

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS COMMITTEE
REQUEST FOR DECISION

PRESENTED BY: Roy Dobson, Chair, Academic Programs Committee of Council

DATE OF MEETING: December 20, 2012

SUBJECT: College of Graduate Studies and Research admission qualifications

DECISION REQUESTED:

It is recommended:

That the College of Graduate Studies and Research admission qualifications be revised to permit students to directly enter a PhD program from a bachelor's degree.

PURPOSE:

Under the University of Saskatchewan Act 1995, decisions regarding admission qualifications and enrolment quotas for university programs are to be approved by Council and confirmed by Senate. This motion will be presented to the Spring, 2013 meeting of University Senate for confirmation.

SUMMARY:

This will allow a third route for students to be admitted to a doctoral program:

1. complete a Master's degree, then be admitted to a doctoral program;
2. transfer from a Master program;
3. be admitted to a doctoral program without being admitted to a Master program.

The College of Graduate Studies and Research had signaled this change in its third Integrated Plan as an opportunity to streamline the recruitment of doctoral students and intensify the research activity on campus. Units offering PhD programs will decide whether they wish to implement this admission option for their students. The College of Graduate Studies and Research will update the Academic Programs Committee annually.

REVIEW:

At its October 31 meeting, the Academic Programs Committee discussed this proposal with College of Graduate Studies and Research associate dean Trever Crowe and identified several questions about this proposal. In particular, the committee asked whether other U15 Canadian universities also offered this option to students, and CGSR prepared a chart showing that ten of the other U15 universities do so. Following subsequent discussion at the November 21 meeting, the committee agreed to recommend approval of this change.

ATTACHMENTS:

Proposal documentation and response to questions from the committee



MEMORANDUM

To: Cathie Fornssler, Committee Coordinator
Academic Programs Committee of University Council

From: Trever Crowe, Associate Dean
College of Graduate Studies and Research

Date: October 25th, 2012

Re: **Revised admission standards for doctoral programs**

Consistent with the Curricular Changes – Authority for Approval chart approved by University Council April 2002, attached is a report that describes the review of the proposed changes to CGSR policy to allow admission to a doctoral program after completion of a bachelor's degree and without being admitted to a Master program.

This report includes two appendices: CGSR committee motions for approval and a copy of the original proposal, including the relevant policy changes as approved by Graduate Council. The formal review started with approval of the changes by the CGSR Executive Committee on September 20th, 2012, and the final motion to recommend to the Academic Programs Committee was made by Graduate Council on October 10th, 2012. Our request is that APC and University Council will consider and approve the proposal to change the admission requirements for the doctoral degree. While APC and University Council need not approve the policy language, the revised policy text does demonstrate how the proposed changes will be implemented. If approved, this will allow a third route for students to be admitted to a doctoral program: complete a Master's degree, then be admitted to a doctoral program; transfer from a Master program; or be admitted to a doctoral program without being admitted to a Master program.

It's likely that some academic units will choose to not exercise this option to admit students into a PhD program without first being admitted to a Master program, and these unit-specific intentions would be respected. After University Council and Senate have approved the revised admission standards, the College of Graduate Studies and Research will begin work to identify those units who wish to take advantage of this option for admission and will work with the Registrar's Office and Student Information Services to update the Catalog and DegreeWorks, respectively. The College of Graduate Studies and Research will update the Academic Programs Committee annually.

The College of Graduate Studies and Research had signaled this change in its third Integrated Plan as an opportunity to streamline the recruitment of doctoral students and intensify the research activity on campus. If questions or concerns arise during the review by the Academic Programs Committee, I would be happy to respond.

Appendix A – CGSR Committees' Recommendations for Approval

**Discussion and Motion passed at College of Graduate Studies and Research Executive Committee
– September 20, 2012**

Direct Entry Ph.D.

