

Proposing, Revising, and Suspending Graduate Degree and Certificate Programs

2024–25



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Introduction

The creation and revision of doctoral, master's, and certificate programs represents an important partnership between Rackham Graduate School, graduate faculty, and programs. Rackham's guidelines are designed to advance excellence in graduate education and to cultivate a vibrant and diverse student community.

Please contact Assistant Dean Emily Swafford for information and assistance about all matters contained in these guidelines: swafford@umich.edu; 734.615.9709.

1. New Graduate Degree and Certificate Programs

The Rackham Executive Board reviews and approves new graduate degree and certificate programs. Proposals may be submitted at any time, but development of a new program can take several months to a year, depending on the complexity of the proposal and the academic calendar. Only after final approvals have been obtained may a new program be advertised or admit students.

[Master's programs](#) must require a minimum of 24 credit hours (30 hours in the College of Engineering) of graded graduate coursework registered as a Rackham student.

A [certificate of graduate study](#) is a 12 to 19 credit non-degree credential that focuses on a topic of academic interest by providing a specialized set of courses and related activities. Proposals should address content areas outlined below in section 1.2. and indicate whether persons outside the university may also apply for the program as non-candidates for degree.

1.1. Steps from Proposal Development to Program Activation

1. *Initiation.* Consultation with Rackham about proposal development and timeframe for approval. It is recommended that programs contact Assistant Dean Emily Swafford early in proposal development so that Rackham can partner with programs and help navigate the process.
2. *Abstract and draft proposal.*
3. *Preliminary Rackham review.* Rackham deans review the draft and give feedback. During the academic year, Rackham deans meet biweekly.
4. *Collection of support letters from units.*
5. *Rackham Executive Board.* The Rackham Executive Board reviews and approves new programs at biweekly meetings during the academic year.
6. *Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU).* [MASU meets quarterly to give final approval for new degree programs.](#) Graduate certificates do not need MASU approval. New programs may not advertise or recruit and admit students until MASU confirms approval.
7. *Activation.* The registrar activates the new program and Rackham opens it to admissions.

1.2. Required Content for Degree and Graduate Certificate Proposals

Proposals must explain the rationale for the new program and provide a comprehensive description of the academic content and the administrative structure, operational activities, and resources that will sustain the quality of the new program and ensure the quality of the student experience.

The name should clearly and accurately indicate the purpose and scope of the proposed degree, degree sub-plan, or certificate and not create the possibility of confusion or of being interpreted as significantly overlapping with an existing program.

1.2.1. Abstract

At an early stage, the faculty developing the proposal should send the graduate school a proposal abstract of up to 350 words. The abstract should include:

- name of the degree or certificate
- a brief summary of the rationale, objectives, and anticipated career paths for students
- a short overview of the general curricular elements
- names of units expected to contribute courses, faculty, or other significant resources
- brief summary of program location and administration
- anticipated term/year the program will open for admissions

The abstract should be shared with all graduate faculty in the unit where the program will be located. The graduate school will place the abstract in its monthly email newsletter sent to chairs and directors of Rackham programs, inviting suggestions and feedback during the following 30 days. Abstracts must be received in the first week of each month to be included in the monthly Rackham newsletter.

The circulation of the abstract to the broader graduate faculty will open opportunities for synergism and possible collaborations early in the proposal development. Feedback will be shared with the faculty proposers and will be appended to the proposal submitted for approval to Rackham.

1.2.2. Objectives and Rationale

Details should include:

- the academic focus and objectives, including why a new program is needed rather than a modification of an existing program
- evidence of demand, including anticipated career paths and job prospects for graduates
- the expected relationship to or synergy with other programs with which it might overlap or have proximate interests, and any anticipated impact on other U-M programs
- a discussion of the features and strengths of the program relative to similar programs at peer universities and other universities in Michigan

1.2.3. Curriculum and Academic Requirements

Proposals should observe the graduate school's policy requirements for [Ph.D. degrees](#), [master's degrees](#), [dual degrees](#), [certificates](#), and [accelerated master's degrees](#). Coursework should be primarily at the 500 level and higher; 400-level courses must be approved by the registrar for graduate credit and require work appropriate for the graduate level.

