

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (MAIS)

STUDENT HANDBOOK

2020-21



## Program Contact Information

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## Welcome!

Welcome to the Interdisciplinary Studies program at George Mason University! We are delighted you decided to enroll in this unique program, which encourages students to make the most of Mason's vast array of courses, our faculty's expertise, and their own creativity.

On behalf of all the concentration heads, our graduate coordinator, and myself, I wish you all the best for your first semester and all the semesters to come!

Dr. Benjamin Gatling  
Director

## I. The Interdisciplinary Studies Program

### History of the Program

The Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) program at George Mason University is about 35 years old. It started out as a single program that enabled students to construct a custom Master's degree tailored to their individual needs. This mission continues with the Individualized Studies concentration, but additional interdisciplinary concentrations have been added over the years. These degree pathways have established curricula that provide greater structure and faculty support. At present, the Interdisciplinary Studies program consists of 9 established concentrations plus Individualized Studies, which still enables students to design their own degree.

The Interdisciplinary Studies program is one of the most dynamic on campus. One concentration, Social Justice & Human Rights, is only in its fifth year, while other concentrations, (Community College Teaching and Film & Video Studies) have been phased out. The ongoing concentrations are also modified periodically to reflect Mason faculty strength, student needs, and the demands of the job market. We are constantly working to ensure that these degree pathways function in the best interest of our students!

The design of the Interdisciplinary Studies program enables new concentrations to be created with relative ease, making MAIS an "incubator" for new degree programs at George Mason. For example, the M.A. in Anthropology was once an MAIS concentration, and the Higher Education concentration has recently become the Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development. Growth and change are constants in the Interdisciplinary Studies program, but our emphasis on excellence and creativity remains consistent!

### Organization of the Program

Interdisciplinary Studies is an "umbrella program" housed in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences that oversees the administration of all the concentrations. Each concentration is administered by a concentration head who has scholarly expertise in the disciplines addressed by the concentration. In some cases, the concentration head is the same person, or a member of a team of faculty, who designed the concentration in the first place. The concentration heads are a great first stop when students have questions of an intellectual or advising nature.

The Interdisciplinary Studies program office is in Enterprise 408, co-located in the same suite as the School of Integrative Studies. The MAIS director oversees the program as a whole, serving as both unit director and graduate director for the Interdisciplinary Studies students. The director also supervises the graduate coordinator, who runs the program's day-to-day operations. The MAIS director is also the concentration head for the Individualized Studies concentration.

### **The MAIS Degree: Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies**

“MAIS” is a shorthand way to refer to the Interdisciplinary Studies program, but it also refers to the degree the program offers: a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in XXX. A graduate’s diploma will read "Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies," with the concentration listed beneath the name of the degree. Students in the Individualized Studies concentration will have the specific name of their individualized degree listed on the diploma.



## II. Communication

Communication is essential to every academic endeavor, and it is even more important in a program as organizationally complex as Interdisciplinary Studies. Complete program contact information is on the first page of this guide.

### Use Your Mason Email for Mason Business

University policy requires faculty and staff to conduct University business using their own GMU email addresses and to contact students at the students' GMU email addresses. We will add your GMU email address to the Interdisciplinary Studies student listserv, which we use for important program-wide messages, and we will contact you directly via your GMU email address when necessary. Further, faculty who use the Blackboard Announcements feature will send class emails to students' GMU email address. It is simply impractical for students to ignore their GMU email or to expect University faculty and staff to contact them at their personal email address. All students should check their Mason email regularly.

### Your Team

Every MAIS student will have to communicate with several different people who comprise a team of faculty and staff committed to their success:

1. The MAIS graduate coordinator
2. The MAIS director
3. Their concentration head
4. Their project or thesis committee chair
5. Other members of their project or thesis committee

Often, the concentration head will serve on a student's committee, but there is no requirement that they do so. As the program has grown, these roles are increasingly performed by separate faculty members. It is the student's responsibility to reach out to the faculty overseeing their degree program and to keep everyone looped into conversations about their progress.

### The Student Listserv

The Interdisciplinary Studies program is also trying to communicate with students, via the program's student listserv, about deadlines, events, and other opportunities of interest. This listserv is maintained by the graduate coordinator and the MAIS director. Listserv members will not receive a lot of extraneous email. Students who have not been receiving email from the listserv should send an email to [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu) asking to be placed on it.

### Contacting Interdisciplinary Studies

Students can submit paperwork in a variety of ways:

1. Scan/Email it to [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu) (preferred method).
2. Drop it off at the MAIS office (Enterprise Hall 408).
3. Send it through intercampus mail to the program office at Mail Stop 5G3.
4. Send it by US mail to the MAIS office.

**Because the graduate coordinator is currently teleworking, all paperwork should be submitted in soft copy via email to [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu).**

The program mailing address is:

Interdisciplinary Studies  
George Mason University  
4400 University Drive MS 5G3  
Fairfax, VA 22030

### III. Policies Governing Your Degree

Every student at George Mason University must be familiar with various policies and procedures that will affect their education. Policies that affect students exist at three different levels:

#### 1. The University

Learn University policies that affect all students & all graduate students. These are located under [University Policies](#) and the [University Catalog](#).

#### 2. The College

Interdisciplinary Studies is housed in the [College of Humanities & Social Sciences](#). Students should regard CHSS as their college, even if they take most of their courses from a unit in another college. Students should focus on CHSS policies that affect all students & all graduate students.

#### 3. The Academic Unit

[Interdisciplinary Studies](#) has its own policies for MAIS students.

When researching a question about policy, students should start with program policies, but you may need to look for answers at all three levels in order to get the clearest picture of the rules governing their degree. See below for more specific information about where to look.

#### What If Policies Conflict?

University policies tend to be very broad, because they affect every student and unit at the University. College policies tend to be more specific and restrictive, and program policies tend to be the most specific and restrictive. In general, if there is a conflict between policies on a given subject, the narrowest reading of the policy will prevail. This means that MAIS policy can trump CHSS policy, and either of those can trump University policy. If a student notices a policy conflict that affects them, they should notify the Interdisciplinary Studies program to get it sorted out.

#### University Policies

There are two essential places to learn about University policies: the University Policy website and the University Catalog.

**The University Policy Website:** <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>

If you want to know whether you are allowed to stalk people, drive a motorcycle to campus, or bring your dog to campus, this is where you go! (Answers: No, Yes, and It Depends!)

**The University Catalog:** <http://catalog.gmu.edu>

Years ago, every student at the University received a hard copy of the *University Catalog* when they first enrolled in classes. This massive book listed all of the policies and procedures for the University, each college, and each program, as well as all of the courses available at Mason. This document still exists, but only online. Because no one hands it to students on their first day of school, they often fail to appreciate how central the catalog is to their daily lives and especially to the unfolding of their degree.

Students are advised to read the catalog in its entirety, and it is expected that they know what is in it. But they probably won't! **There is, however, one section of the catalog that deserves every student's undivided attention:**

Policies >> Academic Policies >> Graduate Policies, found here:

<http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/graduate-policies/>

### A Student's Catalog Year

The University Catalog is somewhat different year to year, because programs are added and deleted, new courses are created, and policies sometimes change. These changes only occur once a year, and new rules do not affect current students. That is, student life is governed by the catalog for the year the student enters their degree program at Mason.

The school year at Mason consists of Fall (70), Spring (10), and Summer (40) semesters, in that order. (Mason's online records sometimes use a numerical code to indicate semester and year, so that lists will automatically be sorted in order. 201810 is "Spring 2018.") If a student first enrolled at Mason in Spring 2017, then their degree is governed by the 2016-17 catalog.