Although CGSR policy does allow a student to be promoted from a Master program into a Ph.D. program without finishing their Master's degree first, the current policies do not permit a student to directly enter a PhD program after completing a Bachelor's degree. Numerous universities internationally, as well as in Canada, allow this option. The College is receiving an increasing number of inquiries from top qualified international applicants and would like to make this option available to those units who feel it would be appropriate. Members discussed the revised language for Policy 3 and Policy 5 that would make this permissible under certain conditions and the following points were noted:

- The same principles that are in effect for promotion from a Master program to a doctoral program should also apply.
- Members discussed the requirement to write a qualifying exam and policy language was revised to indicate that the qualifying exam must be at least as rigorous as the defence for a Master's thesis in their program.
- Should a student fail their qualifying exam, or not meet the academic standing to continue in the doctoral program, they will be given the opportunity to revert to a Master's program. It was agreed that not being qualified to be in a Ph.D. program does not necessarily mean that the student is not qualified to be in a Master's program.
- This option should be reserved for the academically well qualified applicants and thus the minimum GPA has been set at 80%. This is in line with other universities in Canada that post higher academic standing required for direct entry Ph.D. applicants than that for students entering from a Master's program.

MOTION: *“That the proposed revisions to Policy 3 and Policy 5 to permit students to directly enter a PhD program from a Bachelor's degree be recommended to Graduate Council for discussion and approval.”*

Majewski / Ansdell – UNANIMOUS

Discussion and Motion passed at the meeting of Graduate Council – October 10, 2012

Direct Entry PhD – Members of Graduate Council considered a series of proposed revisions to policy text that would allow strong academic students with research potential who have completed an undergraduate degree to be admitted to a doctoral program, without being admitted to a Master degree program. Graduate students in such a program would be expected to complete at least 9 credit units of graduate course work, complete a Ph.D. qualifying exam, possess good communication skills and demonstrate the ability to do independent research.

One member of Graduate Council asked whether there would be any variation in fees or tuition. Students in thesis-based Master and doctoral programs are assessed the same rates of tuition and fees. Students admitted to a PhD program without first being admitted to a Master's program would be assessed the same fees and tuition as other Master and doctoral students.

Another member posed a question about the eligibility of scholarship funding for students who were admitted to a PhD program without first being admitted to a Master's program. Academic units who administer their own devolved funding should develop a plan that addresses this issue. It was suggested that students admitted to the doctoral program without first being admitted to the Master's program should be treated the same way as students who are admitted to a Master's program then transfer to the PhD. It's reasonable that these students should be eligible for scholarship funding for a longer duration than doctoral students who were admitted after completing a Master's degree.

A third member expressed some concern that it may be difficult to accurately assess the capabilities of an applicant after s/he has completed only an UG degree.

MOTION: *“That the proposed revisions to Policy 3 and Policy 5 to permit students to directly enter a PhD program from a bachelor's degree be recommended for approval.”* Ovsenek/Baxter-Jones – Carried. 1 Opposed.

Appendix B – Original Proposal with Policy Changes Approved by Graduate Council



NEW & REVISED POLICIES – DIRECT ENTRY Ph.D.

Background: *There is a growing demand for graduate admission by students who wish to bypass a master's degree and directly enter a Ph.D. program. Most notably are the international students who have done a five-year, research intensive undergraduate degree and who are seeking to leverage their research experience directly into a doctoral program. This demand has intensified over the past several years due to the greater emphasis being placed by funders on doctoral scholarships. In short, the funding levels are higher, and there are more scholarships available for students entering a Ph.D. program.*

Ph.D. students are critical to an institution being able to provide the "labour" to drive its research productivity. As a result, competition by western universities to attract more Ph.D. students, in particular those academically gifted students with the best potential for research and those with external funding from their home country, has driven the need to be more flexible around admissions and marketing. An environmental scan indicates that the majority of universities in Canada, and all of the five major universities in western Canada, permit direct entry into a Ph.D. program.

The universities surveyed operate in the same manner as the UofS in that the program has the final say on whether or not to recommend a student for admission. The extent to which the programs within each institution in Western Canada take advantage of the direct entry Ph.D. policy varies, with the University of Calgary being the most restrictive. Of the university sites reviewed:

- *All require a four-year honours degree or equivalent;*
- *Most require a GPA that is higher than the posted minimum for regular admission;*
- *A few have specific course requirements or minimum credit unit requirements for the first year in program.*

Rationale: *The UofS faces the same pressures for attracting academically well qualified students as other universities in Canada. Although current CGSR policy provides for the promotion of a master student into a Ph.D. program, this does not carry the same appeal as a*

direct entry Ph.D. admission. It also impedes recruiting the very best bachelor's qualified international students who hold external scholarships seeking to come to North America for a doctoral program. The ability to offer direct entry to a Ph.D. program would place the UofS at the same competitive advantage as the other Canadian universities.

