Sunset Policy on PG Programs

The University has been adopting a stringent approval process for postgraduate programs. However, the launching of new PG programs may be postponed or suspended due to various reasons. For better housekeeping purpose, the Senate has recently endorsed CPS’s recommendation to introduce a sunset policy for postgraduate programs.

When a PG program does not have any enrolled students for four consecutive years, the PG Secretariat of VPAAO will write to the respective school at the end of the fourth year to recommend a voluntary termination of the dormant PG program. The school concerned may, with good justifications, request the program to be retained for another year. The special request will be submitted to CPS for endorsement. If the dormant PG program remains inactive in the fifth year, mandatory termination will apply to that PG program at the end of the fifth year.

Reactivation of a closed PG program is possible but the program will have to undergo the normal approval channel similar to that for the introduction of a new PG program.

PG programs approved for introduction should be launched according to the approved schedule and offered on regular basis unless otherwise specified. The program-offering unit is required to report to CPS if there is a change in the program launching date.

All PG programs are obliged to admit students according to the approved program-offering schedule. If a program team/unit plans to halt the admission of students temporarily, the program offering team/unit is required to submit a proposal to suspend the PG program through its School Board to CPS and the Senate for final approval.

Need Advice or Help?

If you as a PG student have any grievance related to your studies or other personal matters that concern the University, there are well-established channels for you to voice your concern. Please refer to Section 20 of the Handbook for Research Postgraduate Studies for details.
Minimum Credit Requirement for Taught Master’s Programs Lifted

A minimum credit requirement of 30 credits for taught master’s degree programs has been established by the University Senate since its inception in 1991. In response to a request initiated by the School of Engineering, this policy had recently been reviewed and discussed by Schools and the Committee on Postgraduate Studies (CPS). In view of the concerns of CPS members about revising the current minimum credit requirement of taught master’s programs, CPS made the following recommendations to the Senate, which had subsequently been endorsed in the December 2003 meeting.

- The minimum credit requirement for taught master’s programs of the University will be lifted, providing individual programs with more flexibility in the design of their structures. All new proposed programs would have to pass through the normal quality assurance mechanism of the University and be approved by departmental/program PG committees, School PG committees, CPS and the Senate. During this approval process all academic aspects of the program including stated credit requirements, would have to be reviewed and approved. For existing taught master’s programs, any change in the credit requirement would also have to follow this full approval process.

- Background courses additionally required of students who need to strengthen their knowledge in particular areas in order to progress effectively through their study should not be counted toward the minimum credit requirement of their program of study.

- The views of external experts, both academics and professionals in the field of study, particularly members of the departmental or school advisory committees as well as major employers should be sought when reviewing the minimum credit requirement for a taught master’s program. The main considerations in lowering the existing credit requirement must not be an erosion of the academic standard of the programs involved.

- Continuing students on existing taught master’s programs must adhere to the existing curricular requirements of their program of study.

- Taught master’s programs must specify the maximum number of credits of 300-level UG courses that may be used to fulfill the credit requirements of individual taught master’s programs in the event a change is proposed to raise or reduce the minimum credit requirement of a taught master’s program.

- The proposed review of the minimum credit load of taught master’s programs may become effective, at the earliest, for students admitted from Fall Semester, 2004/05 onward.

- The minimum credit requirement of the graduate diploma which is currently 15 credits and the professional diploma which is 8 credits will remain unchanged.
Continuing Education Fund (CEF)

Readers may be aware that the Government has set up a $5 billion Continuing Education Fund (CEF) since 2002 to subsidize Hong Kong residents with learning aspiration to pursue continuing education in a few selected areas. Eligible applicants will be reimbursed up to 80% of their course fees, subject to a maximum sum of HK$10,000, on successful completion of a reimbursable course or module(s) forming part of the course. Originally intended for non-degree holders, the eligibility to apply for CEF has been relaxed to include degree holders since 1 September 2003. The coverage of CEF has also been extended to include additional sectors and skill domains since January 2004. The sectors and skill domains under CEF are:

