

9.6

Post-baccalaureate professional degree programs and graduate degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than undergraduate programs, and are structured (a) to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and (b) to ensure engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training. (*Post-baccalaureate rigor and curriculum*)

Rationale and Notes

Graduate education builds upon the foundation of undergraduate education. Hence, there is an expectation that postgraduate professional degree programs and graduate programs demand more rigor and higher-order learning than undergraduate work on the same subject. Post-baccalaureate degree programs are progressively more complex than similar undergraduate programs. This expectation for graduate education also implies that requirements in courses not exclusively designed for graduate credit, but that allow both undergraduate and graduate enrollment, ensure that there is a clear distinction between the requirements of undergraduate students and graduate students.

Effective graduate instruction provides the foundational knowledge and skill development to support independent research and professional practice. Graduates of these programs should have the ability to contribute to a profession or field of study. Although the extent to which students are expected to demonstrate these competencies will vary with the level of the graduate degree, faculty within graduate programs define the skills, knowledge, and competencies required and evaluate the ability of students to engage in scholarly inquiry, research, and informed professional practice.

Questions to Consider

- Are there clear indications of more advanced content in graduate and post-baccalaureate programs when compared to the institution's own undergraduate programs in similar subjects?
- If the institution has no comparable undergraduate programs, are there clear indications of more advanced content in the institution's graduate and post-baccalaureate programs when compared to peer institutions' undergraduate programs in similar subjects?
- What process is used by the institution to establish the expected content and rigor of post-baccalaureate degree programs?
- How does the institution maintain higher rigor for graduate and post-baccalaureate programs if the same course is offered (or cross-listed) to both graduate/post-baccalaureate students and undergraduate students?
- How is the literature of the discipline incorporated into curriculum requirements?
- How does the institution ensure its graduate and post-baccalaureate students are engaged in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences?

Sample Documentation

- Publications that show curricular differentiation between undergraduate and post-baccalaureate programs.
- Comparative course syllabi describing the advanced body of learning to be accomplished through the graduate/post-baccalaureate coursework.
- Graduate or post-baccalaureate studies policies and procedures used to ensure minimum course requirements.
- Examples of independent research projects, portfolios, case studies, theses, dissertations, or other examples of graduate research/professional practice.
- Assessment findings from graduate and post-baccalaureate programs related to research or professional practice with identified expected student learning outcomes beyond the undergraduate level [see Standard 8.2.a (*Student outcomes: educational programs*)].

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 8.2.a (*Student outcomes: educational programs*)

9.7 The institution publishes requirements for its undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate professional programs, as applicable. The requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. (*Program requirements*)

Rationale and Notes

Each program of study at the institution has clearly defined requirements regarding what is necessary to complete the program so that potential students are aware of expectations prior to enrollment. These requirements are published so they are accessible to constituencies including faculty, students, and prospective students. Degree requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices found at institutions of higher education. When degree requirements are highly unusual, the expectations are explained and an academic justification is provided.

Commonly accepted practices for the requirements of an undergraduate program address an appropriate number of semester hours, or its equivalent, and a coherent course of study appropriate to that level of higher education. Each undergraduate program of study identifies courses that are program requirements and any prerequisite courses. Specific program requirements are also published, including an appropriate college-level general education component, and if present, cross-curricular and co-curricular requirements (e.g., chapel attendance, service learning, performance