

MA Curricular Policy

Our MA programs wish to do everything possible to support our students and help assure a timely completion of their degree requirements. We particularly wish to avoid seeing students fall behind and take on additional costs in subsequent quarters if they are unable to complete their outstanding coursework.

The policy below is meant to serve as a guide to ensure that each student is well-positioned to earn our MA degree in a timely and supported manner.

Maintaining Good Academic Standing

Full-time MA students complete three courses each quarter, not including any Workshops or non-credit options they may attend.

To maintain good academic standing, students must submit all required coursework for a passing letter grade in all registered courses before the next quarter begins.

Registration

No MA student may register for more than three courses per quarter. No MA student may formally audit a class or register for an “R.”

The only exception, in addition to the three regular courses, will be a Workshop that has been formally designated as part of the MA curriculum (e.g. the Computational Social Science Workshop in MACSS).

BA/MA students may, with the approval of their MA Faculty Director, be permitted to take 4 classes.

Program Requirements

Students should consult our [MA Program Requirements](#) for a detailed discussion of our curriculum, beginning with the math camp before entry and continuing through the first and second year.

Students in MACSS-Econ will find their [curricular requirements detailed here](#).

Pass/Fail Policy

Students may take up to two classes for a Pass as part of their MA curriculum, not including the three courses in our Perspectives sequence.

It is up to individual instructors to decide if the pass is possible, and if so what work must be completed to earn it.

The request for the pass should be made as early in the quarter as possible, and ideally by the end of seventh week. Letter grades cannot be changed to a pass once the final assignment is submitted.

Students are normally advantaged if they are able to show at least a B on the transcript for any technical or quantitatively demanding course, and at least a B+ for most other social science offerings. The pass may be read by employers and PhD selection committees as if the student never took the course, no matter how much work the student may have performed.

Students should be careful about taking MACS 30121 or MACS 30122 for a pass, as that could impede their ability to take more advanced courses in the MPCS program or in the Computer Science department.

The MPCS will accept a C+ or better in MACS 30121 and a P in MACS 30122 as a minimal requirement for most classes. Students with a P in MACS 30121 but a letter grade in MACS 30122 will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Students with a P in both MACS 30121 and MACS 30122 will not be allowed to take MPCS classes.

Please note that some MPCS classes may require a minimum grade in MACS 30121 and MACS 30122.

Excused Incompletes/Missing Grades

Students with a missing grade or an Incomplete – marked on the transcript as an “I” – must communicate with their program’s Student Affairs Administrator to discuss their circumstances.

In some cases, the work may have been submitted but the instructor has not yet posted the grade.

If all required course work has been submitted, the missing grade will be formally excused by the program's Student Affairs Administrator.

Academic Probation

If a student has any missing or incomplete course grades at the beginning of an academic quarter, and they have not been excused by the Student Affairs Administrator, the student may be placed on academic probation.

That will be the case whether or not the instructor for the course has permitted the student to submit their work late.

Students on probation must meet with their MA program's academic leadership, to agree on a timeline for that missing work to be completed and help students get back on track.

Our program will do everything possible to assist those students, drawing on other university resources – from UChicago Student Wellness, to the Writing Program, to course advising and mentorship support – to help the student maintain a steady progress toward degree completion. When necessary, we will also draw on available options from the Dean of Students office, including advocating a drop to part-time or Reduced Course Load (RCL) status, a temporary leave of absence, or other measures as may be needed.

Students who fail to complete any missing work within 7 weeks of the quarter it was due may be prevented from registering for any subsequent academic quarters, until the instructor of record, for each class missing a grade, confirms that all course requirements have been met.

No permanent notice will be made on student transcripts. The probationary policy is designed to help students stay on track for MA completion.

Students placed on academic probation will be informed in writing about the expectations for their return to good academic standing, including required coursework and the timeline for completion. The student will be asked to confirm, in writing, receipt of the probationary document and that they have read and fully understand the probationary terms.

In cases where a student is unable to meet the expectations outlined in their probationary document, the student may be subject to dismissal from the University. Students may not transfer to another University degree program or apply for a joint degree program while on academic probation.

Please note that carrying two or fewer incompletes may have repercussions outside the MA program. International students may not meet the definition of full-time status for their continued visa eligibility. Students may find that their loans or outside financial awards are not distributed. Those decisions are not within our MA program's control. Students should contact the Office of International Affairs, Graduate Financial Aid, and our Dean of Students office to see what additional complications may result.

Forced Withdrawal/Leave of Absence

Students with more than two unexcused incompletes or missing grades will meet with the program's academic leadership to discuss a withdrawal from the MA program.

In some cases, that withdrawal may be changed to a leave of absence, giving the student up to a maximum of one year to complete the prior coursework and resume study for the MA degree.

In other cases, the withdrawal may be permanent, and the student will not be permitted to resume study.

Failed/Withdrawn Courses

Students who receive an F or a W for one of their three courses in a particular quarter must pay to take another to meet their MA curricular requirements. Few such courses are offered over the summer.

The "W" (Withdrawn) grade means that the student has decided after week 3 of the quarter not to complete the work of the course. Students who wish to exercise this option must request a W by 5 p.m. the Friday before finals week or the day before the final project/exam is due, whichever is earlier. When made before the deadline, a request for a withdrawal cannot be denied except in cases of academic dishonesty. A withdrawal may not be granted after completion of the course.

Students should meet with their preceptor in advance of this deadline to discuss whether a withdrawal is appropriate. Once they have made the decision to request a withdrawal, students in the Economics concentration should submit their request to the Student Affairs Administrator for MACSS-Econ. All other students should submit their request to the Student Affairs Administrator for MACSS.

Students with an F or W on their transcript must meet with their MA program's academic leadership to discuss the steps they will take to make up that class in future quarters.

