



Masters Program Handbook

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I. Overview and VCU Graduate Bulletin

The Virginia Commonwealth University School of Business offers masters degrees in numerous specialized degree programs. While curriculum requirements of each program are separate and distinct, the policies and procedures that govern graduate study in the School of Business are the same, regardless of masters program. This Masters Program Handbook is designed to meet the needs of students in the following degree programs:

Master of Accountancy

Master of Arts in Economics

Master of Business Administration*

Master of Science in Business with concentrations in:

- Finance
- Global Marketing Management
- Real Estate Valuation

Master of Science in Computer and Information Systems Security

Master of Science in Information Systems*

Master of Decision Analytics*

Master of Supply Chain Management

*Students in the Executive MBA, Decision Analytics Professional Track, and Executive Management Information Systems Programs should refer to information provided by the Director of Executive Programs Operations.

VCU Graduate Bulletin

As noted under "General academic regulations for graduate students" in the VCU Graduate Bulletin (<http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/graduate/?uid=10045&iid=30061>): *"It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the Graduate Bulletin (catalog) as well as the academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites; however, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on this Graduate Bulletin website and on the Graduate School website, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines."*

The VCU Graduate Bulletin can be found on-line at business.vcu.edu/graduate/current under Program Documents.

II. Mandatory Orientation

Students are required to attend their School of Business orientation program prior to the start of their first fall or spring semester in the degree program. New students will have the opportunity to meet with an academic advisor and register for their first semester of courses during orientation if they have not had the opportunity prior. Refer to your admissions email for date and time of the School of Business Orientation.

The VCU Graduate School also holds an orientation each Friday before the first day of class. This orientation is not mandatory for School of Business graduate students but does provide useful University information especially for those attending full time.

International students are required to attend the orientation for International Students sponsored by the Global Education Office as well. International students should contact the Global Education Office at (804) 828-8471 to obtain detailed information regarding this program.

In addition, students must have an Approved Program Form which outlines the curriculum, filled out, signed and on file in the Graduate Studies Office, by the end of the first semester of study. See section IV, D.1. for details.

III. Registration

A. VCU e-Services

Students are able to access their University records from VCU e-Services, a secure University internet site. Students can access eServices through the myVCU portal located at www.vcu.edu. Students can register for courses, access up-to-date student accounting information, financial aid, and VCU transcript information, as well as update their personal contact data. Online MBA cohort students will be registered by the program manager.

B. Advising Requirements

Each student is required to meet with their advisor prior to the start of their first semester. Each student is responsible for completing an **Approved Program Form** with their advisor prior to the end of their first semester. The student and faculty advisor must sign the Approved Program Form. Additional forms can be obtained by emailing [Austen Gouldman](mailto:Austen.Gouldman@vcu.edu) at gouldmana@vcu.edu. Online MBA cohort students will follow a prescribed curriculum as outlined when admitted to the program.

C. Definitions of Add/Drop and Withdrawal

Students are encouraged to understand the differences in the use of three specific terms used in conjunction with the course registration process:

- **Add/Drop** is the grace period provided by the university at the beginning of each fall, spring and summer semester in which students a grace period in which students may change their semester registrations. For fall and spring semesters, the add/drop period usually ends on the last day of the first full week of courses. In the summer, add/drop periods are designated for each course offering and usually provide only a one day grace period from the first official start date of each class. Students are responsible for checking the posted VCU Academic Calendar for each semester to determine the specific dates that apply. **Add** refers to a student's adding a course section to his/her course registration for a given semester. **Drop** defines the action taken when a student eliminates a course from his/her course registration in a given semester. During the add/drop period of time a student may change his/her schedule as many times as necessary in order to obtain his/her ideal schedule. Changes made during the add/drop period that require a change in tuition and fee charges for the semester will be documented via new student bill reflecting the appropriate increase or decrease in the current student account. Add / Drop changes can be made online through the student registration menu of eServices with one exception; students with Holds on their accounts must drop in person at VCU's Records and Registration Office.
- **Withdrawal Deadline** is the final date of each fall, spring and summer semester by which a student must withdraw from his/her class(es) in order to receive a mark of "W." Students, who do not have Holds on their accounts, can use e-Services to obtain the "W" at any time during the semester until the published withdrawal deadline. Students with Holds will need to withdraw in person at the VCU Office of Records and Registration. Students must complete any course remaining on a student's transcript after the withdrawal deadline. Professors are required to submit a final grade for each student remaining in a course beyond the posted withdrawal deadline. **Students are responsible for checking the posted VCU Academic Calendar in order to determine the specific deadline for withdrawal for the given semester.**
- **Online MBA students** will have unique Add/Drop and Withdrawal deadlines due to the shortened 7-week course schedule. OMBA students will be given these deadlines prior to each semester.

