



Master's Program Handbook

Approved: May 1, 2003
Last Edited: July 27, 2009

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-------------|--|-----------|
| I. | Overview | 1 |
| II. | Admission | 2 |
| | A. Application Process | 2 |
| | B. Admission Packet | 2 |
| | C. Deferred Admission | 3 |
| | D. Financial Assistance | 4 |
| | E. Readmission Policy | 4 |
| III. | Orientation and Registration for First Semester | 5 |
| | A. Orientation Programs | 5 |
| | B. Blackboard | 5 |
| | C. Listserv Distribution | 5 |
| IV. | Registration | 6 |
| | A. VCU e-Services | 6 |
| | B. Definitions of Add/Drop and Withdrawal | 6 |
| | C. Pre-Registration | 6 |
| V. | General Program Regulations | 7 |
| | A. Courses and Credits | 7 |
| | B. Program Completion Time Limits | 7 |
| | C. Assignment to Degree Program | 7 |
| | D. Program Planning | 8 |
| | E. Transfer Credits | 8 |
| | F. Leave of Absence | 9 |
| VI. | Program Administration | 10 |
| | A. Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies | 10 |
| | B. Director, Graduate Studies in Business | 10 |
| | C. Manager, Student Services | 10 |
| | D. School of Business Masters Program Committee | 10 |
| VII. | Curriculum | 11 |
| | A. Foundation/Prerequisite Component | 11 |
| | B. Required Core Component | 11 |
| | C. Elective Course Component | 11 |
| | D. Option to Complete Research Course | 12 |

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----------|
| VIII. | Student Assessment | 13 |
| A. | VCU Honor System | 13 |
| B. | Grades | 13 |
| C. | Maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress | 13 |
| D. | Student Appeals | 14 |
| IX. | Graduation and Degree Titles | 15 |
| A. | Graduation | 15 |
| B. | Degree Titles | 15 |

I. Overview

The Virginia Commonwealth University School of Business offers master degree training in numerous specialized degree programs. 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 master program. The Master's 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:

- Decision Sciences
- Finance
- Global Marketing Management
- Human Resource Management
- Real Estate and Land Development

Master of Science in Information Systems

Master of Taxation

Students in the Fast Track Executive MBA and Fast Track Executive Management Information Systems Programs should refer to information provided by the Director of the respective program.

II. Admission

Admission is restricted to applicants who possess the academic and professional qualifications necessary to succeed in the program. An applicant must provide a completed application and fee, official transcripts, current resume, personal statement, three letters of reference, and GMAT test score not more than five years old. GRE scores are accepted for the Master of Arts in Economics program and in special circumstances may be acceptable to other graduate business programs.

A. Application Process

Students are admitted to master's degree programs in the fall and spring semesters. Summer admission is available in all programs, however course availability is limited and may not allow for summer entry in certain master's level programs.

| APPLICATION ADMISSION ROUNDS AND DEADLINES | | | | |
|--|----------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| | MBA & MS | MAcct, MTax, MA | Post-baccalaureate Certificate | Ph.D. |
| Fall | July 1 | Jul 15 | Rolling Admission | Jan 1 |
| Spring | Nov 1 | Nov 15 | Rolling Admission | n/a |
| Summer | Mar 1* | Mar 15 | Rolling Admission | n/a |

* Only for students needing foundation courses

Applicants to graduate study in the School of Business are responsible for submitting complete and accurate application materials for review. Once a completed application is received, the appropriate application review will begin. The Director of Graduate Studies in Business will notify applicants of the School of Business' recommended admission decision. The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies reviews school recommendations and officially notifies students of admission decisions.

B. Admission Packet

The Graduate Studies in Business office will hold all applications to graduate study in the School of Business until they are complete. Students are responsible for submitting all required documents by the appropriate published deadline. A complete application includes the following items:

1. Application for Graduate Study and Application Fee
Domestic student applicants must submit a complete *Application for Graduate Study*. International student applicants must submit a complete *Application for International Students*. Applications must be submitted with the appropriate application fee, as printed in the application document.

