



Course Level Policy

Office of Academic Affairs

1. Purpose

This policy defines undergraduate, master's, and doctoral course levels and the academic expectations associated with each. It exists to ensure academic rigor, curricular clarity, and the consistent application of course-level designations across the University.

The policy supports the University's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), including the expectation that the institution maintains and exercises authority over the rigor of its courses and the expectations for student learning, and the expectation that at least fifty percent of the courses applied to a graduate program are designed for graduate-level work. It also supports compliance with federal credit-hour requirements applicable to programs participating in Title IV financial aid.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all credit-bearing courses offered by the University and to all academic programs at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels, including professional doctoral programs. It applies to courses delivered in every modality and at every location. The academic level of a course, and the expectations associated with that level, are the same regardless of whether the course is offered in person, online, in hybrid format, or at an off-campus site.

3. Definitions

- **Course level:** The classification of a course as undergraduate, master's, or doctoral, reflecting its academic depth, expected student preparation, and learning outcomes.
- **Cross listed multi-level course:** A single course offered concurrently under two course numbers at different levels, most commonly an upper-division undergraduate number and a master's number.
- **Master's-designed course:** A course created and approved specifically for master's-level study whose content, learning outcomes, and academic expectations reflect the rigor appropriate for master's education.
- **Doctoral-designed course:** A course created and approved specifically for doctoral-level study whose content, learning outcomes, and academic expectations reflect the rigor appropriate for doctoral education, including advanced theoretical, methodological, and scholarly expectations.

- **Credit hour:** An institutionally established measure of student work, defined in the University's Credit Hour Policy in conformity with federal regulation and HLC requirements.

4. Course Level Definitions

Course numbering is prescriptive. A course must be numbered at the level that accurately reflects its content, expected student preparation, and learning outcomes, and the number assigned in the catalog must match the approved level.

Level	Course Numbers	Primary Academic Emphasis
Undergraduate – Lower Division	1000–2999	Foundational knowledge acquisition, introductory analysis, and skill development.
Undergraduate – Upper Division	3000–4999	Advanced disciplinary knowledge, application, and analytical reasoning.
Master's	5000–6999	Analysis, synthesis, and applied or scholarly research at the graduate level.
Doctoral	7000–8999	Advanced theory, research design and methodology, and original scholarly inquiry.
School of Dentistry Doctoral	1000–8999 (D.D.S.)	Professional doctoral instruction in dentistry. The numbering is retained for historical continuity.
School of Law Doctoral	1000–7999 (J.D.)	Professional doctoral instruction in law. The numbering is retained for historical continuity.

4.1 Undergraduate Courses

Undergraduate courses provide foundational and advanced disciplinary knowledge and are designed to develop content mastery, analytical skills, and applied learning.

- Lower-division courses (1000–2999) emphasize knowledge acquisition, foundational skills, and introductory analysis.
- Upper-division courses (3000–4999) emphasize advanced disciplinary knowledge, application, and analytical reasoning, and ordinarily carry prerequisites.

4.2 Master's-Level Courses

Master's-level courses build advanced disciplinary knowledge and professional or scholarly competence.

- Numbered at the 5000–6999 level.
- Emphasize analysis, synthesis, and applied or scholarly research.
- May serve professional or academic master's degree programs.



4.3 Doctoral-Level Courses

Doctoral courses prepare students for independent scholarly inquiry and original research. Doctoral coursework is designed to demonstrate higher rigor than master's-level coursework in

the depth of theory, the sophistication of research methodology, and the expectation of original scholarly contribution.

- Numbered at the 7000–8999 level.
- Emphasize advanced theory, research design, methodology, and critical evaluation of the discipline.
- Support progression toward doctoral candidacy and dissertation research.
- May include advanced seminars, research methods courses, directed study, independent research, and dissertation-related coursework.

Juris Doctor (J.D.), School of Law: Courses are numbered 1000–7999. This is an intentional exception to the University's standard course numbering system that preserves the School of Law's longstanding course numbering structure and supports continuity within the J.D. curriculum.

