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MEMO

TO: NIV consular officials, CBP inspectors, others
FROM: Michael Bustle, Director, PDSO
DATE: 2010
RE: Length of Program Dates on the Form I-20

NC State University offers masters degrees in more than 100 different disciplines in one of 10 different colleges. Some curricula require research and the writing of a thesis while others are composed of coursework only. Some curricula require 2 years, some 3 years, and still others are designed to be completed in 1 academic year.

Most masters programs can be completed in 2 full academic years for students making normal progress and registering for a full courseload. The institutional practice at NC State University is to issue a visa certificate (Form I-20) for the F-1 student visa for a period of 3 years which is enough time for practically all of the international master's level students to complete their program. The length of study on the visa certificate is for 3 years, but the visa certificate is then shortened to the actual graduation (or thesis submission) date when the student is nearing completion. Overseas applicants for graduate programs who are offered academic admission are asked to document the full amount of funding for the first year only and this is reflected on the Form I-20. Admitted students are then required to demonstrate this amount of funding when they submit the visa application at a US consulate overseas.

While it is not currently practical, given our current technical and resource limitations, for each I-20 form to be customized with different begin and end dates for more than a thousand different admitted students in many different programs, we have received confirmation from several departments that the master's curricula in their departments do not require more than 4 semesters. An example would be those non-thesis programs in Computer Science or Electrical and Computer Engineering, where typical students complete in 3 or 4 semesters. Students in these programs can finish in 2 years.

Consular officials, CBP inspectors, bank and loan officers, etc., are asked to **not** require students to document 3 full years of funding when applying for the F-1 visa, but only funding for the first year. We would be happy to respond to any questions or concerns you may have about this widely accepted practice among US universities. Thank you.