It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of admission policies is not to keep students out. Rather, it is to ensure that those who are admitted are well prepared for meeting the challenges of a graduate degree. As such, when considering policy changes that would permit the direct entry into a Ph.D. program, the same principles that are in effect for promotion from a master's program to a doctoral program should also apply.

POLICY 3.1 ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS – REVISED Direct Entry PhD

3.1.4. Ph.D. Degree

The minimum entrance requirements for a Ph.D. Degree are:

- A Master's degree, or equivalent, from a recognized university in an academic discipline relevant to the proposed field of study; ~~under no circumstances may a prospective student holding a Bachelor's degree be admitted directly into a Ph.D. program.~~
- A cumulative weighted average of at least 70% in the last two years of study (i.e. coursework required in Master's program).
- Demonstrated ability for independent thought, advanced study, and independent research.

Comment [TGC1]: Deleted

****NEW** 3.1.5 Direct Entry PhD**

With the recommendation of the unit, admission to a Ph.D. program without being admitted to a Master's program is available to exceptionally strong students, who show great promise in terms of academic accomplishments and potential for research. The minimum requirements for admission to a Ph.D. program without completing a Master's degree are:

- *A four-year honours degree, or equivalent, from a recognized college or university in an academic discipline relevant to the proposed field of study.*
- *A cumulative weighted average of at least 80% in the last two years of undergraduate study (i.e. 60 credit units of course work).*
- *Demonstrated ability for independent thought, advanced study, and independent research.*

Comment [TGC2]: New policy language

****NEW** POLICY 3.2 DEGREE REQUIREMENTS – Direct Entry PhD(only)**

3.2.1 Direct Entry PhD

For the completion of their degree, students who have been admitted to a Ph.D. program without completing a Master's degree must:

- *Complete at least 9 credit units of course work at the graduate level in the first year of their program, with no final grade in any course below 70%.*
- *The minimum number of credit units required for the degree must be equal to the minimum that would be required for a student in the same program who was promoted to a Ph.D. from a Master's program.*
- *Within the first year of the program, successfully complete a Ph.D. Qualifying Examination that is at least as rigorous as the defence for a Master's thesis in their program area.*
- *Pass a comprehensive examination, after completing the required course work, and prior to focusing on their research and doctoral thesis.*
- *Write and successfully defend a thesis based on original investigation.*

Comment [TGC3]: New policy language

POLICY 5.1.4 TRANSFERS – REVISED

5.1.4.4. Transfer from a Ph.D. Program to a Master's Program

After consultation with their supervisor, Advisory Committee, and Graduate Chair, students may transfer from a Ph.D. program to a Master's program with thesis or project.

****New**** *Students who have entered a Ph.D. program without being admitted to a Master's program who are unsuccessful in their qualifying exam or who do not meet the academic standing required for continuation in the program, will be given the opportunity to revert to the Master's degree program in their field, and the work done towards the Ph.D. degree will be credited towards the Master's degree.*

Comment [TGC4]: New policy language

POLICY 5.3 OTHER REQUIREMENTS – REVISED

5.3.1 Qualifying and Comprehensive Examinations

Qualifying and Comprehensive Examinations are not required components of Master's programs. Academic units may however, at their discretion and for sound academic reasons, require these examinations.

The Ph.D. **Qualifying** or **Comprehensive Examination** may be in written and/or oral form

Each academic unit should establish and make available clear, written and specific regulations regarding the Qualifying and Comprehensive Examinations, within CGSR and University regulations. The student's Advisory Committee must inform the student in an effective and timely way that a Qualifying or

Comprehensive Examination is to take place. The Advisory Committee shall provide in reasonable detail to the student:

- The means of assessment to be used in evaluating the student's knowledge of the field,
- The relative grading weight of each means of assessment to be used, and
- The criteria on which assessment will be based.

