

Master's Degree Policies

Degrees Offered

North Dakota State University (NDSU) offers Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Science (M.S.), and non-thesis master's programs.

M.A. and M.S. students may opt for a Plan A (Thesis) or Plan B (Master's Paper/Comprehensive Study) program. The Plan C (Culminating Experience) option is primarily intended for non-thesis degree programs; however, some M.S. programs do offer the Plan C option. Not all programs offer all three options. In addition, plans may differ in the composition of the student's supervisory committee and required submissions to the Graduate College for degree completion.

Plan A: Thesis Based Master's

The thesis typically includes a problem statement, a review of existing literature relevant to that problem, and the creation and presentation of new knowledge in providing a solution to the problem. Each student assembles a supervisory committee, as described on the next tab, and is required to pass a final oral examination in which the supervisory committee serves as the examining committee. Following a successful final examination, the student will submit an electronic copy of their thesis to the Graduate College for format review.

Plan B: Master's Paper/Comprehensive Study-based Master's

The student will develop a thorough understanding of existing knowledge and the ability to apply that existing knowledge to a problem of interest. The individual creative component is defined by the program and could include a portfolio or integrated field experience.

Each student is required to pass a final oral examination in which the supervisory committee serves as the examining committee. Following a successful final examination, the student will submit an electronic copy of their master's paper to the Graduate College for format review.

Plan C: Culminating Experience-based Master's

The Plan C option allows each academic program to define a culminating experience such as a capstone course, a written examination, or some other approach to measure the student's understanding of the relevant material in the discipline.

Non-Thesis Master's Programs (Discipline-specific or course-based master's programs)

Master of Accountancy (M.Acc.)

Master of Agriculture (M.Ag.)

Master of Athletic Training (M.A.Trg.)

Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)

Master of Construction Management (M.C.M.)

Master of Education (M.Ed.)

Master of Engineering (M.Engr.)

Master of Music (M.M.)

Master of Natural Resources Management (M.N.R.M.)

Master of Public Health (M.P.H.)

Master of Public Health in Epidemiology (M.P.H.Epi)

Master of Public Policy (M.P.P.)

Master of Software Engineering (M.S.E.)

Master of Supply Chain Management (M.S.C.M.)

Supervisory Committee

Some Plan C programs do not require a Supervisory Committee. Refer to Plan C specifics below.

The Supervisory Committee is comprised of the student's advisor (committee chair) and supporting committee members. The major adviser-student relationship must be a mutually acceptable one. The goal in selecting a supervisory committee is creating a team to help the student develop a Plan of Study to align with the student's desired professional goals, provide support in the growth of the student as a professional, and oversee the student's final project or final examination.

The supervisory committee members should be identified before the Plan of Study is formulated so that all committee members have a chance to contribute. The supervisory committee, agreed upon by the major advisor and student, is approved by the graduate program coordinator at the time the Plan of Study is submitted.

Plan A and Plan B

The supervisory committee will have at least three members. The members consist of:

- The major advisor, who must be a full or affiliate member of the graduate faculty Level 1 or Level 2, will be the committee chair.
- A second member, who must be a full or affiliate member of the graduate faculty. The second member may serve as co-adviser on the supervisory committee. The co-chair designation implies equally shared responsibilities in guiding the student through to degree completion.
- A third member, who could be either a full member of the graduate faculty from outside the advisor's home department or a qualified off-campus expert in the field.
 - The external member cannot be an affiliate graduate faculty member of the advisor's home department/program.

To add an external member (not full or affiliate graduate faculty) to a graduate committee, attach to the Plan of Study or supervisory committee form:

1. A letter of support from the department chair (program coordinator for interdisciplinary programs), including the expertise this person brings to the committee.
 - a. The letter must come from the department chair (program coordinator for interdisciplinary programs) only, not the advisor.
2. A copy of the external member's curriculum vitae (CV)

Plan C

- The student's advisor must be a full or affiliate member of the graduate faculty. If the program does require students in this option to form a supervisory committee, all members must be a full or affiliate member of the graduate faculty.

