

**Guidelines and Proposal for the  
Master of Arts (MA) or Master of Science (MS) in  
Interdisciplinary Studies Degrees**

**California State University, Fresno  
Division of Graduate Studies**

**SECTION I**

**GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES GRADUATE DEGREES**

**Introduction**

At California State University, Fresno, the interdisciplinary studies major under either the Master of Arts (MA) or the Master of Science (MS) degree is available to qualified graduate students when there is a need for advanced study in subject matter that is multidisciplinary and that is not reasonably available through existing graduate degree programs. In such instances, a formal proposal for an Interdisciplinary Studies major (see Section II) that includes a cohesive curriculum with interrelated coursework and graduate experiences from two or more departments may be submitted for approval. Proposals that could be accommodated by an existing master's degree or option, as in the use of elective courses, are not approved.

The MS in Interdisciplinary Studies is awarded for programs that include breadth of scientific knowledge as well as attainment of specific professional competencies in scientific research methodologies and data-driven analysis. MS degrees are appropriate for those who wish to engage in professional science-related careers that cross over several traditional specializations. The MA in Interdisciplinary Studies is awarded in all fields, particularly those that include the arts, letters, and humanities.

**Admissions/Eligibility Requirements**

Those seeking admission to the M.A. or M.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies must adhere to university graduate admissions requirements, including application to the university, and submission of official transcripts, and appropriate standardized test scores (e.g., GRE, TOEFL) as identified in the University Catalog. Students who meet the above criteria may be conditionally admitted to the Interdisciplinary Studies program.

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**Note: These guidelines are not comprehensive in terms of graduate requirements. Applicants are advised to obtain a copy of the General Catalog for information on admissions, graduate standing, advancement to candidacy, progress to the graduate degree and regulations governing graduate studies as well as course descriptions and prerequisites.**

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

- completed an acceptable bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university, including appropriate preparation in the primary fields of study being proposed and be admissible to the university; submit required applications and documents;
- possess a 3.0 GPA on previous graduate work and related prerequisites;
- submit acceptable scores on the required standardized test for the principal department/graduate program;
- possess exceptional written and oral communication skills;

### **General Criteria for Meeting Degree Requirements**

A minimum of 30 program units is required for each MA or MS interdisciplinary studies degree. 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. No more than 6 independent study units may apply toward the degree. Not more than 9 units of acceptable transfer units may be used. 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.

An acceptable thesis (2-6 units) that demonstrates mastery of interdisciplinary research is required. The faculty advisory committee may require an oral defense of the thesis or a written final examination.

### **Procedures Used for Approving an Interdisciplinary Studies Degree:**

- 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, then the applicant should establish contact with faculty members who can provide specific guidance on selecting course content and designing an acceptable program.
- Prior to or during the first term of study, students should seek the support of a preliminary faculty advisory committee to gain counsel and advice in designing an interdisciplinary graduate program. At least five 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 application found in Section II entitled **Proposal for Pursuing Interdisciplinary Studies Master's Degree Programs**. The application includes the purpose and rationale supporting the proposal, Faculty assessment and Recommendation Forms, approval signatures and a Proposed Plan of Study that includes the courses and other requirements for the proposed program. (Please refer to the attached copy of the proposal application —Section II).

**NOTE:** The proposal must be filed with the Division of Graduate Studies by November 1<sup>st</sup> for students entering the graduate program in the fall semester or April 1<sup>st</sup> for students entering the graduate program in the 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.

- After obtaining approval by the sponsoring faculty, department personnel and others as required, the proposal and supporting documents are submitted by the applicant to the Division of Graduate Studies Office.
- Following a technical review by staff in the Division of Graduate Studies, the proposal will then 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, then the student will be notified that s/he has classified graduate standing. The student may now prepare to submit a Petition of Advancement to Candidacy.

### **Criteria Used in Reviewing Proposals for Interdisciplinary Programs**

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 how well the proposal supports 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 major;

- 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;
- 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 be applied as stated in the general catalog of the university. 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 General Catalog.

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