

# graduate academic policies and procedures

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These pages contain information on policies, procedures, and regulations that are specific to graduate study at Columbia College Chicago. Students should check with their individual programs for program-specific regulations that may be more restrictive than those that apply to all graduate programs. This document is the authority for College-wide policies and procedures. Where a variance occurs with publications from individual programs—other than more restrictive departmental policies—this document should be considered authoritative.

Graduate students are also subject to College-wide policies that may be found in the *Informer*, the College's student handbook. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all policies, procedures, and regulations that apply to his/her program of study and the College as a whole.

Columbia College Chicago reserves the right to change, amend, modify, or cancel without notice, the statements on these pages.

## degree requirements

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The following requirements apply to all master's degree programs. Individual graduate programs may have additional requirements or more restrictive regulations. Students should consult with their program handbook or website.

- MA                    at least 32 credits at the graduate level
  - MAT                   at least 38 credits at the graduate level
  - MFA                   at least 40 credits at the graduate level
  - MAM                   at least 49 credits at the graduate level
- For degrees requiring 40 credits or fewer, no more than six credits of tutorial or independent project enrollment may be applied toward fulfillment of degree requirements; for degrees requiring 41 credits or more, no more than 12 credits may be applied.
  - Candidates for master's degrees and graduate certificates must present a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 (B) in graduate course work.
  - No more than six credit hours of course work with a grade of C may be applied towards a graduate degree or certificate.
  - Courses with a grade lower than C are not applied toward the fulfillment of degree requirements; however, the grades are included in the calculation of the cumulative grade point average (GPA).
  - All candidates for master's degrees must submit an acceptable final thesis/project or pass a comprehensive examination.

- Students working on their thesis/project must maintain continuous fall and spring thesis registration.
- The time limit for MA and MAT degrees is five years. All requirements including acceptance of the final thesis/project must be completed within this time. Approved leave of absence does not extend the time limit.
- For MFA and MAM degrees, the time limit is seven years. All requirements including acceptance of the final thesis/project or a passing grade on the comprehensive examination must be completed within this time. Approved leave of absence does not extend the time limit. (Please note that the Film/Video Department sometimes extends the period in which a student may complete his/her thesis.)
- If a student does not complete the degree within the prescribed time limit, the program may require that courses be retaken to replace those more than five or seven years old. The original grades for any retaken courses are not replaced, but appear on the academic record along with the “retake” course grade and are included in the calculation of the cumulative grade point average.

### *Course loads*

All graduate students are expected to maintain at least part-time status (six graduate credits) each term they are registered—the only exception being when a student is enrolled in Thesis. Full-time graduate enrollment is nine to twelve graduate credits each regular semester (fall and spring). In some departments, the faculty advisor may permit a student to enroll for more than twelve credits, subject to approval by the program director or department chair.

Part-time graduate students enroll for six to eight credits or a minimum of two courses each regular semester until they have completed the course work requirements of their degree program. Enrollment in the summer session or J-Session is optional for most departments and carries no minimum credit requirement.

Students holding a Follett Fellowship must enroll for a minimum of nine graduate credits during the semester(s) for which the fellowship is awarded. Students awarded the Graduate Opportunity Award (GOA), a Getz Graduate Award, or a Departmental Merit Award (DMA) must enroll for a minimum of six graduate credits during the semester(s) for which the award is given.

Students who wish to waive the minimum credit requirement for a particular term must submit a request in writing to the program director prior to registration. Approval of such a request is not automatic and should not be expected unless the student is in good standing and has completed at least nine credits of graduate course work at Columbia

A student who has been placed on academic probation may request a waiver for the probationary semester, in addition to any previous waiver, from the program director. Approval of the request precludes any future waiver, regardless of academic standing.

Students who wish to drop or withdraw from one or more courses after registration, thereby decreasing their enrollment below the six-credit minimum, must also submit a request for waiver to the program director. Such request will be approved or denied according to the same criteria as an advance request.

Before dropping or withdrawing from any courses, students should seek advice about the impact on their federal and other financial aid.

A waiver of the minimum credit requirement may adversely affect a subsequent request for a leave of absence. Before submitting a request for waiver, a student should meet with a faculty advisor to develop an overall plan that ensures progress toward degree completion.