D. Pre-Registration Period

Continuing VCU students are highly encouraged to advance register for future course offerings using the eServices web site. Pre-registration for spring semester usually begins at or around mid-term of each fall semester. Pre-registration for summer and fall semesters usually begins at or around the end of spring break each spring semester. Please check the current VCU Academic Calendar for each semester's dates. Students needing assistance with course selection are urged to meet with their program advisor immediately prior to or around the time of advanced registration. Online MBA cohort students will be registered by the program manager.

E. Blackboard

Many graduate business courses will require students to access Blackboard, an online course management program. In order to access the Blackboard system, each student must obtain a valid VCU identification card and a current VCU e-mail address. Please refer to the Blackboard web site for more detailed information regarding this system: www.blackboard.vcu.edu. Blackboard is also accessible via the MyVCU portal.

IV. General Program Regulations

A. Courses and Credits

1. Prerequisite and/or foundation-level business course work may be required of incoming students along with their corresponding program's 600 level course requirements. Waivers of foundation and prerequisite requirements are made at the time of admission and are based on a number of factors to ensure student success in program core courses. Students who desire to appeal the waiver decisions may do so by submitting a written request to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Students appealing a waiver decision should include copies of previous course description(s) and/or class syllabi as documentation they have completed the required course work. An option to test out of a course may be offered to a student at the discretion of the program adviser and/or Director of Graduate Studies in Business. These are only considered in cases where the student has completed similar coursework at the undergraduate or graduate level.
2. Students in programs other than the Online MBA may complete their chosen masters degree on either a part-time or full-time basis. The Online MBA is a part-time only program. Please note that some masters programs do not offer core courses every semester, and it may not be possible to complete the entire degree on a full-time basis.
3. Students must complete at least one three-credit class per 12 month period in order to maintain active status in a School of Business masters program.
4. Students must complete all course requirements for the degree. In certain instances, course substitutions or course may be approved at the discretion of the Director of Graduate Studies and VCU's Graduate School.
5. The same course(s) cannot be used to satisfy more than one degree program requirement, unless part of a defined dual-degree program. . The Director of Graduate Studies in Business may make exceptions to this policy for courses applied towards a certificate program.

B. Program Completion Time Limits

1. The time limit for completing all course work is six years. Each student's time limit begins with the first semester in which he/she enrolls for course work after being admitted to the program.
2. Students must apply for an extension of the six-year limit no later than the last day of withdrawal from classes in the semester in which the six-year limit ends. Students should submit written requests for extension of the six-year limit to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies in Business. A maximum of two 1-year extensions is allowed.

C. Assignment to Degree Program

1. Upon admission to a program, students receive official confirmation of acceptance which indicates the program to which they are admitted.
2. Students are assigned to an academic advisor in their major area of study at the time of admission. Students meet with their assigned advisors for initial planning of their program of study and to explore the student's area of interest.
3. A student who desires to transfer from one program to another is required to submit a new application, application fee, and inform the Graduate Studies in Business Office, unless the request is to change concentrations within the Master of Business Administration or Master of Science in Business programs. In these cases, the request may be processed directly through the Graduate Studies in Business Office without the need for a new application.
4. A change of concentration may necessitate the student taking additional course work. The original six-year limit on completing the graduate program will remain intact following a change of concentration.

