



Structure of the U.S. Education System: Master's Degrees

The master's degree is the first graduate-level qualification, or second cycle degree, in the U.S. higher education system. Master's degrees may be considered terminal professional degrees in some fields, such as the fine arts, or they may be considered as second degrees that may or may not lead to PhD studies. In some subjects, such as the behavioral and natural sciences, it is increasingly common practice to proceed directly from the bachelor's degree to enrollment in PhD studies without being required to earn a master's degree. In these subjects, the master's degree is often considered unimportant for professional purposes except as an intermediate qualification that students may petition for in cases where they need such a degree for employment purposes.

Master's degrees generally take two years to complete, but the time period may be shorter or longer depending on how the degree program is structured (12-month versus 9-month academic years, for example), whether the student is enrolled full-time or part-time, the degree requirements and the prior preparation of the student. (Some students may require additional preparation prior to undertaking certain types of research, or may require interdisciplinary training if their research field crosses subject fields or if they have changed academic subject concentrations from the undergraduate level.)

Some U.S. graduate students' transcripts may show that undergraduate courses were completed in subjects such as languages, quantitative methods or a second subject. It is important to know, however, that U.S. accreditation rules do not allow such undergraduate credit to be counted toward graduate studies. Only if undergraduate courses are taken for graduate credit – requiring additional work – and are certified as such by the graduate faculty will an award of credit be considered.

Master's degrees are more common in some subjects than others. In some fields, the master's degree is a required or expected qualification; while in others it is either not required or has no utility in the job market. As a result, U.S. research doctorate programs do not always require a master's degree for admission. The fields where master's degrees are most commonly awarded include business, education, health and medical fields, engineering, public administration and social services.

The most common academic master's degrees are the Master of Arts (MA or AM) and Master of Science (MS or SM). However, there are many different master's degree titles, especially in the professional fields.

RESEARCH MASTER'S DEGREES

Master's degrees awarded in academic fields are generally research degrees that require the completion of required graduate-level courses and seminars, passing comprehensive examinations in the major subfield of research and usually one or more minor subfields, and the preparation and defense of a master's thesis under faculty supervision. Occasionally, such degrees may be awarded without thesis by substituting a major project or set of papers for the thesis.

PROFESSIONAL MASTER'S DEGREES

Master's degrees awarded in professional fields may be structured as research degrees (as in engineering, for example), or they may be structured specifically to prepare students to work in an applied professional field at an advanced level (as with the MBA). In the latter case, there is usually a specified set of course or seminar requirements, specific graded exercises, and a project or other requirement is substituted for the thesis. Professional internships may also be required in supervised work settings.

[Professional Master's Initiative](#) is a project of the Council of Graduate Schools to help institutions respond to local needs for master's degree education in the professions.

[Enhancing the Master's Degree in the Natural Sciences](#) provides data and other information from a National Academy of Sciences project to study the decline of the master's degree in science disciplines and how this could be reversed.

[Retrieving the Master's Degree from the Dustbin of History](#) is a report on the state of master's programs in history by the American Historical Association's Committee on the Master's Degree.

FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED MASTER'S DEGREE TITLES

NOTE: This is only a partial list of such titles for informational purposes, not an exhaustive or official list.