### *Candidacy and status reviews*

Some graduate programs require periodic reviews of student achievement at specific points in their program of study. In MFA programs, this typically involves a review of student work prior to the commencement of the thesis project (a “candidacy review”). Some departments also review students at either the completion of their first semester or first year of study. A student who does not successfully pass such an assessment may be placed on academic probation until he/she makes a suitable adjustment—in grade point, work quality, etc.—or may be asked to leave the program.

### *Master’s thesis/project and comprehensive examination*

All of Columbia’s graduate programs require either an acceptable final thesis or project or a passing grade on a comprehensive examination. Description of the nature, scope, and format of the thesis/project for each graduate program appears in departmental publications along with a summary of the departmental procedures for submission, review, and (if required) revision and resubmission. Currently, the Arts, Entertainment, and Media Management (AEMM) program is the only program that allows students to take a comprehensive examination in lieu of submitting a thesis/project. Students interested in pursuing this option must work with their AEMM faculty advisor to determine their eligibility.

Except as otherwise specified in departmental publications, each master’s thesis or project is reviewed departmentally by a thesis committee. At least one committee member is selected by the student who may request a member from outside the department program. The thesis advisor serves as a member of the committee.

At the close of a semester of thesis registration, the thesis advisor awards a grade of S (satisfactory progress) or U (unsatisfactory program), whether or not the thesis/project has been completed. A student who has not completed the thesis/project by the close of the semester must register for the next semester or term for at least one credit of Thesis or Thesis Continuance before the thesis can be submitted for final review. A grade of S earns credits in progress toward a thesis/project but is not included in the calculation of the grade point average; a grade of U does not earn credit and is not included in the calculation of the grade point average.

Some graduate programs require a thesis defense. This defense must be completed before a student graduate and receive his/her degree.

### **grading policies**

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Columbia College Chicago uses a 4.0 scale to calculate the cumulative grade point average. Individual graduate programs vary in the awarding of pluses and minuses. Students should consult with their programs for program-specific grading policies.

A (4.0) A- (3.7) B+ (3.3) B (3.0) B- (2.7) C+ (2.3) C (2.0) C- (1.7) D (1.0) F, I, IP, W, NG (0)

The following departments do not make use of plus/minus grades in assessing graduate student work: Architectural Studies, Dance Movement Therapy and Counseling, Music, Photography.

### ***Incomplete (I) grade***

A graduate student whose performance in a course has been satisfactory and who finds, due to extraordinary and unforeseeable circumstances, that he/she is unable to complete one or more course requirements by the close of the term, may request a grade of Incomplete. Incompletes will not be issued without a properly completed request and approval form. Approval of a request for an Incomplete should be on file no later than the last day of the semester. A student may request Incomplete grades for some or all classes taken in a given semester.

The award of an Incomplete is never automatic. It requires consultation between student and instructor and commits each of them to a specific agreement concerning submission of the outstanding course work.

The maximum period allowable for the completion of course work is the close of the following academic term; individual circumstances may result in shorter periods. Incompletes in a spring semester course must be cleared no later than the end of the following summer session; fall Incompletes, in spring; summer, in fall, J-Session, in spring. A leave of absence or failure to enroll in the next academic term does not extend this deadline.

Incompletes that accumulate beyond the semester in which they must be cleared may result in consultation between the department and the appropriate school dean. In some cases, this may result in a student's being placed on probation, suspended, or dismissed from the graduate program. Students holding a grade of Incomplete in a course that is a prerequisite for another course will not be permitted to register for the more advanced course until the Incomplete is resolved.

### ***In Progress (IP)***

For graduate courses, the grade of IP is assigned only for those courses that are designed with the expectation that the students will not complete the course work in one semester's time. Course work such as internships or field placements may warrant an IP. When the student completes the course, usually within the next term, the instructor submits a Change of Grade form to the Records Office. The new final grade replaces the IP on the student's academic record.

### ***Withdrawal (W) from course(s)***

Following the fourth week of an academic term and prior to the end of the eighth week (or, from the second through the fourth week of the summer session), a student who wishes to withdraw from one or more courses must complete a withdrawal form in the Records Office. For each such course, a grade of W is entered on the permanent record. Courses with a grade of W do not earn credit and are not included in the calculation of the grade point average (see Course Loads).

Official withdrawal with a grade of W is not possible after the eighth week of classes (or fourth week of the summer session). Thereafter, if discontinuation is dictated by circumstances beyond the student's control, the grade of Incomplete (I) may be appropriate (see Incomplete Grade). Otherwise, the instructor will assign a course grade based upon the amount and quality of work completed prior to discontinuation.

