

Requirements for Participation in Commencement

Current Policy: UMW policy currently stipulates that students must meet all requirements for graduation, except one class, in order to participate in the May commencement ceremony.

Issue: This policy prevents some seniors from participating in commencement, despite being very close to meeting all requirements for graduation.

Proposal: UMW policy should be amended to increase flexibility by allowing students who have satisfied all requirements for graduation except for three classes to participate in the commencement ceremony.

Rationale: This change would ensure that seniors who are very close to graduation, and who will finish their degree requirements over the summer, will not be prevented from participating in commencement. For instance, current policy prevents a 4th year student from participating in the graduation ceremony even if he or she has met all general education requirements and all class requirements for the major, but is only short five of the 120 total credit hours needed to graduate. Changing UMW commencement policy would give students in this situation the option of participating in the ceremony.

Making this change would be in the interest of promoting diversity and inclusion at UMW. It is important to remember that a sizable and growing segment of our student population arrive as transfer students. This means that they are often starting their time with transfer credits that do not neatly link up with standard formulas for what it means to be a sophomore, junior, or senior. In other words, these students may be more likely to need to take two or three classes in the summer session in order to graduate. Nevertheless, participation in commencement might be very meaningful to such students. Indeed, if they are first generation college students, the experience would likely be deeply significant to both them and their families. As UMW strives to become a more diverse and inclusive institution, it should consider this policy change.

Regardless of the students' backgrounds, it is in the best interest of the university to allow seniors near graduation an opportunity to participate in commencement. It is vital for UMW to maintain good relationships with students who have invested so much time and money to pursue their degrees here. Denying students an opportunity to participate in commencement, despite being extremely close to meeting all requirements for graduation, does not achieve this goal.