

Limitations on converting 503 Thesis and 501 Research credits

In any master's degree program that offers both thesis and non-thesis options, there is always the possibility that students will begin working on a thesis but then change to a non-thesis option (or vice versa). Students working on a thesis must take 6 to 9 credits of 503 Thesis. Only 503 credits can be used to meet the thesis requirement, and 503 Thesis credits cannot be used to meet any other requirement (project, internship, etc.). Students who make the change between thesis and non-thesis options typically want credits they have earned under one option to be converted to credits that can be used in their new option. The only change of this kind that PSU will allow is conversion of 503 Thesis credits to 501 Research credits or vice versa. (If a student changes from a thesis to project option, 503 Thesis credits can be converted to 501 Research credits, which can then be used in place of 506 Project credits. If a student changes from a project to thesis option, 506 Project credits can never be converted to 503 Thesis credits or anything else.)

These changes are **not routine** for Registration and Records to make. They are time consuming and can be problematic. Moreover, they are often preventable; we know that students frequently continue to register for 503 Thesis credits even after the determination has been made to switch to a project option, on the recommendation of advisers and departments, based on the assumption that the credits can "simply" be converted later. As indicated above, these changes are not simple.

The following limitations were implemented Fall 2005:

- No credits will be converted unless the change is necessary for graduation. OGS will often hold conversion requests until the time of graduation in order to determine whether the change is actually necessary for graduation.
- No 501 Research or 503 Thesis credits will be converted that are more than two years old at the time the conversion request is made.
- A maximum of 12 credits of 503 Thesis can be converted to 501 Research. (Twelve is the maximum number of 501 Research, 502 Independent Study, and 505 Reading and Conference combined which can be applied to a 45 credit degree.)
- A maximum of 9 credits of 501 Research can be converted to 503 Thesis. (Nine is the maximum number of 503 Thesis credits which can be applied toward a master's degree.)
- Credits cannot be split during the conversion process. For example, if a student has 4-credit section of 503 Thesis, but only needs 2 credits of 501 Research in order to graduate, the 4-credit section will not be split into a 2-credit section of 503 and a 2-credit section of 501. In this instance we would allow all 4 credits of 503 to be converted to 501 even if the limits above are exceeded.

If a student takes many 503 Thesis credits over a number of years, then switches to a non-thesis option, the limitations above could result in several credits of 503 Thesis remaining on the transcript forever with a grade of IP. Nevertheless, this is an accurate reflection of the student's academic history, namely that she or he began a thesis but did not complete it. The best way to avoid this situation is for the initial decision about whether to pursue a thesis or non-thesis option to be made with careful departmental advising and for students to correctly register for either thesis or project credits as soon as the decision to change options is made.