

2 March 2021

TO: Faculty Senate

FROM: Paul Loikith, Chair, Graduate Council

RE: Pre-admission and Reserved Credits Policy Change

The following proposal has been approved by the Graduate Council and is recommended for approval by the Faculty Senate.

Motion

The policy on pre-admission and reserved credits for graduate requirements is hereby changed as follows. Current text is taken from the 2020-21 *Bulletin*, pp. 56-57. Text to be removed is ~~struck through~~. Text to be added is underlined.

Pre-admission and transfer credit

....

Pre-admission credits taken at PSU and applied to master's degree requirements must be letter-graded B- or higher, or graded pass. Pre-admission or transfer credits taken at other institutions and applied to master's degree requirements must be letter-graded B- or higher (pass or similar grading methods are not acceptable). All pre-admission and transfer credits (whether taken at PSU or elsewhere) and applied to for master's degree requirements also must meet all the following requirements: must be letter-graded B- or higher (pass or similar grading methods are not acceptable); must not be used for any other degree at any institution (except for dual master's degrees (p. 57)); must be no older than seven years old at the time the master's degree is awarded; and must total no more than one third of the required credits for a master' degree program.

....

Reservation of coursework for graduate credit

~~Graduate level coursework taken while working toward a student's first bachelor's degree can be reserved for use in a PSU graduate program. Only credits earned at PSU can be reserved for graduate credit. Reserved graduate credit is limited to 12 completed graduate credits letter-graded B- or higher earned within the last 45 credits prior to awarding of the student's first bachelor's degree and not used to fulfill the requirements for any bachelor's degree. Such courses are pre-admission credits and subject to all pre-admission requirements and limitations. Departments may have stricter limitations.~~

~~Use of reserved credits is requested via a DARS exception submitted to the Graduate School. This request should be made soon after admission to the graduate program.~~

Rationale

Pre-admission credits, Bachelors+Masters (B+M) credits, and Reserved credits currently are three different categories of graduate credits students can complete before formal admission to a master's degree and subsequently apply to their master's degree. Each of these distinct categories have their own policy requirements, and when students have credits from a combination of these categories, students/faculty/staff can easily become confused as to how these limits intersect and work together.

- **Pre-admission credits:** Graduate credits (from PSU or another institution) taken before admission to a master's degree program
- **B+M credits:** PSU graduate credits, taken while admitted to a PSU bachelor's degree, that are applied to both the bachelor's and master's degree; for students in approved B+M programs only
- **Reserved credits:** PSU graduate credits, taken while admitted to a first bachelor's degree at PSU, that are not applied to the bachelor's degree but are "reserved" for later use in a master's degree

After a thorough review of existing policies, the Graduate School recommended two policy changes in order to streamline requirements with the goal of reducing barriers and promoting student success. The Graduate Council has approved these recommendations and is forwarding them to the Faculty Senate for review.

Policy recommendation 1: Eliminate the category of Reserved credits.

Reserved credits are pre-admission credits and are counted in pre-admission limits, however, as graduate credits that are taken before a student graduates from their first bachelor's degree, they were separated out as a distinct category with specific requirements decades ago. The Reserved credits limits are more restrictive than regular pre-admission limits in several ways (see Current Policies below). With the elimination of Reserved credits as a category, any graduate credits taken while a student is admitted to their first bachelor's degree and not applied to the bachelor's degree will simply be pre-admission credits and bound by pre-admission policies.

The benefit of Reserved credits is financial: admitted undergraduate students are assessed undergraduate tuition for graduate courses. This will not change with the elimination of Reserved credits as admitted undergraduate students will still be assessed undergraduate tuition for graduate courses.

Policy recommendation 2: Allow use of **PSU** pre-admission credits grade Pass. (Pre-admission credits from other institutions graded Pass would still be prohibited.)

Current policy prohibits Pass grades for *pre-admission credits* (credits taken before admission to a master's degree, from PSU or another institution) and *transfer credits* (credits from another institution, pre- or post-admission). The rationale for this ban is that with non-graded credits there could be significant differences between what the grades actually represent. While this argument is true for grades from other institutions, for courses taken at PSU there is a clear definition of a Pass grade in a graduation course: equivalent of B- or above.

B+M credits (which are by definition PSU pre-admission courses) are allowed to be graded Pass. Having one category of pre-admission credits approved for Pass grades and another that is not is illogical and causes confusion for students, faculty, and staff.

An additional consideration is that when students are informed that a PSU pre-admission course they completed with a Pass grade cannot be applied to their graduate degree, some simply accept this outcome and take another course to replace it. Others ask how they can appeal the policy and submit a graduate petition asking for a waiver. Graduate petitions requesting the use of PSU pre-admission credits grade Pass have a 100% approval rate dating back to 1988 (as far back as the Graduate School's records go). It is inequitable that there is a 100% approval rate for this issue when students do petition, but other students who do not know that there is a mechanism to request policy waivers, such as first-generation students, or those unwilling or afraid to ask for exceptions, do not receive the same benefit.

As with all policies, individual programs can be more restrictive. For example, a program could prohibit the use of PSU pre-admission credits graded Pass even if the University allows it.

Current Policies for Pre-admission, B+M, Reserved credits

Pre-admission credits:

- Graduate credits (from PSU or another institution) taken before admission to a master's degree program
- All courses must be letter-graded B- or higher, Pass grades not allowed (exception for courses taken during the terms when PSU expanded the use of P/NP grading due to the Covid pandemic)
- Maximum 1/3 of the credits needed for the degree
 - One additional credit beyond 1/3 can be used without need of a graduate petition provided none of the courses are a 1-credit course
 - Otherwise eligible PSU credits applied toward a completed graduate certificate can be applied toward a subsequent master's degree without counting toward the pre-admission limits ("limits" here means number of credits; this is not a waiver on use of pre-admission courses graded Pass and below B-)
 - In a truly stackable degree only, credits earned in the graduate certificate and subsequently applied to the master's degree are excluded from the prohibition on C grades with department approval and Pass grades

B+M credits:

- PSU graduate credits, taken while admitted to a PSU bachelor's degree, that are applied to both the bachelor's and master's degree; for students in approved B+M programs only
- All shared courses must be graded B or higher, Pass grades allowed
- Maximum 20 credits (recently increased from 15)
 - B+M credits are considered pre-admission credits and are counted toward pre-admission limits for the master's degree

- One additional credit beyond 20 can be used without need of a graduate petition provided none of the courses are a 1-credit course
- Courses do not need to be taken in the last 45 credits before the bachelor's degree is awarded

Reserved credits:

- PSU graduate credits, taken while admitted to a first bachelor's degree at PSU, that are not applied to the bachelor's degree but are "reserved" for later use in a master's degree
- All courses must be graded B- or higher, Pass grades not allowed (exception for courses taken during the terms when PSU expanded the use of P/NP grading due to the Covid pandemic)
- Maximum 12 credits
 - Reserved credits are considered pre-admission credits and are counted toward pre-admission limits for the master's degree
- Courses must be taken in the last 45 credits before the bachelor's degree is awarded

Discrepancies between policies:

- All maximum credit limits are different:
 - B+M – 20 credits
 - Pre-admission – 1/3 of credits needed for the degree
 - Reserved – 12 credits
- Pass grades are allowed for B+M credits but not for pre-admission and reserved credits
- Reserved credits must be taken in the last 45 credits before the bachelor's degree is awarded; B+M credits are not limited to the last 45 credits
- B+M letter-graded credits must be B or higher; pre-admission and reserved credits must be B- or higher