THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE
FACULTY SENATE

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Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

APC Document 53 (MLAS) Revised: **Change to MLAS Degree Requirements**

Effective Date: Fall 2015

1. **Delete:** On page 213, under **Degree Requirements:**

    Each student seeking a degree will complete at least 30 semester hours of course work within the Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences program, with a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 required for graduation. At least 24 of these credits must be taken at UNC Asheville. Courses offered through the Asheville Graduate Center may be taken as program electives with the prior approval of the Graduate Council.

    I.   Required courses for the degree—30 hours including: MLAS 500, 540, 670, 680; 3 hours from ENG 520 or MLAS 520; 3 hours from CCS 560 or MLAS 560. In addition, students must select 12 hours from 500-600 level program electives. Students may complete these elective courses in a single focus area. MLAS 500 must be taken during the first fall semester after admission to the program.
    II. Other degree requirements—Students will develop a capstone project in MLAS 670, and complete, present and defend the work in MLAS 680. Oral and computer competency will also be demonstrated in MLAS 670 and 680.

    Add: On page 213, in place of deleted entry:

    Each student seeking a degree will complete at least 30 semester hours of course work within the Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences program, with a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 required for graduation. At least 24 of these credits must be taken at UNC Asheville. Courses offered through the Asheville Graduate Center or at other accredited universities may be taken as program electives with the prior approval of the Graduate Council.

    I.   Required courses for the degree—30 hours including: MLAS 500, 540, 3 hours from ENG 520 or MLAS 520, 3 hours from CCS 560 or MLAS 560, 12 hours from 500-600 level program electives, and 6 additional hours completed in one of the capstone options listed below. MLAS 500 must be taken during the first fall semester after admission to the program.
    II. Other degree requirements—Students will choose one of three capstone options as the final requirement for the degree: a) completion of 6 credit hours in MLAS 681; b) completion of 6 credit hours in MLAS 690; or c) completion of a non-credit bearing MLAS Portfolio and 6 additional hours of 500-600 level program electives. Oral competency will be demonstrated through a formal presentation at the MLAS Program Forum.

    Students who select the non-credit bearing Portfolio option must still complete 30 credit hours in the program, so they will take two additional program electives to reach the required number of hours. The portfolio will be completed within the student's final semester, and for students not selecting a graduate project or thesis, the portfolio is a degree requirement. The

student's MLAS advisor serves as the portfolio advisor. The Portfolio will be submitted at the end of the semester to the MLAS Program Director and the Graduate Council for review and approval. The following items must be submitted to satisfy the requirements for the Portfolio option:

- A cover page with the student's name, date, and title of the project.
- At least three substantive papers from separate courses that represent their best work.
- A 10-12 page reflective narrative placing the papers in the context of the student's intellectual journey through the MLAS program.

Students will make an oral presentation of their portfolio and reflective essay before faculty and fellow students at the MLAS Program Forum. A copy of the Portfolio and reflective narrative will be retained in the MLAS archive in Ramsey Library.

Impact: The program will have the opportunity to offer additional seminars, rather than offering repeated sections of the MLAS 670/680 sequence. This change will assist the program in that MLAS will not have to devote so many faculty to the sequence, nor to a two semester content advisor role. This will also allow the program to bring additional faculty into the program to teach, as there will be more room for topical seminars to be added to the schedule. Another impact will be that students will need to seek out faculty to serve as primary and secondary readers of projects, or on Thesis committees, but faculty and MLAS leadership already serve in such roles currently; moreover, the commitment in most cases will be for one semester.

Rationale: The MLAS 670/680 sequence was originally designed to provide assistance to students in shaping and executing their MLAS Projects. More importantly, the sequence was created during a time when MLAS enrollments were declining in order to provide a sense of community through the establishment of a "cohort feel" for the students in the program. This sequence has been partially successful in these two aims, but as the program has grown, the MLAS 670/680 structure has created obstacles for students and faculty that must be addressed.

Currently, the MLAS program attracts three distinct groups of students, each with different goals for their participation in the program: 1) life-long learners, who typically want to take as many courses as possible and to be exposed to as many faculty perspectives as possible; 2) students who wish to continue beyond the MLAS program through further graduate study, and who see MLAS as a way to deepen their academic skill set; and 3) a growing number of students who are using the program and its interdisciplinary flexibility for workforce purposes, e.g., making a lateral or vertical move in their places of employment, etc. In addition, there are within these groups, students who are following an interdisciplinary academic path and then others who are working primarily in creative areas, such as writing, art, and multimedia.

The single MLAS 670/680 option no longer serves the needs of all, or even most, of our students. Because of the very different nature of the work of our academic track students and those pursuing creative projects, we have had to offer two sections each of MLAS 670 and 680, one devoted to each group. Even before we moved to this structure, we were often offering as many as two sections of MLAS 670 and/or 680 to accommodate the growing number of students moving through the program. The program typically offers 14 courses per academic year, with 4 of these being the MLAS 670/680 sequence. This is an enormous commitment of faculty resources to the sequence, which prevents the program from offering other MLAS courses, exploring other areas of topical interest, and providing students with a richer array of interdisciplinary opportunity.

This structural problem is not uncommon at Universities offering MLAS-style master's programs. Many of these programs offer a range of capstone experiences in order to meet the needs of their diverse and growing student body. For example, Johns Hopkins University offers students the option of completing the degree through an MLA Portfolio Option or an MLA Graduate Project; University of Miami offers the MALS Project, the MALS Thesis (for students who qualify), or the MALS Final Portfolio option; UNC Greensboro offers a Portfolio option or the Thesis (for students who qualify "under special

circumstances"; DePaul University offers the Thesis, Practicum (i.e., Project), and Portfolio (with essay) Options. Other universities that offer Thesis/Project and Non-Project or Portfolio pathways to the degree include: Dominican University of California, Georgetown University, Loyola University of Maryland, Wake Forest University, Wesleyan University, among others.

For the growing number of students who are using the MLAS program as a vehicle for their professional development, the MLAS Capstone Project will allow them to focus their energies appropriately and take better advantage of University and faculty resources. Moving to a system of project advisement by a faculty supervisor for the Capstone Project brings to bear adequate expertise on the student's work, and an exit interview by the faculty supervisor and the student's MLAS advisor (who also serves as a second reader for the project) ensures programmatic consistency.

For MLAS students intending to pursue further graduate work, the MLAS Thesis remains available. The committee that the student establishes, with a thesis director, a second faculty reader, and a representative from the MLAS program, is a common practice for master's-level programs, and ensures both adequate expertise and appropriate oversight on quality.

For the students who pursue the Portfolio option, the opportunity to take additional seminar work meets their personal learning goals, while the narrative essay provides them with an avenue to demonstrate the interdisciplinary coherence of the intellectual journey. The portfolio narrative can also serve, as it does in other, similar programs, as a means to assess student-learning outcomes.