Advisor or Supervisory Committee Changes

Advisor changes and changes to the supervisory committee may be made with the Request to Form or Change Supervisory Committee (<https://powerforms.docuSign.net/1c3281c5-f567-4702-8620-3d62724d1518/?env=na3&acct=1ceb9a57-b6a3-4df7-b655-d64cf8f1c2d7&accountId=1ceb9a57-b6a3-4df7-b655-d64cf8f1c2d7>) form. The student, advisor, graduate program coordinator, and the Graduate College must approve changes.

Supervisory Committee Meetings

While students will meet with their advisor often, meeting at least once a year with the supervisory committee is recommended.

Students may not bring food or beverages for the committee members to supervisory committee meetings, preliminary examinations, or final examinations. If a program wishes to provide refreshments at these meetings, it is the responsibility of the program to pay for and obtain them.

Plan of Study

**Some programs do not require a Plan of Study to be filed with the Graduate College. Refer to your program handbook for more information.*

The Plan of Study is an agreement between the student, the academic program, and the Graduate College that specifies all courses required to earn the graduate degree, including any qualifying transfer credits (see transfer credit policy below).

- Each program is responsible for defining the requirements for a major in its disciplinary area and making this information available to students. Each student is responsible for familiarizing themselves with the requirements, rules, and recommendations.
- up to 10 credits taken as a non-degree NDSU graduate student can be used towards the degree
- Courses that a student has used to fulfill the requirements of a baccalaureate degree may not be used on that student's graduate plan of study, unless taken as part of an accelerated degree program.
- The Graduate College allows credits taken as part of a certificate to be used towards the requirements for a master's degree.
 - Programs may restrict the usage of these credits on the master's Plan of Study. Reference your program's handbook for more information.
- The Plan of Study must be approved and filed by the student, the supervisory committee, the graduate program coordinator, and the Graduate College by the end of the student's second semester of study.

Plan A Master's Degree

- Minimum 30 credits total
- 16 of the 30 must be didactic credits (<https://catalog.ndsu.edu/past-bulletin-archive/2025-2026/graduate/graduate-school-policies/>)
- 6-10 credits of 798 Master's Thesis

Plan B Master's Degree

- Minimum 30 credits total
- 21 of the 30 must be didactic credits (<https://catalog.ndsu.edu/past-bulletin-archive/2025-2026/graduate/graduate-school-policies/>)
- 2-4 credits of 797 Master's Paper

Plan C Master's Degree

- Minimum 30 credits total

Course Waivers or Substitutions

Course waivers or substitutions may be made with the Waive/Substitute Course eForm. This is an advisor initiated form. Students do not have access to this form.

Transfer of Credit

Transfer of credit is requested at the time a Plan of Study or a [Waive/Substitute Course eForm](#) is filed. A maximum of 10 credits of graduate-level course work from regionally accredited colleges or universities (or equivalent for international institutions) may be eligible to be used in completing the student's degree program.

Transfer credit coursework must:

- meet degree program requirements
- be graduate level
- be verified by an official transcript from the transfer institution with grades posted
 - Transcript(s) must be filed in the Graduate College at the time the transfer of credit is requested
- not have been used to fulfill the requirements of a baccalaureate degree
- carry only grades of A or B on a 4.0 scale
 - Pass/Fail or Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory graded courses are not eligible for transfer
- not be a continuing education, correspondence, extension education, or workshop course
- not be internship, individual study, special topics, or research course
- have been earned within a 7-year period at the time of the student's final defense (Plan A/B options) or at the end of the student's last semester of coursework (Plan C option/non-thesis degree programs)

**Departments and programs have the right to further restrict or eliminate acceptance of transfer credits for their degree programs. Prospective students are encouraged to contact the respective academic department or the Graduate College with transfer credit questions.*