D. Program Planning

1. Each student is responsible for meeting with his/her advisor to complete an **Approved Program Form** (program specific Approved Program Forms are available in the Graduate Studies in Business Office) in the first few weeks of their first semester. The student and faculty advisor must sign the Approved Program Form and then submit it to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Online MBA students will be advised of the prescribed curriculum by the MBA program manager.
2. **Email Distribution List:**
Graduate Studies in Business maintains an email list for all master level students in the School of Business for announcements. Email to the VCU email account is the primary method of communication between Graduate Studies staff and

students regarding changes in course schedules, position announcements, changes in curriculum, and notices for School of Business events. Students' VCU email address will be automatically added to the distribution list upon entry to the program. *Students must check their VCU account in order to be kept up-to-date on School and program announcements.*

3. If **revision of the Approved Program Form** is required, a revised copy of the originally approved form must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. The revised copy should include the course changes, initialed and dated by the faculty advisor and student. Once submitted, the Senior Director of Masters Programs in Business will review the changes and provide final approval.

E. Transfer Credits

Transfer credits refer to graduate courses taken prior to admission to the masters program that may have been taken at VCU, another accredited institution. (See the Readmission Policy subsection of this Handbook for policies related to using previously earned course credits upon readmission.) The rules for transferring credit to a masters degree program follow:

1. Credits earned toward another degree cannot be applied to this degree program.
2. School of Business policy allows for a maximum of **30 percent** of the didactic hours required for a graduate degree or any graduate certificate program to be transferred from another VCU program or outside institution and, if not applied previously toward another degree, may be applied toward a degree. Prerequisite course work that does not count toward the VCU degree may not be transferred.

Due to strict standards of AACSB accreditation, student access to graduate business courses prior to admission to a graduate degree program is limited and monitored. Students must seek special permission from the Graduate Studies in Business office to enroll in graduate business courses prior to admission. Similarly, students who have taken graduate business courses at VCU prior to admission must seek permission from the Director of Graduate Studies to accept them as transfer credit.

3. School of Business policy restricts transfer courses to those completed at an AACSB-accredited institution. Exception to this may be granted by the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Students must submit course descriptions of the work presented for transfer, in order to be reviewed for possible exception.

All transfer courses must be approved as applicable to the program of study and students must submit official university transcripts and course descriptions of the work presented for transfer. The Director of Graduate Studies in Business along with VCU's Graduate School will determine whether the courses can be accepted as transfer courses.

4. In cases of relocation or other extreme circumstances a student may request to take transfer courses from other institutions. Requests must be made in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business and they should include a detailed explanation of transfer request. Final approval will then be requested from VCU's Graduate School on your behalf.
5. In all cases, the student must have earned a grade of "B" or better in graduate courses presented for transfer. A student will not be permitted to transfer a course in which a grade lower than "B" or its equivalent in U.S. standards was received.

F. Leave of Absence

According to University policy, an admitted student may apply for leave of absence anytime after having been enrolled for program course work. The request must be submitted in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business and must include reason as well as length of requested time. A leave of absence can be for no more than a 12-month period, and students may request leave for a shorter period of time. If the request is granted and the student does take the approved leave, he/she must still complete all program requirements within the original six-year time frame.

V. Program Administration

A. Associate Dean of Graduate Studies

The Associate Dean of Graduate Studies has oversight of all graduate business programs including evening, weekend, online masters, and PhD programs. The Associate Dean is responsible for all matters relating to curricula, program assessment, and faculty relations.

B. Executive Director of Masters Programs in Business

The Executive Director of Masters Programs in Business reports directly to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and is responsible for the day-to-day administration of graduate programs in the School of Business. The Executive Director is the primary contact for matters relating to curricula changes, grade appeals, and dismissal appeals.

C. Director of Graduate Studies in Business

The Director of Graduate Studies in Business, along with associated staff and administrators, works directly with matriculated students in all graduate certificate and masters level programs. The Director is responsible for sending out all relevant announcements to the students and assisting in program registration. The Director is the primary contact in matters related to the administration of the program, including but not limited to correspondence, record keeping, articulation of the programs to prospective and current students, tracking graduate Masters assistantships, and other duties as assigned.

D. School of Business Masters Program Committee

The School of Business Masters Program Committee is a standing committee of the School of Business Faculty Council. This committee is made up of one faculty representative from each of the seven academic departments within the School of Business and two appointed graduate student members. Representatives from the Graduate Studies in Business Office, and two graduate students serve as non-voting, ex-officio members. In the case of student dismissal appeals, graduate student members are voting members. The Masters Program Committee is responsible for approving all changes to masters programs as well as hearing appeals related to student status in School of Business masters degree programs.