1. Logistics
2. Business Services*
3. Tourism
4. Design
5. Languages (English, Putonghua, Written Chinese, French*, German* and Japanese*)
6. Financial Services
7. Creative Industries*
8. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills for the Workplace

(* New areas covered by CEF from January 2004)

Only courses included in the CEF reimbursable course list are eligible for reimbursement. At present, HKUST has 59 courses on the reimbursable course list, including Master’s degree, diploma, certificate and short programs offered by the School of Business and Management, the School of Engineering, and the HKUST College of Lifelong Learning. A list of CEF reimbursable courses offered by HKUST can be found at http://www.ust.hk/ocpe/CEF/CEF.htm

To be eligible for registration under the CEF reimbursable course list, the courses must be self-financing, and meet the minimum course duration and competency requirements for the respective sectors. Proposals for new CEF courses will have to be vetted by the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). The Office of Continuing and Professional Education (OCPE) in VPAAO has been coordinating the submission of CEF course proposals from all units of HKUST. To benefit our students, schools and departments are encouraged to submit existing or new self-financing programs for inclusion under CEF if they can meet the requirements of the CEF scheme. For further information on CEF course submission, please contact Cindy Yung of OCPE at aacindy@ust.hk or ext. 6139.

For further information on CEF, please visit the CEF website: http://www.info.gov.hk/sfaa/cef

For information on CEF for course providers, please visit the HKCAA website: http://www.hkcaa.edu.hk

Postgraduate Studentship for 2004/05

Following recommendations made by the Audit Commission Report of Government for the establishment of a formal coordinating mechanism among the institutions for the setting and reviewing of stipend rates [Audit Commission’s Report on Tertiary Institutions 2003, Part 5.26(b)], Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) has agreed to delegate

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authority to the Postgraduate Administrators’ Circle (comprising representatives from CityU, CUHK, HKBU, HKU, HKUST, LU and PolyU) to approve a recommended common band of studentship rates for research postgraduate students (RPgs) for use by HUCOM member institutions.

The Postgraduate Administrators’ Circle has subsequently set the standard PGS rate for the 2004/05 academic year at HK$12,250 a month, allowing a 5% leeway each way. Academic Affairs Management has endorsed that RPgs admitted in 2004/05 may receive a monthly PGS up to HK$12,500 a month. Continuing RPgs may receive a monthly PGS ranging from HK$12,500 to HK$13,500. The actual amount will be determined by the home department.

Please visit our homepage to view the Terms and Conditions of Postgraduate Studentships (PGSs) 2004/05.

Positive Comments on Research Postgraduate Education

In January 2003, the Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review (TLQPR) Panel of UGC visited the University. The Panel met with personnel from different sectors of the University including University Management, faculty and students from academic units, committees responsible for teaching and learning quality at both UG and PG levels as well as those concerned with continuing and professional education.

In the TLQPR Report released in November 2003, the TLQPR Panel commented that the University was ‘developing a sound approach to teaching and learning quality for research postgraduate education’. The Panel had identified a number of positive developments that were worthy of commendation. These include the following:

➢ The effective balance between bottom-up initiatives and a university-wide framework for guiding activity.
➢ The improvements in TA training (since the first round TLQPR) and the roles played by TA Coordinators.
➢ The clear information and communication for students.
➢ The positive feedback received from students.
➢ The well-structured route via which research students develop as academics.

The following were areas identified where the Panel felt further improvements could be made:

➢ Monitor/review variations between departments in terms of duration of program to completion, and completion and attrition rates.
➢ Ensure that the overall combination of program requirements for students (coursework, thesis, TA duties) is consistent with timely completion.
➢ Move to promulgate good departmental practices across the whole University.

Discussions will be held with the academic units concerned in due course to explore ways the areas for improvement identified can be addressed.

COMMENTS?

This newsletter has been prepared by the PG Secretariat of the VP-AA Office. Feedback or suggestions on this newsletter can be emailed to pgsec@ust.hk.