Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about master's degree programs and certification at the graduate level in Science Education at UGA, including the Master of Education (MEd), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degrees and the graduate-level, non-degree certification program (ND)

Please feel free to contact the Graduate Coordinator for Science Education Programs, Dr. David Jackson, d.jackson@uga.edu, or the M.A.T. Coordinator for Science Education, Dr. Georgia Hodges, georgiahodges@uga.edu, with any other questions or for clarifications of any of these answers.

What are the major differences between the MEd, MA, and MAT programs, and non-degree teacher certification at the graduate level?

- Purpose/goals
  - MEd: professional degree designed for certified, experienced science teachers and meant to emphasize practical applications to science classroom teaching and curriculum issues
  - MA: research degree intended to accommodate any student with a strong interest in more abstract questions and issues in science education
  - MAT and ND: include requirements for initial teacher certification
- Practical considerations
  - Special admissions requirements
    - MAT, ND: sufficient science coursework background in certification field (Please see the detailed listing of criteria on the MAT site.)
    - MEd: existing T-4 certification
    - MA: none
  - "Capstone" requirement
    - MAT: Certification Portfolio
    - MEd: Professional Portfolio
    - MA: educational research thesis
    - ND: none beyond certification requirements
  - Minimum total credit hours required
    - MA: 30
    - MEd: 36
    - MAT: 51
    - ND: 33
      - The non-degree certification option consists of the same courses as the first two academic-year semesters of the M.A.T. program.
  - Relationship to certification status
- MEd: initial (T-4 level) certification a prerequisite for admission; degree qualifies for a certification upgrade (to T-5)
- MAT: designed for those earning initial teacher certification as part of master's work; initial certification earned at the T-5 level
- ND: initial certification earned at the T-4 level, comparable to completion of undergraduate major
- MA: unrelated to certification status – certification not required for admission; degree does not qualify for certification upgrade

**How long does it usually take to complete the program?**
- MEd, MAT, or MA requirements can potentially be completed in 1 full-time year (including a Summer semester) if the program is started in either Fall or Spring.
- ND requirements can be completed in 2 full-time academic-year semesters, so as little as 9 months if started in Fall.
- MEd students in Science Education are almost universally part-time and usually take 2 to 4 years, taking only classes that meet in Summer Semester and in the evening hours during the academic year.

**Can I complete a master's degree or certification program part-time, while keeping my current teaching job or another full-time job?**
- Yes, in the case of the MEd or MA programs. All Science Education courses intended primarily for graduate students, and most others typically included in these two program, are scheduled either on weekday evenings during the Fall and Spring Semesters, or during the Summer Semester, so as not to conflict with the typical core schedule of practicing classroom teachers.
- No, in the case of the MAT and non-degree certification programs, because the Student Teaching experience requires full-time attention for one entire (15-week) semester. The “Block 1,” “Methods” courses taken in the academic-year semester preceding student teaching also preclude truly full-time employment on a traditional work-week schedule, since the combined time commitment for these courses is 8:00-11:00am on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
- Important bureaucratic note: At UGA all graduate studies must be fairly continuous and cannot, for instance, be pursued exclusively during the Summer Semester. The Graduate School’s Continuous Enrollment Policy requires enrollment for at least 3 credit hours of coursework during at least two of the three semesters (Fall, Spring, Summer) of each academic year cycle, until degree requirements are met.

**What is the cost of tuition?**
- At this writing (Fiscal Year 2014-15), the standard graduate in-state tuition rate was listed as $337 per credit hour. All UGA students are also charged $1123 in miscellaneous fees per semester if enrolled in two or more courses (6 hours or more), or $873 if enrolled only one course. Please check the UGA Bursar’s Office web site for specific and up-to-date information.
- For full-time students, enrollment beyond 12 hours per semester does not incur extra tuition charges (in other words, enrollment for 15-18 hours of credit, which
is common for M.A.T. students in their first two semesters or for non-degree certification students, requires paying for only 12 hours' worth of tuition). Currently this full-time, in-state tuition rate is $4044 per semester.

- Out-of-state tuition rates are approximately 3 times as high. Upon moving from another state, in general one must live in Georgia for one full year as a non-student in order to establish legal residency and thus qualify for in-state tuition rates. If this issue is relevant it is advisable to check with the Bursar’s Office directly for details.