2. Official Copies of all University Transcripts
All students must submit two official and up-to-date copies of transcripts from each college or university previously attended. The transcripts must indicate that the applicant has minimally earned a four-year bachelor's degree from an accredited institution.
3. Official Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) or Graduate Records Examination (GRE) Scores (not required for Graduate Certificate programs)
Students must submit official copies of GMAT scores received in the last five years. When taking either test, or when requesting that previously earned scores be forwarded to Virginia Commonwealth University, please use university code LP8-QF-86. Master's programs in the School of Business predominately require GMAT test scores. Please check with Graduate Studies in Business before submitting GRE scores for admission.
4. Personal Statement
Each applicant must submit a written statement describing his/her personal career goals and the manner in which earning master's degree will assist in attaining those goals. Candidates are expected to describe the way in which they will also contribute to the overall masters program during their time of study.
5. Current Resume or Vita
Candidates must submit an up-to-date resume or vita illustrating the types of educational and professional experiences they have had. The document should include dates of education, dates of work experience, description of work experience and responsibilities, list of publications, and list of related awards and professional memberships.
6. Three Letters of Reference
Applicants must submit current references from three individuals qualified and willing to rate the applicant's intellectual and leadership ability. Each person should submit a reference form, included with application materials, in which they rate the applicant in a number of personal and academic areas. References are invited to attach an additional letter to the reference form that is provided. All three letters of references should be submitted to the applicant in signed, sealed envelopes that the applicant can include in his/her application packet when delivering the application to Virginia Commonwealth University.

C. Deferred Admission

Any student who is admitted to a master's program may request a deferral of admission for up to one year. Written requests for deferred admission must be sent to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business in the School of Business and must include the reason for such a request.

D. Financial Assistance

The School of Business provides a limited number of master's assistantships each year. The assistantships provide partial coverage of tuition and fees for the fall and spring semesters of study as well as an hourly wage for the required 20 hours of work in an assigned School of Business department each week.

Additional information regarding University-sponsored financial assistance is available from the VCU Financial Aid Office. Students can reach this office by telephone at (804) 828-6669, via e-mail at faidmail@vcu.edu, or via Internet at www.vcu.edu/enroll/finaid.

E. Readmission Policy

After a student leaves the program, whether voluntarily or because of failure to meet one or more of the program requirements, he/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.

Graduate Studies in Business will review the entire readmission packet. At the time readmission is considered, the Director of Graduate Studies in Business will determine whether courses previously taken will be used to satisfy current requirements of a master program. If readmitted, the candidate will be expected to meet all program requirements as outlined in the bulletin for semester of reentry, including continuous enrollment, grades, program requirements, and the six-year time limit for completion of the program.

III. Orientation and Registration for First Semester

A. Orientation Programs

Students are required to attend one of the GSIB Orientation programs offered prior to the start of their first semester in the degree program. Orientation programs are scheduled through the Graduate Studies in Business office prior to the start of each semester. New students will have the opportunity to meet with an academic advisor and register for their first semester of courses during orientation. Refer to the invitation to participate in orientation that was included in your admission letter from GSIB for more details.

The VCU Graduate School also holds an orientation each fall on the 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 also required to attend the orientation for International Students sponsored by the Center for International Programs. International students should contact the Center for International Programs at (804) 828-6016 to obtain detailed information regarding this program.

B. 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.

D. Listserv Distribution

Graduate Studies in Business maintains a listserv for all master's level students in the School of Business. The listserv is the primary method of communication between GSIB 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 listserv upon entry to the program. Students must check their VCU account in order to be kept up-to-date on School and program announcements.

IV. 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, financial aid, and VCU transcript information, as well as update their personal contact data.

B. 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 period of time each fall, spring and summer semester in which the University provides students a grace period in which to 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 University 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.
- **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 can use e-Services to obtain the "W" at any time during the semester until the published withdrawal deadline. The student 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 University Calendar in order to determine the specific deadline for withdrawal for the given semester.