Catalog year is important to note in three places:

- **When using the University Catalog online**, pay attention to the year. The online catalog is always the *present* school year's catalog. If a student entered the MAIS program in a previous year, they should revert to the appropriate archived catalog using the link at the top right of the Catalog's main page. Unfortunately, catalogs from before 2017-18 are archived with an online pdf that is difficult to search. This unfortunate loss of functionality does not absolve students of their responsibility to follow the prescripts of the catalog particular to their catalog year.
- **When using Patriot Web** to check student records. There are some instances where the user must specify a catalog year, though this may not affect student users examining their own records. If someone *other* than the student is searching for a record, they should input the year the student first enrolled in the MAIS program at Mason, not the present year, or the student's new catalog year if they updated it at some point. (Students can change catalog years to a *newer* catalog if they deem it advantageous to do so.)
- **When downloading the curriculum worksheet** for your degree. As explained later in this handbook, every Interdisciplinary Studies student is required to submit a curriculum worksheet annually. These worksheets can be downloaded from the program website. Since a concentration's degree requirements can change, students should be sensitive to their catalog year when downloading their curriculum worksheet.

## CHSS Policies

As graduate students in the College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary Studies students need to learn CHSS policies governing graduate students. These policies are housed in two places: the University Catalog and the CHSS website.

### The University Catalog

<http://catalog.gmu.edu/colleges-schools/humanities-social-sciences/#requirementspolicies>

This section of the catalog specifically discusses CHSS policies. Pay special attention to:

- Policies for All Students
- Policies for Graduate Students

### The CHSS Website

<http://chss.gmu.edu/graduate>

There is great information on the CHSS website in general. To focus the search, use the green dropdown menu for "Current Students," then "Graduate Students." Focus especially on:

- Forms for Graduate Students
- Policies
- Graduation Checklist

## Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) Policies

Students in the Interdisciplinary Studies program need to learn about program policies as well. In addition to this Handbook, these policies are housed on the program website (which duplicates relevant sections of the catalog) and, in some cases, a website specific to the concentration.

**The Interdisciplinary Studies Website** <http://mais.gmu.edu>

The program website should always be your first stop!



## Who Does What?

WHO...	MAIS DIRECTOR	CONCENTRATION HEAD	PROJECT THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR	STUDENT	NOTES
Orients new students?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Helps with degree planning?		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Signs curriculum worksheets after ensuring accuracy?		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Must be legible and accurate for MAIS to accept.
Signs paperwork to make curricular exceptions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Signature Order: 1) Student 2) Concen. Head 3) MAIS Director.
Helps the student form a committee?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Students coordinate this process and make requests.
Helps the student identify a research topic?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This is primarily the student's responsibility, but faculty can help!
Signs the MAIS 797 Registration Checklist?			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Must be submitted with a CW signed by the concentration head.
Approves the student's project/thesis proposal?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		Signature Order: 1) Committee 2) Concen. Head 3) MAIS Director
Signs the MAIS 798/799 Registration Checklist			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Must be submitted with a CW signed by the concentration head.
Serves as instructor of record for MAIS 798/799?			<input type="checkbox"/>		
Approves student projects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		No dean's signature required; MAIS stores finished projects.
Approves student theses?	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		The concentration head reviews but doesn't sign. Dean signs; UDTS stores.
Is responsible for circulating paperwork and ensuring all of the above gets done?				<input type="checkbox"/>	Students must be vigilant and monitor their online records!
Attends graduation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	☺ YAY! ☺
Troubleshoots any of the above?	<input type="checkbox"/>				Contact <a href="mailto:mais@gmu.edu">mais@gmu.edu</a> !

## V. Interdisciplinary Studies Program Requirements

Program requirements consist of the following elements:

- Degree requirements: certain courses taken to satisfy certain requirements for the degree.
- Transactions that every student is required to perform.
- Deliverables that every student is required to produce and submit.

Degree requirements will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. The capstone experience will be discussed in its own chapter. Other program requirements will be discussed in later chapters.

### Degree Requirements

The MAIS curriculum consists of core courses all Interdisciplinary Studies students are required to take plus distribution requirements offered by other units that are specific to each concentration.

The MAIS degree consists of the following elements:

- **At least 36 credits overall.**
- **MAIS 796: Proseminar (1 credit)**
  - Take within the first 9 credits of the degree or the first 2 semesters of coursework.
- **A research methods class (3 credits)**
  - All concentrations except Social Entrepreneurship are required to take a research methods class.
- **Experiential Learning (3 credits)**
  - Concentrations in Folklore Studies, Higher Education, Social Entrepreneurship, and Social Justice & Human Rights require experiential learning.
  - Concentrations in Energy & Sustainability, Individualized Studies, and War & the Military in Society encourage experiential learning.
  - Students may meet this requirement by taking a discipline-specific course or by taking MAIS 795: Experiential Learning.
- **MAIS 797: Proposal (1 credit)**
  - Prerequisites are MAIS 796, 21 credits, and completion of a research methods course (if required).
  - Students must complete their research methods course *before* registering for MAIS 797. The two courses may not be taken concurrently.
- **MAIS 798: Project (1 credit) or MAIS 799: Thesis (4 credits).**
  - For students on the 2018-19 catalog and later, all projects will be 1 credit only. For students on earlier catalogs, the number of project credits they need will vary by concentration, but usually consists of either 1 or 4. All theses are 4 credits, regardless of concentration or catalog year.



### **MAIS 796: MAIS Proseminar**

This 1-credit course is designed to introduce students to the Interdisciplinary Studies program, to create a sense of community among new students, to educate students about interdisciplinarity, and to help them plan their degrees.

### **MAIS 797: Interdisciplinary Studies Proposal**

This 1-credit course is designed to facilitate the proposal research and writing process and should be taken after the research methods course required of the concentration. (Social Entrepreneurship does not require a research methods course.) Students may not take their research methods course and MAIS 797 concurrently. In MAIS 797, students may refine a project they began in their research methods course, but they cannot turn in the same work for credit in both courses.

#### **Preparing to Take MAIS 797**

Students should anticipate doing a great deal more work for this course than 1 credit would suggest, so it is important to factor that into your planning.

Students should have a good idea about their research topic prior to enrolling. Ideally they will have done at least some of the reading for their literature review prior to the start of the semester.

Students must have the support of their committee chair in order to register for this class. Students must complete their research methods course (if required) prior to registering for MAIS 797; the two courses may not be taken concurrently.

#### **Completing the Course vs. Completing the Proposal**

MAIS 797 is designed to provide students with a guided, structured process to develop their research plans. The course results in a nearly complete research proposal, not a finished proposal. After successfully completing MAIS 797, students still must seek formal approval from their committees. If the committee requires further work on the proposal, students are obliged to satisfy their committee's concerns. Ideally, a student works *with* their committee, or at least with their committee chair, while taking MAIS 797, so that the resulting document is in accordance with the committee's expectations.

#### **Timing the Turnaround**

Students need to factor the "turnaround" between finishing their proposal in MAIS 797, acquiring committee approval, and registering for MAIS 798/799. This process involves circulating the proposal to the entire committee, getting feedback from each committee member, executing the requested changes, and recirculating the proposal until every committee member approves it.

If a student completes MAIS 797 in the fall semester and expects to register for project or thesis credits (MAIS 798 or 799) in the spring, they should have an early and honest discussion with their committee about the "turnaround time" in between the semesters. That is, if the student does not finish the proposal until December, they cannot necessarily expect their committee members to review and provide feedback on the proposal in time to make the required changes, *and*

register for MAIS 798/799, before the start of spring semester in January. Please discuss the committee's expectations and availability during the short and very busy window of time between the fall and spring semesters.

