10/8/2015

To: ASC Curriculum Committee, Graduate School, Deborah Haddad

From: Mike Slater, Graduate Studies Committee Chair, School of Communication

Re: Proposed Program Change and Rationale, School of Communication PhD program

*Proposed change in minimum required credit hours.* The School of Communication (SOC) Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) and graduate faculty have unanimously recommended changing our minimum credits to the degree from 85 to 81.

*Rationale:* When the program was revised for the semester change-over, we had developed an 85 credit minimum, based on the program indicated in the table below. At the time, we had anticipated using Maymester as part of the exam process, which accounted for three of the credits. That became non-viable as Maymester policies evolved. However, the 85 credit minimum requirement remained. For most students, this was not a problem: internal MAs had credits they could transfer, as did many students admitted from other MA programs. However, some students from other MA programs (e.g., from other disciplines) did not have credits to transfer, and that did force taking extra credits in some semester to stay on track.

At the same time, we’ve been doing some tweaking with our first year requirements which reduces the credit load to 12 from 13 for students in their first semester of graduate school at OSU. That credit reduction takes the minimum, to keep an external MA with no transfer credit on track, to 81 credits.

Table 1: Original plan with 85 credits

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Autumn** | **Spring** | **May** | **Total** |
| Year 1 | 13 | 13 |  | 26 |
| Year 2 | 13 | 13 |  | 26 |
| Year 3 | 12 | 12 | 3 | 27 |
| Year 4 | 3 | 3 |  | 6 |
| Total | 41 | 41 |  | 85 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

Table 2. Revised plan with 81 credits

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Autumn** | **Spring** | **May** | **Total** |
| Year 1 | 12 | 13 |  | 25 |
| Year 2 | 13 | 13 |  | 26 |
| Year 3 | 12 | 12 |  | 24 |
| Year 4 | 3 | 3 |  | 6 |
| Total | 41 | 41 |  | 81 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

*Implications.* This will permit external MAs with no transfer credit to take the recommended load each semester without having to take three extra credits at some point during their program, and still graduate on time. There should be no substantive impact on programs for other students, given the 12 credit minimum per semester and classroom elective credit rules (15 credits of SOC classroom electives are required) that we have in place.

*Changes to first-year requirements.*  We are not sure if the following changes require curricular review as program changes. If not, they are being provided as explanatory background. If so, we are providing the rationale and a discussion of implications so that review can take place.

*Change to first-semester program for students new to OSU SOC graduate program.*  Requiring a one-credit Comm 6500 course, a one-credit directed research, and one-credit colloquium, with the three three-credit core courses, for 12 credits, instead of the three three-credit core courses, three credit elective, and one-credit colloquium previously the norm for students new to OSU.

*Rationale:* The GSC over the past few years has identified several issues we needed to address. First, students would clearly benefit from systematic exposure to guidance in how to succeed as a graduate student; this was affirmed by a survey of students. Such guidance has been provided in an *ad hoc* way during the required weekly graduate research colloquium. However, what was offered was a function of available time, as this is also the venue for job candidate presentations, visiting scholar presentations, and faculty/student research presentations. The GSC last year had received approval for a 2 credit 6500 Professional Studies course combining such material with material on pedagogy to support their future efforts in the classroom. However, in trying to plan/staff the proposed course, several problems became evident, and it was not offered. It was difficult to staff the course—faculty experts in graduate student research issues are not the same as faculty experts in pedagogy issues. Moreover, this would mean teaching pedagogy a year or more before students would actually have an independent teaching experience, and teaching it in a classroom rather than a hands-on setting. It seemed more appropriate to funnel all of our students through a first independent teaching experience in Persuasion under the close supervision and training of Kristie Sigler, a winner of the Provost’s Teaching Award; they then can go on to teach independently in other courses. So, we are submitting under separate cover (online) a change in Comm 6500 from two credits to one; that course will feature topics identified via a survey of graduate students to be most needed/beneficial for orientation to our program. We also will require one credit of directed research with the temporary advisor, to encourage setting aside structured time for discussion of emerging research interests and guidance regarding exposure to the research experience at the SOC (identifying lab meetings to attend, projects to assist with, etc.). Combined with the one credit of required colloquium, this makes for a total of 12 credits. Another advantage of this plan is that students, who typically find the first semester with 3 demanding core courses plus typically GTA responsibilities quite overwhelming, will be able to focus on these courses and responsibilities without taking an elective in addition. Instructors for those electives have pointed out that students who haven’t had our Methods, Theory, and Stat I classes are not yet ready for the readings and discussion in those courses, so this is also a benefit. This all adds up to 12 credits, instead of the 13 credits (3 3-credit core courses, 3 credits of electives, 1 credit of colloquium) that was previously the norm for new students. That is why we are asking to change our minimum requirement from 85 to 81 instead of 82 credits.

*Dropping Qualitative Methods as a core requirement for the PhD.* The GSC recommended and the graduate faculty unanimously voted to drop Qualitative Methods as a core requirement for the PhD. We are requiring that three credits of elective coursework, from inside or outside the School, be advanced research methods/statistics, which can include qualitative research (We don’t know if approval of this change is required but are including this on the chance such approval is needed).

*Rationale:* Our program is primarily a quantitative one. All of our core courses are taught by people we consider to have world-class training and expertise. We no longer have any faculty members whose primary research expertise is qualitative research. We compared our program with the other big 10 Communication PhD programs and found our core requirements were almost at the top in terms of credit hours; there was interest in creating more flexibility for advisors and graduate students in constructing a student’s program. When we surveyed alumni of our program, the Qualitative Research course was ranked the least useful/necessary of the core courses they had taken. Students interested in qualitative research can take excellent courses from expert faculty in departments such as Sociology. We are including discussion of qualitative research and mixed methods research in our core Methods class.

*Implications:*  Removing one core class provides advisors and committees more flexibility in customizing student programs, notably in taking more courses around the college and university. Given our requirements for classroom electives, limits on independent study courses, and 12 credits per semester requirement until candidacy is completed, this should not impact our program in other ways.

Thank you for your attention and let us know if you have any questions.