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Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs Overview

Welcome to the Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs (IGP) at the Graduate School. This document is intended to help faculty understand their role in an interdisciplinary committee. Detailed explanation of degree requirements, policies, and procedures associated with graduate education can be found at the Graduate School website (www.umt.edu/grad/). A student handbook is available at the Interdisciplinary Programs website (http://www.umt.edu/grad/Interdisciplinary%20Graduate%20Programs/IGP%20Handbook%20FINAL.pdf). Information about the application process and faculty’s role in it can be found in the Prospective Student webpage (http://www.umt.edu/grad/Interdisciplinary%20Graduate%20Programs/Prospective%20Students/default.php).

IGP Degree Programs

The Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs offers two degrees, one Master’s and one Doctoral. Each is a student-driven degree that promotes student’s individuality, originality and intellectual synergy with different disciplines on campus, and the opportunity to tailor the educational experience to the student’s needs and goals with the expert guidance of UM’s faculty.

Master of Interdisciplinary Studies (M.I.S.)

The M.I.S. program allows students, in consultation with three faculty, to combine the curricula of two or more programs from this university to produce a hybrid program. This degree is appropriate for students who want to tailor the degree to fit their personal and professional goals, and who are looking for an interdisciplinary and integrative approach that cannot be achieved through a traditional degree offered by the University of Montana. There is a 30-credit thesis option and a 36-credit non-thesis option for this degree.

Individualized Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program (I.I.P.)

The I.I.P. is focused on identifying a research problem(s) that will be approached from different perspectives to create a unique and innovative research project. The student must seek out five faculty with the resources and expertise to assist them in defining and executing the research goals, and designing a curriculum to acquire the skills and competencies needed to reach those goals. The I.I.P. student is highly motivated, has a focused goal/research project in mind, and is able to actively participate in his or her educational process.

• Collaboration with Montana Tech of the University of Montana. The I.I.P. is available to qualified Montana Tech students. The degree is conferred through the University of Montana and the student’s committee will consist of faculty from UM and MTech.

Administrative Structure

The M.I.S. and I.I.P. degrees are housed in the Graduate School and do not have a specific department. Thus, the student’s M.I.S. or I.I.P. committee serves as his or her department. The Director of Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs oversees the degrees, and serves in the role of department chair with support from the I.I.P. Admissions Committee, the I.I.P. Oversight
Committee, and, when needed, the Dean of the Graduate School. Upon admission into the program, the student’s prospective committee becomes the official acting committee (i.e., the department). This committee is responsible for directing the student’s program and committing their time and effort to mentor and guide the student through program and degree completion.

Each committee will have a unique composition of faculty from different disciplines who are used to certain expectations for committee work. Recent I.I.P. proposals have a section on how the student will interact with his or her committee. All committees, M.I.S. and I.I.P., are strongly urged to meet and define how the committee will work internally, based on the different expertise and roles of the individuals in the interdisciplinary program; joint MTech and UM committees especially are encouraged to have clear delineations of duties. Communication of the clear expectation and responsibilities of each member as well as the committee’s expectations and responsibilities of the student towards the committee are essential for an efficient relationship.

The University of Montana thrives in both formal and informal interdisciplinary collaborations and research among its graduate programs. The M.I.S. and I.I.P. degrees offer formal opportunities for interaction and collaboration of multiple departments. In this unique opportunity, the members of the students’ committee are effectively the students’ home department. The Graduate School encourages the home department of the faculty mentors to utilize this opportunity to engage with the interdisciplinary student and benefit from their ability and training to make connections across disciplines and pursue problem-based inquiry. Faculty members are encouraged to start the conversation with their department heads early on about their interdisciplinary students’ research interest and interaction with the mentor’s home department.

**Faculty Responsibilities**

Faculty serving in Interdisciplinary graduate committees must clearly understand the program process as articulated in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs Prospective Students webpage. Because of the unusual nature of these programs, they carry a number of special admission and programmatic limitations.