VI. Curriculum

Students must follow the curriculum outlined in the VCU Graduate Bulletin (bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate) for the academic year in which they were admitted. Students can request to move to a more recent curriculum by contacting the Director of Graduate Studies in Business; however, all course requirements of the newer curriculum must be followed. Students cannot request to follow an older curriculum pre-dating entrance in their program.

Option to Complete Research Course

Certain masters degree curricula allow students to take one research course toward completion of their elective or other degree requirements. Research courses are titled "guided study" and have a course specific to each department (e.g. MGMT 697). In order to earn credit in a research course, a student must submit a signed Request for Research Course Form, found on the School of Business, Graduate Studies web site at <http://www.business.vcu.edu/graduate/current.html>, a completed approved program form, and a description of the research study/project that will be completed. Students must identify a faculty member willing to supervise their independent research work and obtain signatures from their supervising faculty member, academic advisor, and department chairperson before submitting the formal request to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Upon approval of the request, Graduate Studies in Business staff members will register the student for the approved research course.

VII. Student Assessment

For the same reason that great care is taken during the admission process, the School of Business Graduate Studies office continues to monitor the progress of students in all School of Business masters degree programs.

A. VCU Honor System

"VCU recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission to advance knowledge and student success both in the world VCU students will enter, or return to, once they have graduated and in the university community as a microcosm of that world. In a community

devoted to learning, a foundation of honor must exist if that community is to thrive with respect and harmony. Therefore, all members of the university community must conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty, ethics, and integrity at all times. Additional standards of academic and professional integrity consistent with this Honor System may apply to students in professional programs" (VCU Honor System). Violations include

1. Plagiarism
2. Cheating
3. Lying
4. Stealing
5. Facilitation

Penalties upon violation range from honor probation to expulsion from the University.

The existence and enforcement of Honor System rules are important at all levels of study. The Honor System rules and procedures are found at

<https://policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Honor%20System.pdf>

Familiarization with the rules is of decisive importance because ignorance of them will not prevent a finding of violation and imposition of penalty. The instructor for each class determines what will and what will not constitute a violation of the VCU Honor System rules, although students are responsible for understanding what types of conduct are deemed unacceptable and, therefore, prohibited.

B. Grades

Students will earn a grade for each course they attempt throughout the master program. All foundation, required and elective courses are graded with a letter grade. Students in the graduate programs are expected to maintain a 3.0 cumulative grade point average throughout their program. Please use the following grade table to determine the weight of grades in master degree programs:

Letter Grade	Grade Point/Credit Hour
A	4.0
B	3.0
C	2.0
D	1.0
F	0.0

Students who are graduate assistants can lose the assistantship with any grade less than "B."

C. Maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students are expected to satisfy the degree requirements at a pace that will enable them to meet the six-year time limit. Graduate students must maintain a cumulative grade point average of at

least 3.0 in order to maintain satisfactory academic progress and active status in the graduate program. Failure to meet either of these conditions constitutes unsatisfactory progress. The School of Business Graduate Studies office reviews all students' progress at the completion of each fall, spring and summer session. Students whose cumulative grade point average is below 3.0 must show progress towards raising the GPA in the following semester. Students earning any grade less than "C" or who have received three grades (or 20% of attempted coursework, whichever is greater) of "C" are generally recommended to the Graduate School Dean for dismissal from the program. Please note, the School of Business policy is stricter than the University policy as outlined in the VCU Graduate Bulletin.

D. Student Appeals

The right of students to due process is upheld in the School of Business through the Masters Program Committee. Students who need to appeal for exception to University and/or school regulations regarding graduate business programs may do so by submitting a written request to the School of Business Masters Program Committee through the Executive Director of Masters Programs in Business.

