

## Exceptions (i.e. substitutions and waivers)

Students must fulfill all degree requirements to earn a degree or certificate as described in their Bulletin or catalog. The standard way a student meets 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 (i.e. exemption) submitted as a request through the Google substitution-waiver form.

There must be compelling, valid reasoning for an approved substitution or waiver. 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 sole purpose 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 discuss situations that are confusing or complex. Programs should not contact Graduate School administrators for guidance because their advice will often be somewhat generic. Ultimately, program directors and/or program administrators have the detailed understanding of curricula required to initiate requests for exceptions.

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? The graduate school discourages moving credits with grades of C, but will assess on a case-by-case basis. Consequences for the student's GPA are important.*
  - Examples of requests likely to be approved
    - *Non-degree-seeking student:* A non-degree-seeking student earns credits. The student then applies to, is admitted into and accepts the admission offer into a degree program. The credits earned as a non-degree-seeking student are eligible to be moved (i.e. slotted) into the degree program.
    - *A student completed a certificate program and then matriculates into a MS degree program:* The credits earned in the certificate program are eligible to be moved (or slotted) into the MS

- program so they count toward the MS degree.
- *A student enrolled in a PHD program does not complete the PHD degree, and then enroll in a MS program.* The credits earned in the PHD program are eligible to be moved (or slotted) into the MS program and count toward the MS degree.
  - Example of requests unlikely to be approved
    - *Credits earned toward a prior degree being 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 satisfy 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 earn other appropriate credits to satisfy degree requirements.
    - *Credits with grades of D, F or U being applied to a degree.* These credits are not eligible for moving because they cannot satisfy graduate degree requirements.
  - Substitution
    - Used when credit is acceptable in place of the originally prescribed degree requirement
    - Possible rationale
      - Similar course
      - Equivalent training activity
      - Achieves same curricular goals
    - *Additional considerations*
      - *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.*
      - *Course numbers not necessarily a consideration; the key issue is that the content of the credits earned is a satisfactory alternative*
      - *Course grading system per se (A/B/C, S/U/F, P/F) not relevant*
      - *Courses graded A, B, S or P generally are fine for substitution. Courses graded C are discouraged, but will be assessed on a case-by-case basis considering student's GPA. Courses grades D, U or F are not eligible for substitution.*
      - *Except in rare circumstances, courses must be graded to be considered eligible for substitution*
  - Examples of requested substitutions 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 and in which the student earned a grade of A, B or S) 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 and in which the student earned a grade of A, B or S) instead:* Very straightforward. Indicate activities are equivalent in form.
  - Examples of requested substitutions that will not 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.

- *Any substitution of credits with grades of D, F or U. Will not be approved.*
- Waiver
  - Used when a student has completed an activity that makes an official degree requirement redundant
    - Program does not require a student to complete the degree requirement
    - No other coursework or activity will be required to fulfill the degree requirement
    - Does not change the minimum credit hours required
  - Possible rationale
    - Student completed same or similar course work for previous degree
    - Student completed similar course work at another institution
    - Student had a training experience (without earning credit) that satisfies the degree requirement (i.e. experiential waiver)
  - *Additional consideration: program cannot waive a course based on the completion of another required course in the degree program.*
  - Examples of requested waivers 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 requested waivers 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.

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