The committee chair or co-chairs are responsible for ensuring that a student’s work is ready for committee review and must approve all proposal and thesis/dissertation material before they are circulated to the rest of the committee. However, the internal responsibilities of the committee should be decided by agreement on a case-by-case status. The following are specific responsibilities by the committee that may apply to one or more members:

- Making arrangements to ensure continuity of supervision when the committee chair or co-chairs will be absent for extended periods (e.g., one month or longer).
- Providing career and professional advice, and assisting in professional networking.
- Advising the student about current graduate program requirements, deadlines, sources of funding, etc.
• Encouraging the student to make presentations of research results within the University and to outside scholarly or professional bodies as appropriate, and assisting the student to obtain funding to attend conferences or professional meetings.
• The nature of interdisciplinary studies makes all committee members important in advising the student at different stages of the project, but the student should always keep the committee chair or co-chairs equally informed of his or her progress.
• Remaining accessible to the student on a regular basis for consultation and discussion of the student’s academic progress and professional development.
• Helping students make appropriate progress by responding in a timely manner to written work submitted by the student with constructive suggestions for improvement and continuation.
• Helping the student gain access to facilities or research materials.
• Ensuring that the working environment is safe, healthy and free from harassment, discrimination, and conflict.
• Working with the student on finding alternative coursework when planned coursework is no longer available.

Application Phase

M.I.S. Application Phase

During the application phase, Faculty is expected to:
• Help students decide between a 30 credit Thesis option and a 36 credit non-Thesis option;
• Review GPA, minimum 3.0 required; and GRE, minimum determined by committee; TOEFL, minimum 580 PBT or 237 CBT or 92 iBT;
• Have at least one meeting with the applicant and the whole committee;
• Guide students in developing a study plan and fill out the M.I.S. program form - integrated coursework that is a balance among the disciplines represented in the proposed program;
• Send the M.I.S. program form and the student's Letter of Intent to each department chair of the faculty in the committee. Department chairs need to send a memo to interdisciplinary@mso.umt.edu verifying that they are aware of their faculty's involvement in the M.I.S.;
• Write a letter of recommendation that include include their willingness to work in the interdisciplinary degree and why they recommend the student for a M.I.S.

I.I.P. Application Phase

During the application phase, Faculty is expected to:
• Help students develop the I.I.P. proposal;
• Review drafts of the proposal and provide feedback;
• Have as many meetings necessary with the applicant and the full committee to develop the plan of study;
• Be present for a meeting with the Director of Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs approximately one month prior to the application deadline;
• Chair/co-chairs must be present for a meeting with the I.I.P. Admissions committee chair approximately two weeks prior to the application deadline;
• Write a commitment letter for the applicant. The letters should include a) a statement about the value and rigor of the student's proposal, b) an indication of willingness to participate in the collaborative effort, c) a discussion of their specific areas of expertise, and d) how this expertise strengthens the student’s IIP program of study and dissertation project(s);
• Provide applicant with a bio sketch for the proposal;
• Review GPA, minimum 3.0 required; and GRE, minimum determined by committee; TOEFL, minimum 580 PBT or 237 CBT or 92 iBT;
• Chair/co-chairs will be the principal advisor(s) throughout the program;
• The committee must fill out the third page of the I.I.P. checklist;
• Chair or one of the co-chairs must submit the whole application packet to the Director of Interdisciplinary Programs.

Program Phase: Procedures

Committee member changes
There may be occasions where the composition of a student’s M.I.S. or I.I.P. committee would change due to extenuating circumstances. The student needs to consult with the full committee in those instances and get the committee’s approval. The committee chair or co-chairs would then send a memo to the IGP Director of the change. The committee member change has to be done within the areas identified by the student upon application to the program, as each M.I.S. or I.I.P. student has a unique discipline composition for the degree. In addition, the member who is stepping down needs to send a memo to the IGP Director stating just that; and the new committee member needs to send a memo to the IGP Director stating he or she is filling that position and acknowledges the change from the previous person.

Major, substantive revision to an I.I.P.
If an I.I.P. student makes substantive changes to his or her I.I.P. program (e.g., original research plan, scope of work, timeline, comprehensive examination format, or committee member composition), a formal review and approval process of the revised I.I.P. must occur. The Graduate School (which is the responsible academic unit) must approve of the proposed changes. The procedure can be found in the IGP Student Handbook.

