

CHANGE IN THE PRINCIPAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EARNING A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors change the principal requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree from 90 credits to 60 credits, effective Winter 2025.

These changes will be implemented by reducing the minimum number of dissertation credit hours from 30 credits to 18 credits and the minimum curricular credit hour requirement from 60 credits to 42 credits through normal curriculum review and approval processes. The change in credit hour requirements reflects a new minimum standard. Programs can retain additional credit requirements as necessary.

Program Description

The current Doctor of Philosophy degree requires 90 semester credits beyond a baccalaureate degree with 30 of those credits coming from dissertation credit hours. There are currently 60 doctoral programs that operate under these requirements.

Rationale

A comparison with 15 peer institutions showed that Wayne State is an outlier regarding the number of credit hours required for a PhD and the number of credit hours for dissertation research. Of the 15 schools reviewed, the average minimum number of dissertation credits was 19, and the average minimum number of total credit hours required to earn a PhD was 52.

The primary rationale for the reduction is as follows:

1. A lower number of credits required for a PhD would make Wayne State graduate programs more attractive to prospective graduate students.
2. A reduced credit hour requirement for the PhD will reduce the time required for our students to complete the degree. Time-to-degree is an important consideration in the review of applications for institutional training grants such as the National Institutes of Health's T-32 mechanism. Recent reviews of training grant applications from Wayne State have raised concerns about the longer-than-average time it takes for our PhD students to earn their degrees.
3. The 90-credit requirement is frequently cited in an unfavorable light by external reviewers participating in regular academic program reviews. These reviewers have consistently noted that the 90-hour requirement has a negative impact in several areas. First, this has been a negative factor for enrolling prospective students comparing various universities. Second, this has impeded the ability of faculty to charge student tuition to external grants due to high tuition costs.
4. A reduction in the number of required dissertation credits will significantly benefit faculty who fund students' tuition from their grants. The change will reduce these costs and allow funds to be reallocated to support research.

Submitted by: Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Budget and Resource Requirements

Reducing the credit hour requirement will have only a modest effect on tuition revenue, as only a fraction of PhD tuition is derived from external sources. However, the credit hour reduction is estimated to reduce tuition revenue by \$750,000 per academic year. This reduction will be offset by the benefits cited above of increased enrollment, increased number of institutional training grants awarded, and a higher percentage of STEM faculty who will fund graduate students on their grants.

Approvals

The proposal was approved by the Graduate Council, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Provost.