



**Title:** Master's Degree Criteria  
**Effective Date:** February 5, 2015  
**Issuing Authority:** Provost  
**Policy Contact:** Vice Provost  
[provost@mercer.edu](mailto:provost@mercer.edu), 478-301-2110

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the criteria for master's degrees offered at Mercer University.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to master's degrees at Mercer University.

### **Exclusions**

None

### **Policy Statement**

The master's degree is the first graduate-level degree credential in the U.S. higher education system. A master's degree may be academic or professional. The most common academic master's degrees are the Master of Science degree (M.S.) and the Master of Arts (M.A.) degree. Traditionally, these degrees were distinguished by subject matter with the M.A. degree applying to the humanities and arts and the M.S. being appropriate in STEM areas. Academic master's degree may be appended by the discipline or subdiscipline, such as the Master of Science in Engineering, indicating immersion in the disciplinary area. As fields of study have integrated techniques and analysis from other fields this distinction is not precise and varies greatly by institution and discipline.

All master's degrees at Mercer University require that students hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, with a specified minimum grade point average as determined by each program. Master's degrees require a minimum of 30 credit hours at the graduate or professional level. Research programs may require a thesis or have a thesis option. At Mercer, the basic criteria for the M.S. and M.A. categories of degrees are described below.

#### **A. Master of Arts**

The Master of Arts is an academic degree in any field concentrating on the theoretical and historical study of that field. Characteristics of the Master of Arts degree include

- Academically focused on areas within the humanities, social or behavioral sciences, or

arts.

- Curricular focused on the literature and theories of the discipline.
- The pedagogical approach from a humanist perspective concentrates on analytical, critical thinking, and communication skills within the discipline.
- Research is approached from a literature review and theory-driven perspective.
- Admissions standards focus on broad skills of literacy, writing, and analysis.

## **B. Master of Science**

The Master of Science is an academic degree concentrating on the direct application of theories and research in a subject. Characteristics of the Master of Science degree include

- Academically focused on areas within STEM or social or behavioral sciences.
- Curricular focused on the techniques and methods of analysis and evaluation in the field.
- The pedagogical approach focuses on the techniques and methods of analysis the formulate the modes of discovery within the discipline.
- Research is approached from specialized methods and techniques perspective.
- Admissions standards focus on direct prerequisite knowledge and skills related to that area of study.

## **C. Professional Master's**

The University offers a host of professional master's degrees such as the Master of Business Administration, Master of Divinity, and Master of Public Health. Professional masters involve the direct application of knowledge or professional practice to an applied field or profession. The focus of professional masters tends to relate to the development of professional practices. The structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and research associated with professional masters are structured according to professional accreditation and licensing requirements.