Milestones
As of Spring 2016, MIS and IIP milestones documents can be found at the Forms website http://www.umt.edu/grad/Interdisciplinary%20Graduate%20Programs/igp-forms/default.php to help committees keep track of important mid-degree completion items.
Exams, Defense and Graduation

Exams
There are three exam options for the IGP: the comprehensive exam, the comprehensive portfolio or a hybrid. The graduate student in concert with his or her committee will define the appropriate examination for the degree.

M.I.S. Comprehensive Exam: The M.I.S. comprehensive exam requirement applies only to students enrolled in the 36-credit, non-thesis option. This exam must be completed and assessed on the semester prior to graduation. The student and his or her committee will determine the best format of the comprehensive exam.

I.I.P. Exam: There are three exam formats for the I.I.P. One is the comprehensive exam; the second is the comprehensive exam portfolio; the third is a hybrid between the comprehensive exam and portfolio. These exam formats are described in the student handbook.
   a) The comprehensive examination.
   b) The comprehensive portfolio.
   c) The hybrid comprehensive exam and portfolio.

Defense
All M.I.S. students pursuing the thesis option and all I.I.P. students are required to conduct a public thesis/dissertation presentation and oral defense. Prior to formally scheduling the defense, the student must send the final draft to his or her chair or co-chairs for approval and verification that it is defensible. At least two weeks prior to the intended defense date (earlier if possible) the student must send a draft copy of the thesis/dissertation to each member of the committee for review. One copy should also be sent to the Graduate School for formatting approval (contact Isa Atkinson at the Graduate School for more information). The thesis or dissertation must show originality and demonstrate competency in independent scientific inquiry. The student is responsible for sending the Graduate School a notice of the date, time and place for the defense to be published on the IGP webpage and announced to the other M.I.S. and I.I.P. students, if desired.

The IGP director or his/her designee, as a non-voting member of I.I.P. committees, must be included in the scheduling of the defense. The chair or co-chairs of the student’s committee will send an informational email to the IGP Director of the student’s defense results.

Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs office responsibilities
The Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs office is responsible for maintaining oversight of all interdisciplinary students, which include:

• Performing audits on each students’ file regarding GPA, continuous registration, time to degree, graduation matters, and program changes;
• The director is a non-voting member of every I.I.P. committee and should be informed of a full committee meetings, comprehensive exam/portfolio presentations or defenses, and final project defense. The director will be present as his or her schedule allows;
• The Director should be informed of M.I.S. thesis defenses;
• The IGP will report annually to the I.I.P. Oversight Committee;
• The IGP office will be available to assist every M.I.S. and I.I.P. committees in regards to procedures, degree requirements and other needs that may arise between committee and graduate student.

Graduate student progress will be assessed every spring to verify that the student is making acceptable and timely progress toward the completion of the degree. Students will be sent an email with a link for an online survey on the first week of April and they will have two weeks to submit the information requested. This information has to be approved by the IGP student’s chair or co-chairs before final submission; approval will be electronically, chair/co-chairs will receive an email with the information student's submit.

Assessing student progress
The following items will be tracked annually:
  a) Credits earned to-date applicable to graduate program (excluding current spring semester enrolled credits);
  b) Credits currently enrolled in for Spring semester;
  c) Comprehensive exam/portfolio completion or anticipated date of completion;
  d) Anticipated date for Thesis or Dissertation defense;
  e) Anticipated date for program completion;
  f) An up-to 500 word abstract describing the project;
  g) A narrative of the progress on the degree in the last year (completing coursework, applying for IRB, finishing exams, collecting or analyzing data, writing thesis or dissertation);
  h) Overview of the student’s latest professional activities in the past 12 months, relevant to the degree.

If any deficiencies are identified, the student will be informed of what they are and given one semester to rectify them. Students who do not meet the stated deadlines will be placed on probation the following semester and may become ineligible for TA or RA support, unless the committee approves a revised timeline. If deficiencies remain, a formal meeting of the student’s committee will then be held to determine whether additional conditions need to be set. If deficiencies are still not rectified by the end of the second semester after being identified, the student will be dropped from the program.