

To: Dr. Rob Roy McGregor, Chair of Graduate Council

From: Dr. Katherine Hall-Hertel, Associate Dean of the Graduate School

Date: January 17, 2017

RE: Substantive changes to Graduate Transfer Credit Policy

Please accept this proposal to revise the transfer credit policy. The outlined changes are intended to make the policy more equitable for students and less cumbersome for programs.

For your reference, the current academic policy on transfer credit is located on page 60 of the 2016-17 *Graduate Catalog* and it states:

1. To obtain approval to receive transfer credit, the student must submit an *Application for Transfer of Credit into a Graduate Degree Program* form (available online at graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/forms), approved by the graduate program coordinator, to the Graduate School. If the courses being transferred are from another institution, the student must include an official copy of the transcript along with the request, as well as valid course descriptions from that institution. The University is not obligated to accept any courses for transfer credit.
2. No more than six semester hours of transfer credit will be considered for acceptance into a master's degree program. The amount of transfer credit that may be accepted into a doctoral program varies by program. See program specific policies in this *Catalog*.
3. Undergraduate courses are not transferable for graduate credit.
4. Graduate courses that appear in the undergraduate section of a transcript are only transferable if the Registrar of the institution where the credit was received can verify in writing that the graduate courses in question were not counted toward the student's undergraduate degree requirements.
5. Courses which have been taken as part of any graduate program at UNC Charlotte or another institution for which the student has received a master's or doctorate degree are not transferable into a certificate program or a second master's degree program. The transferability of master's degree or doctoral coursework into a doctoral program varies by program. See program specific policies in this *Catalog*.
6. The grade in any course accepted for transferred credit must be A or B, as defined by UNC Charlotte (a 3.0 or above on a 0.0-4.0 grade point scale). Coursework that has been graded on a Pass/No Credit or Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory basis will not be accepted for transfer. In some cases, the Graduate School will allow completed thesis credit (graded on a Pass/No Credit scale) to be transferred into a doctoral program. It should be noted that, although the credit for a course may transfer, the grade will not be used to calculate the graduate GPA at UNC Charlotte.
7. Courses accepted for transfer are subject to the same time limitation as courses taken in residence.
8. To be considered for transfer credit, the courses must have been undertaken at a regionally accredited institution.
9. Courses taken at an accredited institution using the quarter system may be transferred but the quarter hours will be converted to semester hour credit.
10. Courses for which credit is accepted must be appropriate for approved University programs and curricula in which the student is enrolled.
11. Transfer credit is not awarded for non-degree seeking graduate students (i.e., post baccalaureate students).

12. Students may transfer the credits earned in a graduate certificate program toward a single degree that they pursue either in conjunction with the graduate certificate or after the certificate has been awarded. However, students may not transfer credits earned in one certificate program toward the satisfaction of requirements in a second certificate program

Additional policies on transfer credit are located on pages 69 – 77, with each degree type having unique rules. Please refer to Appendices A, B, C, and D for specific policy information.

Proposal 1 – Change transfer credit limits to a percentage of the program credit

Location: Degree Requirements and Academic Policies/Registration/Transfer Credit

Current catalog copy:

2. No more than six semester hours of transfer credit will be considered for acceptance into a master's degree program. The amount of transfer credit that may be accepted into a doctoral program varies by program. See program specific policies in this *Catalog*.

Proposed catalog copy:

2. No more than twenty percent (20%) of the total semester hours required will be accepted for transfer into a master's degree program. Up to six (6) hours may be accepted for transfer in master's programs requiring 30 semester hours; up to 9 hours may be accepted for master's programs requiring 45 semester hours; up to 12 hours may be accepted for master's programs requiring 60 semester hours, and so forth. Partial/fractional credits are not awarded.

The amount of transfer credit that may be accepted into a doctoral program varies by degree type and program. See degree and program specific policies in this *Catalog*.

