

Graduate Study Defined

The graduate experience involves specialized knowledge and concentrated study in at least one area. In this respect it differs from undergraduate study, which introduces students to a wide range of subjects and develops general intellectual skills. That is, a graduate program is generally more focused on a specific area of interest and on accruing specialized skills to practice a profession or do advanced research. There are two primary types of graduate degrees: professional degrees and research degrees.

Master's Degree

At the master's level, a professional degree provides a specific set of skills needed to practice a particular profession. It is generally a final degree. The research master's provides experience in research and scholarship, and it may be a final degree or a step toward a doctoral degree.

Terminal projects associated with the completion of the master's degree provide evidence of understanding the discipline-specific inquiry methods, thinking critically about a problem, and producing a written document or creative work appropriate to the standards of the discipline.

Wichita State University's master's degrees include a minimum of 30 graduate hours and usually take one or two years of full-time study to complete. Students have 10 years to complete their degree. The professional master's degree often involves some type of internship or fieldwork. The research degree may involve writing a thesis or completing comprehensive exams.

The thesis is considered a scholarly contribution to knowledge evidencing research or creative capacity, independent thought, and the ability to interpret materials. In some cases it involves original research or development of original works such as a painting or a manuscript in creative writing.

Doctoral Degree

The doctoral degree typically involves both coursework and a major research project. Students admitted to a doctoral program usually spend four to six years of full-time study completing their degree. Depending upon the field of study, the first two to three years involve classes, seminars, directed readings and directed research to provide a comprehensive knowledge of an academic field. During this time, students may also begin independent research projects.

Comprehensive knowledge in the field is assessed through the qualifying exam. On passing the qualifying exam, a student becomes a *candidate for the degree* and must be continuously enrolled every semester for a minimum of 2 credit hours of dissertation research.

As a candidate for a doctoral degree, a student works on a project that involves original research and reports on the research through the production of a dissertation. The dissertation is considered a substantial contribution to knowledge in which the student exhibits original scholarship and the ability to conduct independent research or creative works. Depending upon the field, the dissertation project may take one to two years to complete.

Graduate Certificate

A graduate certificate gives students the ability to learn professional skills through focused study in a specific area. Graduate certificates are awarded by departments, colleges and the Graduate School to recognize graduate-level accomplishment in a cluster of related graduate courses on a topic, skill, theme or method, as defined by the appropriate

faculty. The courses serve as the student's record of coherent academic accomplishment. Graduate certificate programs are typically 12 to 15 credit hours. Graduate certificates are not degrees, concentrations, minors or certification programs.