Concurrent Master's Degrees

A student may be allowed to work at satisfying the requirements of two graduate degrees concurrently. A maximum of 10 graduate credits of course work can be applied to both programs of study as approved by all members of both supervisory committees, the two program administrators, and the Graduate College. A student pursuing multiple graduate degrees must:

- Apply and be accepted to both degree programs
- File a plan of study for each program
- Complete all academic program requirements
- Complete all Graduate College requirements
- Maintain continuous enrollment in each program
- Successfully complete the master's thesis, paper, or culminating experience for each degree program
 - If each program requires a master's paper, thesis, or culminating work, they must differ substantially and must result from substantial work completed independently in each discipline.
- Successfully complete any final defense as required for each program

Master's Degree with Two Major Areas

A student may pursue one master's degree with two major areas. Such a program must have the concurrent recommendation of the administrators of the two programs. The Plan of Study shall clearly delineate the course work required for each major area.

- A minimum of 40 credit hours are required, including at least 14 graduate course credits in each of the two major areas.
- No more than 10 of the required 40 credits shall be research credits under the Plan A masters, while no more than four of the required 40 credits shall be paper credits under the Plan B master's.
- The student is required to conduct interdisciplinary scholarly work culminating in one master's paper or thesis acceptable in both major areas.

Final Defense

**The following policies do not apply to Plan C option students. Refer to your program handbook for more information on procedures.*

The final defense is an oral examination given to the supervisory committee in which the author of the master's paper, thesis, or culminating work demonstrates satisfactory command of both the focus area of their project and the broader field.

Notification of Scheduled Defense

At least seven (7) calendar days prior to the final defense date, the Notification of Scheduled Final Defense form must be approved by the student's advisor and graduate program coordinator and filed with the Graduate College.

- A *successful* submission requires all signatures, not only that the graduate student has initiated the form.
- If the form is not filed seven (7) calendar days prior, it will not be approved by the Graduate College.
- A final defense takes place without an approved notification form is considered void. A new defense date must be scheduled and the Notification of Scheduled Final Defense filed seven calendar days prior to the new date.

Pre-defense Document Distribution

- The master's paper, thesis, or other culminating work must be distributed to the committee members for review at least seven (7) calendar days prior to the defense.
 - If this seven (7) day stipulation cannot be met, the student's committee holds the right to cancel the final defense. It is the student's responsibility to notify the Graduate College if their defense does not take place as scheduled and to complete a new Notification of Scheduled Examination.

Defense Attendee Policy

- If one supervisory committee member cannot participate in the final defense, the defense may be held; however, their absence is considered a "Disapproval" of the student's defense.
- If more than one supervisory committee member cannot participate in the final defense, the defense must be rescheduled.
- It is the student's responsibility to notify the Graduate College if their defense does not take place as scheduled and to complete a new Notification of Scheduled Final Defense.

Final Defense Outcomes

It is the student's responsibility to initiate the Report of Final Defense (https://www.ndsu.edu/gradschool/current_students/forms/#:~:text=Report%20of%20Final%20Defense), ensure all committee members sign it, and submit it to the Graduate College within 14 calendar days following the defense.

- A *successful* submission requires all signatures, not only that the graduate student has submitted the form.
- If the form is not submitted within 14 calendar days, the defense is considered void and must be rescheduled.

The student must pass a final defense as part of earning the master's degree.

- A negative vote by two or more members of the student's committee will signify failure of the defense.
- The student may repeat the defense only upon permission from a majority of the supervisory committee. The committee will set a date at least one month after the failed defense and a new Notification of Scheduled Examination must be submitted within the seven (7) day deadline.
 - Exceptions to this time limit will be considered by the graduate dean upon presentation of written justification from the chair of the committee in consultation with the committee. Should the defense be failed twice, the student cannot continue in their graduate program.
 - The student will not be given a third defense except by recommendation of the examining committee, program coordinator, and special approval of the Dean of the Graduate College following consultation with the Graduate Council.