This proposed change benefits UNC Charlotte's longer master's programs without significant changes to current practice for 30 – 39 hour programs, which include the majority of the master's programs on campus. Current transfer credit policy penalizes students enrolled in longer master's programs, and potentially limits the pool of candidates. Schools with similar percent-based policies include UNC Chapel Hill, University of Texas – Arlington, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Proposal 2 – Accelerated tracks for students coming in with a master's degree:

Location: Degree Requirements and Academic Policies/Ph.D Degree Requirements

Current catalog copy:

Ordinarily, a student must complete at least 72 post-baccalaureate credit hours in order to earn the Ph.D.

Proposed catalog copy:

Ordinarily, a student must complete at least 72 post-baccalaureate credit hours in order to earn the Ph.D.

In cases where a student has earned a master's degree in a relevant field from UNC Charlotte or another institution, the student may be permitted to pursue an accelerated track within their Ph.D. program. Such accelerated tracks must be approved through the graduate curriculum review process and appear in the program-specific sections of this *Catalog*.

Accelerated Tracks

Programs which admit students both with and without relevant master's degrees may seek formal approval of an accelerated track for those students with relevant master's degrees. Such a track reflects a reduced number of coursework credit hours and/or requirements. Under no circumstances will an accelerated track be approved which requires less than 42 credits, of which 36 must be completed at UNC Charlotte. Accelerated tracks must require the same number of research credits as the full program, as well as the Responsible Conduct of Research and Academic Integrity courses.

Students who have completed a relevant master's degree may be permitted to pursue an accelerated track.

Proposal 3 – Standardize the time limits for courses:

Location: Degree Requirements and Academic Policies/Ph.D Degree Requirements

Current catalog copy:

Program of Study

Although the maximum amount of credit past the baccalaureate degree that a Ph.D. student may transfer towards a doctorate is 30 semester hours, only courses appropriate for the approved program and curriculum in which the student is enrolled may be transferred. Appropriate courses should be determined by the student's supervisory committee and approved by the program coordinator before the request is submitted to the Graduate School. This rule applies whether the courses were taken at UNC Charlotte or elsewhere and whether a master's degree was earned or not. However, no more than six hours taken when the student was in post-baccalaureate (non-degree seeking) status may be applied toward the doctoral degree.

Time Limit

No course older than eight years may be applied towards a Ph.D. (excluding transfer credit). Courses that exceed this time limit must be revalidated or retaken, whichever the graduate program decides necessary, if they are to count in a degree program.

To revalidate a course, the student, along with the program coordinator and the course instructor, prepare a revalidation plan that must be reviewed and approved by the Graduate School. This plan often involves taking a special examination designed by the faculty of the graduate program. Once the plan has been completed, the program coordinator must notify the Graduate School in writing. The Revalidation Form is available on the Graduate School website at graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/forms.

Students may not revalidate courses with a grade of C or lower, courses that are internships or other forms of practica, or courses taken at other institutions. Additionally, no more than 25% of the courses on a student's program of study may be revalidated, and no course older than ten years may be revalidated.

Proposed catalog copy:

Program of Study

Students pursuing a Ph.D. who are not enrolled in an accelerated track are eligible to transfer a maximum of 30 credit hours from another institution. In situations where a student is pursuing a master's degree and a Ph.D. simultaneously at UNC Charlotte, up to 30 credit hours may be shared between the two programs, provided that the student completes the master's degree before or concurrently with the Ph.D. Only those courses appropriate for the approved program and curriculum in which the student is enrolled may be transferred or shared. Appropriate courses should be determined by the student's supervisory committee and approved by the program director before the request is submitted to the Graduate School. This rule applies whether the courses were taken at UNC Charlotte or elsewhere and whether a master's degree was earned or not.

No more than six hours taken when the student was in post-baccalaureate (non-degree seeking) status may be applied toward the doctoral degree.

Students enrolled in an accelerated track within a Ph.D. program may transfer a maximum of 6 credit hours from another institution.

Time Limit

No course older than eight years may be applied towards a Ph.D. (including transfer and/or shared credit). Courses that exceed this time limit must be revalidated or retaken, whichever the graduate program decides necessary, if they are to count in a degree program.