A comprehensive description of the curriculum should include:

- a model term-by-term program of study that shows courses with credits and other requirements; total required credits; and anticipated time to degree and time to candidacy for doctoral programs
- a brief description of each required course with credit hours

- a list of elective courses with credit hours
- additional requirements for language or other competency, capstone projects, internships, fieldwork, practicums, or requirements mandated by accrediting agencies, and how these will be assessed and approved
- for doctoral programs, [pre-candidacy requirements, written and oral qualifying exams, and other required milestones for advancing to candidacy](#), as well as expectations for the structure of the dissertation, i.e., monograph, journal articles, performance (for the Doctor of Musical Arts)
- a discussion of how professional or career development will be integrated into the program

Sub-plans. Sub-plans may be used to define tracks of study or areas of concentration within a degree program. Sub-plans appear only on the transcript. Each sub-plan should include additional explanation of the rationale and requirements, including courses and credit hours.

Doctoral degree proposals should include an exit master's option for students who leave the program after completing the pre-candidacy requirements. Doctoral proposals may also include a separate standalone master's degree program in the same field. Curriculum and requirements for a standalone master's degree should approximate those for pre-candidacy.

1.2.4. Graduate Faculty Resources

Provide evidence of sufficient graduate faculty with active records of research and graduate teaching:

- names, ranks, and tenure status of faculty who will be active participants
- evidence of sufficient core faculty to provide leadership, to ensure that required courses are taught regularly, and to provide mentoring and advising
- for Ph.D. program proposals, short CVs of participating faculty.

1.2.5. Admissions and Enrollment Planning

Discuss:

- anticipated admissions activity, including first-year enrollment targets and overall steady-state program enrollment, and impact on enrollments in other programs
- admission requirements and the admissions process, including requirements for English proficiency exams such as TOEFL¹
- active measures to reach and recruit a diverse pool of students, particularly those traditionally underrepresented in the program or field

¹ Applicants whose native language is not English and who do not meet the graduate school's criteria for exemption must submit TOEFL or other English language test scores as required to meet [Rackham English proficiency requirements](#).

1.2.6. Advising, Mentoring, and the Student Community

Discuss plans to support student success:

- assurance of effective academic advising and mentoring, including annual student reviews and support for professional and career preparation
- measures for building and maintaining an inclusive community, ensuring successful degree completion of students traditionally underrepresented in the program or field

1.2.7. Administration

Identify the academic unit where the program will be administratively located and clearly articulate a leadership plan. Generally, oversight of the curriculum and academic experience is the responsibility of the graduate faculty affiliated with the program. Program chairs or directors, which are equivalent terms for the same administrative role, should demonstrate leadership experience in graduate education.

- Except as noted below, the chair or director should be a tenured graduate faculty member who can assure stability of leadership and, for doctoral programs, draw on experience chairing dissertation committees.
- When appropriate for certain master's and certificate programs that have a focus on clinical or professional practice, a proposal may recommend that a member of the graduate faculty who is a clinical associate professor, clinical professor, research associate professor, or research professor be eligible to serve as program chair or director. The chair must have a demonstrated record of experience in graduate education.
- The dean or designee of the school or college that is the administrative home of the degree or certificate program must appoint the chair or director. For interdepartmental degree programs, the appointment process must be inclusive of the deans or the designees of the primary participating academic units.
- Proposals should discuss the composition and duties of the graduate faculty program committee and explain how the committee will be appointed; the department chair or dean of the administrative home of the program should confirm appointments to this committee.
- Proposals for interdepartmental and certificate programs should describe the process and criteria for the formal designation of graduate faculty affiliates and for periodic review of their engagement and contributions.
- Proposals should explain how faculty advising and other administrative responsibilities will be assigned, and how the graduate coordinator and other student services will be provided.

Note: Degree and certificate programs should be administratively located within schools or colleges and may not be administered by research institutes, centers, or programs unless in exceptional circumstances and with approval by the graduate school.

