

Dual/Joint PhD Degree Options
Subcommittee of the Graduate Council
George Mason University

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The purpose of this document is to explore available options for the development of a general framework governing “dual PhD” or “joint PhD” degree programs based on collaboration between George Mason University and another accredited, PhD-granting institution in another country. It is recognized that such an arrangement can have significant advantages for Mason, based on the prestige of the international academic partner, the recognized importance of international collaboration, and the potential attractiveness of such a dual- or joint-PhD program for highly-qualified students. In this interim (draft) report, the subcommittee is proposing two options, either of which may be used as a means for developing collaborative PhD programs involving Mason and another institution.

In the following discussion, the “home” institution is defined as the student’s primary institution, located in their country of origin, and the “remote” institution is located in a foreign country. Given the foreign location of the remote institution, the subcommittee places special emphasis on the importance of including a robust “cultural immersion” component in any proposed dual- or joint-PhD program. This component is clearly necessary in order to familiarize the student with the fundamental academic and social mores of the country involved, thereby facilitating the successful interaction of the student with the local faculty and populace. The detailed plans for the practical implementation of this component should be highlighted as a central part of any joint or dual degree proposal.

Option 1: Dual PhD Degrees with Complementary Dissertations

This option focuses on two separate, existing doctoral programs (one at each institution) that may be offered in a coordinated manner, leading to the awarding of two separate doctoral degrees.

A standard reduction (usually 18 credit hours) is made in the Mason coursework curriculum requirements for the Mason degree based on coursework completed at the foreign institution. At least 30 hours of coursework must be completed at each institution, and the standard number of dissertation hours must be completed at each institution in accordance with the policy for that degree program. Students must also satisfy all of the general requirements for each degree program. The course work may not also be applied to a Master’s degree or to any graduate certificate. Any proposal for a dual PhD program must be approved by SACS before implementation.

Two PhD dissertations are written, encompassing related and complementary topics. The two theses should be distinct and substantial contributions that focus on separate aspects of a larger problem. For example, one dissertation might focus on theoretical concepts, and the other on real world applications. Or, one dissertation might involve the development of the mathematical foundation for a model, while the other focuses on simulations based on that model.

Both doctoral programs are supervised by a single, joint dissertation committee that reviews the qualifications, curriculum plans, and scientific contributions of the student. The joint dissertation committee will ensure the separate and complementary nature of the two dissertations. The committee includes a dissertation advisor from each institution, and a single Chair from the home institution. The committee, and especially the Chair, are responsible for ensuring that the two PhD dissertations have a minimal amount of overlap, and that each separately satisfies the requirements for a dissertation in the respective doctoral program. Both dissertations must be reviewed and approved by the joint committee before either PhD degree is awarded. In addition, both dissertations must be reviewed and approved by each institution's academic dean before either degree is awarded. Upon successful completion of all program elements, a separate doctoral degree is awarded by each institution.

Option 2: Joint PhD Degree with Single Dissertation

This option focuses on a new, joint PhD degree program that is developed and approved based on extensive educational and research collaboration between the two institutions. The rationale for any proposed joint program should stem from the identification of a coherent, distinct intellectual contribution provided by the remote institution that is complementary to the research and educational experiences available at the home institution. Any proposal for a joint PhD program must be approved by SCHEV and SACS before implementation.

The 48 credit hour curriculum requirement is satisfied using coursework taken at both the home and remote institutions, including 9-24 credit hours taken at the remote institution. The student prepares a single PhD dissertation that is used to fulfill the thesis requirement. The program requires 24 hours of dissertation research, including at least 12 hours taken at the home institution. The course work may not also be applied to a Master's degree or to any graduate certificate.

A single, joint doctoral committee is formed to review the qualifications, curriculum plan, and scientific contributions of the doctoral student in the joint doctoral program. The committee is composed of equal numbers of faculty from the two institutions, and is chaired by a dissertation advisor who is a member of the faculty at the home institution. The dissertation must be reviewed and approved by the committee before the PhD degree is awarded. In addition, the dissertation must be reviewed and approved by each institution's academic dean before the degree is awarded. Upon successful completion of all program elements, the joint doctoral degree is awarded by the home institution.