### **MAIS 798: Interdisciplinary Studies Project**

Students enroll in project credits after completing MAIS 797: Proposal and drafting a proposal that the entire committee has approved. To register for MAIS 798, students must submit a copy of the project proposal with a signature sheet indicating approval of every member of the committee, as well as the concentration head. Projects will be discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

### **MAIS 799: Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis**

Students enroll in thesis credits after completing MAIS 797: Proposal and drafting a proposal that the entire committee has approved. To register for MAIS 799, students must submit a copy of the project proposal with a signature sheet indicating approval of every member of the committee, as well as the concentration head. Theses will be discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

### **Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning is a signature component of the Interdisciplinary Studies curriculum that encourages students to connect the classroom to the world. "Experiential learning" is an umbrella term that includes a wide range of hands-on learning such as internships, service learning, fieldwork, or consultancy, among others.

The purpose of experiential learning is to seek new challenges and experiences and to apply classroom learning to real-world problems and projects. Reasons to do experiential learning include:

- Expanding knowledge and cultivating skills by applying classroom theories to contemporary challenges.
- Professional networking opportunities.
- Exploration of career opportunities.
- The discovery of personal strengths and preferences.
- Fulfillment of a degree requirement or elective.

How to register for experiential learning is described later in the Handbook, under "MAIS Program Procedures."

### **Concentrations that Require Experiential Learning**

Four concentrations require experiential learning, and it is an elective option (as MAIS 795) for the rest.

- Folklore Studies: Take 3 credits of ENGH 604: Internship in Folklore.
- Higher Education: Take 3 credits of HE 685: Practicum.
- Social Entrepreneurship: Take 3 credits of MAIS 795: Experiential Learning.
- Social Justice and Human Rights: Take 3 credits of MAIS 795: Experiential Learning.

### Determining Experiential Learning Credits

Each semester, students can earn between 1 and 3 experiential learning credits. According to the Carnegie Formula, students earn 1 course credit for a minimum of 37.5-50 hours of experiential learning work.

On-site Hours (60 minutes per hour)	Minimum of 37.5-50	Minimum of 75-100	Minimum of 112.5-150
Credits	1	2	3

### When to Do Experiential Learning

Since the idea behind experiential learning is to apply classroom knowledge to real-world experiences, it's best to get some coursework under your belt to maximize what you have to offer in a professional setting. The EL course matters too. The prerequisite for MAIS 795 is 12 credits in the Interdisciplinary Studies program.

Ideally, experiential learning work should fall within the bounds of the regular semester, ie, it should start when classes start, and it should end when classes end. Most importantly, the work must end before the end of the semester in which you are registered for EL credits.

If taking 3 experiential learning credits at once is onerous, students may split their credits up. However, they will have to repeat the application process each time they register.

### Limitations on Experiential Learning

Students should be aware of the following concerns:

- The University does not offer credit for internships in the state of Maryland, with some exceptions regarding federal agencies.
- The University requires experiential learning sites to be suitably insured.
- Students must have the support of a faculty member who agrees to serve as instructor of record for their EL course.
- Students are bound by the prerequisites associated with their EL course.
- All experiential learning must end on or before the last day of classes for the semester in which the student is enrolled.
- Students may not get EL credit for doing their regular, pre-existing job.
- Students may not get EL credit for work they have done in the past.

## VI. Monitoring Your Degree Progress

While faculty and staff provide oversight to the program, it is every student's responsibility to monitor their own progress towards the degree. The University provides online tools that enable you to do this in real time. We encourage you to check your online records once each semester to ensure that your credits are counting towards the degree in the manner you and your concentration head want them to. If you notice errors or problems, you should bring them to the graduate coordinator's attention. We also recommend printing hard copies (or downloading digital copies) for your files.

### Patriot Web

To track degree progress, log into Patriot Web (<https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/>). New students should click on every link they can to understand the information that is available. Click on Student Services >> Student Records to view the DegreeWorks degree evaluation and the academic transcript.

### Verifying Your Name & Contact Information

The name and contact information listed for you in PatriotWeb are how the University knows to call and reach you. Please make sure this information is accurate and up-to-date. The name listed for you in PatriotWeb is the name that will appear on your diploma!

### Academic Transcript

The academic transcript is a semester-by-semester list of the courses taken and the grades and credits earned. Transfer courses will be listed at the top, and Mason courses will be listed in the order taken, top to bottom. Courses taken in non-degree status, prior to entry into a degree program, will be notated as "ND."

The online transcript is useful for:

- Tracking GPA.
- Ensuring that professors are uploading grades as the student thinks they have earned them.
- Ensuring that transfer credits from other schools transferred to Mason correctly.
- Ensuring that transfer credits taken at Mason in non-degree status transfer into degree status.
- Ensuring that the degree has been conferred, which will result in a degree conferral date being inserted next to the name of the degree.

Despite its great utility, the academic transcript alone cannot demonstrate whether a student is making progress towards their degree. See below!

### The DegreeWorks Degree Evaluation

The degree evaluation is the tool the Registrar and other administrative offices at Mason use to determine student progress towards the degree. Since that is the tool administrators will use to determine eligibility to graduate, it is in students' best interest to use it as well!

Unlike the academic transcript, which displays *all* courses taken at Mason, the degree evaluation features only courses that are counting towards the degree. It is essentially a record of course work, but arranged by degree requirement rather than by semester. If there are courses missing or listed at the bottom and not yet counting towards a degree requirement, students should take

steps (outlined later in the Handbook) to ensure that those credits are pulled into the appropriate category.

If there is a discrepancy between the courses taken and the courses counting towards the degree, students should contact their concentration head or the graduate coordinator to sort it out. Chances are there is additional paperwork that needs to be done:

- To transfer in credits from another institution or from Mason non-degree status.
- To perform a substitution of one course for another.
- To get a requirement waived (rare).
- To notify the Registrar which credits should count towards a particular requirement.

Students should not worry if they do not know exactly what the problem is or which form to use to fix it. That is our job! It is the student's job to be *aware*, to submit an updated [Curriculum Worksheet](#) (available for download on the MAIS website) to the program once a year, and to let the MAIS program know that something is amiss. This will ensure a smooth process once you apply for graduation!

### **The Degree Evaluation for Individualized Studies Students**

Individualized Studies students design their own curriculum, in consultation with their faculty advisor and the INDV concentration head. In order to "populate" the degree evaluation with the correct requirements, the Interdisciplinary Studies graduate coordinator must communicate those requirements to the Registrar. Which means that the student must communicate the design of their degree to the program.

The tool for doing so is the [Curriculum Worksheet](#), available for download from the MAIS website and provided in hard copy in the orientation packet. Students should fill this out in consultation with their faculty advisor.

Once the student submits a signed Curriculum Worksheet to the MAIS office for approval, the MAIS graduate coordinator will forward it to the Registrar. The Registrar will then create a custom degree evaluation that reflects the students' personalized curriculum. If a student fails to submit a completed Curriculum Worksheet to the MAIS office, neither the student nor the Registrar will have any way to track the student's progress towards the degree. Read: no graduation!

## VII. When Plans Go Awry

Every graduate student begins their program with the best of intentions: adherence to deadlines, good grades, timely graduation. But sometimes life intervenes. And in graduate school, there is less margin for error than in undergrad. So, it is important for students to understand what to do and how things work when plans go awry.