Continuing students who drop or withdraw from all course work during any term following the first semester should first request a leave of absence. Spaces in graduate programs are limited, and a space

may not be available when a student desires to return. If a student has left the program without an approved leave of absence, he/she will need either official approval from the program director/department chair or official readmission based upon a new application form in order to resume study. (see Resuming Students and Returning Students). In either case, the five-year (or seven-year) limit for completion of degree requirements will be calculated from the initial term of entry.

Students who are planning to withdraw from course work should discuss their decision with the graduate program, the Records Office, and Student Financial Services. It is the student's responsibility to make sure he/she has met any and all withdrawal requirements and to be aware of any consequences, financial or otherwise, associated with the decision to withdraw. It is especially important that international graduate students also meet with the assistant dean of international student affairs to learn how their decision may affect their status (also see Withdrawal from Program).

### ***Change of grade***

All grade changes must be initiated by the instructor in whose course the original grade was awarded. A change of grade usually results from one of the circumstances listed below.

- Removal of Incomplete or In Progress following completion of outstanding requirements.
- Discovery of a posting error.
- Discovery of a violation of academic integrity.
- Reconsideration following an appeal.

### **course credit, course transfer, and academic records**

A graduate student seeking transfer credit must submit a written request to the program director or department chair along with an official transcript showing the course(s) in question. If the request is approved, a written recommendation of transfer credit is then forwarded to the Office of Graduate Admission along with supporting documents. The transfer credit is then posted to the student's academic record/transcript. To be eligible for transfer, course work must meet the following criteria:

- Courses must have been taken at a regionally accredited institution.
- Courses must have been taken for graduate credit.
- Courses must have earned an A or B or equivalent on a numerical scale.
- Credits earned cannot already have been applied toward the completion of a previous degree.
- Course work must have been completed not more than five years before the student's first semester of graduate study at Columbia.
- Some departments do not allow transfer of credit for required courses.

The total of all hours earned through transfer and credit-by-examination may not exceed six credits in programs requiring 40 credits or fewer, or twelve credits for programs requiring 41 hours or more.

Transfer credit is applied only toward credits earned and does not affect the cumulative grade point average.

Transfer credit evaluations are conducted only for admitted graduate students. While some preliminary transfer credit evaluation may be possible for prospective students, it is at the discretion of the graduate department; and it is not official or binding.

### ***Credit by examination***

Graduate students may also request the award of credit by examination in lieu of enrolling for some Columbia courses. The request must be approved by the student's faculty advisor and the program director or department chair. The examination is generally administered by the regular instructor of the course in question.

The results of the examination, including a recommended grade of A or B, are submitted to the program director or department chair for final approval. The course title, number, credits, and grade are then submitted to the Office of Graduate Admission along with the name of the examining instructor for entry onto the student's academic record. Student Financial Services prepares the appropriate statement of charges (currently \$50) for each posting of credits.

Credit by examination earns credit toward completion of degree requirement and the grade is included in the calculation of the cumulative grade point average. A total of all hours earned through transfer credit and credit by examination may not exceed six credits for programs requiring 40 credits or fewer or twelve credits for programs requiring 41 hours or more.

### ***Internal transfer***

Graduate students may study in only one Columbia graduate program at a time. In the rare instance of program change within Columbia, the College does not specify a limit on internal transfer. Instead, such transfers are handled on a case-by-case basis by the programs involved.

A graduate student who wishes to change degree programs *within* his/her current graduate department must submit the following to the Office of Graduate Admissions by the appropriate application deadline:

- A letter of intent addressed to the director of graduate admissions.
- A new application form for the new program.
- An approval letter from the chair/director of the new program detailing any supplemental requirements.
- Any supplemental documents/work samples, etc., required by the new program.

A graduate student who wishes to withdraw from one degree program and enter an entirely *different* degree program must submit a new application package with all supporting materials to the director of graduate admissions. Such students must follow the regular guidelines and deadlines as outlined in the admission instructions. These students will be reviewed for admission along with other applicants for that cycle.

The College does not permit vertical transfer of credits from undergraduate courses. When prospective graduate students elect to enroll for undergraduate course work, such course work is not subsequently applicable toward the requirements of the graduate degree.

