

## **Credit for Undergraduate Subjects in Masters Courses**

In 2007, the Academic Board adopted new guidelines for Masters degrees to accommodate the advent of the Melbourne Model and the specific requirements of professional-entry Masters programs. On the matter of credit for subjects taken in the undergraduate degree, a firm stance was taken:

.... no credit will be given in the Masters degree for subjects taken in the undergraduate degree. In some cases it may be appropriate to give exemption from taking a compulsory subject to students who have completed similar material in their undergraduate program, but students should be required to undertake the all the points of study required to take out the Masters.

In the light of developments since, it may be necessary to move away from this strict position in some cases.

When the 2007 statement was framed, it was with 200 point ("plus-two") Masters programs in mind, and was consistent with the notion that no-one should be able to take out a Masters degree without having completed 500 points of study (or equivalent). This is a strongly-held principle in the University and the basis for the definition of Masters degrees.

However, some of the professional-entry Masters are longer than two years and undergraduate pathways are being proposed that would give students relevant content that would enable them to complete the program in a shorter time if credit for the undergraduate subjects were given. There is also the issue that these programs need to cater not only for NG degree students from Melbourne but also for students from other universities, both in Australia and overseas, who will have come from very different programs and may not have the particular knowledge that it can be assumed the students coming from the prerequisite Melbourne degree(s) would have if they had pursued certain study pathways.

This situation could be handled by creating bridging graduate certificates and diplomas and requiring students without particular background knowledge to complete them, but this would complicate entry requirements, be cumbersome, against the spirit of cutting down the number of programs the University offers, and relatively inflexible, since it would be harder to be responsive in terms of credit to the configuration of subjects that a student had done. Besides, it would be a deterrent for people moving from other universities if they could not enrol immediately in their chosen program, but had to complete a bridging certificate or diploma first, and so would work against the University's aim of attracting the brightest and best students both nationally and internationally into our Masters programs.

We could stick to the principle that students can be given exemptions if they have covered the material in their undergraduate study, but still need to complete the required number of points at Masters level to take out the award. However, in many cases with the professional entry Masters, they are set programs with few or no electives, and so there would simply not be relevant subjects for the students to take.

Under these circumstances, it seems sensible to reconsider the policy of not giving credit for undergraduate subjects and modify it to make it possible under certain conditions. Given the significance of a Masters degree requiring 500 points of tertiary study both in University policy and in the conceptualization of the Melbourne Model as a 3+2+3 sequence, it is proposed that credit for undergraduate subjects only be available in Masters-level programs that are longer than two years. Since the subjects for which credit for undergraduate study might be given will be of their nature foundational, they will come early in the Masters course, presumably in the first year, and certainly not in the final two years. This fits with the expectation that for a Masters degree there should be two years of Masters-level study.

In many cases, the undergraduate subjects for which credit can be given will be part of a set pathway within an undergraduate degree leading to the Masters program, and it is tempting to limit permission for credit to such cases, which could even be scrutinized and approved by Melbourne Model Committee and Academic Programs Committee. However, this would not

accommodate students coming in from other institutions and so would be inequitable. Consequently the recommendation is not framed exclusively in these terms, although the desirability of the credit being part of a set pathway is noted. Assessment of credit for students from other institutions will need to be especially careful in determining equivalence.

***Recommendation:*** *That credit for undergraduate subjects be permitted for subjects in a professional entry Masters course when:*

- *The course is longer than two years (200 points);*
- *The subjects for which credit is being given are not in the final two years of the course; and*
- *Where possible, the undergraduate subjects for which credit is given are part of a planned pathway in the NG degree, leading to the Masters program.*