### Grades

Graduate students must maintain good grades. Unacceptable grades are anything below a B-. However, even a B- for a course taken in non-degree status is insufficient to have the course transfer into degree status, and a B- in a class taken in degree status will undermine the student's overall GPA, which must be 3.0 to graduate.

Unlike undergraduate, graduate students may not repeat courses and have their bad grades replaced by newer, better grades. Failure to maintain good grades may result in academic termination (see below).

### Withdrawal

Undergraduate students at GMU are able to withdrawal from a single course, for any reason, a transaction known as Selective Withdrawal. This option is *not* available to graduate students. The only withdrawal available for graduate students is the withdrawal from *all* of their courses. Even then, this option requires significant documentation of serious exigent circumstances (serious illness, family emergency) and the College's approval.

### Taking an Incomplete

Asking for a grade of Incomplete (IN) is a common transaction, but one that is poorly understood by students and faculty alike. If you are considering asking for an Incomplete, read *everything* below so that you can make an informed decision.

#### How the IN Grade Works

If a student takes an Incomplete, they get an IN on their transcript. They then have extra time to finish their remaining work for a course. (The amount of time is up to the instructor of the class.) The maximum amount of time allowable is 9 weeks into the next semester—Fall semester for Incompletes taken in Spring/Summer, and Spring semester for Incompletes taken in Fall. Once the student has submitted their remaining work, the faculty member must change the IN grade to the appropriate letter grade.

If the student does not submit all of their work by the agreed-upon deadline, the faculty member is entitled to award a grade based on what the student has submitted. If the student does not submit their remaining work by the Registrar's final deadline, or if the student does submit their work but the faculty member does not submit the change-of-grade, then the IN grade will automatically change to an F.

Faculty are 100% entitled to deny requests for Incomplete grades or to prescribe a specific deadline that is *earlier* than the Registrar's final deadline.

### When an IN Is Appropriate

A grade of Incomplete (IN) may be awarded for a course if a student is unable to finish it due to exigent circumstances like serious illness or a death in the family. An IN grade may only be awarded if a student is passing the course, based on their work already submitted. An IN grade is not appropriate in cases where the student is failing the course, has submitted no work for the course, or is simply behind in their work.

### How to Take an Incomplete

Students who feel that they may be entitled to an IN grade must petition the course instructor *in writing* for the grade. This will ensure that there is no misunderstanding. The instructor is entitled to ask for documentation of the circumstances necessitating the Incomplete.

Best practice dictates that the instructor will have the student fill out an [Incomplete Grade Contract](#) that stipulates the remaining work to be done and the deadline by which it must be completed. Even if a faculty member doesn't require the form, it is in the student's best interest to ask for it so that expectations on both sides are clear. The faculty member may specify any date they want for the final due date, so long as it is before the Registrar's final deadline.

### Is There a Downside to Taking an Incomplete? YES.

First, taking an Incomplete may mean that you start your next semester under the cloud of lingering work, which will make it more difficult to focus on new work.

Second, if you take an Incomplete in a course that is the prerequisite for another course, you will not be able to register for that second course because you will not have met the prerequisite.

Third, and most importantly, the IN grade counts as an F for the purposes of GPA calculation until it is resolved. Students should consider carefully the ramifications of requesting an IN grade for scholarships, financial aid, or veterans benefits.

### What If I Still Need More Time?

Students may also request an extension of incomplete if they are unable to meet the agreed-upon deadline set by their professor. However, extensions of incomplete are subject to greater scrutiny and must be approved by the College.

### Academic Termination

Students who get persistently bad grades will be terminated, rendering them unable to complete their degrees.

Termination will result when a student has one of the following on their transcript:

- 2 F's
- 3 C's
- 1 F and 2 C's

The ruling is "three unsatisfactory grades," but NC grades ("no credit," or F for a pass/fail course) do not factor into this calculus. Remember, IN (Incomplete) grades will eventually default to Fs and will count as Fs for the purposes of GPA.

The dean's office will send out notification to students who are on "academic warning" when they reach the point where one additional grade will cause them to be terminated.

### Appealing Academic Termination

Terminations are performed by the College but can only be undone by the Provost. That is, once a termination happens, it is very difficult to undo it. There is an appeals process that works similarly to the time-limit extension request process (see below), but appeals of termination are granted only by the Provost and only in the most extreme cases (serious illness, serious family emergency, etc.) Therefore, efforts to avoid termination should be made at all cost.

### Avoiding Academic Termination

Students who are in danger of academic termination—that is, they are on academic warning—should excel in their classes, resolve Incomplete grades before they default to Fs, and take courses at a rate that will enable them to succeed. If you find yourself on academic warning, be honest with yourself about how you are doing and whether your situation has resolved such that taking courses is going to yield a good outcome. Talk to your professors, your concentration head, and/or the program director for guidance. We are all invested in your well-being and success!

### Time Limit

Graduate students have 6 years to complete their degrees. If you start your degree in fall, you will time out in August, 6 academic years later. If you start your degree in January, you will time out in December. For example, if you start your degree in Fall 2019, you will time out in August 2025. If you start your degree in Spring 2020, you will time out in December 2025.

Students who run out of time are terminated and will never earn their degrees.

### Time Limit Extensions

When there are exigent circumstances, students may be granted an extension of up to one year by the College. Extensions are not a guaranteed part of your time to degree, and they are hard to get. Not all students who request an extension will have it granted. Extensions can be 1-2 semesters only, and they can only be requested *once*. Extensions must be approved by Interdisciplinary Studies before they can be submitted to the College. Once the College has granted an extension, only the Provost's Office can grant a second extension to prevent termination, which is an extremely rare and difficult exception to get.

The process of requesting an extension is substantial. Students must be able to document exigent, extenuating circumstances *that have been resolved* in order for an extension to be granted. Running out of time because the work proved to be more difficult and time-consuming than anticipated is not an appropriate reason to ask for an extension.

Students requesting an extension must submit the following items in a single file to the College:

1. A statement that asserts the request *in the first sentence*, followed by a discussion of the circumstances that prevented completion of their work in a timely fashion.
2. A letter of support from the student's advisor.
3. A letter of support from the Interdisciplinary Studies director (as graduate director of the student's program) endorsing an extension.
4. Supporting documentation (medical records, letters from clinicians, obituaries, etc.).

The student must digitize all of the elements of this packet and upload it as a single file via a special portal on the Registrar's website.



### Resignation

If a student decides that they simply cannot or do not wish to finish their degree, they should resign from the program in order to preempt time-limit termination. Resignation is preferable because termination, even for time, is regarded as a sanction. Having a termination from a graduate program on one's academic transcript can make it difficult to gain admission to another graduate program later in life. Resignation casts the student as the agent of their fate on the transcript, that they *chose* to leave their program rather than timing out or flunking out.

### Going Inactive

It's ok to take a break from your studies. After two semesters without taking classes, inactive students will have to "reapply" for admission to Interdisciplinary Studies. However, this is a simple process that involves a single form. Interdisciplinary Studies policy is not to prohibit students from returning after time away. ***We want you to finish!***

### Continuous Thesis Enrollment

The one exception to this is if you are working on a thesis. Thesis students are required to be registered for thesis credits every semester (Fall & Spring), from the semester they first register for thesis credits until the semester they graduate. If students fail to register, then resurface and finish the degree, the University will levy charges for all of those unpaid thesis credits. Think carefully, then, about when it is best to start your thesis. It's ok to take a break. It's just that it may be cheaper to take that break *prior* to registering for thesis credits for the first time.