### ***Course waivers***

Graduate credit is awarded only through regular enrollment, transfer credit, and credit by examination. Columbia College does not offer course waivers or other exemptions, such as life experience credentialing, at the graduate level. Therefore, graduate students do not receive credit by "placing out" of courses; however, the admissions committee of a program may recommend waiving prerequisite

undergraduate courses normally required for admission. Some departments do not allow waivers for required courses.

### *Course substitutions*

When a required graduate course would essentially duplicate life experience or a course previously taken for undergraduate credit, a graduate student may request departmental approval to replace the required course in lieu of retaking it for graduate credit. The student petitions the program director or department chair for approval to replace the required course with another course in the program curriculum. The department chair/program director compares the student's prior knowledge attained with the course curriculum and may approve course replacement. The approval of course replacement does not in any way reduce the credit requirements for earning a graduate degree in a particular program. Some departments do not allow substitution for required courses.

### *Dropping courses*

After registration and prior to the end of the fourth week of classes, a student wishing to drop one or more courses completes the drop/add process online or in the Records Office. Dropped courses will not appear on the student's academic record.

### *Retaking courses*

Any course in which a W was assigned may be taken for credit. Within limits established by individual programs, certain courses required for the degree may be taken for credit more than once. The original grade for the course is not replaced. Both the original grade and the "retake" course grade appear on the academic record and are included in calculation of the cumulative grade point average.

Before a student decides to retake a course, he/she should first consult with a faculty advisor and Student Financial Services to determine whether such a decision would have any impact on his/her federal or other financial aid.

### *Transcripts*

Official Columbia College Chicago transcripts are maintained by the Records Office. Students may request official transcripts from that office located at 600 South Michigan Avenue. For information, call 312-369-7224.

## **student standing**

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### *Leave of absence*

Graduate students may be granted a leave of absence, unconditional or conditional, for up to one calendar year upon the recommendation of the program director or department chair. In either case, an approved leave of absence does not extend the time limit for completion of degree requirements. The circumstances necessitating the leave will be taken into consideration if an extension of the time limit is requested.

Unconditional leave may be granted to students in good standing who have not previously taken a leave of absence and who have maintained the required minimum credit course load. The request must be submitted to the program director/department chair at least six weeks prior to the registration period for the first term of absence. At the close of the authorized period of leave, students must contact the program director/department chair to begin the process of resuming study.

Conditional leave may be granted to students who have been placed on academic probation in lieu of enrollment for the probationary semester. If leave is granted, a letter of approval will specify the conditions that must be met prior to resumption of study. These conditions will include, but not necessarily be limited to, the conversion of any outstanding Incomplete grades to a grade of C or better. Conditional leave will be granted only once.

### *Withdrawal from program*

Applicants who have accepted an offer of admission but have not yet registered for classes may withdraw from the program by canceling their confirmation of intention to enroll. Applicants should do this by contacting the director of graduate admissions before the beginning of the originally intended term of study.

Students who drop or withdraw from all course work during their first term of graduate enrollment will not have established graduate standing and may be required to reapply. If a subsequent application for readmission is approved, calculation of the five-year (or seven-year) limit for completion of degree requirements will begin with the new term of entry (see Time Limits).

### *Academic probation*

A student whose progress in a graduate program fails to meet minimum academic standards is placed on academic probation for one regular semester. The following requirements apply to all graduate students. Individual graduate programs may have additional requirements.

- A student who earns a semester grade point average of 2.5 or less in any term (fall, spring, or summer) is placed on probation for the next regular semester (fall or spring).
- A student whose cumulative grade point average falls below 3.0 for two consecutive academic terms is placed on probation for the following fall and spring semesters.
- Regardless of grade point average, a student whose cumulative academic record shows two grades less than B (totaling six credits or more) is placed on probation for the fall or spring semester following the semester in which the second grade is earned.

In matters relating to academic probation, the summer session is treated differently from the fall and spring semesters. Poor performance in the summer session may result in placement on probation; however, since summer enrollment is optional, the summer session is not calculated as a probationary term for students whose spring semester performance results in probation. For such students, the following fall semester is the term of probation.

Academic probation does not preclude continued enrollment in graduate study. It does attach the following two conditions to enrollment.

- The student must earn at least a B in all courses attempted during the probationary semester; the normal minimum credit requirement may be waived upon request (see Course Loads).
- The student may not arrange for an incomplete in any course attempted during the probationary semester.