**What sources of financial aid are commonly available for master’s and/or certification programs?**

- Unfortunately, relatively few.
  - Georgia's former HOPE Teacher Scholarship Loan program, which was extremely popular with our master's and certification students in the past, has been "on hiatus" since 2010, and realistically our faculty do not expect that future state budgets will reinstate its funding in the near future.
  - Occasionally, grant-funded programs provide financial aid aimed primarily at MAT students. Recent examples about which current applicants may have heard include the Noyce Fellowship program (funded by the National Science Foundation) and the UGA-Clarke County Schools' Teach to Learn program (funded by the U.S. Department of Education's "Race to the Top" initiative), however both of these programs have ended. Whenever such programs are available to UGA students, a call for applications/nominations will be prominently featured in multiple locations on this web site, as has been true in the past.
  - In extremely rare circumstances, full-time MEd or MA students in Science Education may be eligible for a Graduate Assistantship appointment, especially if they have a substantial record of full-time science teaching experience, although in nearly all years budget constraints make these positions open only to full-time doctoral students in our department. Assistantships include both a cash stipend and a waiver of all but a nominal tuition charge, and are only available to full-time students. Miscellaneous fees must still be paid each semester by students with any assistantship appointment.
  - A very limited number of unusually highly qualified applicants who intend to be full-time students may be nominated by the Graduate Coordinator for competitive special assistantships funded directly by the Graduate School, which include the same tuition waiver and typically a higher level of stipend. Nominations are usually made in February and are only accepted for applicants already admitted to the Graduate School and the program.
  - A limited but substantial number of unusually highly qualified students who are residents of other states may be nominated by the Graduate Coordinator for a Regents Out-of-State Tuition Waiver (ROOSTW) award, through which the Graduate School subsidizes the very substantial difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates for any of our
graduate programs. ROOSTW awards usually must begin in Fall Semester. Nominations are usually made late in Spring Semester and are only accepted for applicants already admitted to the Graduate School and the program. Part-time students are eligible, although preference is customarily given to full-time students.

What background is expected for admission to science teacher certification programs as a graduate student?

- It is not assumed that graduate students seeking certification have taken any previous education courses. Besides the minimum basic standards for admission to the UGA Graduate School, the most important requirement is a strong coursework background in one of the science fields that correspond to the initial Georgia Secondary Science teacher certification fields – Biology, Chemistry, Physics, or Earth/Space Science.
- If you hold a bachelor’s or graduate degree with a major in one of these core science fields you should be sufficiently prepared. If your academic background is in a science-related field (e.g., most commonly, Agricultural Sciences, Exercise Science, Allied Health Sciences), or especially if your undergraduate major was largely unrelated to science, you may be required to take one or more undergraduate-level science courses before starting the professional education course part of the program (“Block 1”: ESCI 3450-6450-6460). If you have little or no science course background, it is possible but potentially very time-consuming to do all of the necessary "makeup" science coursework. (Please see the detailed listing of criteria on the MAT site.) These requirements are considerably less extensive and specific than the science content coursework required of our undergraduate Science Education majors, who would be your academic peers in certification coursework and fieldwork.

Can I earn "Broad Field" Secondary Science certification, or am I restricted to a single science subject?

- Students in our programs directly earn only initial single-field certification (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Earth/Space Science) through UGA. They may earn “Broad Field” certification, but only in addition to initial single-field certification, and by dealing directly with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC).
- [If you care to learn about politics:] The problem is one of conflicting philosophies and jurisdictions among state agencies. University System of Georgia institutions are prevented by a Board of Regents rule from granting initial certification in Broad Field. You must qualify in one of the specific fields (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Earth/Space Science) first, through our program, and may then add Broad Field certification by passing the additional GACE test and applying directly to the PSC. There is no Earth Science GACE test, so students gaining their initial certification in that field take the Broad Field test for their initial certification. Those being initially certified in Biology, Chemistry, or Physics are strongly advised to take the additional test and apply to add on Broad Field certification in this manner. Despite the best intentions underlying the Board
of Regents' policy (all secondary science teachers should have special expertise in their specific subject), very recent experience at some schools with which our programs have a close relationship has indicated that teachers holding Broad Field Secondary Science certification are the more likely to both obtain and retain a job than those holding only single-subject certification.

Can I complete certification or a master's degree largely or wholly online?

- No, not yet. There are a slowly increasing number of graduate-level courses given on an online basis that may be applied to master's requirements in Science Education. Prominent examples include several Educational Psychology courses, including the entire sequence leading to a Gifted Education endorsement, and the most general and basic Special Education course. The Science Education program taught a master’s course in hybrid/blended format (partly face-to-face, partly on an asynchronous online basis) for the first time in Summer 2014, and the development of an online degree program may be on the horizon, but is not yet realized.

- An M.A.T. program for which all formal coursework is online is available through the Board of Regents, under the combined auspices of several other state institutions, including Columbus State, Georgia Southern, Kennesaw State, University of West Georgia, and Valdosta State. This program is coordinated by Columbus State and is listed as typically requiring five to six semesters, and still requires very extensive (900 hours) personal presence in schools near one of these institutions for Student Teaching and other field experiences, so it does not seem compatible with holding a non-teaching-related full-time job with traditional hours.