## VIII. The Capstone Experience

Producing a thesis or project is the “capstone” experience of the Interdisciplinary Studies program and should reflect students’ mastery of relevant subjects and skills in their course work, experiential learning opportunities, and research. Students earn course credit for projects by registering for MAIS 798. Students earn course credit for theses by registering for MAIS 799.

### The Proposal

Whether a student does a project or a thesis, a formal proposal approved by all three members of the student’s committee is required. Completing the proposal and registering for project or thesis credits is a 4-step process that will unfold over a semester or more:

1. Forming a committee and acquiring a committee chair (project or thesis advisor).
2. A satisfactory (passing) grade for MAIS 797: Proposal.
3. Obtaining formal approval of the proposal from the entire project/thesis committee.
4. Submitting the final proposal and a signed signature sheet to Interdisciplinary Studies, along with an [MAIS 798/799 Registration Checklist](#).

All Interdisciplinary Studies proposals, for both projects and theses, include the following elements:

- A statement of the problem to be addressed.
- A review of relevant literature to establish the need for and the originality of the proposed research.
- A discussion of the proposed methodology or decision-making process.
- A discussion of the expected significance of the results.
- A timeline of work.
- A bibliography or reference list.

### The Interdisciplinary Studies Project

#### What is a project?

In general, projects include an applied component. That is, projects do not require students to produce new knowledge based on the collection of original data (as a thesis requires). Rather, projects require students to gather existing research and apply it to a problem in an original way.

Project deliverables can be many things:

- A traditional research monograph that makes an original contribution to knowledge, but is smaller in scale than a thesis and/or does not rely on the collection of original data.
- A deliverable with a practical application, such as a curriculum, exhibit design, technical manual, business plan, or computer model.
- (See following page for more required elements.)

Regardless of deliverable, all projects must include a substantial written portion that incorporates the following traditional research elements:

- A literature review.
- A statement of the problem to be addressed by the work.
- A discussion of the methodology or approach.
- A discussion of the results and the project's significance.

These elements can be imported from the research proposal, then updated in light of additional research and findings.

If students choose to do a project rather than write a thesis, the catalog reminds us, "The same quality of work is expected of students regardless of their chosen option." Also, even if the primary deliverable of a project is not text-based, the student will still have to document their work in a format (text, CD, DVD, etc.) that can be submitted to and stored by Interdisciplinary Studies in perpetuity.

### How many credits of MAIS 798 should a student take?

**For students starting the program in 2018-19 or later, all projects will be 1 credit.**

For students who started the program prior to Fall 2018, the number of project credits required will vary by concentration. Students may wish to explore whether updating their catalog year to 2018-19 will be beneficial for their time to degree.

How Many Credits of MAIS 798 a Student Should Take*			
1 Credit	1 or 4 Credits	3 Credits	4 Credits
CCT, FLKS	CSS, EAS, HEDU, INDV, RCV, WMS, WGST	FAVS, NETH	SJHR, SOCE

\*Based on the 2017-18 Catalog Year

Students who do projects are not required to maintain continuous enrollment until graduation. However, all Mason students are required to be enrolled in the semester they graduate.

If a student anticipates taking longer than 1 semester to complete their project, they should consider working on the project without being enrolled, then registering in the semester they plan to graduate. If a student enrolls in 1 credit of MAIS 798, and needs only 1 credit of MAIS 798, but they do not finish the project in a single semester, they will be required to enroll in an additional credit of project in the semester they graduate.

**Who may serve on a project committee?**

Here is a chart to illustrate a typical project committee:

Who May Serve on a Project Committee?		
Project Committee Chair	Project Committee Member #1	Project Committee Member #2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a member of the Mason graduate faculty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a member of the Mason graduate faculty</li> <li>• a member of the non-graduate Mason faculty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a member of the Mason graduate faculty</li> <li>• a member of the non-graduate Mason faculty</li> <li>• a working professional in a related field (must have at least a master's degree)</li> </ul>

**What is the procedure for acquiring project signatures?**

Students should circulate their own signature sheets.

Interdisciplinary Studies projects are handled internally; they do *not* go to University Dissertation & Thesis Service. The [project signature sheet](#) is downloadable from the MAIS website. It requires the student to obtain the signatures of all of committee members, then the concentration head. When the student submits the final project to Interdisciplinary Studies, they must also submit the signature sheet (with original signatures) for signature by the MAIS director. This project signature sheet does not require the dean's signature.

**The Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis****What is a thesis?**

A thesis is a rigorous piece of research that requires the collection of original data and is presented in a traditional, formal, written format. The guidelines and deadlines for thesis submission are set by the University and administered by the University Dissertation & Thesis Services. Thesis writers should make note of UDTs requirements early in the process. <http://thesis.gmu.edu> An MAIS thesis involves the same creativity, originality, and intellectual rigor as required for a master's thesis in any other program.

Thesis research and writing typically unfolds over at least 2 semesters.

**How many credits of MAIS 799 should a student take, overall and at once?**

All students will take 4 credits of MAIS 799—usually 3 credits the first semester, then 1 credit per semester thereafter until graduation. Once started, the University requires continuous enrollment in thesis credits (Fall and Spring) until graduation.

Students should think carefully about registering for all 4 thesis credits in a single semester. If it is in the student's interest to be full-time enrolled while doing thesis work, then students should register for 3 credits their first semester of MAIS 799. For subsequent semesters, they can maintain full-time status by registering for a single credit of MAIS 799 and submitting a [Full-Time Equivalent form](#).

It is usually not advisable for students to register for more than 3 credits of thesis in their first semester of thesis writing, because the University requires students to maintain continuous enrollment until graduation. This means students have to be registered in the semester they graduate as well as every semester since they first registered for thesis credits. Students who take all of their thesis credits in their first semester of thesis writing often find themselves having to pay for an extra, unneeded credit in order to satisfy this University requirement.

### Who may serve on a thesis committee?

The answer to this does not need a chart: *All thesis committee members must be members of the graduate faculty.*

### What is the procedure for acquiring thesis signatures?

Students should circulate their own signature or cover sheets.

University Dissertation & Thesis service will send out explicit timelines for thesis submission near the end of every semester. In addition to the committee's signatures, students will also need the MAIS director's signature and the signature of the CHSS Dean, in that order. The *thesis* signature sheet does not require the concentration head's signature, but students should consult with their concentration head to see if they would like to approve it.

To obtain the MAIS director's signature, students must email a soft copy of the thesis to [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu), then work with the MAIS graduate coordinator (or the director) to arrange for signature. Usually this means dropping off the signature sheet, then picking it up later. To obtain the Dean's signature, students must go to specially designated office hours that the dean's office will announce near the end of the term.

UDTS will only accept cover sheets that are complete and signed in **black** ink. Only the approved signature sheet format found on the website should be used. Specific names should not be listed. Only one signature may be scanned; the rest have to be original. Students should seek the scanned signature first so that all of the remaining signatures can be original. All signatures must be on the same cover sheet.

### What Does a Signature Sheet Actually Mean?

When a faculty member signs your signature sheet, they are not merely affirming that they have witnessed the existence of the capstone proposal, project, or thesis. They are affirming that they have read it carefully and they approve it in its final form. Students should not ask committee members to sign their signature sheets before the work is finalized, and no faculty member should ever agree to do so. Faculty shortchange graduate students when they fail to provide a rigorous experience. Students should demand one.

### Project or Thesis Defense

Some concentrations require students to defend their project or thesis. Students should consult with their concentration head about whether a defense will be required.

### Should I Do a Project or a Thesis?

This is a decision that every Interdisciplinary Studies student makes for themselves, in consultation with their concentration head, capstone committee, and other relevant faculty.

