



Report of the *ad hoc* Working Group to examine Michigan Tech's policies and procedures on Masters degrees

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Charge from the Provost: Dr. Jacqueline Huntoon convened the group in the spring of 2021 and asked us to consider a variety of issues concerning graduate education at the Masters level at Michigan Tech. Those issues include the number of credits that the university currently requires for a Masters, the delineation between coursework and research based Masters, admissions to Masters programs, and changes that should be considered to facilitate the use of graduate certificates as subunits of a Masters degree (stacking).

Specific points of discussion and recommendations are below.

Work (credits) required to receive a Masters

The committee engaged in a wide-ranging discussion on the issue of the body of work required to earn a Masters degree, touching on the number of credits beyond the Bachelors that should be required, the intent of the person earning the degree, and how graduate certificates might be combined to achieve a Masters. Our recommendations on this topic are:

- Keep the number of credits beyond the Bachelors degree required for the Masters degree at 30. There was some discussion of reducing this number, perhaps to 27, to accommodate ease of combining nine credit graduate certificates. The committee feels that the 30 credits currently required is commensurate with Michigan Tech's reputation for quality and rigor. Note that the current accelerated Masters policy falls within this recommendation because the six credits that can be double counted between the Masters and Bachelors are, in fact, counted toward the Masters such that an accelerated Masters degree constitutes 30 credits.
- Preserve the current pathways available by which students can earn a Masters degree – coursework, report, thesis.
- Require programs to explicitly delineate what is necessary to complete the Masters if certificates are combined to achieve the requirements since credits in certificates will rarely add to 30 (most likely number is 27). This requirement should be clearly communicated to students and, ideally, posted on the program website.
- Require programs to explicitly delineate which certificates can be stacked to achieve a Masters for that program. Many programs have few explicit requirements, which

would suggest that any certificates from that program could be combined to achieve the requirements for a Masters in that program. Some programs have strict requirements in terms of courses that must be taken for the Masters. In those cases, the list of certificates that could be stacked to get the Masters degree might be quite small. Programs should decide and clearly communicate (preferably post on the web sites) which certificates could be combined for a Masters in their areas.

- Encourage programs to specify how Learning Objectives for Masters program will be assessed when certificates are stacked for the degree. All graduate certificates are required to have Learning Objectives and assessment plans. All degrees also have Learning Objectives and assessment plans. The Learning Objectives for three certificates (at least) and the Learning Objectives for the degree will not necessarily overlap. Since assessing the Learning Objectives for certificates does not replace the need to assess the Learning Objectives for the degree, programs should specify how this will be done.
- Create a Masters of Interdisciplinary Studies to accommodate students wishing to combine certificates from non-cognate areas. Many programs have put forward multiple certificates that could be combined in a straightforward way for a Masters in that program. In other cases, certificates in two closely aligned disciplines could easily be combined for a degree. However, there might be circumstances where certificates from three different fields could be combined to a coherent Masters degree. This recommendation is to accommodate such cases. We further recommend that such a degree be open only to students combining certificates. Finally we recommend that any such degree program be characterized by a class (at least three credits) which provides the synthesis and coherence as to why the three certificates being stacked to the degree constitute a coherent whole.

Time-to-degree

With a greater emphasis on online programs/credentials, time-to-degree is going to become an issue that we must confront. The current time-to-degree limit at Michigan Tech for a Masters is 5 years. (This can be extended upon appeal.) Someone taking one course per semester will most likely hit or exceed this limit. On the other hand, having a clearly stated time-to-degree provides students, faculty, and administrators important tools for ensuring timely completion of a degree – a research degree in particular. Our recommendations on this topic are:

- Remove the prescriptive time-to-degree limit for coursework students and define adequate progress to degree as enrollment plus satisfactory performance in classes (not being on probation etc.). Leaves of absence would not count against the requirement for enrollment.
- Freeze credits earned in certificates, once the certificate is awarded, such that they do not expire.

Admissions

The committee recognized that an increasing number of students are pursuing coursework based Masters degrees, and that admission to these programs can be a significant drain on faculty time and effort. The committee also discussed equitable and inclusive admissions practices at some length. The recommendations of the committee on this topic are:

- Encourage programs to go to a centralized admissions model for coursework Masters. This practice is has already been implemented for a limited number of programs.
- Encourage programs to admit students who successfully complete a certificate to coursework Masters with no further requirements. The Graduate School is facilitating this by adapting the D1 form (Masters to PhD admission) to be more generally applicable.