

# MASTER OF ARTS/ MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

The MA/MS in Interdisciplinary Studies at Fresno State is a multi-discipline degree program designed for students whose academic and/or professional objectives cannot be met by master's degree programs currently offered at the university. In consultation with the Division of Graduate Studies and in collaboration with faculty mentors, eligible students create and submit for approval a personalized, coherent course of study composed of courses from at least two departments and capped by the submission of an approved thesis or project.

The MA/MS in Interdisciplinary Studies program should not be seen as a device to avoid certain requirements of an existing program, nor as a means to gain admission to an impacted program. Likewise, an Interdisciplinary Studies program cannot be developed in areas where the campus currently lacks the necessary faculty expertise and physical facilities. Finally, the MA/MS in Interdisciplinary Studies Major is not a self-study, independent study, or external degree program.

## Student Learning Outcomes

Because Interdisciplinary Studies programs are individualized courses of study, student learning outcomes will be individually created for each student by the student's Interdisciplinary Studies Advisory Committee. All students, however, who graduate with an M.A. or M.S. Interdisciplinary Studies Major from Fresno State will be able to: 1) approach an issue or problem from at least two disciplinary perspectives; and 2) demonstrate mastery of an interdisciplinary approach to an issue or problem in a capstone assignment (thesis or project).

## Program Requirements

The university offers the Interdisciplinary Studies program for both the Master of Arts (M.A.) and the Master of Science (M.S.) degrees. There is not a clear distinction between the two degrees, so normally the decision regarding the designation of the proposed Interdisciplinary Studies program reflects the type of degree offered by the departments involved.

- The program of study should be interdisciplinary, including coursework from two or more departments represented at the university. The proposed program of study must be overseen by a faculty member that is a member of the graduate faculty and in a primary or "sponsoring" department, who will serve as advisor and thesis or project chair.
- The program of study must include a minimum of 30 semester units of course work. All courses in the proposed program must reflect the requirements of scholarly creativity and research appropriate to the graduate level and must exhibit overall coherence in a particular, recognized field of study.
- Needed prerequisite course units are to be taken in addition to the graduate program units. Depending upon successful record of prerequisite academic courses, students may be required to take more than 30 units of coursework.

- At least 70 percent of the program units must consist of courses designated for graduate study in graduate-level 200-series courses. Lower-division courses and upper-division courses that are not approved for use toward a graduate degree may not be used.
- As a rule, no more than 9 semester units of acceptable transfer units may be included in the approved master's degree program.
- The program of study must not include more than six units of independent study course work, excluding the units allowed for thesis or project.
- The proposed program must include a thesis or project as the culminating experience, accounting for no more than six units of the program's total units.
- Any additional general requirements not cited above and listed in the [Graduate Studies Regulations portion of the General Catalog](#).

### Admission Requirements

Successful applicants are normally expected to meet the following requirements before attaining graduate standing in an Interdisciplinary Studies degree program:

- Have completed an acceptable bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, including appropriate preparation in the primary fields of study being proposed;
- Meet the university's and sponsoring department's minimum admission requirements;
- Submit required applications and documents;
- Meet the sponsoring department's minimum GPA requirement for previous graduate work and related prerequisites;
- Submit acceptable scores on the required standardized test(s) for the sponsoring department;
- Possess exceptional written and oral communication skills.

To assure eligibility, the sponsoring department must certify that the prospective Interdisciplinary Studies program student would be eligible for admission to its program as a "Classified Graduate" student.

### Program Proposal Procedure

- Prospective applicants who wish to obtain approval to pursue a Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies should obtain copies of the Guidelines and Proposal Format for approving such degrees, the current General Catalog, and a list of Graduate Program Coordinators. If the applicant believes they meet the eligibility requirements as listed in these documents and that their programmatic interest meets the requirements for designation as an interdisciplinary degree, the applicant should then establish contact with the Division of Graduate Studies.
- After consultation with the dean, and prior to the first term of study, the student should then contact faculty members who can provide specific guidance on selecting course content and designing an acceptable program.
- Students should seek the support of a preliminary faculty advisory committee to gain counsel and advice in designing the interdisciplinary graduate program, including the appropriate courses and culminating experience. At least three faculty members should form the committee.

The chair of the committee must be a member of the graduate faculty group in a department authorized to offer a graduate degree.

- Following consultation with the advisory committee, the student should complete the [Proposal for Pursuing Interdisciplinary Studies Master's Degree Programs](#). **All applications must include:**
  - A clear and concisely stated rationale for pursuing an Interdisciplinary Studies Master's degree and an indication of the professional/academic objectives to be achieved. This rationale must include evidence clearly indicating that the Interdisciplinary Studies program could not be accommodated within any existing approved master's degree program on this campus.
  - A proposed list of available courses chosen from two or more departments/divisions/schools totaling a minimum of 30 units, of which at least 70 percent of units must be 200-level.
  - A preliminary description of the thesis or project topic.
  - Names and areas of specialization of at least three tenured or tenure-track faculty members' representative of the disciplines in the proposed study plan who have agreed to serve on the advisory committee for such a degree program.
  - Two letters of recommendation from faculty confirming commitment to serve as a member of the program faculty advisory committee. One letter must be from a faculty member willing to serve as committee chair.
- After obtaining approval by the sponsoring faculty, department personnel, and others as required, the applicant submits the proposal and supporting documents to the Division of Graduate Studies Office.
- Following a technical review by staff in the Division of Graduate Studies, the proposal will be forwarded to the University Graduate Committee for their review and recommendation to the Graduate Dean. The faculty committee and the student may be invited to address or respond to questions during the Committee's review.
- The student and the faculty advisory committee will be notified of the final decision in writing within two weeks. If the proposed degree is approved, the student will be notified that they have been admitted with classified graduate standing.
- The proposal must be filed with the Division of Graduate Studies by November 1st for students entering the graduate program in the subsequent fall semester or April 1st for students entering the graduate program in the subsequent spring semester. A maximum of 10 units may be applied toward the master's degree prior to official university approval of the plan of study.

### Proposal Review Criteria

Proposals are expected to meet the requirements of an interdisciplinary program as noted above. In addition, there must be evidence that the student possesses the skills to successfully undertake the program and that the university is prepared to provide appropriate facilities and support.

Proposals are reviewed according to the following:

- Overall clarity and completeness of the proposal.
- A clear statement of the advanced nature and purpose of the program, including the capacity of the campus to offer such a program at the graduate level.

- Evidence that there is adequate support to ensure completion of the proposed interdisciplinary program.
- Adherence to technical requirements including student eligibility, conformance with university academic standards, requirements, and deadlines.
- Presentation of a study plan that demonstrates coherency in the title and choice of courses and graduate experiences.
- The strength of the student's academic record, acquisition of appropriate knowledge and technical skills, attainment of strong written and oral communication skills, and the ability to complete the program.
- The relationship of the program in contributing to the advanced career goals of the student.
- Evidence of faculty and other forms of support.

### Degree Completion Requirements

Although approved interdisciplinary studies programs provide an opportunity for exceptional students to engage in a program outside the framework of existing majors, all normal graduation requirements and standards will apply, as per the University's general catalog. This includes meeting established academic and professional requirements, as well as procedural requirements and deadlines for applying for the master's degree to be granted and compliance with the 5-year time limit for program completion.

Students and faculty advisors are expected to be familiar with the regulations and limitations binding graduate studies curricula, and standards for progress and awarding of a graduate degree as detailed in the University's General Catalog.