Proposal to offer part-time study for graduate students who desire to complete professional degrees

Background: In the 1982-83 college catalog, coursework for non-degree students was described as: “Credit or noncredit courses, at campus or off-campus sites, can be arranged” (p. 10) and students were directed to contact the Director of the School of Continuing Education for additional information. The philosophy of continuing education at ESF evolved to meet the needs of individuals or organizations that required seminar courses, professionals who were required to engage continuing education as part of their professional development, students who needed to prove their ability to complete graduate level coursework, and students who desired to test courses before they committed to applying to degree programs.

The following description of “Nonmatriculated Students” first appeared in the 1987-88 college catalog: “All of the credit courses offered… are available to students not enrolled in a degree program. By enrolling through the Office of Continuing Education, a student may earn credit toward a degree…” (p. 9). Simultaneously, students who were matriculated in degree programs could transfer no more than 6 credits [non-degree graduate level coursework] to their degree programs, and the delimitation date for master’s-level students was three years; doctoral students were required to complete degree requirements within three years of successfully completing the candidacy exam.

In recent years, OI&GS staff have noted a trend in the characteristics of students who enroll in graduate-level courses as non-degree students, concurrent with large numbers of students who are registered for less than full-time study. Nationwide, there has been a trend to accommodate the needs of working students who wish to take courses on a part-time basis, which is anything less than 12 credit hours per semester. 1 ESF graduate students avoid the limitations imposed by the delimitation date by taking courses as non-degree students. Students who do not have the benefit of an advisor may register for a range of courses as non-degree students; some of these courses may not constitute a coherent program of study in a professional degree program. At the extreme, students have completed as many as 30 credits of coursework before applying for admission to graduate programs. In the worst case, advisors may feel obligated to accept courses completed as part of a degree program, even if some courses do not make sense in the area of study.

Secondary to the advising issue, there has been an increased demand for professional degrees at ESF. Since the elimination of Option 3 of the MS program and the introduction of the MPS program in fall 1996, there has been a trend in the number of students who applied for the MS degree, changed to the MPS program, and earned the graduate degree. Of the 29 students who completed MPS degrees as of May 2003, 12 students who started as MS students changed to the MPS degree within the 2002-2003 academic year. Of the 16 students who completed MPS degrees as of December 2003, 14 started as MS students and subsequently changed to the MPS during 2003. This suggests that there is demand for professional degrees. ESF could meet the demand by offering the degrees on a part-time basis with considered advising in the current course schedule.

Goals and objectives of the part-time degree:
1. Provide consistent and appropriate advising;
2. Recognize the changing demographics of students who seek to earn graduate-level professional degrees;

1 According to institutional data, during fall 2003, there were 269 full-time graduate students and 305 part-time graduate students at ESF.
3. Market programs to meet the needs of working professionals; and
4. Recruit qualified graduate students to programs in areas of strength at ESF.

Mechanics:
1. Potential students will apply for part-time study through the Office of Instruction & Graduate Studies;
2. **Part-time programs will be available for M.P.S. and M.F. degrees offered at ESF;**
3. Part-time students will matriculate and register through the same process that other students complete (not via Continuing Education);
4. During any semester, students who enroll in part-time programs may register for the equivalent of full-time study;
5. Part-time students will be held to the policy for continuous registration;
6. Upon completion of 12 credit hours, part-time students will request assignment of a steering committee, which will consist of the major professor and one other person. The steering committee will meet and agree upon a program of study (3B) and specify the delimitation date according to the needs of the part-time student in collaboration and agreement of the steering committee.

Last revised: Friday, March 26, 2004