UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT SPRINGFIELD
CAMPUS SENATE AY 2010/2011
RESOLUTION 41-6

Graduate Closure Guidelines
(Replaces UA Bill 20-3)

WHEREAS, in 1991, the Sangamon State University (now University of Illinois at Springfield) created and implemented a policy on closure requirements at the graduate level (Assembly Bill 20-3); and

WHEREAS, changes in the curricular structure and campus administration have occurred since 1991; and

WHEREAS, the Graduate Council has determined that administrative procedures for closure projects in the original bill were not universally appropriate to all closure options; and

WHEREAS, a revised written policy is needed to ensure appropriate administrative oversight, documentation, and archiving of closure written components;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Illinois at Springfield Campus Senate approves Graduate Closure Guidelines.

Section 1. This closure policy establishes five closure options and a standard closure process for academic programs granting the master’s degree. The policy is intended to encourage innovative and educationally-legitimate variations in the curricula of academic programs.

Section 2. This policy supersedes Assembly Bill 20-3.

Section 3. Uniform Closure Process

Master’s degrees will be awarded only to students who have satisfactorily completed a closure exercise prescribed by their academic program. Closure exercises will generally occur in the last semester of the student’s course of study, due to the comprehensive and integrative nature of master’s studies.
Section 3.1. Standards for Closure Option

Standards for each closure option are set by the academic program and subject to review and approval by the appropriate College Curriculum Committee and Graduate Council. Academic programs may select from five closure options: master’s thesis, graduate project, creative/artistic project, capstone course, or comprehensive exam. Exceptions require additional supporting evidence of appropriateness to degree requirements. Closure exercises may carry up to eight (8) semester hours of credit, as deemed appropriate by the program.

All closure exercises must include a written component, prepared in accordance with the effective formatting and style guidelines of the Office of Graduate Studies. Formatting and style guidelines are developed by the Vice Chancellor for Graduate Education and Research in consultation with the Graduate Council. The written component for theses, projects, and creative/artistic projects shall be housed in University Archives upon final approval. Written components for capstone courses and comprehensive exams shall be housed in student records kept by the academic programs, according to the records retention schedule of the department.

Section 3.2. Closure Approval Forms

The Closure Approval Form documents that closure has been successfully completed by the student. The Closure Committee appropriate to the type of closure (see 4.1 and 4.2 for Closure Committee requirements) shall be documented on the Closure Approval Form. Collectively, the Closure Committee members shall determine the quality of the closure product and determine that closure has been satisfactorily completed. Signatures required on the Closure Approval Form vary, based on committee makeup, and are as follows:

- Thesis, project, or creative/artistic work – The Closure Committee is constituted to approve the closure exercise in both its initial developmental stage (proposal) and in its final form. Proposals must be approved in writing by Closure Committees, which shall meet prior to action. When all elements of the closure exercise have been satisfactorily completed, each member of the Closure Committee shall sign the Closure Approval Form, which is attached to the written portion of the closure exercise and submitted for archiving.

- Comprehensive Exam – Each faculty member of the comprehensive examination evaluating committee shall sign the Closure Completion Form upon a student’s successful completion.

- Capstone Course - Unless additional faculty are involved, only the instructor of record will sign the Closure Approval Form for the academic program.
All signed Closure Approval Forms shall then be processed administratively through the appropriate program chair and submitted to the Office of Records and Registration. The program chair must verify that the form is completed accurately.

Section 4. Closure Options

Closure options of master’s thesis, graduate project, and creative/artistic project (4.1 Closure Options with University-Defined Committees) require committees as defined by university policy (below). Closure options of comprehensive exam and capstone course may have closure committees as defined by the academic program (4.2 Closure options with Program-Defined Committees). Exceptions to the recognized closure options shall be individually evaluated for academic appropriateness and for the appropriate type of closure committee (4.3. Exceptions).

Section 4.1. Closure Options with University-Defined Committees

All closure exercises as set forth below in Section 4.1 must be approved by a Closure Committee that will consist of at least three fulltime faculty, including the student’s closure advisor and two or more additional faculty members (which may include emeriti faculty). One of the faculty members must come from outside the Program and be appointed by the appropriate dean after consultation with the closure advisor. (The dean’s representative shall serve the primary purpose of ensuring that the closure process is maintained. In addition, the dean’s representative may serve to provide additional disciplinary expertise important to the advising and review of the student’s thesis, project, or creative/artistic work.) In consultation with the closure advisor, students may request an additional committee member from outside the university representing disciplinary expertise important to advising the student on the closure option.

A. The Master’s Thesis

A master’s thesis represents a sustained research essay, original in either its research material or mode of integration, written individually by a student on an approved topic germane to the field in which the master’s degree is awarded.

B. The Graduate Project

A graduate project is an applied study germane to the field in which the master’s degree is awarded. Graduate projects normally combine the subject-matter of academic programs with problems or issues in practical professional settings of concern to an academic program. The graduate project shall be accompanied by a written explication and/or criticism.

C. The Creative/Artistic Work Product

The creative/artistic work product consists of the creation of an original work which employs and synthesizes principles, theories, and techniques from the student’s graduate education. The creative/artistic work shall be accompanied by a written explication and/or criticism.
Section 4.2. Closure Options with Program-Defined Committees

The parameters of the closure options set forth in Section 4.2 shall be collectively determined by the faculty of the program. Each program shall maintain records which document processes, committee membership, and evaluation of student outcome.

A. The Comprehensive Examination
   A comprehensive examination consisting of written exams based on the student’s course of study tests the candidate’s integration of various dimensions of a field of study; the comprehensive exam may include an oral portion. It is generally assumed that faculty members of the comprehensive exam committee shall serve to create the comprehensive exam and evaluate the written product submitted by each student.

B. The Capstone Course
   The capstone course is an integrative course utilizing theoretical and applied aspects of the relevant discipline and shall include a major writing component such as a case study, project, or examination. It is generally assumed that faculty members of the academic program shall serve to create the capstone course. Faculty delivering the capstone course shall honor the content and assessment strategies developed collectively by the program faculty.

4.3. Exceptions
   Exceptions to the foregoing closure options may be proposed by an academic program, reviewed by the appropriate College Curriculum Committee, and approved by the Graduate Council if deemed necessary and desirable, upon demonstration by an academic program that its proposed exception to closure options (1) is consistent with prevailing standards in the relevant professional and academic disciplines, or (2) implements the intent of this bill.

Section 5. Implementation

All academic programs awarding the master’s degree must submit standards for the closure, e.g., guidelines specifying means of assuring the quality of master’s closure exercises, at the time proposed to the appropriate College Curriculum Committees and Graduate Council for review and approval prior to implementation consistent with catalog copy deadlines. Master’s closure options are subject to assessment and review criteria during the eight-year academic program review in accordance with university policy.