1.2.8. Finances, Space, and Equipment

Proposals should outline any necessary funding arrangements. Rackham approval does not convey or imply funding for any costs associated with starting or maintaining a new program. Proposals should provide information about:

- source of funding for anticipated start-up or bridging costs
- for Ph.D. programs, sources for funding five years of full support, as well as sources of additional funding for research or other needed requirements
- grants or other funds available for master's students
- source of funding for administrative and other program costs
- source of funding for specialized equipment or other academic resources
- unit that will provide space for program administration and operations
- firm commitments from the units that will provide resources to meet transition and ongoing program costs

1.3. Letters of Support

The dean or designee of the school or college where the program will be administratively located should provide a letter affirming that faculty have approved the proposal under the procedures of the unit. In addition, deans or designees, chairs, and directors of academic units contributing courses, faculty effort, funding, space, or other resources for the proposed program must provide letters of support that confirm these commitments.

For review by the College of Engineering's Curriculum Committee, contact [Lola Eniola-Adefeso](#). For review by the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts's Dean's Cabinet and Executive Committee, contact [Paula Hathaway](#) (lsa-grad-ed@umich.edu).

1.4. Dual Master's Degree Programs

[Dual master's programs](#) lead to two different degree citations on the transcript and two separate diplomas. Students undertake complementary programs of study that allow [limited double counting of course credits](#). In no case may double-counting exceed one quarter of the total credits for the two degrees, and triple-counting credits for a third certificate or degree is not allowed.

1.5. Accelerated Master's Degree Programs (4+1)

Undergraduates with an exceptional academic record may apply in their junior or senior year to work toward an [accelerated master's degree \(AMD\)](#) while fulfilling the remainder of their bachelor's requirements. A qualified student who is close to completing undergraduate requirements in 3 or 3.5 years may apply to an AMD. A student admitted to an AMD may start earning credits toward the master's while finishing the undergraduate degree and complete a two-year master's with only one additional year of study enrolled in Rackham.

Students may double count and/or transfer to the master's up to half the credits of required graduate-level coursework taken as an undergraduate. Credits earned for courses required for the undergraduate degree may not be double-counted, nor may credits for graduate courses from other institutions that have been transferred into the undergraduate registration. No courses may be triple-counted with any other degree, and no transfer

credits from a third institution are allowed. Students admitted to an AMD program are not eligible to apply to a dual master's degree program.

AMD proposals should discuss:

- admission requirements, including academic statement of purpose, personal statement, or other credentials, and application timeline
- coordination with undergraduate programs for recruitment, admission, and transition to the master's
- curriculum, with confirmation that requirements are identical for all students in the program, including a model term-by-term program of study for years four and five listing required courses, cognates, electives, and credit hours that shows how students will complete both bachelor's and master's degrees
- arrangements for instruction in the responsible conduct of research and scholarship

The registrar will assign a sub-field program code for AMD students.

Note: In the College of Engineering, [Sequential Undergraduate/Graduate Studies](#) (SUGS) degree programs are governed by additional rules and follow a modified approval pathway. Please contact Assistant Dean Emily Swafford if you are interested in forming a new SUGS degree program.

1.5.1. Accelerated Master's Degree Programs with Other Institutions (3+2)

The graduate school may approve partnership agreements that allow undergraduates from another institution to participate in an AMD program. In this arrangement, students complete nearly all requirements for the bachelor's degree in three years at their home institution. In the fourth year, they are admitted to U-M as undergraduate departmental non-candidates for degree (NCFD) or comparable status, during which they complete requirements for the bachelor's from their home institution while also taking graduate courses and applying for admission to the master's. In the fifth year, they enroll as Rackham students and complete the master's degree.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the U-M academic unit(s) and the partner institution governs the terms, conditions, and procedures for the program. MOUs with international partners are coordinated and approved by the Office of the Vice Provost for Global and Engaged Education. The MOU must specify that the graduate school may terminate the agreement if it determines that the partners are not meeting their commitment to the program or the students, or that the quality is falling short of standards expected for Rackham graduate programs. An MOU may not be signed without prior approval by the graduate school. When the graduate school approves the program, the MOU may be sent to the Office of the Vice Provost for Global Engagement and Interdisciplinary Academic Affairs for final institutional review and authorization.

