

SANS TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE

ADMISSIONS PROCESS GUIDE

WAIVERS FOR SANS CLASSES AND GIAC CERTIFICATIONS

This Guide is designed to address questions by prospective students who seek advanced standing upon admission because they hold one or more GIAC certifications relevant to a master's program, or have taken a relevant SANS Institute class in the past. This guide should answer the questions, "What waivers will be granted for these experiences and qualifications, and under what conditions will they be granted?" This document supplements the more general [Policy Regarding Transfers of Credit and Waivers for Courses or Course Requirements](#), as published on our website and included in the Student Handbook.

Generally, waivers may be granted when students have previously taken a relevant SANS Institute class or GIAC exam, but each waiver requires that a student had taken the class or exam within a specified period of time prior to program admission. Waivers will be granted from having to re-take a particular SANS Institute class when the prospective student has already taken that class within the two years prior to admission. Waivers will be granted from a requirement to take a particular GIAC exam (and therefore the required SANS Institute class associated with that exam) when the prospective student took and passed the relevant GIAC exam within the past three years. Note that this is not associated with whether the GIAC certification is considered 'current' or 'renewed', but related solely to the passing of the exam itself in the past three years.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The SANS Technology Institute requires graduate students to take SANS Institute classes taught by our faculty and to pass certain GIAC certification exams. Unlike most graduate programs, non-matriculated students can take the same SANS Institute classes and GIAC exams as non-credit experiences prior to applying to the master's program. This document guides the prospective applicant through the rationale and process associated with determining which of these prior experiences waive the related SANS Institute class or GIAC exam requirements within the program, after a student is accepted and enrolled.

There are two primary drivers that govern whether a waiver will be granted for a SANS Institute class or GIAC exam that has been taken in the past:

1. *The relevancy of performance on a past GIAC exam is reduced by the passage of time.* The field of information technology changes quickly, and our courses and GIAC exams are frequently updated to reflect these changes. At the time of admissions, the content of the former class or certification exam must be considered fully relevant by the SANS Technology Institute.
 - a. Generally, we deem a GIAC certification exam *taken and passed within the three years prior to admission* to be sufficiently current and applicable and therefore those exams qualify for a waiver of that exam (and the associated SANS Institute class) in the program.
 - b. Relative to a SANS Institute class where the student didn't take the relevant GIAC exam, the student will receive a waiver for the class only if it was taken within the past two years.
2. *There is a limit on the number of waivers that can be granted in order to maintain the integrity of the progression of courses in the program.* The master's programs are formal graduate-level curricula, designed as an integrated and holistic progression of course experiences that build upon each other throughout the student's experience: Courses assume a timed relationship between classes, exams, papers, and presentations; research papers are meant to be written while the course material from class is still fresh; presentations of those research papers are meant to be completed sequentially over time to allow for assessment, feedback, and continued improvement; and, most importantly, students are presumed to be gaining working experience in their jobs while they are advancing through the program,

and their work experience is a presumed and integrated part of their learning. While certain variances from the established program design and progression are acceptable, too many variances and waivers cause harmful fragmentation of the learning experience. To minimize this fragmentation and maintain the integrity of the program offering, waivers may be granted for up to, but not more than, one-quarter (25%) of the total number of credit hours or credit-hour equivalents required by the program.

It is important to highlight that the SANS Technology Institute requires in most cases that a student has *actually taken the exam* in the past three years, rather than looking solely to whether the GIAC certification is considered current. The SANS Technology Institute establishes criteria beyond whether the GIAC certification is current because the applicant must be able to prove that their knowledge in the area remains current. Because GIAC's procedures for certification renewal include the application of Certification Maintenance Units (a common and accepted practice for certifications), there are instances where a certification may be renewed by taking additional coursework in an area of information security unrelated to the original exam, and therefore the renewal of the certification by these means might not confirm that the student's skills in the original area have not atrophied.

There are a limited number of mechanisms that can establish a waiver for particular GIAC exams taken more than three years ago. Successful completion of certain GIAC exams within the past three years may establish a waiver for other, related GIAC exams the student also holds as current and renewed. These are:

- Applicants that hold a current or renewed GSEC certification but took the exam more than three years ago may receive a waiver for that GSEC exam in ISE 5150 if they have taken and passed the GCED within the past three years.
- Applicants that hold a current or renewed GCFE certification but took the exam more than three years ago may receive a waiver for that GCFE exam in ISE 6420 if they have taken and passed the GCFA within the past three years.
- Applicants that hold a current or renewed GPEN certification but took the exam more than three years ago may receive a waiver for that GPEN exam in ISE 6320 if they have taken and passed the GXPN within the past three years.
- Finally, all applicants that hold a current GSE certification and will be granted waivers for the GSEC, GCIA, or GCIH certification exams, regardless of whether they took the related exam(s) more than three years ago.

To minimize the difficulties associated with re-taking any exams, students whose GIAC certifications are current but who have not actually taken the exam in the past three years will be able to take the relevant GIAC exam at a greatly reduced price of \$125, relative to the standard certification renewal charge. If indeed their skills are current, passing the exam and establishing their grade should not present a burden.

GIAC WAIVERS: ESTABLISHING ELIGIBILITY

There are many combinations and permutations of SANS Institute classes, GIAC certifications, and GIAC Gold papers in the program. Determining how your own particular set of experiences impacts eligibility for waivers requires a detailed review of the timing and nature of your classes and certifications. The worksheet on the next page should help organize your data, assist in the communication of your waiver request during the admission process, and serve as a base for establishing what course elements or courses should be taken upon matriculation. You will need to supply these data as part of your application to the master's program. You should find the information required to fill out the worksheet in your SANS Institute portal account.

The worksheet lists all required and elective courses in the MSISE program that require a SANS class or GIAC certification exam. To fill out the worksheet:

- For all the SANS classes you have taken that are part of required or elective courses in the MSISE program, enter the date that you began the course. If this date is less than two years ago, the requirement that you take the course after you matriculate will be waived.
 - For example, if you took SANS SEC 401 beginning on April 1, 2012, but did not take the associated GSEC certification exam, you will not need to re-take SANS SEC 401 as part of the requirements of ISE 5150, but you will still need to take the GSEC certification exam and write the Editing Gold paper assignment.
- For all the GIAC certifications you hold that are current, enter the date of the last time you took the exam, and note whether it is current/renewed. For courses where you have taken and passed the exam in the past three years, you are eligible for a waiver of both the required SANS class and the GIAC exam. For ISE 5800 and any of the elective courses, a waiver for taking the GIAC exam also waives the requirement to take the associated course entirely.
 - For example, if you had taken SEC 503 in January, 2012, and then taken and passed the GCIA exam on April 20, 2012, the requirements of taking the class and exam again as part of ISE 5400 would be waived. However, you would still need to write the associated Gold paper to receive credit for ISE 5400.
- Relative to ISE 5150 and ISE 5400, if you anticipate being eligible for a waiver for the course and exam, and if you have already written a Gold paper associated with that certification, you will be eligible to receive a waiver for taking ISE 5150 and/or ISE 5400.

Completing the worksheet should enable you to identify which GIAC exam requirements will be waived and which are the ones that you may re-take for the reduced price (e.g. if the certification is current but the exam was not taken within the past three years).