C. 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 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.

V. General Program Regulations

A. Courses and Credits

1. Prerequisite and foundation-level business course work may be required of students before they may enroll in required courses of a degree program. Waivers of foundation and prerequisite requirements are made at the time of admission and are based on whether a student previously has completed the equivalent coursework from an accredited institution. 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.
2. Students may complete their chosen master's degree on either a part-time or full-time basis. Please note that some master's 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 each year in order to maintain active status in a School of Business master's program.
4. All appeals relating to student status in a master's program of the School of Business will be heard by the School of Business Master's Program Committee. The Masters Program Committee is comprised of one faculty representative from each of the school's six academic departments and two appointed student members. The Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies and Director of Graduate Studies in Business sit on this committee as non-voting, ex-officio members.

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 Director of Graduate Studies in Business. The School of Business Masters Program Committee will review and decide on requests for extension at the meeting immediately following receipt of the student's request.

C. Assignment to Degree Program

1. Students are admitted to a master's program based on their intended degree, as described in the admission section of this manual.

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.

Each student may retain his/her original academic advisor throughout the graduate program, or may request a change of advisor. Requests to change advisors must be made in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business and should include an explanation for the change. The Director of Graduate Studies in Business will notify the student upon assignment of a new academic advisor.

3. A student who desires to transfer from one program to another must make the request in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. If the request is to change concentrations within a given degree program, the Director of Graduate Studies in Business will make the final decision. If the request is to change from one degree and/or concentration to another degree and/or concentration, the Director of Graduate Studies in Business and appropriate department faculty will review all original admission documents as well as current VCU transcripts to determine whether the change will be approved.
4. A change of major 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 program.

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 on the GSIB web pages) prior to the time the student applies for graduation. The student and faculty advisor must sign the Approved Program Form before submitting it to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business.
2. 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 Director of Graduate Studies in Business will review the changes and provide final approval.

E. Transfer Credits

The University policy concerning credits is found in the current edition of the *University Graduate and Professional Bulletin*. Transfer credits refer to graduate courses taken prior to admission to the master's program that may have been taken at VCU or another AACSB-accredited institution. The rules for transferring credit to a master's degree program follow:

1. Credits earned toward another degree cannot be applied to this degree program.
2. University policy allows for students to apply up to six credit hours of study taken at VCU prior to admission to the program toward completion of the degree. 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 Director of Graduate Studies in Business 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 in Business to accept them as transfer credit.

3. School of Business policy allows students to transfer up to six credit hours of previously completed graduate coursework to current graduate program requirements. The courses must have been completed at an AACSB accredited institution and must be applicable to program of study. Students must submit official university transcripts and course descriptions of the work presented for transfer. The Director of Graduate Studies in Business will determine whether to accept the courses as transfer.
4. In cases of relocation or other extreme circumstances a student may request an additional three credit hours to be transferred into the program. Requests must be made in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies in Business and include detailed explanation of transfer request.
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 in the School of Business and must include reason as well as length of requested time. A leave of absence can be for no more than one calendar year, 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.

VI. Program Administration

A. Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies

The Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies reports directly to the Dean of the School of Business and oversees all graduate programs, including the Ph.D. program, the MBA program, the Fast-Track Executive MBA and MSIS programs, and specialized master's programs. The Associate Dean is primarily concerned with issues of research, academic quality of graduate programs, and consistency and continuity of program offerings.

B. Director of Graduate Studies in Business

The Director of Graduate Studies in Business reports directly to the Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Programs and is responsible for the day-to-day administration of graduate programs in the School of Business. The Director of Graduate Studies in Business is the primary contact in matters related to the management of the program, including but not limited to budgetary matters, correspondence, record keeping, articulation of the program to prospective and current students, tracking graduate teaching assistantships, and other duties as assigned.

C. Manager of Student Services, Graduate Studies in Business

The Manager of Student Services, Graduate Studies in Business, works directly with matriculated students in all graduate certificate and masters level programs. The Manager is responsible for sending out all relevant announcements to the students and assisting in program registration. The Manager is also the faculty advisor for the graduate student organization, The Business and Development Club.

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 six academic departments within the School of Business and two appointed graduate student members. The Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs and Director of Graduate Programs serve as non-voting, ex-officio members. The Masters Program Committee is responsible for approving all changes to master's programs as well as hearing appeals related to student status in School of Business master's degree programs.