1.5.1.1. General Structure

Year Three, At Home Institution

- Students apply to U-M for undergraduate departmental NCFD admission, with decisions made by the graduate admissions committee with regard to promise for successful admission to the master's program.

Year Four, Undergraduate NCFD Enrollment

- Students enroll for two terms of full-time study with undergraduate NCFD status, earning a minimum of 12 credits per term for courses that can either be transferred to the bachelor's degree at the home institution or used to meet requirements for the master's. Note: Students with NCFD status are not permitted to register for classes until the first day of the term, so the program should confirm that class space is available for students.
- Students apply for admission to the master's program.
- Students complete the bachelor's degree by the spring/summer term.

Year Five, Rackham Master's Registration

- Students enroll in the master's program with Rackham registration (or registration in another academic unit with non-Rackham graduate term) for a minimum of two full terms with a minimum of nine credits per term, paying full tuition.
- Students complete the requirements for and receive the master's degree.

1.5.1.2. Additional Proposal Requirements

Rationale and Objectives

- Provide a substantive rationale that explains the objectives of the partnership, the anticipated benefits for the program and all students, and how these objectives align with the goals of the graduate program and those of the university more broadly. Examples would include partnerships with minority-serving institutions or institutions in world regions where U-M has few collaborative engagements.

NCFD Admission

Contact the Office of Undergraduate Admissions for information about NCFD admissions.

- Discuss enrollment targets and intended steady-state cohort size both in absolute numbers and relative to the program's current enrollment.
- To safeguard transparency of the selection process, describe procedures for ensuring that the undergraduate institution consults with the U-M program about endorsing applicants.
- Establish minimal [TOEFL scores](#) for applicants whose native language is not English.
- Confirm availability of class space for AMD students.

Admission to the Master's

- Outline the criteria for admission.
- Describe arrangements for students not admitted to the master's to exit the program.

Program Implementation

- Explain arrangements for joint governance with the partner institution, including identification of the lead U-M faculty member who will be responsible for oversight of the program.
- Describe administrative support, including provision of services for students in year four.
- Discuss plans for evaluating the program jointly with the partner institution.

Advising

- Provide names and ranks of faculty who will collaborate with advisors at the partner institution to advise and mentor students during year four.
- Describe arrangements for supporting the transition of students in year four and their successful integration with the program.

Finances

Explain anticipated costs of tuition, student support, health insurance, travel, and books and other supplies, and expected sources of funding.

1.6. Online Degree or Certificate Programs

With approval by the graduate school, degree or certificate programs may deliver half or more of required courses online. Proposals must provide assurance that the quality of education and access to student services maintains the same standards as for in-person programs. Graduate faculty must participate actively; the program must allow direct interaction of students with faculty and may not rely solely on the distribution of recorded material.

Online programs must verify that course materials are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accessible to students with visual or other disabilities. Information and guidelines are available at the Office for Institutional Equity's [Web Accessibility website](#). Programs must also comply with the university's [copyright policy](#) and [U.S. export control restrictions](#) on access by foreign nationals to certain regulated information or software. Academic units are strongly encouraged to work with the Center for Academic Innovation (CAI) when developing proposals for online or hybrid programs. CAI must review such proposals for compliance considerations. To do so, complete the [Online and Hybrid Program \(OHP\) approval form](#) and include it with the proposal. Contact ai-ohp-team@umich.edu for more information, or to discuss an online or hybrid program proposal.

In addition to information required for all proposals, online proposals must discuss:

- participation by regular graduate faculty in design and delivery of instruction and provisions for assuring frequent and effective interaction with such faculty, including the opportunity for asking questions and for interaction with other students
- qualifications of adjunct faculty that may teach and the extent of their contributions
- assessment mechanisms to monitor curriculum and instruction and to train faculty in effective distance-teaching techniques
- arrangements for student access to learning and research resources, including library, computing, laboratory, and other facilities necessary for completion of the degree
- access to advising, professional development, and other student services
- any on-campus component of instruction
- mechanisms to ensure academic integrity, including authentication to assure that enrolled students do all required work themselves
- the adequacy of technical and infrastructural resources for program delivery and student support, including providing students with technical support for hardware, software, and the delivery system required in the program

- arrangements to ensure access for students with disabilities; to comply with university policies and legal and regulatory requirements for copyright; and to comply with U.S. export control regulations

2. Changes to Existing Programs

Before implementing changes to curriculum and other program requirements, chairs should inform the graduate school to ensure that program information and degree audits are accurate. The approval process for revising existing programs mirrors the process for creating a new program. It is recommended that programs contact Assistant Dean Emily Swafford early in the revision process, so that Rackham can partner with programs and help navigate the process. It is common for the revision process to encompass several rounds of review and can often take six months or more.