Master of Accounting (M.Acc.)
Master of Agricultural Economics (M.A.E.)
Master of Agricultural Extension (M.A.Ext.)
Master of Agriculture (M.Ag./M.Agr.)
Master of Applied Anthropology (M.A.A.)
Master of Architecture (M.Arch.)/Master of Science in Architecture (M.S.Arch.)
Master of Arts (M.A./A.M.)
Master of Arts in Art Education (M.A.A.E./M.A.A.Ed.)
Master of Arts in Art Therapy (M.A.A.T.)
Master of Arts in Arts Administration (M.A.A.A.)
Master of Arts in Behavioral Science (M.A.B.S.)
Master of Arts in College Teaching (M.A.C.T.)
Master of Arts in Communications (M.A.C.)
Master of Arts in Community Psychology (M.A.C.P.)
Master of Arts in Computer Education (M.A.C.E.)
Master of Arts/Science in Counseling (M.A.C./M.S.C.)
Master of Arts/Science in Counseling Psychology (M.A.C.P./M.S.C.P.)
Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Studies (M.A.C.C.S.)
Master of Arts/Science in Education (M.A.Ed./M.S.Ed.)
Master of Arts in Family Counseling (M.A.F.C.)
Master of Arts in the Humanities (M.A.H.)
Master of Arts/Science in Teaching (M.A.T./M.S.T.)
Master of Bioinformatics (M.B.)
Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)/Master of Science in Business Administration (M.S.B.A.)/Executive Master of Business Administration (E.M.B.A.)
Master of City Planning (M.C.P.)/Master of City and Regional Planning (M.C.R.P./M.R.C.P.)/Master of Regional Planning (M.R.P.)
Master of Clinical Medical Science (M.C.M.S.)
Master of Community Health (M.C.H.)
Master of Computer Science (M.C.S.)
Master of Criminal Justice (M.C.J.)/Master of Arts/Science in Criminal Justice (M.A.C.J./M.S.C.J.)
Master of Design (M.Des.)
Master of Divinity (M.Div.)
Master of Education (M.Ed.)
Master of Engineering (M.E./M.Eng.)/Master of Science in Engineering (M.S.E.)
Master of Science in Aeronautics and Astronautics (M.S.A.A.)
Master of Aerospace Engineering (M.A.E./M.S.A.E.)
Master of Architectural Engineering (M.A.E./M.S.A.E.)

Master of Science in Artificial Intelligence (M.S.A.I.)
 Master of Science in Biomedical Engineering (M.S.B.E.)
 Master of Science in Ceramic Engineering (M.S.Cer.E.)
 Master of Chemical Engineering (M.C.E./M.S.Ch.E.)
 Master of Civil Engineering (M.C.E./M.S.C.E.)
 Master of Computer Engineering (M.C.E./M.S.C.E.)
 Master of Electrical and Computer Engineering (M.E.C.E.)
 Master of Electrical Engineering (M.E.E./M.S.E.E.)
 Master of Engineering Management (M.E.M./M.S.E.Mgt.)
 Master of Engineering Science (M.E.S.)
 Master of Science in Environmental Engineering (M.S.Env.E.)
 Master of Geological Engineering (M.G.E.)
 Master of Industrial Engineering (M.I.E./M.S.I.E.)
 Master of Manufacturing Engineering (M.M.E.)
 Master of Materials Science (M.M.S.)/Master of Materials Science and Engineering
 (M.M.S.E.)(M.S.Mat.S.E.)
 Master of Mechanical Engineering (M.M.E./M.S.M.E.)
 Master of Science in Metallurgical Engineering (M.S.Met.E.)
 Master of Science in Nuclear Engineering (M.S.N.E.)
 Master of Science in Petroleum Engineering (M.S.Pet.E./M.S.P.N.G.E.)
 Master of Engineering Technology (M.E.T./M.S.E.T.)
 Master of Environmental Design (M.E.D.)/Master of Environmental Design Studies
 (M.E.D.S.)
 Master of Environmental Planning (M.E.P.)
 Master of Environmental Science/Studies (M.E.S.)
 Master of Family Therapy (M.F.T.)/Master of Marriage and Family Therapy (M.M.F.T.)
 Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.)
 Master of Forestry (M.F.)/Master of Science in Forestry (M.S.F.)
 Master of Forest Engineering (M.F.E.)
 Master of Forest Resources (M.F.R.)
 Master of Health Administration (M.H.A.)/Master of Health Care Administration
 (M.H.C.A.)/Master of Health Care Management (M.H.C.M.)/Master of Health
 Services Administration (M.H.S.A.)/Master of Science in Health Administration
 (M.S.H.A.)/Health Care Administration (M.S.H.C.A.)
 Master of Hebrew Letters (M.H.L.)
 Master of Heritage/Historical Preservation (M.H.P.)
 Master of Home Economics (M.H.E.)
 Master of Hospitality Management (M.H.M.)
 Master of Human Resources (M.H.R.)/Master of Human Resource Development
 (M.H.R.D.)/
 Master of Science in Human Resources (M.S.H.R.)
 Master of Individualized/Interdisciplinary Studies (M.I.S.)
 Master of Information Resources Management (M.I.R.M.)
 Master of Information Technology (M.I.T.)
 Master of International Affairs (M.I.A.)
 Master of International Business/Business Administration (M.I.B./M.I.B.A.)
 Master of Industrial Design (M.I.D.)
 Master of Journalism (M.J.)/Master of Arts/Science in Journalism (M.A.J./M.S.J.)
 Master of Justice Administration (M.J.A.)
 Master of Landscape Architecture (M.L.Arch./M.L.A.)
 Master of Laws (LL.M.)
 Master of Comparative Law (M.C.L./LL.C.M.)
 Master of Liberal Studies (M.L.S.)/Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (M.A.L.S.)*
 Master of Library Science (M.L.S.)/Master of Science in Library Science (M.S.L.S.)/Master
 of Library and Information Science (M.L.I.S.)
 Master of Law Librarianship (M.L.L.)
 Master of Management (M.M.)
 Master of Manufacturing Management (M.M.M.)
 Master of Marine Affairs (M.M.A.)
 Master of Mass Communications (M.M.C.)
 Master of Music (M.M./M.Mus.)
 Master of Music Education (M.M.Ed.)
 Master of Music Therapy (M.M.T.)