A student failing a Qualifying or Comprehensive Examination is permitted a second Examination with permission of the Dean of the CGSR. A second failure automatically disqualifies the student from further work for that particular Ph.D. degree. This failure may be appealed to the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee ~~Ph.D. Committee~~ on substantive or procedural grounds.

The CGSR must always be advised of the results of a Qualifying or Comprehensive Examination on a pass/fail basis.

In all cases, unless the student and the CGSR are informed otherwise in advance, the Examining Board for all written and/or oral components of the Qualifying or Comprehensive Examination will be all members of the Advisory Committee.

Comment [TGC5]: Updated consistent with the current college structure.

Comment [TGC6]: Deleted

From: Crowe, Trever
Sent: Sunday, November 18, 2012 12:08 PM
To: Fornssler, Cathie
Cc: Skilnik, Penny; Martz, Lawrence; Crowe, Trever; Beldan, Alex
Subject: RE: Questions about direct entry PhD proposal
Attachments: Direct entry summary.docx

Hi, Cathie

Responses to the committee's questions follow. Please let me know if there are any subsequent questions. Depending on the timing of the next APC meeting, I should be able to attend the APC meeting November 21.

Trever

1. Can you undertake a comparison of the U15 universities in Canada to determine how many of them also offer Direct-Entry PhD programs and, if so, what their requirements and restrictions are.

The attached document shows that ten of the 14 other U15 institutions (excluding UofS) permit direct-entry to a PhD program after completing a bachelor's degree. The universities surveyed with this option operate in the same manner as the UofS in that the program has the final say on whether or not to recommend a student for admission. The extent to which the programs within each institution take advantage of the option to admit students directly into a PhD without first completing a master's degree varies. In some universities, only select programs will accept students after completing a 4-year bachelor's degree only. Of the university sites with posted admission criteria for direct-entry PhD applicants:

- all require a four-year honours degree or equivalent,
- most require a GPA that is higher than the posted minimum for regular admission,
- a few have specific course requirements or minimum credit unit requirements for the first year in the program and
- one will only consider their own undergraduate students for this option (Laval).

2. Is there any research available on the outcomes of direct-entry PhD programs? For example, have there been any comparisons done of student and faculty satisfaction with such programs, whether students encountered more difficulty in meeting the requirements, how students and supervisors could determine whether such programs are the right choice for them, and so forth.

Unfortunately, we are unaware of any such research. Anecdotally, there are a few programs at the University of Saskatchewan that routinely admit students to a Master program, with the mutual expectation that students will transfer to a PhD program after 12 and before 24 months in the program; a Master's degree is not the intended outcome at the time of admission to graduate studies. People (students and faculty) involved with these programs would likely support the concept, but they are clearly a biased sample. It would be difficult to accurately answer the question about whether students encounter more difficulty completing the PhD without first writing and defending a Master thesis (that would be the only difference), given that the 2 groups of students would be different in terms of their aptitude and academic preparation.

3. Committee members were concerned about protecting the interests of students and ensuring realistic prospects for their success. It was suggested that departments might have difficulty implementing the direct-entry option unless they develop mechanisms for evaluating student preparedness to undertake PhD-level research, and also are rigorous in the qualifying exam. How could the college assist students and departments

in this regard? For example, would the college consider implementing an approval process for departments which want to offer a direct-entry option, or monitor the qualifying exam requirement more closely for these students?

At every comparator institution, the posted requirements for direct-entry PhD were measurably higher than those for students who went the normal route – completing a Master degree first. The proposal here is consistent with that theme. Thus, in terms of applications, these are the very best students. Beyond that, the policies and procedures currently in place would serve to protect these students' interests just as they currently do for every other student.

The expected process for implementing direct-entry PhD programs at the UofS would require units to decide whether they would allow students to be admitted to their PhD program without first being admitted to a Master program. Units would have to discuss and vote to adopt this program option. At that point they either accept the College's set minimum admission requirements, or they have the option of proposing higher standards, which the college, University Council and Senate would have to approve (confirm) through the established collegial processes. It's important to remember that units are in the business of evaluating students' preparedness when evaluating an applicant's suitability for admission either to a Master or Doctoral program. Prior to deciding/recommending that an applicant should be admitted, units must first conclude that the applicant has good (more than realistic) prospects for success. Units have plenty of experience evaluating applicants, and they are well placed to determine a student's preparedness and suitability for study in their particular discipline.

