

Guidelines for student transfer into the MA program

Approved by Academic Council on March 8, 2023

Principles:

1. A student should be allowed to transfer from either the MS or PhD program if they decide that their current program no longer supports their long-term goals and they can meet the MA program requirements
 - a. Rationale: Students may discover in the course of their program that their professional goals do not align with the research-oriented tracks. Allowing them to transfer to the MA program ensures that they obtain a degree, allows them to focus on building the professional skills of interest to them, and may move them through the program in a timely manner, commensurate with their professional goals.
2. A student may transfer at any point in the academic year
 - a. Rationale: There are no semester-related milestones that would prevent a student from transferring mid-semester and delaying the transfer would slow student progress through the academic program
3. A student must be in good academic standing to transfer to the MA program and have demonstrated interest in using marine science in a professional setting
 - a. In general, the students accepted to the MA program through the regular admission process are high academic achievers and are required to demonstrate their accomplishments and goals related to the professional degree. Transfer students should be students that would have been accepted in the regular admission process to keep from diluting the value of the degree.

Process:

1. A student who wishes to transfer to the MA degree track from the MS or PhD track should inform the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (ADAA), the Director of the MA program, and the Faculty Advisor. These three individuals will meet with the student to discuss the student's motivation and the requirements for transfer into the program before deciding on the appropriateness, terms of the transfer, and transition timeline. The Director of the MA program, in consultation with the ADAA, will be responsible for 1) determining if the student meets the qualifications for transfer to the MA program (see 3 above) and 2) working with the student to identify a Capstone advisor. The Director of the MA program and SMS Registrar will work together to draft a transfer plan that identifies completed or in-progress coursework that is suitable for transfer to the MA program, and any other activities that may be used to meet MA program requirements. The ADAA will review the transfer plan and decide on transfer, or request additional information. When a student is approved for transfer, a new timeline for graduation will be developed by the SMS Registrar based on MA Program milestones, and subject to approval by the ADAA and Program Director. An approved transfer request does not imply a financial aid commitment on the part of the School of Marine Science.
 - a. Rationale: There are numerous considerations when transferring from the MS/PhD track to the MA track, which require collaborative decision making. These considerations may include:

- i. Class credits – the MA program is focused on graduating full-time students within 18-24 months. It is appropriate to consider coursework or activities completed for the MS/PhD track for transfer to MA program requirements. For example, a student with thesis credit may be able to transfer some of that credit towards the capstone requirement if the topic of their thesis can support their Capstone project.
- ii. Capstone advisor – Identification of a Capstone advisor is a requirement for admission to the MA program. When possible, it is preferred that a transferring student retain their faculty advisor. However, if either the student requests a new advisor or the faculty advisor is unwilling or unable to serve as a Capstone advisor, the Capstone advisor must be identified before the transfer is approved.
- iii. Financial considerations – it is important that any student who is considering a transfer be aware that they will be moving from a fully-funded position to one that may be partially or completely unfunded. While efforts will be made to find the student a graduate assistantship, there should be no expectation of continuing financial support based on the financial aid offer for the MS or PhD program. Only full-time MA students are eligible for assistantships. Under most circumstances, the student will be responsible for tuition. Students on assistantships are eligible for the in-state tuition rate as long as they are receiving at least \$4,000 in financial aid (assistantship) administered by VIMS per academic year. In addition, there may be grant obligations under the student's existing research assistantship that should be considered.