Factors to consider include:

- The skills, expertise, and interests of the student.
- The skills, expertise, and interests of faculty willing to work with the student.
- The student's desire to make an original contribution to knowledge, as with a thesis.
- The student's desire to apply research to a practical or creative challenge, as with a project.
- The student's interest in pursuing doctoral work.
- The student's time to degree. (Usually a thesis will take longer than a project.)

There is an assumption that a thesis helps to preserve the opportunity to pursue doctoral work. However, this is not true in every case. Students interested in pursuing doctoral work should research the admissions requirements of the program(s) to which they intend to apply. Doctoral programs frequently require applicants to submit a writing sample, but whether that writing sample must be a thesis, as opposed to something else, will depend on the doctoral program. Students should discuss their educational goals openly with their faculty advisors/mentors in deciding whether to do a thesis or project.

### Will Anyone Ever Read My Project or Thesis?

That is up to you!

Students who write a thesis will submit it to University Dissertation & Thesis Service (UDTS), which will upload it to the Mason Archival Repository Service (MARS) at <http://mars.gmu.edu>. Dissertations and theses in MARS are eventually indexed by ProQuest so that they can be searched by other scholars doing research. Students have the option of embargoing their thesis, meaning they can block anyone from seeing it for a specific period of time. However, if you are proud of your work, and if you desire to make an original contribution to knowledge and scholarship—the very reasons students write theses in the first place—you should consider making your work available for others to read.

Students who do a project will submit it to the Interdisciplinary Studies program office, where it will be stored for a few years until it is transferred to the Mason archives, where it will be stored for several more years before being destroyed. In the interim, it may be used by University faculty and administrators for the purpose of program assessment. At present, the Interdisciplinary Studies program does not disseminate projects to the public in any way. However, students are encouraged to *implement* their projects after graduation. Please let us know if you do that!

## IX. Putting Together a Project or Thesis Committee

Putting together a project or thesis committee is one of the most important responsibilities a student has. Whether a student pursues a project or thesis, the composition of the capstone committee will directly influence the scope and direction of the student's research.

### Choosing Committee Members

Students should start thinking about who they would like to work with on their capstone project or thesis committees early in their academic careers. There are a few ways to research potential committee members:

- Talk to other students about their experiences.
- Read online faculty biographies.
- Read what the faculty have published.
- Talk to the faculty member during office hours or via email.
- Take a class or independent study with the faculty member.

It is important for students to take courses with a variety of faculty so that they have multiple options when it comes to asking faculty to serve on their capstone committee.

Students should make the decision to ask a faculty member to serve on their committee based on professional considerations like scholarship, work experience, and teaching credentials. Factors like personal compatibility and emotional support are also important, but students should weigh carefully their desire to get along easily with a committee member (especially their chair) against the expertise the faculty member will bring to the process.

### What does "Graduate Faculty" Mean, and How Can You Tell?

Committee chairs of both project and thesis committees must be members of the graduate faculty, and all members of a thesis committee must be graduate faculty. The term "graduate faculty" is defined in the catalog here (AP.6.12):

<http://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/academic/graduate-policies/>

The policy reads as follows: "The graduate faculty consists of all George Mason University tenured and tenure-track faculty. Other Mason faculty members, as well as individuals from outside the university, may be appointed to the graduate faculty by the Provost for a specified duration of time."

Some adjunct, term, and administrative faculty are members of the graduate faculty, but others are not. If it is not clear whether a faculty member is graduate faculty, just ask them. It is better to ask than to labor under a false impression.

Students should not count on a non-graduate faculty member being made a member of the graduate faculty just to work with them.

## Making the Request

Students should present themselves in the best possible light when asking a faculty member to serve on their committee, especially as chair. Full-time Mason faculty have heavy teaching, research, and service loads, and they are not obligated to accept more students than they can comfortably handle. Taking on a student (or turning one down) is not likely to change a faculty member's performance evaluation (or salary) for better or worse. It is therefore in the student's interest to present themselves as an accomplished, well-informed professional with interesting ideas, someone who can take criticism, and someone who will not create problems by missing meetings, blowing deadlines, ignoring feedback, or doing shoddy work.

## Information to Provide

When asked to serve on a committee, the main issue a faculty member must determine is whether they are a good fit. To that end, students should offer information about themselves and their work.

### Information to provide if the faculty member does not know the student:

- A brief summary of the student's relevant professional and educational biography.
  - Relevant course work (highlights only).
  - Relevant professional experience, including internships or other experiential learning.
  - Honors, awards, or distinctions such as an unusually high GPA. (All graduate students must maintain at least a 3.0, and GPA's above 3.5 are typical).
  - Relevant professional or educational goals.

### Information to provide in every request to every prospective committee member:

- A description of the research topic or the kind of work the student plans to do. Be prepared to submit a draft of the proposal upon request. (Every committee member has the right to ask for changes.)
- An offer of a writing sample, to be provided upon request.
- The names of other members of the committee and the committee chair.
- A timeline for the process of completing the project/thesis.
- An explanation of why *they* would be a good fit for the topic, based on knowledge of their publications and research and teaching interests. (Students should not ask a faculty member to work with them without researching them first!)

This information will help the faculty member determine whether the student's work is interesting to them and also whether they have the necessary expertise to be helpful.

If the request takes place in person, the student could bring hard copies of a 1-page CV or resume, a writing sample, and/or a draft of the proposal. If the request takes place via email, the text could include an offer to send these items upon request. It's best not to load an email down with attachments if you don't know the faculty member and/or they are not expecting them.



### Getting a Yes

The ideal way to make this request is in person, in office hours, while talking about research ideas. (In this case, students should have hard copies of their materials at the ready.) Treat the appointment like a job interview: arrive on time, be prepared, and dress appropriately.

Just as with a job cover letter, any written correspondence should be proofread for clarity, accuracy, grammar, and typos. Students should only handle these transactions using their Mason email accounts.

Whether in person or over email, the student should give the faculty member time to think about the request.

### Following Up

If the student gets a "yes" in person, or there was some other follow-up (like taking a class, asking later, or arranging an independent study), the student should follow up with a polite email reiterating the arrangement in order to confirm that both parties left the meeting with the same understanding. All correspondence with faculty should be conducted using Mason email addresses, and students should proofread their text for errors before sending.

### Notifying the MAIS Program

Students will inform the Interdisciplinary Studies program of the composition of their committees as a requirement of MAIS 797: Proposal course and when they seek registration for MAIS 798/799 credits. They should enumerate their committee chair and members on the [MAIS 798/799 Registration Checklist](#), available for download from the program website.

If the student's committee changes after completing MAIS 797: Proposal, the student should notify the Interdisciplinary Studies program.

### Ensuring an Informed Committee

Interdisciplinary Studies committees are staffed by faculty from throughout the University, and some committee members may be serving on an MAIS committee for the first time. Students can assist their committees by encouraging them to explore the MAIS website, especially the tab "[For Faculty](#)," which contains information about projects, theses, and procedures. Students can also provide their committee chairs/members with contact information for the concentration head and/or the Interdisciplinary Studies director, in case they have further questions or concerns about their role.

Following MAIS 797: Proposal, the Interdisciplinary Studies program will send out a letter to each member of the committee affirming the faculty member's participation and providing them with guidelines for Interdisciplinary Studies projects or theses.

## X. MAIS Program Procedures

One of the goals of Interdisciplinary Studies program's administration is to ensure consistency and rigor across all concentrations, while also helping students as they make their way towards their degree. With so many students in so many different concentrations, managing the program can be difficult. What follows is a set of procedures designed to achieve these goals.

