

ACADEMIC BOARD – MEETING 4/02 (23 MAY 2002)

COURSEWORK MASTERS PROGRAMS Implementation guidelines for the 'Robinson Report'

Background

The proliferation of postgraduate coursework degrees and certificates, particularly in the context of the introduction of PELS, has confronted the Academic Board with the need to define both what is understood by a coursework Masters degree and the appropriate entry pathways into such a degree. In turn, this has required faculties to examine both the level of subjects offered in coursework programs, especially Masters, and the requisite levels of prior study and work experience necessary for the selection of students likely to succeed in the course.

In 2001 a combined working group from the Academic Programs Committee and the Selection Procedures Committee, chaired by Professor Jon Robinson, prepared a Report on Coursework Masters Programs, which was adopted by the Academic Board on 13 December 2001. The report affirmed the existing principle that a Masters degree should recognise at least five years of tertiary study. However, it placed emphasis on the level of study in a Masters program and the appropriate pathways into it rather than simply on the number of years of tertiary study it represents.

It concluded that a Masters coursework program at the University of Melbourne must include 100 points of study at Masters level, however many points in the complete program. The outcomes for students in such a program should reflect the 'Attributes of a Melbourne Postgraduate Coursework Graduate' (see Appendix). The onus will be on Faculties to certify to the Academic Programs Committee that its programs are at Masters level.

This report sets out the essential principles for the implementation of the 'Robinson Report'. It synthesises the views of both the Academic Programs Committee and the Selection Procedures Committee with a view to facilitating the review of existing programs and the design of new postgraduate coursework proposals.

ACADEMIC LEVELS OF CERTIFICATES, DIPLOMAS AND MASTERS

Certificates (50 points) and Diplomas (100 points) may be 'Graduate' (where the first degree is from any discipline) or 'Postgraduate' (where the first degree is from an appropriate field of study). 'Appropriate' prior study refers to those degrees or their equivalent which are cognate or relevant to the Masters program. Certificates and Diplomas may be structured to provide entry pathways into Postgraduate Diploma/Masters level study or may be end-points in an integrated postgraduate program consisting of Certificate/Diploma/Masters.

Academic levels in Masters level subjects

A Masters level subject is at level 5 and should take the student beyond level 4, which includes Honours, Postgraduate Diploma (including Postgraduate Certificate) and fourth-year subjects (including fifth year and sixth year Bachelors degree courses). 'Masters level' is for Faculties to certify and, apart from the level of study, this should have regard to subject aims and objectives, generic skills outcomes, depth and breadth, presentation, assessment and, in particular, prerequisites.

Honours, Postgraduate Diploma and fourth-year students may be permitted to enrol in Masters level subjects provided that the Faculty is satisfied that relevant prerequisites and/or preliminary studies have been satisfactorily completed. Subjects may be taught at both level 4 and Masters level, but delivery at level 4 and at Masters level must be clearly differentiated in terms of content, assessment and outcomes. When a Faculty wishes to offer a subject at both level 4 and Masters level, core classes may be shared by both groups of students. However, the two subjects must be described in such a way as to differentiate between the requirements for level 4 and the requirements for Masters level. The subjects will have different codes. Students cannot obtain credit twice in a shared subject: students who have successfully completed a level 4 subject will not be permitted to enrol in the equivalent subject at the Masters level.

Academic levels in Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma subjects

Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas may contain at least 50 points of subjects at level 4. The additional 50 points of subjects in the Postgraduate Diploma may be at level 4 or at the Masters level provided that prerequisites have been met. If a student has taken level 4 subjects only in a Diploma, and wishes to enrol in a Masters course, the student will be required to take 100 points of Masters subjects. In cases where the subjects in the Masters and Diploma are at the same academic level, entry requirements must ensure that applicants have the same likelihood of success. Entry requirements may be different, however Diploma students are expected to have the same likelihood of passing the course.

Academic levels in Graduate Certificate and Diploma subjects

In cases where the subjects in a Certificate and Diploma are at the same academic level, entry requirements must ensure that applicants have the same likelihood of success. Entry requirements may be different; however, Certificate students are expected to have the same likelihood of passing the course. Graduate Certificates and Diplomas may contain some subjects at lower levels.

ENTRY PATHWAYS

Range of Pathways The 'Robinson Report' provided Faculties with a range of entry pathways into Masters (and other graduate coursework) programs. These pathways depend on the preparation of the student in terms of their prior degree, preliminary study and work and professional experience.