2.1. Major Revisions

The graduate school must approve requests for substantive revisions that affect the scope or nature of the program. These include:

- *a new mission or focus, including change of program name²
- modifications to admission requirements
- *a change in the number of required credit hours
- alteration of candidacy requirements for Ph.D. programs
- addition of a new sub-plan or modification or cancellation of an existing one
- the provision of half or more of instruction online
- for interdepartmental programs, the withdrawal of a collaborating department or program, or the participation of a new academic unit
- other major curricular changes

Program chairs should submit a detailed explanation that discusses the difference between the existing and revised programs, the rationale, anticipated impact, and confirmation of graduate faculty approval. Chairs or directors of all units involved in the program must provide written approval to the graduate school. Major revisions may require review by the Rackham Executive Board.

2.2. Minor Modifications

Modifications that do not require approval but must be reported to the [Rackham Office of Academic Records and Dissertations](#) for degree audit purposes include:

- revisions to cognate requirements
- changes to foreign language requirements
- revisions to thesis/capstone project requirements

Minor changes that do not need reporting include:

- introduction of a new core course to replace an existing one
- course changes that do not affect the number of required credit hours

² Revisions with an asterisk require notification of the Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU).

3. Admissions Suspension, Moratorium, and Program Closure

3.1. One-Year Admissions Suspension

Graduate programs may ask the Rackham dean to suspend admissions for one year. An admissions suspension allows a program to address short-term issues such as over-enrollment in a given year, the need for curriculum redesign, or temporary financial pressures.

A request should provide reasons for the suspension and the academic year when it should be in effect. The graduate chair or director should submit a request far enough in advance for the graduate school to act before applications open—requests should be submitted by August 1 for an admissions suspension to take effect in the fall or winter term of the following academic year. The request should include confirmation of approval by the program's graduate faculty.

The graduate school and the program will place a suspension notice on their websites. The program will maintain regular curriculum, advising, and other resources for currently enrolled students.

Toward the end of the suspension year, the program should ask the Rackham dean to reopen admissions if it is ready to reopen applications. If the program is not ready to accept applications, the dean will ask the Rackham Executive Board to place a moratorium on admissions.

3.2. Admissions Moratorium

The program chair or director, the dean of the school or college where the program is located, or the Rackham dean may recommend that the Rackham Executive Board place a moratorium on admissions to a program. A moratorium request should confirm support of the graduate faculty. A moratorium allows the graduate faculty to reassess the purpose and goals of the program and to address longer-term structural issues. A moratorium may last up to five years to allow time for planning and recalibration of resources that can ensure the success of the program.

Reasons for an admissions moratorium may include insufficiency of graduate faculty and leadership to ensure that courses are available and that students are mentored and advised; persistently low application and admissions activity that affects the quality of the student community; and the lack of funding and other resources needed to sustain the operation of the program.

A request should explain the reasons for the moratorium, when it should take effect, and its anticipated length. Program chairs should submit a request far enough in advance to allow the graduate school to act before applications open, no later than March 1 for a moratorium to take effect in the fall or winter term of the following academic year.

The graduate school will remove the program from the admissions website, and the program should place a notice on its website. The program will be responsible for informing current students and will maintain the regular curriculum, advising, and other resources to assure their progress toward completion of their degrees.

The Rackham Executive Board will lift the moratorium when the program can demonstrate that faculty, staff, and financial resources are available to sustain a level of quality appropriate for a Rackham degree. To lift an admissions moratorium, the graduate chair or director should provide a written request that affirms the support of the graduate faculty to reopen it, and that explains the reasons for the moratorium and discusses the

outcome of the steps taken to address these issues. The request should explain any revisions to the curriculum and requirements and a timetable for reopening admissions. The dean of the school or college where the program is located must provide written approval that includes any commitments for funding, staffing, and space. The program may not advertise or admit students until the graduate school has lifted the moratorium.

