

Degree Definitions Guide

NON-DEGREE PROGRAMS

Non-degree programs take multiple forms. These programs generally include a series of courses, may carry academic credit, and may result in a credential, certificate, diploma, or badge at the successful conclusion of the program.

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

Associate degrees

These degrees, AA or AS, typically involve a minimum of 60 semester or 90 quarter units of study (or the equivalent) and include a general education component. They may be designed for transfer or for preparation for specific professional fields. The AA implies a more liberal orientation and the AS implies a more scientific or technical orientation, although the differences in these two designations are not always this distinct.

Bachelor's degrees

These degrees, BA or BS, normally represent about 120 semester or 180 quarter units of college study, or its equivalent in depth and quality of learning experience. The BA usually implies more liberal education orientation and the BS usually implies more a more scientific or technical orientation, although the differences in these two designations are not always this distinct.

GRADUATE DEGREES

Master's degrees

These degrees, MA or MS, require from 30 to 60 semester or 45 to 75 quarter units, or its equivalent in depth and quality. The distinctions between MA and MS are similar to those between BA and BS. Some master's level degrees are professional in nature, i.e. the MBA, MPA, MSW, and MSN. For some students, the master's level degree serves a professional need on its own, whereas others complete the degree on the way to doctoral level work.

Research doctorate

The Ph.D. is a research oriented terminal degree that provides students with substantial mastery of subject matter, theory, literature, and methodology of a field of study. Students develop research skills leading to the attainment of independent research capacity. The total units required vary depending upon coursework but typically require multiple years of study.

Professional doctorate

Professional or practice-oriented graduate programs are designed to prepare students for professional practice involving the application or transmission of existing knowledge or the development of new applications of knowledge within their field. Examples of professional doctorates include EdD, JD, MD, PsyD. The total units of study required vary greatly depending upon the specific degree and may require several years of prescribed postgraduate work.

Refer also to Standard 2 (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.2a, 2.2b, 3.1) in the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation and the Graduate Program Guide for further details.

NOTE REGARDING HONORARY DEGREES

The Commission recognizes that honorary degrees may be appropriately awarded for scholarly achievement, attainments which demonstrate unusual creativity, or distinguished service. The integrity of earned degrees, however, should be protected, and the Commission discourages the awarding of earned degrees as honorary degrees, or the use of terminology which implies such. Refer also to Standard 1 (CFR 1.7) and Standard 3 (CFR 3.1) in the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation.

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