### MAIS Paperwork 101

- In general, every form requires both the concentration head's signature and the MAIS director's signature. Many forms are available to students on the Registrar's website (<http://registrar.gmu.edu>) under "Forms." Start there. Other forms are controlled, and students will have to ask the MAIS graduate coordinator for help.
- Copies of signed forms will remain in the student's file in the MAIS office. The MAIS graduate coordinator will forward the signed originals to the appropriate office. Most paperwork goes through the dean's office (the Associate Dean for Graduate Academic Affairs in Buchanan Hall) on its way to the Registrar.
- It is the student's responsibility to follow up after an appropriate waiting period (about 10 business days) by checking their online records in Patriot Web (Degree Evaluation, Academic Transcript).
  - If the change is not showing up, contact the MAIS graduate coordinator for help in tracking it down.

### Registering for MAIS 796: Proseminar

The only prerequisite for MAIS 796 is that a student be declared *in* the Interdisciplinary Studies program. This course is closed to ensure that only Interdisciplinary Studies students can register for it. All students that have not yet taken MAIS 796 will have an override added to register. If there are still issues, students should email the MAIS graduate coordinator to say that they would like to take the course. The coordinator will lift the restriction, and the student will be able to register via Patriot Web. All students are required to take MAIS 796 in their first or second semester in the program.

### Curriculum Worksheets

Curriculum worksheets are available for [download](#) from the Interdisciplinary Studies website. There is a different curriculum worksheet for each concentration. It is the student's responsibility to download and fill out the correct worksheet, discuss degree planning with their concentration head, get their concentration head's signature, and submit a signed original to the Interdisciplinary Studies program.

### Curriculum Worksheets & Catalog Year

The concept of "catalog year"—the academic year a student starts their degree—was discussed previously. Worksheets for the current catalog and past several years are posted on the MAIS website. If a student entered the program in a prior year, then they will want to review the degree

requirements for the year that they entered the program and use the appropriate worksheet. The Interdisciplinary Studies program provides each student with a hard copy of the appropriate curriculum worksheet in their welcome packet, for use as a reference guide.

### Filling Out the Curriculum Worksheet

The curriculum worksheet is a *planning* document. Students should fill out every requirement with the course they *plan* to take, in consultation with their concentration head. As a result, the first draft of the curriculum worksheet will be a best-case-scenario projection of the student's hoped-for degree program. Because course offerings can be difficult to predict, it is very common that students will have to work with their concentration head to identify alternatives semester to semester. Students should submit a revised and signed curriculum worksheet on the annual anniversary of the first one they submit. Students will also need to have a current version on file by the time they register for MAIS 797 and again when they register for MAIS 798/799.

### Curriculum Worksheets: The Key to the Degree

The curriculum worksheet is a planning document, but it is also an essential communication tool. First, requiring the concentration head's signature means that students must seek their advice. Next, the Interdisciplinary Studies program submits the CW, along with other forms, to the Registrar to communicate how the courses a student has taken, or plans to take, will count towards specific degree requirements.

Think of the curriculum worksheet like a key: every little node has to line up perfectly to turn the lock. Like a key, the curriculum worksheet needs to be *correct*—accurate course names and numbers, dates, grades—so that the program can communicate correctly to the Registrar how the degree should be configured. If students do not submit a curriculum worksheet regularly, then the MAIS program cannot ensure that the Registrar will know, when it is time for graduation, how the courses are supposed to count. **This can delay degree conferral!**

### Substituting One Class for Another

Because Interdisciplinary Studies does not offer most of the classes students will take towards their degrees, students frequently have to make course substitutions. To request a course substitution:

1. The student should discuss the substitution with their concentration head *before* they take the course.
2. *After* they have registered for the course, they should ensure that the substitution is correctly listed on the curriculum worksheet. The MAIS office will submit any additional paperwork.

### Getting a Requirement Waived

If for some reason a concentration head feels that a requirement should be waived, then the waiver should be noted on the student's curriculum worksheet. The MAIS office will submit any additional paperwork.

### Registering for an Experiential Learning Course

Several concentrations (FLKS, HEDU, SOCE, SJHR) require students to acquire an [experiential learning experience](#) (read: internship, consultancy, etc.) as part of their degree, but students in other concentrations are encouraged to do this as well. Most Interdisciplinary Studies students will fulfill this requirement using MAIS 795: Experiential Learning, but some concentrations (FLKS and HEDU) have their own EL course, and on a limited basis a student may elect to do experiential learning through another academic unit.

The registration process is described in greater detail on the program website ([Current Students >> Experiential Learning](#)), where you will also find a handout with “Guidelines for Learning Objectives” and the Interdisciplinary Studies Experiential Learning Application.

All Interdisciplinary Studies students, regardless of what course they use to fulfill their experiential learning requirement or elective, should follow these procedures and submit information about their experiential learning opportunity to the program, including a statement about their learning objectives and the application. This will ensure that the EL work and course you pursue will actually count towards your degree.

#### To register for Experiential Learning through the Interdisciplinary Studies program:

1. Identify which course you plan to use for experiential learning credit.
2. Broker an experiential learning opportunity.
3. Identify an instructor of record.
4. Identify your learning objectives in consultation with your site supervisor, your concentration head, and your instructor of record.
5. Submit the MAIS Experiential Learning Application.
6. Register for your EL course.

### Registering for MAIS 797: Interdisciplinary Studies Proposal

MAIS 797 is a controlled course, meaning that students will have to ask the MAIS graduate coordinator to lift the registration restriction for them to register. Registration in MAIS 797 requires that each student submit an up-to-date Curriculum Worksheet signed by the concentration head and an MAIS 797 Registration Checklist signed by the student's capstone committee chair. This notifies the program who will chair the student's committee and ensures that this faculty member is aware of their role and responsibilities.

Steps to register:

1. The student will ensure that an updated [curriculum worksheet](#) signed by the concentration head is on file in the MAIS office.
2. The student will form a [project/ thesis committee](#) or at least acquire a committee chair.
3. The student will submit a completed [MAIS 797: Proposal Checklist](#), available for download on the MAIS website, to the MAIS office.
  - This document requires a signature from the chair of the committee.
4. Once the MAIS graduate coordinator has verified all of the items on the checklist, she will lift the registration restriction for the class.
5. At that point, the student will have to log into Patriot Web and register for the class.

### Forming a Committee

Using the techniques discussed earlier, students will broker relationships with three Mason faculty to form their [committees](#). This can be done at any point in the student's process. At the very least, students must have a committee chair before they take MAIS 797: Proposal. Then they must have the entire committee in place as a requirement of MAIS 797: Proposal course.

To formalize the process of committee formation, students will provide their committee chairs' names and email addresses on the [Project/Thesis Registration Checklist](#).

### Submitting A Project or Thesis Proposal

MAIS 797: Interdisciplinary Studies Proposal is a 1-credit course designed to facilitate the creation of a *draft* of a project or thesis proposal. Successful completion of the course is just the *beginning* of the process of submitting the proposal.

The steps for submitting the proposal are the same for both project and thesis. The only difference is that the proposal signature sheet is slightly different for each. Templates may be found on the program website.