The comment about the qualifying exam is a good point. It's well known that the conduct and content of qualifying exams vary among units and often for different students within the same unit. This is an area for improvement and it's something that the college could consider. The proposal for the direct-entry PhD would require the qualifying exam to include a written element. This seems reasonable, given that these students will not have written and defend a thesis as part of a Master's degree. While competence in written communication is expected to be part of the evaluation criteria at the time of admission, the qualifying exam would be a good opportunity to confirm this ability.

The student and the quality of the graduates from the program are also protected by the option for the student to transfer from the PhD program to a Master's program. If the student is not able to complete the PhD, s/he can complete the requirements for a Master's degree, then consider whether to enrol in a PhD program at a later time.

From: Fornssler, Cathie
Sent: Wednesday, November 14, 2012 2:19 PM
To: Crowe, Trevor
Cc: Dobson, Roy
Subject: Questions about direct entry PhD proposal

Hi, Trevor

Thank you for attending the last Academic Programs Committee meeting to discuss the Direct Entry PhD proposal. The committee would like to receive some additional information relating to this proposal and discuss this again with you at an upcoming meeting:

1. Can you undertake a comparison of the U15 universities in Canada to determine how many of them also offer Direct-Entry PhD programs and, if so, what their requirements and restrictions are.
2. Is there any research available on the outcomes of direct-entry PhD programs? For example, have there been any comparisons done of student and faculty satisfaction with such programs, whether students

encountered more difficulty in meeting the requirements, how students and supervisors could determine whether such programs are the right choice for them, and so forth.

3. Committee members were concerned about protecting the interests of students and ensuring realistic prospects for their success. It was suggested that departments might have difficulty implementing the direct-entry option unless they develop mechanisms for evaluating student preparedness to undertake PhD-level research, and also are rigorous in the qualifying exam. How could the college assist students and departments in this regard? For example, would the college consider implementing an approval process for departments which want to offer a direct-entry option, or monitor the qualifying exam requirement more closely for these students?

Our upcoming meetings are on November 21 and December 12 (any time between 3:30 to 5) – would one of these work for you to attend?

Cathie

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University	Permitted	Posted admission Requirements
Dalhousie University	No	
McGill University	YES	Exceptional circumstances + 4 graduate courses
McMaster University	YES	>A average, 1500 word LOI, prior research experience
Queen's University	YES	>80% average, first-class honors degree, advanced research ability
University of Alberta	YES	Exceptionally qualified students holding a four-year baccalaureate degree can bypass the master's degree program and be admitted directly into a doctoral degree program.
University of British Columbia	YES	1st class average in all undergraduate semesters, research experience, co-authorship; requires approval of Dean of Grad Studies
University of Calgary	YES	Higher academic standing generally required (Posted minimum GPA requirement for direct entry is 3.7 for many programs)
University of Manitoba	YES	Exceptional circumstances with honors thesis or other research experience
University of Ottawa	No	
University of Saskatchewan	----	
University of Toronto	YES	> A- average, more coursework needed; direct-entry guidelines for PhD programs: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/Assets/SGS+Digital+Assets/governance/policies/Direct+Entry+Programs+-+Guidelines+for+5-year+PhD.pdf
University of Waterloo	No	
University of Western Ontario	YES	>85% average, research experience, authorship; direct-entry guidelines for a PhD program: http://www.uwo.ca/anatomy/grad/DirectEntryPhD_guidelines2007Jan17.pdf
Université de Montréal	No	
Université Laval	YES	For students who have successfully completed their Bachelor's degree at Laval and have proved their skills they may be admitted....Au Québec, la maîtrise requiert généralement deux années d'études spécialisées après le baccalauréat (grade de premier cycle). Cependant, si vous avez terminé avec succès la scolarité de la maîtrise à l'Université Laval et que vous faites la preuve de vos aptitudes, vous pouvez, sous certaines conditions, être admis au troisième cycle dans la même discipline ou le même champ d'études sans terminer la maîtrise. Le grade de maîtrise pourra vous être accordé ultérieurement sous certaines conditions