Students who desire to appeal a grade must do so by following the VCU Grade Review Procedure as outlined in the VCU Bulletin. Appeals related to the VCU Honor System or VCU Rules and Procedures must follow the steps outlined in those policy statements found at <https://students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/>

VIII. Readmission Policy

After a student leaves the program, whether voluntarily or because of failure to meet one or more of the program requirements, he or she may seek readmission. Readmission must be sought through the regular admission process, adhering to all deadline dates and admission criteria. In addition to admission material regularly requested, a candidate for readmission must provide a cover letter explaining the rationale for readmission, including a statement of the factors that have changed the applicant's situation and increased the expectation of success for the candidate.

Business Graduate Studies and the academic department (when appropriate) will review the entire readmission packet. At the time readmission is considered, the Associate Dean of Masters Programs in Business will determine whether courses previously taken will be used to satisfy current requirements of a master program. Courses in which a student received a grade of 'C' or below are not admissible. For course work that was taken more than eight years prior to the completion of the VCU degree, the graduate program director and school dean/designee will evaluate the course work for acceptability and report those courses deemed acceptable to the Dean of the Graduate School. If readmitted, the candidate will be expected to meet all program requirements as outlined in the bulletin for the semester of reentry, including continuous enrollment, grades, program requirements, and the six-year time limit for completion of the program. Refer to the Transfer Credits subsection of this Handbook for transfer credit policies.

IX. Graduation and Degree Titles

A. Graduation

Students must submit an application for graduation to Business Graduate Studies at the start of the semester or summer in which they anticipate graduating. **No degrees will be conferred unless students make formal application to graduate.** Graduate Studies in Business staff members and the VCU Graduation Office will notify students of the deadline for applying for graduation each semester through the email distribution list. Applications received after the announced deadlines will be processed for graduation, however, we cannot guarantee that applicants' names and degrees will be noted in the official Commencement Bulletins for the given semester.

Virginia Commonwealth University officially graduates students in December, May and August of each year. Formal University commencement ceremonies are held in December and May of each academic year. Students who graduate in the summer are officially recognized in December commencement exercises although they may participate in the May ceremony. Graduates can attend one ceremony only (December or May).

B. Graduation Eligibility Checklist

A graduation checklist (above and beyond the general application requirements) may be found in the Graduate section of the Bulletin under "Graduation Requirements" or at: <http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/general-academic-regulations-graduate-students/graduation-requirements/>

The checklist includes the following criteria:

- All provisional or probationary conditions of admission have been met.
- Candidates enrolled at time of application/reapplication to graduate (i.e., semester in which candidates plan to graduate).
- Overall graduate GPA is greater than or equal to 3.0.
- Graduate GPA based on all graduate course work attempted after acceptance into program.
- For repeated courses, both original grade and repeat grades included in calculation of graduate GPA.
- No more than six credit hours or 20 percent of total credit hours attempted (whichever greater) at C or below level (C, D, F). Individual programs reserve the right to establish more stringent requirements regarding the acceptance of C grades. Specifically, students may not present courses receiving grades less than C for fulfilling degree requirements.
- No course work approved for transfer below grade of B; no course work approved for transfer included in calculation of GPA.
- Graduate course work only (500 level or higher) may be applied to a graduate degree with at least one half of required course work designated exclusively for graduate students (600 or higher).

- All Incompletes (I) converted to letter grade by last day of class of semester in which candidate plans to graduate.
- All grades of Continued (CO), Progress (PR) and No Grade (NG) converted to letter grades by last day of class of semester in which candidate plans to graduate.
- All course work taken within prescribed time limits (master's, six years; Ph.D., eight years with any extensions approved by Graduate School).
- Students must settle all financial obligations with VCU's Office of Student Accounting.

*Revised 5/11/2010; 5/10/2011
University Graduate Council*

C. Degree Titles

University transcripts fully describe the specific master degree program and concentration areas pursued by each student. A student's diploma will identify the degree name and major area of study completed by the student. The following table provides the text that will print on each diploma according to the specific degree program.

<u>Degree Program</u>	<u>Diploma Text</u>
Master of Business Administration (with or without concentration)	Master of Business Administration
Master of Arts in Economics	Master of Arts Economics
Master of Accountancy	Master of Accountancy
Master of Science in Information Systems	Master of Science Information Systems
Master of Science in Business (all concentration areas)	Master of Science Business
Master of Decision Analytics	Master of Decision Analytics