The Rackham Executive Board will consider closing a program that has had an admissions moratorium in place for five years.

3.3. Program Closure

The program chair or director, the dean of the school or college where the program is located, or the Rackham dean may recommend that the Rackham Executive Board close a graduate program. This may occur when enrollment activity has stopped (no enrollment for five years or more or very intermittent enrollment over a 10-year period) or the program can no longer be offered at an acceptable level of quality because of lack of resources, including qualified graduate faculty or declining commitment by the faculty of the unit(s) where it is located. The request to close a program should confirm support of the program's graduate faculty.

Rackham Executive Board approval is required to close a program. Requests must explain the reasons, when it should take effect, and a plan for providing courses, advising, and support for current students until they graduate, transfer to another program, or leave the university. The dean of the school or college must provide written approval. If a dean proposes closing a program, the graduate school will ask the program's graduate faculty to provide a written response to the proposed closure and share this with the Rackham Executive Board.

The registrar will deactivate the program after all enrolled students have completed the degree, [transferred to another program](#), or left the university.

A request to reopen a program requires a complete program proposal and approval by the Rackham Executive Board.

4. 2023–24 Rackham and MASU Deadlines and Meeting Dates for Approving New Rackham Degree Programs

Developing, reviewing, and approving degree and certificate proposals may take up to six months or more. The Rackham deans (Planning Group) review preliminary drafts and give feedback. The Rackham Executive Board reviews and approves new programs. The Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU) gives final approval for programs in new fields. Regental approval is required for new degree designations.

For programs requiring MASU approval, Rackham-approved proposals must be submitted to Michele Matouka (matoukam@umich.edu) in the Office of Budget and Planning (OBP) two weeks before the MASU submission deadline.

Note: Rackham meeting dates are subject to change.

Table 1: 2024 Fall Term Deadlines and Meeting Dates for Approving New Rackham Degree Programs

Rackham Deans Planning Group Deadline	Rackham Deans Planning Group Meeting	Rackham Executive Board Deadline	Rackham Executive Board Meeting	Office of Budget and Planning Deadline	Michigan Association of State Universities Deadline	Michigan Association of State Universities Meeting
08/30/24	09/03/24	09/20/24	09/25/24	11/22/24	12/06/24	01/17/25
09/13/24	09/17/24	10/04/24	10/09/24	11/22/24	12/06/24	01/17/25
09/27/24	10/01/24	10/18/24	10/23/24	11/22/24	12/06/24	01/17/25
11/08/24	11/12/24	11/01/24	11/06/24	11/22/24	12/06/24	01/17/25
**11/22/24	11/26/24	11/15/24	11/20/24	11/22/24	12/06/24	01/17/25

** Absolute latest to get something approved by MASU ahead of the next admissions cycle.

Table 2: 2025 Winter Term Deadlines and Meeting Dates for Approving New Rackham Degree Programs

Rackham Deans Planning Group Deadline	Rackham Deans Planning Group Meeting	Rackham Executive Board Deadline	Rackham Executive Board Meeting	Office of Budget and Planning Deadline	Michigan Association of State Universities Deadline	Michigan Association of State Universities Meeting
01/10/25	01/14/25	01/17/25	01/22/25	02/14/25	02/28/25	04/11/25
01/24/25	01/28/25	01/31/25	02/05/25	02/14/25	02/28/25	04/11/25
02/14/25	02/18/25	02/21/25	02/26/25	04/11/25	04/25/25	06/5-6/25
03/07/25	03/11/25	03/14/25	03/19/25	04/11/25	04/25/25	06/5-6/25
03/21/25	03/25/25	03/28/25	04/02/25	04/11/25	04/25/25	06/5-6/25
04/04/25	04/08/25	04/11/25	†04/16/25			
04/25/25	04/29/25					

† Last Rackham Executive Board meeting of the year; consideration of proposals may be carried over to the fall term.