Application of Course Credits: Doctoral-level courses may be applied toward master's degree requirements when permitted by the approved curriculum. Master's-level courses may be applied toward doctoral degree requirements only when approved and may not constitute more than 50% of the credits required for a doctoral degree.

5. Cross Listing Limitations

To ensure the academic quality and integrity of graduate education, UDM limits the use of cross-listed courses within graduate degree programs consistent with HLC policy.

Master's Degrees: At least 50% of the credits required for a master's degree must be earned through learning experiences designed exclusively for graduate students. These may include graduate-only courses, dissertation or thesis credits (where applicable), or other learning experiences in which undergraduate students are not permitted to enroll. Accordingly, no more than 50% of the credits required for a master's degree may be earned through undergraduate/graduate (UG/GR) cross-listed courses.

Doctoral Degrees: At least 50% of the credits required for a doctoral degree must be earned through learning experiences designed exclusively for doctoral students. These may include dissertation credits, doctoral-only courses, or other learning experiences in which master's students are not permitted to enroll. Accordingly, no more than 50% of the credits required for a doctoral degree may be earned through master's/doctoral cross-listed courses.



Program faculty and the relevant graduate or doctoral program departments are responsible for verifying that each graduate program satisfies this requirement, and the Office of the Registrar confirms it through the program's degree audit.

See Policy on Cross-listing of Multi-Level Courses for more detailed guidance.

6. Dual-Numbered and Shared Courses

6.1 Cross Listed Multi-Level Courses

6.1.1 Undergraduate/Master's Course

When a course is offered concurrently at both the undergraduate and master's levels, the master's section must include learning outcomes and academic expectations that are distinct from and more rigorous than those of the undergraduate section. Students enrolled in the master's-level course must complete work appropriate to the level of study. Because the course is also offered at the undergraduate level, it does not count toward the requirement in Section 5.

6.2 Master's/Doctoral Course

When a course is taken by both master's and doctoral students, doctoral students are held to higher academic expectations. Faculty differentiate doctoral-level learning through:

- Additional or advanced readings;
- Research-focused or original scholarly assignments;
- Higher standards for depth, synthesis, and critical analysis.

Such differentiation must be documented in the course syllabus and ensures doctoral-level rigor consistent with accreditation expectations.

7. Alignment with Credit-Hour Expectations

The academic level of a course is reflected not only in its content but in the amount and depth of student work it requires. The credit hours assigned to a course shall conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and to the University's Credit Hour Policy and shall be consistent with the expectations of the course's level. Course-level designation and credit-hour assignment are reviewed together when a course is proposed or revised.

8. Academic Oversight and Authority

Academic ownership of course offerings resides within each college under the oversight of the Dean's Office. The Dean's Office, in collaboration with department chairs, program directors, and faculty, is responsible for ensuring that courses are assigned the appropriate course level and numbering, that



learning outcomes, content, and academic expectations are consistent with the standards and rigor required for that level, and that all courses comply with University policies.

Body	Responsibility for Course Levels
Academic Department / Program Faculty	Propose the appropriate course level and numbering, develop learning outcomes, content, and workload appropriate to that level, and ensure clear differentiation among multi-level cross-listed courses.
Graduate / Doctoral Program Leadership	Verify that graduate and doctoral courses meet the academic expectations for their assigned level.
Curriculum Committee / Faculty Senate	Review and approve course-level assignments and changes through established curricular governance, exercising institutional authority over the rigor of courses.
Office of the Registrar	Review courses for compliance with the University's Course Level Policy and numbering standards. Courses that do not comply with the policy will be returned to the originating academic unit for revision prior to approval.

9. Compliance and Review

This policy supports the University's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation of the Higher Learning Commission and with federal expectations for graduate and doctoral education, and it affirms the University's commitment to academic quality and integrity. The body responsible for academic policy reviews this policy on a defined cycle, and at least once every three years, to confirm that course-level definitions and expectations remain consistent with accreditation standards and commonly accepted practice in higher education.

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Drafted by the Office of Academic Affairs, the Associate Vice President and University Registrar and the Executive Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness

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