What are the basic procedures and requirements for application?

- All graduate students in Science Education must apply online to the UGA Graduate School. Required application materials include transcripts from all institutions from which you have earned a degree, three letters of recommendation, and, for degree programs, a Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score report. Note that original, official transcripts and GRE score reports must be sent directly to the UGA Graduate School (not to the Science Education office, and copies of any kind are unacceptable), and that the Educational Testing Service will issue GRE reports only for tests taken in the last 5 years.

- For degree program applicants, the online application provides a facility to request via automated e-mail that writers of recommendation letters complete the process online. For non-degree applicants, or for those simply preferring to solicit or submit letters in hard-copy form, a cover sheet for letters of recommendation is also available on the Graduate School web site.

What are the minimum objective standards for admission?

- Minimum objective standards for master’s program admission established by the UGA Graduate School and the Science Education Program include:
  - an undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale)
a combined Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score (verbal + quantitative) of at least
  - 950 on the scale used before August, 2011 ("SAT-type," 200-800 for each portion), including a minimum of 400 on the verbal portion
  - 292 on the current scale, a minimum of 146 each on the verbal and quantitative portions

• Deviations from these minimum quantitative standards are sometimes possible, if the Science Education faculty believe, and can successfully argue to the Graduate School, that an applicant's subjective qualifications are truly unusually outstanding (e.g., exceptionally strong letters of recommendation, unusually impressive accomplishments related to a current or possible career in science education).

• In the case of applicants whose undergraduate GPA falls slightly short of the 3.0 standard but who have been more successful in previous graduate coursework (either at UGA or elsewhere), all graduate and undergraduate credit hours may be combined in GPA calculations in order to reach this standard.

• The Board of Regents requires any student enrolling in any teacher certification program at any University System of Georgia institution to have an undergraduate GPA of at least 2.5. This requirement also applies for non-degree ("certification only") applications to our program, and is completely inflexible. The verbal GRE standard of 400 or 146 is also considered absolute by the Board of Regents for all teacher education programs.

• The final decision in all admissions decisions lies formally with the Graduate School, although recommendations from programs/departments are approved in a vast majority of cases.

Can I earn initial teacher certification on a non-degree basis?

• Yes. You may choose to fulfill only the minimum requirements for T-4 certification (the same credential earned by completing an undergraduate major) and not apply for or enroll in the MAT program. Common reasons for doing so include: already having earned a masters (or even doctoral) degree in a scientific one; desire to complete a program in only two full-time, academic-year semesters; or desire to minimize tuition costs.

How do application or admissions requirements, procedures, or policies differ for non-degree students?

• Non-degree applicants are not required to submit standardized test scores. Non-degree applicants to Science Education, however, are still required to submit three letters of recommendation. Since this is contrary to the default assumption of the designers of the Graduate School's application web site, that site’s feature for requesting and receiving online recommendations is not available for non-degree applications. Therefore recommendations should be solicited using either a paper or electronic copy of the separate cover sheet, and mailed directly to Dr. Georgia Hodges, MAT Coordinator, at the address at the bottom of this page, or scans sent as an e-mail attachment to georgiahodges@uga.edu.
Can I start a master's and/or certification program at any time of the year, or only when the academic year begins in the Fall?

- Currently, all programs may be started during any semester – Fall, Spring, or Summer. Science Education courses leading to certification (Block 1: Methods and Block 2: Student Teaching) are offered during both academic year semesters but not in the Summer.

Can I continue as a full-time master's degree student immediately upon completion of an undergraduate degree in science education or completion of certification at the graduate level?

- Yes, although note the following differences between programs that make this option advisable in some cases but not others:
  - New Professional Standards Commission rules do not permit certification upgrades (from T-4 to T-5) without first gaining full-time teaching experience. Therefore for graduates of either an undergraduate major or a graduate certification-only program it makes no sense to continue as a full-time student through completion of an MEd degree. Therefore:
    - The most common approach is to find employment as a teacher after completion of certification and complete MEd coursework on a part-time basis. This is advantageous in two ways:
      - financially, because of the income and seniority gained from working as a teacher as soon as possible; and
      - academically, because practical experience beyond student teaching provides a context and perspective that most students and instructors consider a valuable asset in master’s-level courses.
    - A partial exception to this advice applies to those graduating with an undergraduate degree and/or certification in the middle of a school year (at the end of Fall Semester) – it may make good practical sense to get a “head start” on MEd coursework on a full-time basis for Spring and/or Summer semester only, before beginning a teaching job in the Fall.

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