DRAFT: Master of Science in Information Science
University of Washington
Moderate Degree Change Proposal

Introduction

The University of Washington Information School proposes to offer a Master of Science in Information Science (MSIS) degree as part of its Doctor of Philosophy in Information Science program. Beginning spring 2010, students in the doctoral program who have successfully completed 60 credits and met certain General Examination evaluation criteria, would have the option of receiving the MSIS. The doctoral program currently serves 20 FTE students per year and would continue to do so. Program planners estimate that up to ten students would graduate per year, including one or two students who would graduate with the MSIS rather than a doctorate.

Students would not be admitted to a stand-alone MSIS program; rather, the MSIS degree would be available for students in the Ph.D. program, including students who wish to terminate their studies early.

Proposed Change Description and Rationale

The proposed change would add a master's degree to the doctoral program without altering the program's admission process, curriculum, requirements, faculty, location, delivery mode, scheduling, or cost. Students would apply to the doctoral program, which would continue to admit students interested in pursuing a doctorate rather than students interested in pursuing a master's degree. For students interested in pursuing a master's degree, the Information School offers Master of Library and Information Science and Master of Science in Information Management professional degrees. Unlike these professional degrees, the MSIS degree would be an academic degree focused on research and theory.

The MSIS degree would be awarded to students as part of the doctoral program and would not entail any expansion of the program. The doctoral program consists of 60 credits, including core courses, practicums, and electives, culminating with the General Examination and dissertation. Students in the program will read the literature of the information science discipline, critique the work of key theorists and researchers, and design and critique information systems. The MSIS

degree program would use the same curriculum as the doctoral program, but it would not include the dissertation. All students who successfully complete the required doctoral coursework and meet required General Examination evaluation criteria would be offered the MSIS degree; however, students would have the option of declining it if they wished.

The General Examination assesses a candidate's ability to demonstrate and apply his or her knowledge of the field, including current literature. In addition, it assesses a candidate's ability to scope, design, and write a dissertation. If the proposed program is approved, there would be three possible outcomes on the General Examination: M.S. Pass with continuation to the Ph.D. dissertation stage, M.S. Pass without continuation to the Ph.D. dissertation stage, and M.S. Fail. Students who meet all General Examination evaluation criteria would be offered an M.S. and continue to the dissertation stage. Students who only meet the evaluation criteria required[1] for the M.S. would be offered an M.S., but they would not continue to the dissertation stage. The remaining students would neither be offered an M.S. nor continue to the dissertation stage.

The doctoral program underwent program review in 2006-07. Although the program review resulted in no major suggestions for change, the Information School's Ph.D. Committee, consisting of the chair, two tenure-track faculty, a staff member, and a graduate student, discussed the idea of offering an MSIS degree program during 2008. The proposal to offer an MSIS degree program was approved by Information School faculty during spring quarter 2008. It has been reviewed by Graduate School staff and endorsed by the Dean of the Graduate School. It would align the Information School's doctoral program with current Graduate School policy, which calls for a master's component in all new doctoral degree program proposals.

The proposal notes that a few doctoral students do well in their coursework but are unable to meet all of the General Examination evaluation criteria. Without the MSIS degree, such students do not receive a degree acknowledging their academic work. This can be particularly harmful for international students, because of the stigma of failure associated with lack of degree in many countries. The proposed degree would benefit students by providing them with appropriate acknowledgement of their academic work.

Although the program would primarily benefit students, it has some potential to benefit employers too. The joint report, *A Skilled and Educated Workforce* (2009)[2] notes shortages of research, science, and technical workers and graduate degree holders. The proposed degree would respond to those needs in a broad sense because it is a graduate degree reflecting a curriculum with a significant research component in the high-need computer and information sciences field. As such, it would signal to employers a graduate's ability to do high-level analytical work.

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[1] The evaluation criteria required for the M.S. degree pertain to a candidate's ability to demonstrate and apply his or her knowledge, including knowledge of current literature in the field. However, they do not include criteria regarding a candidate's ability to scope, design, and write a dissertation.

[2] A needs assessment report prepared jointly by the Higher Education Coordinating Board, State Board for Technical and Community Colleges, and Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

The Information School views the proposed degree as an important factor in the continued success of the Doctor of Philosophy in Information Science program. By enabling students who wish to exit the program early to do so with a recognized degree, the MSIS degree would cut down on the number of students who stay enrolled in hopes of getting a doctorate just for the sake of having something to show for their work. It would enable faculty to focus their effort on students willing and able to write a high-quality dissertation, providing them with high-quality supervision.

Staff Analysis

The MSIS proposal is not a typical moderate degree change proposal because it is not an option conversion, degree consolidation, or externally mandated change in degree level. However, moderate degree change treatment is appropriate because the proposal would not alter any aspect of an established doctoral program, other than to award a credential to students who reach certain milestones. Furthermore, students would not be admitted to the master's program itself; rather, the MSIS degree would only be awarded to students who initially pursued a doctorate.

The MSIS degree would provide appropriate academic recognition for students who complete all doctoral coursework and meet required General Examination evaluation criteria, and it would give students a credential that would help employers recognize their ability to do high-level analytical work. Thus it would benefit students desiring an early exit from the program, as well as their potential employers.

Students who continue to the dissertation stage of the program would benefit from increased faculty supervision and interaction. In other words, the MSIS program would promote more effective and efficient use of resources (faculty effort) in a way that results in better-trained doctoral graduates. This would benefit the community, as well as the continuing students.

The proposal has undergone internal institutional review at both the departmental and Graduate School levels. The MSIS degree would align the Information Science doctoral program with UW Graduate school policy regarding the inclusion of master's degrees in such programs. The MSIS degree would also align with the *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* because it would expand the opportunity for students to raise their educational attainment level in a high-need field.

Normally, UW would have been required to include in its proposal a statement or report from an external expert indicating whether the proposed addition of the MSIS degree is consistent with trends in the field. Further, the statement or report would have to indicate the addition would result in a program with an appropriate degree title and level, and demonstrate a coherent design with appropriate depth, breadth, and curriculum. UW requested an exception to the this requirement, which staff granted on the grounds that the proposal would add a credential, and otherwise, not alter a well-established doctoral program that recently completed a successful program review.

Staff Recommendation

After careful review of the proposal and supporting materials, staff recommends approval of the Master of Science in Information Science at the University of Washington. The Higher Education Coordinating Board's Education Committee discussed the proposal during its January 4, 2010 meeting and recommended approval by the full Board.

RESOLUTION NO. 10-01

WHEREAS, University of Washington Information School proposes to offer a Master of Science in Information Science degree program as part of its existing Doctor of Philosophy in Information Science program; and

WHEREAS, The new degree would be awarded to students in the doctoral program and would not entail any expansion of the program or any changes to the program's admission and recruitment process, curriculum, or faculty; and

WHEREAS, The new degree would align the doctoral program with current University of Washington policy regarding inclusion of master's degrees; and

WHEREAS, The new degree would provide appropriate recognition for students' academic work; and

WHEREAS, The new degree would benefit students who exit the doctoral program prior to completion of their Ph.D. degree, as well as those who continue on to completion; and

WHEREAS, The new degree would benefit the community by allowing faculty to focus their efforts on continuing students;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the Master of Science in Information Science degree program at the University of Washington effective January 29, 2010.

Adopted:

January 29, 2010

Attest:

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Jesús Hernandez, Chair

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Roberta Greene, Secretary