Master of Nursing (M.N.)/Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.)
 Master of Nursing Administration (M.N.A./M.S.N.A.)
 Master of Occupational Therapy (M.O.T./M.S.O.T.)
 Master of Pharmacy (M.Pharm.)
 Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.)
 Master of Physical Education (M.P.E./M.P.Ed.)
 Master of Physical Therapy (M.P.T.)/Master of Arts/Science in Physical Therapy
 (M.A.P.T./M.S.P.T.)
 Master of Planning (M.P.)
 Master of Professional Accounting (M.P.A./M.Prof.Acc.)
 Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.)/Master of Science in Public Administration
 (M.S.P.A.)
 Master of Public Health (M.P.H.)/Master of Science in Public Health (M.S.P.H.)
 Master of Public Health Education (M.P.H.E.)
 Master of Public and International Affairs (M.P.I.A.)
 Master of Public Management (M.P.M.)
 Master of Public Policy (M.P.P.)
 Master of Recreation Administration (M.R.A.)
 Master of Rehabilitation Counseling (M.R.C.)
 Master of Real Estate Development (M.R.E.D./M.S.R.E.D.)
 Master of Recreation and Parks Administration (M.R.P.A.)
 Master of Rehabilitation Medicine (M.R.M.)
 Master of Religious Education (M.R.E./M.Rel.Ed.)
 Master of Sacred Music (M.S.M.)/Master of Liturgical Music (M.Lit.M.)
 Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.)
 Master of Science (M.S.)
 Master of Science in Dentistry (M.S.D./M.Sc.D.)
 Master of Science in Economics (M.S.E.)
 Master of Science in Exercise and Sport Studies (M.S.E.S.S.)
 Master of Science in Finance (M.S.F.)
 Master of Science in Forensic Science (M.S.F.S.)
 Master of Science in Genetic Counseling (M.S.G.C.)
 Master of Science in Gerontology (M.S.G.)
 Master of Science in Information Science/Systems (M.S.I.S.)
 Master of Science in Management (M.S.M./M.S.Mgt.)
 Master of Science in Mass Communications (M.S.M.C.)
 Master of Science in Medical Illustration (M.S.M.I.)
 Master of Science in Medical Technology (M.S.M.T.)
 Master of Science in Natural Science (M.S.N.S.)
 Master of Science in Nurse Anesthesia (M.S.N.A.)
 Master of Science in Orthodontics (M.S.O.)
 Master of Science in Pharmaceutical Sciences (M.S.P.S.)
 Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)
 Master of Taxation (M.T.)
 Master of Technology (M.Tech.)
 Master of Science in Textiles (M.S.Text.)
 Master of Theology (Th.M.)
 Master of Tourism Management (M.T.M./M.T.H.M.)
 Master of Urban Planning (M.U.P.)/Master of Urban and Regional Planning
 (M.U.R.P.)/Master of Urban Design (M.U.D.)/Master of Urban Planning and Policy
 (M.U.P.P.)
 Master of Urban Studies (M.U.S.)
 Master of Veterinary Science (M.Vet.Sc./M.V.S.)
 Master of Women's Studies (M.W.S.)

The Master of Liberal Studies or Master of Arts in Liberal Studies degree (*) is frequently awarded to graduates of programs in divisions of continuing or adult education. Despite the title, the content of this degree often corresponds to regular M.A., M.S. or professional master's degree programs.

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