A student who meets these conditions is automatically restored to good standing at the close of the probationary semester. A student who fails to meet these conditions may be suspended from the graduate program or, at the discretion of the program/department, may be continued on probation.

### ***Academic suspension***

Suspension is a temporary withdrawal of permission to enroll. It is possible for a student to be reinstated after at least one fall or spring semester on suspension.

Academic suspension is the consequence of continuing unsatisfactory academic performance following placement on academic probation. A student may be suspended under the following conditions:

- The student does not fulfill the conditions of probation by the end of the probationary semester.
- The student has been placed on probation before the current probation and, as a result of the current probation, again fails to meet minimum academic standards.

The program director or department chair oversees conditions for suspension and reinstatement after suspension.

### ***Reinstatement after suspension***

A student who has been suspended for academic reasons is not eligible to enroll in the next regular semester (fall or spring). The student may petition the program for reinstatement after a period of one regular semester. The petition should describe any changes in those circumstances that may have hindered academic performance and must offer clear evidence of potential for further progress toward the degree. In order for a petition for reinstatement to be considered by the program, it must be submitted no later than six weeks before the start of the semester for which reinstatement is sought.

### ***Academic dismissal***

A student who has been reinstated following academic suspension and again fails to meet minimum academic standards will be dismissed from the graduate program. Following academic dismissal, a student is not eligible for readmission to any of Columbia's graduate programs.

### ***Dismissal for non-academic reasons***

A student whose behavior is inconsistent with the College's code of conduct may be dismissed summarily by the school dean or another member of the College's upper administration.

### ***Resuming students and returning students***

Students who have interrupted their studies for one full academic year or longer and who have not been granted an official leave of absence must obtain permission to resume their studies from the program director or department chair. Students who wish to resume must discuss this possibility with their department advisor and send a written request with an explanation of their absence to the program director/department chair. This request must be made at least six weeks prior to the start of the term in question.

## **appeals procedures**

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Graduate students may appeal administrative decisions by submitting a written petition to the Petition for Exceptions Committee in the Office of Student Affairs with copies to the program director and

faculty advisor. Following review at the department level, the program director or department chair will attach a written recommendation to the original petition and forward both to the dean of the relevant school. Written notification of the dean's decision is mailed to the student with copies to the originating department and the faculty advisor. This closes the appeals dossier and a copy is also placed in the student's permanent file.

Similarly, graduate students may appeal for review of any academic decision, such as the award of a course grade. Typically, such issues are resolved informally between the student and the instructor. If the informal appeal is not successful, the student may elect to file a formal appeal by submitting a written petition to the program director or department chair with a copy to the student's faculty advisor and the course instructor. Following review at the department level, the written decision of the director or chair is mailed to the student with copies to the faculty advisor, course instructor, and student's permanent file.

If the student wishes to appeal the decision of the program director or department chair, a written petition must be submitted to the dean of the relevant school with copies to the faculty advisor, the program director or department chair, and the course instructor. The decision of the dean is final. Written notification of the decision is mailed to the student with copies to the faculty advisor, program director or department chair, course instructor, and the student's permanent file.

## **graduation procedures**

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There are three required forms that must be submitted by students completing their graduate degrees: Graduation Application Form, Program of Study Form 401, and the Thesis Acceptance Form. The Graduation Application Form and Form 401 are initiated and completed by the student. Both forms are available on the graduate website and are due at different points during the final term of student. The website also provides specific instructions and deadlines for these forms. The Thesis Acceptance Form is completed by the program once the thesis paper/project/exam has been approved.

## **academic year**

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Each academic year at Columbia includes two 15-week semesters (fall and spring) plus a summer session. Courses taken in the J-Session are counted as part of the spring term. The regular academic year for most programs is fall and spring semesters. Some programs encourage their students also to take full advantage of the summer semester. For purposes of the awards such as Follett, GOA, and assistantships, only fall and spring semesters are included. Students who receive financial aid and wish to take summer courses must budget for the in their existing financial aid package.

While the usual term of a class is a full 15 weeks, some subjects may be offered in shorter periods, ranging from one to eight weeks. These intensive courses meet more frequently than the 15-week courses.

Courses are scheduled during the day and evening as well as on Saturdays to accommodate the schedules of working students. The number of evening and weekend courses varies by department.