

# THE MASTER'S DEGREE: COMMON STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

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**T**he master's degree is awarded to students who demonstrate a level of academic accomplishment and subject mastery substantially beyond that required for the baccalaureate degree. Graduates from master's degree programs should have developed the ability to think logically and consistently; integrate and synthesize knowledge; access up-to-date knowledge and information within the discipline; communicate in a clear, consistent, and logical manner, both orally and in writing; understand the interrelationships between their discipline and others; be aware of and prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas within their profession; apply their knowledge of the discipline to real-life situations; and, increasingly, adapt to the dynamic requirements of their profession and their workplace.

Master's graduates are expected to have gained knowledge and skills not only from course work, research, and practicums but also from varied experiences and perspectives brought to the program and shared among students, faculty, and practitioners. The specific requirements for individual students, even those working in the same field, may vary to a certain extent, depending not only on their pre-master's preparation and experience but also on the research projects or new applications of knowledge for which the program is preparing them.

Master's programs usually require a capstone or culminating experience that indicates the ability to synthesize material from course work and to apply information and knowledge to a specific issue or problem, although some programs may require only completion of course work. The capstone requirement may be a thesis (once nearly universal), an equally rigorous creative project, a demanding comprehensive examination, or, increasingly, some alternative requirement, such as a documented contribution to a group project or outcome (increasingly common in professionally focused programs) or reports of internship or fieldwork experiences. Since the ability to communicate in one's field is essential, master's programs typically include an opportunity for the student to learn to present scholarly information in written and oral form to a variety of audiences.