

Graduate Exceptions (a.k.a. substitutions-waivers)

Students must fulfill all degree requirements to earn the degree. The standard way a student can meet a degree requirement is to earn credit for taking a prescribed course or performing a prescribed activity. If that approach is not possible or is not in the best interest of the student, the degree requirement may be met via an exception, which is operationalized as a substitution or waiver submitted as a request through the Google substitution-waiver form.

The main purpose of an exception is to fulfill the requirements of the student's degree plan in a manner consistent with the student's degree requirements as described in the student's Bulletin or Catalogue of record. There must be compelling, valid reasoning for an approved exception. The "Rationale for Request" should be authentic, accurate and well researched to support the request. Exception requests that are not well founded (e.g., appear to have the purpose only of propelling the student forward in the program) are very likely to be denied. Programs should consult with the Associate Dean for Graduate Education to map out a strategy in situations that are confusing or complex, which is often the case. Programs should not contact Graduate School administrators for guidance since their advice will often be somewhat generic. Ultimately, program directors and/or program administrators have the most detailed understanding of curricula required to initiate exception requests.

Note that

- (i) a student's situation can be unique and therefore this primer is somewhat generic
- (ii) the information in this primer is based on current policy, which can change.

Types of exceptions

- Allow Course Taken Prior to Admission to Count
 - Used when a course completed prior to the student's matriculation term in the program is to be applied to the program. By default, DegreeWorks excludes such courses from applying toward degree requirements.
 - Possible rationale
 - Course taken prior to acceptance into current degree program.
 - Credit earned as a non-degree-seeking student
 - Credit earned in a certificate program that can count toward MS and PHD
 - Credit earned in a MS or PHD program that can count toward the student's current degree program if the credit was not applied to meet requirements of the prior degree
 - Readmitted student
 - Change in degree program from PHD to MS or from MS to PHD without earning the prior degree
 - *Additional considerations*
 - *Was the credit earned within 6 years for a MS and 8 years for a PHD?*
 - *Was the grade an A, B or S?*
- Examples of proposed actions likely to be approved
 - *Non-degree-seeking student:* A student takes one or more courses while classified as a non-degree-seeking student, then applies to and is offered admission into a degree program. After matriculating into the program, the student may request that the previously completed course(s) be applied toward the degree requirements (with program approval).

- *Student earned a graduate certificate and then enrolled in a related degree program:* A student who has completed a certificate program matriculates into a MS degree program. The MS program requires one or more courses that the student completed for the certificate program. The credits earned in the certificate program are eligible to be substituted (or slotted) into the MS program so they count toward the MS degree.
 - *Student does not complete a prior graduate program:* A student enrolled in a PHD program does not complete the PHD degree. The student then moves to a MS program. The MS program requires one or more courses that the student took while in the PHD program. The credits earned in the PHD program are eligible to be substituted (or slotted) into the MS program and count toward the MS degree.
- Example of proposed action unlikely to be approved
 - *Credits earned toward a prior degree cannot be applied to another degree:* A student completes a MS degree at VCU, then applies for and is admitted into a related PHD program. The PHD program requires many credits earned during the MS. Many of the credits earned during the MS count toward the MS degree. Credits cannot count toward 2 degrees, so any credits that apply to the MS degree cannot be substituted for the requirements for the PHD. The requirements met by these credits would be eligible to be waived, however, but the required total credits to earn the PHD would not change. The student would have to take other appropriate courses to meet the minimum credit requirement for the current degree.
- Substitution
 - Used when one course or activity is acceptable in place of the originally prescribed course or degree requirement
 - Course numbers not necessarily a consideration; the key issue is that the content of the course or activity is similar
 - Course grading system *per se* (A/B/C, S/U/F, P/F) not relevant (exceptions are possible depending on the program)
 - Course grades are highly relevant. Courses graded A, B, S or P generally are fine for substitution. Courses graded C, D, U or F are unlikely to be eligible for substitution.
 - Except in rare circumstances, courses must be graded to be considered eligible for substitution
 - Possible rationale
 - Similar course
 - Equivalent training activity
 - Achieves same curricular goals
 - *Course content or training activity must be truly similar or otherwise achieve the training goals of the program to substitute. Review course catalog for additional information.*
 - *If you are making the same substitution repeatedly, this indicates that the Bulletin degree requirements section needs to be reviewed and updated.*
- Examples of proposed actions likely to be approved
 - *Degree program requires course A, program director allows student to take course B (which is similar or otherwise achieves the training goals of the program) instead:* Very straightforward. Indicate courses are equivalent in form.
 - *Degree program requires activity A, program director allows student to complete activity B (which is similar or otherwise achieves the training goals of the program) instead:* Very straightforward. Indicate activities are equivalent in form.

- Example of proposed actions unlikely to be approved
 - *Degree program requires course A, student takes course B (which does not achieve training goals of program) instead: Will not be approved.*
 - *Degree program requires activity A, student completes activity B (which does not achieve training goals of program) instead: Will not be approved.*
- Waiver
 - Used when a program officially does not require a student to complete a prescribed course or activity, and no other coursework or activity will be required to fulfill that degree requirement
 - Does not change the minimum credit hours required for the degree
 - Possible rationale
 - Student completed similar course work for previous degree
 - Student completed course at external institution
 - Experiential waiver
 - Relevant material or training previously completed
 - *A program cannot waive a course based on the completion of another required course in the degree program.*
 - Examples of proposed actions likely to be approved
 - *Student completed a course or other activity in a MS degree program and the same course or activity is required for their current PHD program: Very straightforward. Indicate course or activity are equivalent when completing form.*
 - *Student did not complete a course that would have represented the completion of an activity, but student has completed the activity itself: Very straightforward. Indicate student has completed the activity and therefore program will waive requirement in form.*
 - Example of proposed actions unlikely to be approved
 - *Course no longer offered: This, by itself, is not grounds for waiving a course requirement.*
 - *Student, possibly through no fault of their own, did not complete a required course or activity: This will not be viewed as a compelling reason to waive a course or requirement.*

Degree Types - <http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/degree-definitions/>

Transfer Credit - <http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/transfer-credit/>

- Form: Special Action
- Transfer Equivalency Form

** all exception requests should be relevant to the degree program and will be reviewed by the Graduate School for validity*

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