#### Steps to Submit:

1. The student must submit the proposal to their committee chair for review and execute any required changes.
2. When the committee chair indicates the proposal is ready to share with the other committee members, the student must submit the proposal to them and execute any required changes.
3. The student must circulate the final draft of the proposal along with an original copy of the [Proposal Signature Sheet](#), available for download on the MAIS website, to all committee members. Signature on the signature/cover sheet connotes that the committee member has both read *and approved* of the proposal in its final form. **Students should not ask committee members to sign the signature/cover sheet preemptively, before they have finalized their proposal.**
4. The student must submit the proposal and an original copy of the Proposal Signature Sheet with the committee members' signatures to the appropriate concentration head for signature.
5. The student must submit the final proposal and the signed Proposal Signature Sheet, including the concentration head's signature, to the MAIS office or [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu) for the director's signature.

#### Registering for MAIS 798/799

Once the student has met all the course prerequisites and submitted the proposal and signature sheet (see above), it is time to register for MAIS 798 (Project) or MAIS 799 (Thesis) using the MAIS 798/799 Checklist.

#### Steps to Register:

1. The student must submit a completed & signed [MAIS 798/799 Checklist](#), available for download on the program website, to the Interdisciplinary Studies program.
  - *This document requires the signature of the student's project or thesis committee chair.*
2. The student must submit a copy of the completed project or thesis proposal to Interdisciplinary Studies.
3. The student must submit a Proposal Signature Sheet with the signatures of the committee members and the concentration head to Interdisciplinary Studies.
4. Once the graduate coordinator has double-checked that all requirements have been met, s/he will create an individualized section of the appropriate course and provide the CRN number to the student to register.

## Graduating with a Project 😊

Congratulations! It is time to graduate! You are now responsible for initiating the graduation process with the Registrar and ensuring that all degree requirements have been met.

Steps to graduate with a project:

1. The student must file their intent to graduate with the [Registrar](#) via Patriot Web.
  - If a student misses the usual deadline, they must file a late intent-to-graduate.
  - If a student files their intent to graduate but then does not graduate, they must withdraw it.
  - Visit the [Registrar's website](#) for more information, under Students >> Graduation.
2. The student must make sure they have completed all MAIS degree & program requirements.
3. The student must circulate the final version of the project along with an original copy of the [Project Signature Sheet](#), available for download on the MAIS website, to all committee members. Signature on the signature/cover sheet connotes that the committee member has both read *and approved* of the project in its final form. **Students should not ask committee members to sign the signature/cover sheet preemptively, before they have finalized their project.**
4. The student must share the project with their concentration head and have them approve it by signing the Project Signature Sheet.
5. The student must submit a soft copy of the completed project to Interdisciplinary Studies via [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu). If the deliverable involves a URL, then the website must be supported in perpetuity. (This is for long-term assessment purposes.) If it is not, then students should provide a thumb drive.
6. Students must submit a copy original of the signature sheet to the MAIS director for signature.
7. The graduate coordinator will ensure that a final grade for MAIS 798 is recorded with the Registrar.
8. Provide Interdisciplinary Studies with your post-graduation contact information and your future plans.
9. Attend University Commencement (where you turn your tassel) and the CHSS Degree Celebration (where you walk across the stage) with your friends and family! Congratulations!

## Graduating with a Thesis 😊

Congratulations! It is time to graduate! You are now responsible for initiating the graduation process with the Registrar and ensuring that all degree requirements have been met.

Steps to graduate with a thesis:

1. The student must file their intent to graduate with the [Registrar](#) via Patriot Web.
  - If a student misses the usual deadline, they must file a late intent-to-graduate.
  - If a student files their intent to graduate but then does not graduate, they must withdraw it.
  - Visit the [Registrar's website](#) for more information, under Students >> Graduation.
2. The student must make sure s/he has completed all MAIS degree & program requirements.
3. The student must circulate a final version of the capstone thesis to their committee members and obtain their signatures on an original copy of the [Thesis Signature Sheet](#), available for download from the MAIS website. Signature on the signature/cover sheet connotes that the committee member has both read *and approved* of the thesis in its final form. **Students should not ask committee members to sign the signature/cover sheet preemptively, before they have finalized their thesis.**
4. The student must follow all procedures with University Dissertation & Thesis Services (<http://thesis.gmu.edu>).
5. The student must submit a soft copy of the completed thesis to the Interdisciplinary Studies program for the director's review.
6. The student must submit a hard copy original of the signature sheet to the MAIS director for signature. Thesis students will need to retrieve this document in order to take it to the dean's office for signature prior to submission to UDTS.
7. Thesis students will need to acquire the dean's signature prior to submitting the thesis to UDTS. The dean's office will announce office hours for when to get the signature.
8. Submit the thesis and signature sheet to UDTS.
9. The graduate coordinator will ensure that a final grade for MAIS 799 is recorded with the Registrar.
10. Provide Interdisciplinary Studies with your post-graduation contact information and your future plans.
11. Attend University Commencement (where you turn your tassel) and the CHSS Degree Celebration (where you walk across the stage) with your friends and family! Congratulations!



## XI. Degree Celebration, Commencement, & Degree Conferral

Earning a master's degree is a significant life accomplishment worthy of celebration with family, friends, and colleagues. The University provides two opportunities for students to celebrate their graduation, and they are welcome to participate in both.

### The CHSS Degree Celebration

The CHSS Degree Celebration is the college's celebration of degrees. CHSS hosts two celebrations, one for the social sciences and the other for the humanities and interdisciplinary program. Interdisciplinary Studies participates in the latter ceremony. It provides an opportunity to have one's name called and to walk across the stage.

### University Commencement

University Commencement is a University-wide celebration. It does not provide an opportunity to hear one's name called and to walk across the stage. However, students do turn their tassels at commencement, and it is at graduation that a student officially graduates.

### Degree Conferral

Both the CHSS Degree Celebration and University Commencement are purely ceremonial affairs. They are wonderful opportunities to honor student achievement and celebrate with family and friends. However, neither ceremony is connected to the process of degree conferral, which determines if and when a student receives their diploma. ([Diplomas](#) are mailed well after both ceremonies.)

### The Grace Period

Before conferral, every degree must be carefully scrutinized by degree auditors in the Registrar's office. This is not an automated process! The Registrar uses the 6 weeks after the end of classes to get degrees in order. This "grace period" serves two functions: 1) it enables students with Incomplete (IN) grades to complete them, and 2) it gives the Registrar's degree auditors time to do their work. ***The grace period is NOT an opportunity for students to submit coursework late. All coursework, including projects or theses, must be submitted by the end of the final exam period!***

Students should not panic if there is a delay between the submission of their final project/ thesis grade and the conferral of their degree. The MAIS graduate coordinator monitors this process very carefully. The MAIS graduate coordinator will generate any paperwork necessary to get credits in order. The #1 thing students can do to ensure this process goes smoothly is to make sure they have a signed, up-to-date [Curriculum Worksheet](#) on file.

*Thank you for your patience in this period, between graduation and degree conferral!*

## Best Wishes for Your Degree Program & Beyond!

Completing an advanced degree is a momentous achievement and one of the few accomplishments in life that cannot be taken away from you. We hope that your experience in the Interdisciplinary Studies program is a positive one and that your degree helps you to accomplish your personal and professional goals.

We also hope that you will stay in touch with the Interdisciplinary Studies program and let us know how you are doing! As an Interdisciplinary Studies Alumni, you have an important role to play in the program's future and success:

- Modeling the possibilities inherent in earning the degree.
- Sharing your expertise and mentoring students coming along behind you.
- Providing financial support to Interdisciplinary Studies, to another program that helped you, or to the University as a whole.
- Promoting the Interdisciplinary Studies program and especially George Mason University through your future endeavors.

Please keep in touch with us by updating your contact information with [mais@gmu.edu](mailto:mais@gmu.edu) and sharing news of where your degree has taken you!

You may be leaving the University, but you will always be a part of Mason Nation!



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