executive Vice President

02/06/2020

/s/ Randolph F. Follett
President, Robert Holland Faculty Senate

02/11/2020

/s/ Timothy N. Chamblee
Assistant Vice President and Director
Institutional Research and Effectiveness

03/02/2020

/s/ Joan Lucas
General Counsel

03/03/2020

APPROVED:

/s/ Mark Keenum
President

03/06/2020

This policy has been superseded