To revalidate a course, the student, along with the program coordinator and the course instructor, prepare a revalidation plan that must be reviewed and approved by the Graduate School. This plan often involves taking a special examination designed by the faculty of the graduate program. Once the plan has been completed, the program coordinator must notify the Graduate School in writing. The Revalidation Form is available on the Graduate School website at graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/forms.

Students may not revalidate courses with a grade of C or lower, courses that are internships or other forms of practica, or courses taken at other institutions. Additionally, no more than 25% of the courses on a student's program of study may be revalidated, and no course older than ten years may be revalidated.

These proposed changes represent a significant shift for the graduate transfer credit policy. If you reference the general transfer credit policy on page 1 of this document, you can see that "Courses accepted for transfer are subject to the same time limitation as courses taken in residence." However, that policy is contradicted by the transfer credit rules stated in the Ph.D. Requirements section, which states: "No course older than eight years may be applied towards a Ph.D. (excluding transfer credit)."

This policy contradiction creates two different classes of doctoral students:

1. Students who have not earned a master's degree or are currently pursuing a master's degree at UNC Charlotte. For these students, all doctoral courses expire after 8 years.
2. Students who have earned a master's degree at another institution or at UNC Charlotte. For these courses, only some courses expire after 8 years.

In practice, we see doctoral programs use transfer credit for two different purposes. In some cases, students have taken equivalent credit in another program or school, and their current program feels that it is appropriate to apply these credits towards their Ph.D. The other common application is to reduce the number of credits required for program completion for students holding a master's degree in a relevant field. This are two very different applications, in conjunction with the contradictory policy on time limits, creates an ambiguous transfer credit policy with an extremely low ease of use.

The [2012 Principles of Accreditation](#) from SACS specifies that graduate education must be progressively more advanced in academic content, and that students must complete at least 33% of the degree requirements at the institution awarding the degree. It is relatively common for the Graduate School to approve up to 30 hours of transfer credit for our doctoral students. Looking at this from another angle, students are not required to earn all credits for a Ph.D. from UNC Charlotte at this institution. For students with a master's degree in a relevant field, it is common for students to transfer in these master's credits and apply them towards the Ph.D. For reference, here is the policy for the Ph.D. in INES:

The INES Ph.D. program requires a minimum of 72 post-baccalaureate credit hours (a minor in this program is not applicable). A master's degree in an appropriate field consistent with the admission requirements may count up to 30 credit hours of transfer credit into the INES Program upon recommendation of the Program Director and upon approval by the Graduate School.

However, there is no policy which stipulates that we must transfer in these credits. What we propose is the creation of a new academic policy which allows Ph.D. programs to pursue Graduate Council approval of an accelerated track within the program, into which students with a relevant master's degree can apply. This accelerated track would eliminate the need to transfer in 30 credits from the master's degree. Admission to an accelerated track would require that a student have completed a 30+ hours master's program, and no accelerated tracks would be approved totaling fewer than 42 credit hours. This ensures that each student will have completed the 72 post-baccalaureate hours as required by Faculty Governance for the program.

Since an accelerated track means no longer having to transfer in credits from the master's degree, the issue of time limits on these courses becomes moot. This policy would also allow students to retain some ability to transfer in credit from another institution, including instances where doctoral students have an opportunity to enroll in coursework with a specific faculty member within their area of research at another institution (we have received numerous requests from the College of Engineering for such allowances for several years).

Students in programs that do not offer accelerated tracks would remain eligible to transfer in up to 30 credit hours from another institution, but these credits would be subject to the 8-year time limit. Additionally, students pursuing a master's degree and a Ph.D. simultaneously at UNC Charlotte would continue to be permitted to share 30 credits between the two programs, as they can under the current policy.

Essentially, we are attempting to kill two birds with one stone through these proposals – clean up the discrepancies within the existing transfer credit policy, and update the policy to better reflect what is transpiring in practice. Other schools have similar “accelerated track” options within doctoral programs, including the University of South Carolina.