

Policy Number/Title:	2.3.3.01 Graduate Program Rigor
Effective Since:	03/01/2024
Last Revision Approved:	03/01/2024
Responsible Office:	Graduate School; Academic Affairs

1. Scope:

Graduate Students

2. Definitions:

This section was intentionally left blank.

3. Policy:

Winthrop University's (WU) post-baccalaureate degree programs are progressively more advanced than their corresponding undergraduate programs. The relatively greater rigor of WU's post-baccalaureate degree programs is demonstrated through program faculty's and administrators' explication of degree program requirements (both graduate and undergraduate), course syllabi, institutional policies and procedures, assessment of student learning outcomes, and other artifacts.

Winthrop University's accrediting agency, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), requires the accredited institution to demonstrate that its "post-baccalaureate professional degree programs and graduate degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than undergraduate programs" (Standard 9.6; emphasis added). More specifically, SACSCOC further requires that the university demonstrate that graduate curricula "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" (Standard 9.6).

Winthrop University ensures that its graduate programming and coursework are more advanced than undergraduate programming and coursework through the thorough review of evidence contained in the following:

1. A Winthrop University Graduate Program Assessment "Matrix";



2. Annual graduate program assessment reporting addressing SACSCOC Comprehensive Standards 8.2 (Student Outcomes) and 9.6;

3. Winthrop's periodic Academic Program Review Process;

4. 500-level course syllabi.

More specifically:

1. A Winthrop University Graduate Program Assessment "Matrix"

The assessment matrix details the comparative rigor of programmatic content, specifying appropriate instruction in disciplinary literature and research and/or practice, and supplies appropriate support documentation, such as syllabi detailing course assignments and corresponding assessment tools. The matrix is evaluated by the University Graduate Assessment Committee (UGAC) to determine the quality and comprehensiveness of the program's evidentiary framework. Graduate program directors submit to the UGAC a document (the "matrix") indicating how the program will be in compliance with SACSCOC Standard 9.6 at the following times:

a. Upon program creation (i.e., detailed descriptions of proposed assessment activities as well as explicit evidence regarding how/why these are indicative of graduate-level rigor);

b. Upon substantial change to the program;

c. Two years prior to the beginning (i.e., self-study phase) of Academic Program Review.

2. Annual graduate program assessment reporting

Winthrop graduate programs include in their annual assessment processes explicit narratives and corresponding evidence of compliance with Standard 9.6. Program assessment of outcomes pertinent to 9.6 is evaluated by university assessment personnel.

3. Winthrop's Academic Program Review (APR) Process

Two years prior to a program's regularly scheduled Academic Program review, the program director submits to the UGAC an updated copy of the above matrix. The UGAC provides its evaluation to the program director in a timely fashion, enabling the director to address during program review any deficiencies revealed in the matrix.

4. 500-Level Course Syllabi

Winthrop University courses offered for both undergraduate- and graduate-level credit

must specify distinct course outcomes by means of distinct syllabi – one for undergraduate-level credit and one for graduate-level credit – if the course is taken for credit by both undergraduate and graduate students. 500-level courses in which only undergraduates or only graduate students are enrolled need define only the syllabus appropriate to the given student body.

4. Procedures:

First, note that “more advanced” is a comparative expression requiring reference to both graduate and undergraduate artifacts for demonstration.

Further, note that comparative rigor may be spelled out by reference to the activity of the graduate of the program with respect to the appropriate academic field or professional practice. Graduate programs are designed to enable the successful student “to contribute” to the field or profession in question; by contrast, baccalaureate program graduates typically produce work for undergraduate-level conferences and journals, or produce practitioners similarly appropriate to that level of education. Thus, to demonstrate the greater rigor of the graduate program, it is sufficient to demonstrate:

- That graduates of the program are capable of independent research, scholarship, or practice appropriate to the field or profession in question – whereas the corresponding baccalaureate graduates are not;
- That the faculty of the program define the skills, knowledge, and/or competencies required to perform such research/practice – in contrast to skills, knowledge, competencies defined for baccalaureate study;
- That students in the program are evaluated for their ability to engage in the scholarship/practice appropriate to the field/profession – whereas the corresponding baccalaureate graduates are not.

Compare degree specifications, course syllabi, student work, and assessment findings to demonstrate the different abilities of graduate vs. undergraduate program graduates.

Be sure to address the case of courses in which both undergraduate and graduate students may receive credit (500-level courses). Distinguish clearly the expectations of undergraduate from those of graduate students in syllabi specific to each. Refer to course syllabi, assignments, student work, etc. to demonstrate that there is a clear distinction between the student learning expectations of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in courses designed for both.



PICS remains the official Winthrop University repository of course syllabi. Please ensure that the appropriate syllabi are recorded there.

5. Resources:

Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement. 3e. SACSCOC.

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2018%20POA%20Resource%20Manual.pdf>

6. History of Revisions:

03/01/2024	Minor Revisions
04/20/2021	Minor Revisions
07/01/2020	Policy first established

7. Approvals:

Responsible Officer Signature/Date:

Vice President/Senior Administrator Signature/Date:

President Signature/Date: