

# University of Minnesota Graduate School

## Guidelines for the Formal Identification of Tracks within Degree Programs<sup>1</sup>

Under certain circumstances it may be necessary or desirable to clearly identify on the transcript a student's area of emphasis, or track, within the major field. For example, in the case of merged programs, it may be important to formally recognize specializations within the larger program that are academically unique and have distinct coursework requirements beyond a common core curriculum. In other cases, accreditation requirements or market considerations may dictate inclusion of a subfield of study on the student's official University record. The following processes, procedures, and conditions are proposed to apply in such instances.

### 1. Documentation, process, and implementation

a) The adoption of a track, or tracks, within a program should require a proposal to the Graduate School in much the same way that new degree programs and major programmatic modifications do. Such proposals should include the following elements at minimum:

- assurance of support by the program's graduate faculty
- identification of the particular track, or tracks, to be implemented
- a cogent rationale for the adoption of a particular track, or tracks
- a description of the program's admission, curricular, and graduation or completion requirements and standards
- possible changes in graduate program administration that may result from track adoption (e.g., although the Graduate School's contact will ideally be with one individual, the DGS, the faculty may elect to designate coordinators to assist with program administration)
- if a track label is similar to another program's name and/or disciplinary content, evidence of consultation with other departments/programs and the result of that consultation
- assurance that students enrolled in the program, or programs, prior to track implementation will be given the option of completing their degrees under either the old program name and structure or the new one, recognizing that the latter may entail fulfillment of additional degree requirements
- for umbrella programs that result from program merger, written assurance of support from the budgetary units that will contribute resources to the umbrella program

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by the Graduate School Executive Committee, 5/28/97.

The option of track organization should be extended to both existing programs as well as to new umbrella programs that result from program merger. The option should be extended automatically to programs of the latter type, which should clearly indicate their intent to adopt tracks as part of their request for merger.

b) Proposals to establish formal tracks within degree programs should be considered by the relevant Policy and Review Council(s) and the Graduate School Executive Committee. Action beyond the Graduate School should not be necessary; however, track approvals may be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs as a point of information.

c) Tracks should be implemented in phases. Initially, newly merged programs should be given the option of track organization, but existing programs not targeted for merger should not. Following the implementation of semesters and the introduction of a new, central University computing system, consideration should be given to the broader adoption of tracks within degree programs.

## 2. Admission to a program with identifiable tracks

a) The admission application form should list the individual tracks associated with an umbrella program (e.g., Applied Plant Sciences: Agronomy, Horticulture, Plant Breeding). Admission will normally be to a specific track within an umbrella program; however, admission should also be possible to the umbrella program without track specification to accommodate students who are not yet sure of their area of specialization. If no track is indicated on the admission appraisal form returned to the Graduate School, the student will be admitted to the umbrella program without track.

b) A single admission fee should be charged for application to an umbrella program, and the completed admission application should be sent to a single contact in the program. The same fee should be charged for admission to umbrella programs as is charged for admission to any other Graduate School program.

c) Consistent with the Graduate School's policy document on program mergers, umbrella programs should normally utilize a single admissions committee and DGS.

## 3. Change of Track

a) Students admitted to one track who wished to change to another track should apply for a "Change of Status" and pay the associated fee, currently \$40. Students admitted initially to the umbrella program without track should be permitted one change to a specific track without paying the fee; however, any subsequent change of track should require the customary "Change of Status" fee.

b) Students who change tracks should be required to file a new program. However, a student could not effect a change in track by simply filing a new program.

#### 4. Transcript and diploma issues

At present, the subprogram name is printed in abbreviated form (10 characters maximum) after the major field name on the transcript, both at the top of the transcript's first page as well as at the top of each quarter header. The Graduate School will explore the possibility of also including the track name as a memo entry in the transcript's "degree award" section.

#### 5. Organization of graduate faculty

Graduate faculty and LTS appointments should be made only in the umbrella program, not in the program's individual tracks. Internal (i.e., program) monitoring will be required to ensure the appropriate assignment of advisers and examining committee members, based on the program's knowledge of faculty members' expertise in the various subfields. It would be helpful if proposals seeking to establish tracks included as an appendix a list of the initial faculty members who would be associated with each track.

#### 6. Degree program structure and examining committee issues

The more widespread adoption of tracks (particularly in the biological sciences) has implications for the concept of minors, related fields, and supporting programs, as well as for the composition of student examining committees. For newly combined programs, where an umbrella program results from a merger of two or more previously distinct major fields, the notion of minors should continue as at present. Thus, if a student wishes to pursue a designated minor, it should be outside the area of the umbrella program. However, at the discretion of the adviser and DGS, a related field or supporting program may be developed within the disciplinary scope of the umbrella program. The correct assignment of committee members to reflect a program of study that is internal to the umbrella program will be the responsibility of the student's adviser and DGS. A student majoring in a field external to the umbrella program would declare the umbrella program, not the specific track, as his/her minor.

#### 7. Graduate School data management and reporting

Under the Graduate School's current data management system, enrollment and registration statistics would be reported separately for each track within an umbrella program (e.g., following the Applied Plant Sciences example cited above, program statistics would appear under four distinct headings, and in some cases, as four distinct

reports; the structure of the current system does not provide for aggregate program statistics). Introduction of a new, central University computing system may provide the opportunity to enhance reporting capabilities with respect to programs with distinct emphases or tracks. These opportunities will be explored.

8. Graduate School funding and governance issues

Umbrella programs should be treated as a single entity with respect to award of Graduate School funds (e.g., block grant funds would be allocated to the umbrella program to be dispersed across the various tracks according to internal criteria; the umbrella program, not its individual tracks, would be invited to submit a stipulated number of nominations for first-year fellowships). Umbrella programs should also be considered as a single entity with respect to Graduate School governance and should have one DGS and one faculty representative on a designated Policy and Review Council. This structure will require the DGS and Council representative to communicate clearly and frequently with program coordinators (if applicable) and other program faculty.