In certain cases, there may be no direct entry from a Bachelors degree if the course requires work experience by all applicants. In other cases, work experience may be substituted for 50 points of preliminary study.

Entry requirements for Masters

The main principle behind the establishment of an entry pathway is that the candidate should be sufficiently prepared academically, and in terms of any requisite professional work experience, to successfully complete the program. Regulation 11. I.R3 - Principles of Selection for Entry to Courses states that 'The University will select from those students likely to succeed in its courses'. The nature of the entry pathway also depends upon prior academic background (cognateness, length and level of study), any requirement for professional work experience and the length and content of the Masters program.

An appropriate undergraduate degree or equivalent is a minimum prerequisite for a 100 point Masters degree. Entry into a Masters degree may be direct (such as from an Honours degree) or through preliminary study, such as Certificates and Diplomas, or a combination of preliminary study and professional work experience. Where an applicant does not hold an appropriate Bachelors degree, the applicant will normally be required to undertake additional studies prescribed by the Faculty to add specialised knowledge to the generic skills developed in prior tertiary studies. This will normally take the form of a Graduate Certificate or Diploma or the first 50/100 points of a 150 or 200 points Masters program.

Professional work experience

Professional work experience may be a component within the entry pathway to Masters programs. Where work experience is part of the pathway to Masters study, one year of relevant full-time work experience may be substituted for 50 points of preliminary study. Where work experience is a requirement or an alternative pathway for entry, the Faculty must specify it to be full-time equivalent, documented and relevant. Where a prior degree has been in a discipline area which is not appropriate to the Masters program, work experience may not normally be substituted for all of the 'bridging' study necessary for adequate coursework preparation for entry into a Masters program.

Approval of Pathways

The Selection Procedures Committee will work with Faculties to design pathways that ensure to applicants the likelihood of success in the course. Faculties will be expected to demonstrate that the pathways are appropriate, taking into consideration:

- the type of Masters (or other graduate coursework) program;
- the type of Bachelors degree (cognateness, length and level);
- the number of points of necessary preliminary study; and
- any requisite work and professional experience

Relationships between Certificates, Diplomas and Masters

When Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are structured to provide entry pathways into Postgraduate Diploma/Masters level study, entry requirements (as would be the case when the entry requirement is *any* Bachelors degree) will normally be less demanding than for the related Postgraduate Diploma / Masters courses. When entry requirements differ, transfer from Graduate (or Postgraduate) Certificates to Graduate (or Postgraduate) Diplomas or from Postgraduate Diplomas to Masters may require achievement at a specified level. In an integrated postgraduate program consisting of Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma/Masters where entry requirements are the same, transfer from Certificate to Diploma or Diploma to Masters would be allowed.

In summary, a Masters degree requires 100 points of Masters level subjects. Students must have met the prerequisites for this level of study through specified prior learning, or a combination of certificates and professional work experience. The specific entry pathways will depend on the nature, length and level of the Masters course. There is no single 'rule' that will cover all courses.

Appendix

Attributes of the Postgraduate Coursework Graduate.

In 2001, the Academic Board adopted the following statement regarding University of Melbourne postgraduate coursework degrees. It affirmed that these degrees seek to develop graduates who demonstrate a capacity for contemporary professional practice and/or specialist knowledge and theory. Postgraduate coursework qualifications have multiple purposes. They are designed to provide students with the opportunity for advanced knowledge and understanding in a specialist area; to enhance professional knowledge and skills; and to engage with new and emerging fields of study.

The University expects its postgraduate coursework graduates to have the following qualities and skills:

- an advanced understanding of the changing knowledge base in the specialist area;
- an ability to evaluate and synthesise the research and professional literature in the discipline;
- advanced skills and techniques applicable to the discipline;
- well-developed problem-solving abilities in the discipline area, characterised by flexibility of approach;
- advanced competencies in areas of professional expertise and/or scholarship;
- a capacity to articulate their knowledge and understanding in oral and written presentations;
- an advanced understanding of the international context and sensitivities of the specialist area;
- an appreciation of the design, conduct and reporting of original research;
- a capacity to manage competing demands on time, including self-directed project work;
- a profound respect for truth and intellectual integrity, and for the ethics of scholarship;
- an appreciation of the ways in which advanced knowledge equips the student to offer leadership in the specialist area;
- the capacity to value and participate in projects which require team-work;
- an understanding of the significance and value of their knowledge to the wider community (including business and industry);
- a capacity to engage where appropriate with issues in contemporary society; and where appropriate, advanced working skills in the application of computer systems and software and a receptiveness to the opportunities offered by new technologies.