

HSSEAS Engineer Degree

As stated in the Academic Senate Regulations regarding the Engineer Degree, the purpose of this degree is to provide advanced training and competence in the Engineering Field above the M.S. graduate training. However, the Engineer Degree does not require the research effort and orientation involved in a Ph.D. dissertation. The 2020-2021 UCLA General Catalog provide the following description of the Engineer Degree:

“The Engineer degree represents considerable advanced training and competence in the engineering field but does not require the research effort involved in a PhD dissertation...Requirements for the Engineer degree are identical to those of the PhD degree up to and including the oral preliminary examination, except that the Engineer degree is based on coursework. The minimum requirement is 15 (at least nine graduate) courses beyond the bachelor’s degree, with at least six courses in the major field (minimum of four graduate courses) and at least three in each minor field (minimum of two graduate courses in each).

The PhD and Engineer degree programs are administered interchangeably, so that a student in the PhD program may exit with an Engineer Degree or pick up the Engineer degree en route to the PhD degree; similarly, a student in the Engineer degree program may continue to the PhD after receiving the Engineer degree. The time spent in either of the two programs may also be applied toward the minimum residence requirement and time limitation for the other program”

The Engineering Degree was established during the period in which the School of Engineering and Applied Science had a unified curricula. However, as Departments reverted to become independent in terms of their programs and their accreditation by ABET, Departmental Ph.D. Degrees became the norm in the School of Engineering. The Engineer Degree is essentially a “left over” from the early days and served the purpose of catering to those individuals who were still following the unified curricula as different departments were making the transition away from the unified curricula. While the intent was to phase out the Engineer Degree, it appears that this was not a top priority since there were very few students who actually followed this path. For example, during the period of 2014-2020 only three graduate students were awarded the Engineering Degree.

The Ph.D. and M.S. Degrees are both highly regarded in the engineering community and are the acceptable norms in higher engineering education. Today, graduate students can pursue their Ph.D. Degree objectives at HSSEAS without having to go through the M.S. Degree route. Also, students who are in the Ph.D. program and then decide not to continue in the Ph.D. path, have the option of converting to the M.S. Degree path. Moreover, HSSEAS has a phenomenally successful online M.S. program catered to those who wish to pursue advanced engineering graduate studies but are unable to be on campus in-person.

Given the above, one cannot but conclude that having the Engineer Degree which is unusual (and uncommon in most Engineering Schools) may dilute the stature of the Ph.D. degree and create confusion, in addition to requiring resources for a degree program which has little attraction.