Students with more than one F or W on the transcript must meet with their MA program's academic leadership to discuss whether a withdrawal or leave of absence is merited.

Minimum Program GPA

Students must earn a minimum 3.0 GPA in order to receive their MA degree.

It is exceptionally uncommon for students to fall below that threshold. Should that happen, the student should meet with their program leadership to talk about how to get back on track.

MA Thesis

MACSS is a two-year degree program. Students matriculate in September. They are expected to complete all program requirements, including the MA thesis, and graduate by either the June or August of their second year.

The MA thesis is the centerpiece of your MACSS degree. Regardless of the path you choose to take after MACSS, the ability to plan and execute a research project is a valuable skill.

MACSS theses are of two types, academic and professional. For both types, a thesis proposal must be approved by the primary reader by November 10th. The proposal lays out the scope and nature of the work to be done on the thesis.

Whether you produce an academic or professional thesis, you will submit a draft of your paper to your primary and secondary readers by the deadline specified in our [graduation deadlines](#). You will revise the paper based upon the feedback you receive from your reader(s) and submit a final version that will be graded and evaluated.

The Academic Thesis

The academic thesis is an article-length piece of original research and writing, modeled on a professional journal article for the discipline in which you choose to specialize. Most will be 30 to 50 double-spaced pages. The goal is to advance a scholarly conversation in your discipline, by means of an original contribution that improves our understanding of your research question in conceptual and empirical ways.

The primary reader for the academic thesis is a member of the Social Science Division faculty or any other person with a doctorate and an appointment at the University whom you can interest in your project. Your preceptor will serve as the second reader.

Your thesis will be evaluated based upon the interest of your question, the relevance of your research design, the quality of your data, the sophistication of your analysis, the strength of your presentation, and the significance of your findings.

For those who apply to PhD programs after MACSS, the academic thesis is critical to the success of your application, demonstrating your ability to develop and execute a graduate-level research project. For those who go on to positions outside the academy, the academic thesis is an important part of your resume, showcasing your graduate-level research skills, methods training, and professional writing.

The Professional Thesis

The professional thesis applies social scientific knowledge and research methods to a concrete problem. This option is designed for those who know from the outset that they wish to use their MACSS thesis as an opportunity to position themselves for a career outside the academy. It is also for those who decide during their MACSS study that they wish to pivot from a scholarly focus to a professional one.

Like the academic thesis, the professional thesis is a demonstration of the skills learned in your coursework at UChicago. And like the academic thesis, the professional thesis is based upon a solid grounding in the scholarly literature, with data that has been rigorously analyzed to reach a set of conclusions.

The difference between the academic and professional thesis is in the kind of contribution your project makes. While the academic thesis intervenes in a scholarly conversation, the professional thesis speaks to an audience outside the academy.

There are numerous forms a professional thesis might take. It may be a computationally-driven market analysis for a firm; a predictive model to solve a business problem; a computationally-driven policy brief for a legislator or agency leader; an open-source tool for statistical modeling and evaluation; an audit of an artificial intelligence (AI) algorithm for fairness or transparency; or other projects as approved by your primary reader.

Requirements for the Professional Thesis

Your preceptor will serve as the primary reader for the professional thesis, and the project must meet their expectations. The length will vary depending on the kind of project you undertake. Your preceptor will ask that you provide at least one or two examples for the kind of project you intend, and will confirm that a project of that kind is viable for our MA degree.

To get the most out of the project, we encourage you to secure a secondary reader elsewhere on campus or a secondary reader outside the University who is knowledgeable about your thesis topic and the kind of project you wish to complete. That second reader may be an internship supervisor or a qualified data analyst working in industry.

No matter what form your thesis submission may take, it must be accompanied by a supplemental report consisting of the following two components:

1. **Literature Review (7-10 double-spaced pages):** A critical literature review demonstrating your use of the relevant academic literature on applied problems. Your review should discuss current scholarly understandings of your research question, the disagreements/tensions in that literature, what parts of the research question remain unsettled or poorly understood, what you learned in the aggregate from those scholarly discussions, and how it informed your research.
2. **Evaluation of the Research Design (7-10 double-spaced pages):** A detailed discussion of your data, data collection procedures, and methods of analysis. This discussion should include considerations of the strengths and weaknesses of your research design and what other methods might have been employed.

Other Considerations for the MA Thesis, Both Academic and Professional

For both the academic and the professional thesis, the thesis proposal must be approved by November 10th of your second year.

Failing to submit an approved proposal by November 10 of the second year will prevent students from registering for any subsequent academic quarters, until the proposal is submitted.

Students who do not have a faculty reader by January 1 of their second year will automatically be assigned a MACSS faculty reader for the MA thesis.

The November 10th and the January 1st deadlines may be extended for MACSS-Econ students, because of disciplinary differences in bringing faculty readers on board.

All MACSS students who have not completed the MA thesis by December 31, 28 months after starting our MA program, forfeit the ability to work with anyone outside of MACSS on the MA thesis and will be automatically assigned a MACSS faculty reader.

All part-time or Reduced Course Load (RCL) students will be assigned a MACSS faculty reader for the MA thesis.

Maximum Time to Degree

All students must earn the MA degree no more than 10 years following their initial matriculation into the MA program.

Unregistered Students

If an MA student has not registered for any classes by the end of the third week of an academic quarter, whether as a result of a hold on their registration, or through a failure to register as they should have, the Dean of Students may place the student on an involuntary leave of absence.

That will be communicated to the student in writing, with an explanation of what the student must do to be permitted to resume study at the University.

The involuntary leave will take effect, whether or not the student formally responds.

Resumed study at the University is not guaranteed. The conditions for a resumption, when possible, will be decided by the MA Faculty Director in consultation with the Dean of Students.