VII. Curriculum

The curriculum of master's programs in the School of Business can be divided into three components. Each area is described below and will be addressed between student and advisor as they meet to complete the **Approved Program Form**. Students are encouraged to visit the Graduate Studies in Business web site (www.gsib.vcu.edu) for the most up-to-date curriculum requirements of all master's degree programs offered in the School of Business.

A. Foundation/Prerequisite Component

Each master's degree program in the School of Business has identified prerequisite/foundation requirements specific to the degree. Graduate Studies in Business staff members and/or faculty advisors will determine whether a student has satisfied the foundation/prerequisite component of his/her intended major at the time of admission. Students who enter a master's program without having first completed the required foundations/prerequisites will be expected to meet the foundation requirements for their intended degree program before completing required degree courses.

Foundation/Prerequisite courses may be met by previous college course work or by taking the courses listed below at the time of entry to the program:

| Business Foundation Courses | Equivalent VCU Undergraduate Courses | Equivalent at Other Universities |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| ACCT 507 | ACCT 203-204 or ACCT 205 and ACCT 303 | Principles of Accounting I & II, Intermediate Accounting I |
| FIRE 520 Finance | FIRE 311 | Financial Management |
| MGMT 524 Statistics | MGMT 301-302 | Business Statistics I & II |
| MGMT 530 Business Law | MGMT 323 | Business Law |
| MGMT 540 Management | MGMT 319 or 320 | Management |
| MKTG 570 Marketing | MKTG 308 | Principles of Marketing |
| ECON 500 Economics | ECON 210-211 | Micro & Macro Economics |

B. Required Core Component

The required core component of a master's degree program is the list of classes that all students in the degree program must complete. The list of classes may require that all students take all courses on the list, or the list may provide students options from which to choose when satisfying the number of credit hours required in the core component.

C. Elective Course Component

Each degree program requires a different number of credit hours of elective courses. Depending upon the degree program, electives will be either free or restricted. All electives must be 600-level courses taken in the School of Business or taken outside the School of Business with previous permission of the student's faculty advisor and the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Certain 500 level courses may also be allowed with permission of the Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Free electives refer to courses that a student selects of his/her own choosing. Restricted electives refer to the courses provided in a list of courses from which a student may choose when satisfying elective requirements for his/her degree program.

D. Option to Complete Research Course

Students in master's degree programs of the School of Business may request permission to take one research course toward completion of their elective or other degree requirements. Research courses are titled guided study or field projects. In order to earn credit in a research course, a student must submit a signed Request for Research Course Form, found on the GSIB web site, 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.

VIII. Student Assessment

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

A. VCU Honor System

"Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education." (VCU Honor System.) Violations include cheating, plagiarism, facilitating academic dishonesty, abuse of academic materials, stealing academic materials, and lying related to academic matters.

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 degree and certificate programs. The Honor System rules and procedures are found in each current edition of the *VCU Resource Guide* (a publication of the Division of Student Affairs, 901 Floyd Avenue) and on the Internet at www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/rg7honor.html. 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 be dropped from the assistantship award 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 Graduate Studies in Business 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 will have one semester to make up that deficiency. Students earning any grade less than "C" or who have received three grades (or 20% of attempted coursework, whichever is greater) of "C" will be terminated from the program.

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 Director of Graduate Studies in Business. Appeals heard by the Masters Program Committee include but are not limited to: reinstatement to program after termination; request for late drop; and request for late withdrawal.

Students who desire to appeal a grade must do so by following the VCU Grade Review Procedure. Appeals related to the VCU Honor System or VCU Rules and Procedures must follow the steps outlined in those policy statements as outlined in the current *VCU Resource Guide*.

IX. Graduation and Degree Titles

A. Graduation

Students must submit an application for graduation to Graduate Studies in Business at the start of the semester or summer in which they anticipate graduating. GSIB staff members notify students of the deadline for applying for graduation each semester through the listserv distribution. Students who do not follow the instructions for graduation application provided in the listserv message are expected to secure their application for graduation directly from Records and Registration by the deadlines set on the VCU Academic Calendar. Applications received after the announced deadlines will be processed for graduation, however, we can not 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.

B. 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 Taxation | Master of Taxation |
| Master of Science in Information Systems | Master of Science Information Systems |
| Master of Science in Business (all concentration areas) | Master of Science Business |