

Guidelines for Developing and Implementing Dual Bachelor's-Master's Degree Programs

at

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Faculty may use this document as a resource that provides a set of guidelines for the development and implementation of academic programs that combine undergraduate work and master's degree work. Students are increasingly requesting flexibility in earning more than one degree from the University, including a desire to participate in a coherent course of study leading to both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. While this scenario is possible for some students – in particular those who arrive with numerous AP, IB, or other college credits – there are guidelines that must be met when considering such programs.

The University encourages dual programs in appropriate disciplines to provide exceptionally strong students with substantive educational opportunities that enhance the quality of these students' experiences.

Program Requirements

All policies and guidelines governing both the graduate and undergraduate degree programs must still be met in the dual degree program, including admissions standards, credit hour requirements, course credit transfer policies, residency, registration and enrollment restrictions, and graduation requirements. Individual school and external accreditation requirements must also be met.

The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is the accrediting body for the University. SACS requires the following:

- 120 semester credit hours at minimum at the baccalaureate level
- 30 semester credit hours at minimum at the post-baccalaureate/graduate level
- The institution's master's, professional, and doctoral degree programs are progressively more advanced in academic content than undergraduate programs

In a practical sense, this core requirement means the undergraduate degree and master's degree must be met with at minimum 150 credit hours total (120 + 30 that cannot overlap or "double-count").

While SACS does not mandate the timing of coursework, several campus units have restrictions in place concerning time spent in residence to earn a degree and the amount of course credit that can be transferred into or out of their programs. Most critical to these guidelines is the Graduate School's 20% rule, which allows transfer of a maximum 20% of the hours required to earn the master's degree (i.e., only 6 credit hours toward a 30-hour Master's degree may be transferred into the Carolina graduate degree program).

The Administrative Board of the Graduate School has given its approval to increase the 20% course credit transfer limit to no more than 30% for UNC-Chapel Hill approved dual degree

*For additional questions, please contact the Office of Undergraduate Education
in the College of Arts and Sciences or the Graduate School.*

programs at the master's level. It is therefore possible to treat a dual bachelor's-master's degree program similarly. This means that 9 credit hours toward a 30-hour Master's degree may be taken while pursuing the Carolina undergraduate degree and transferred over to count toward the Carolina graduate degree program. The transferred credits may not count toward the undergraduate degree requirements.

Students must fulfill all other requirements for both degrees, including applying to the undergraduate major when appropriate, an official application and admittance to the master's program, core coursework, program credit hour requirements above the SACS minimums, special projects and seminars, and a thesis or approved substitute. Below are several examples to illustrate possible dual degree program tracks.

Example 1: An advanced undergraduate student is in a program that requires 120 hours for the undergraduate degree and 30 hours for the master's degree. The student may take up to 9.0 hours (up to 30% of the master's hours) of graduate level coursework prior to earning the bachelor's degree; however, this must be in addition to the 120 hours required for the bachelor's degree. The student may earn up to 129 hours while enrolled as an undergraduate, and upon official application and admittance to the master's program, must then earn at least 21 hours while enrolled as a master's student.

Example 2: An advanced undergraduate student is in a program that requires 122 hours for the undergraduate degree and 30 hours for the master's degree. The student may take up to 9.0 hours (up to 30% of the master's hours) of graduate level coursework prior to earning the bachelor's degree; however, this must be in addition to the 122 hours required for the bachelor's degree. The student may earn up to 131 hours while enrolled as an undergraduate, and upon official application and admittance to the master's program, must then earn at least 21 hours while enrolled as a master's student.

Example 3: An advanced undergraduate student is in a program that requires 122 hours for the undergraduate degree and 36 hours for the master's degree. The student may take up to 10.0 hours (up to 30% of the master's hours) of graduate level coursework prior to earning the bachelor's degree; however, this must be in addition to the 122 hours required for the bachelor's degree. The student may earn up to 132 hours while enrolled as an undergraduate, and upon official application and admittance to the master's program, must then earn at least 26 hours while enrolled as a master's student.

Program Approval

All dual bachelor's-master's degree programs will follow normal campus guidelines for review and approval of new academic proposals. All home academic school approval processes must be followed. The Graduate School will also route the proposal through its Administrative Board before a program can be established and offered to students. The home school or unit for the undergraduate degree should be consulted simultaneously with the Graduate School.

Sponsoring programs should consult with appropriate faculty and staff as early as possible to ensure program development accounts for all guidelines and policies in effect. Both units can assist with reviewing the proposal and confirming how all policies will apply.

Examples of approved proposals are available on request from the Graduate School. Proposals should include the following:

- Describe the rationale for the proposed dual degree program. Provide background and context.
- Provide a brief overview of the current academic requirements for both degrees.
- What is the proposed structure for the dual program, including academic requirements, faculty involvement, administrative support, and resources?
- Discuss the guidelines for admission to the dual program, including proposed timelines for both degrees, any financial aid considerations for students, and exception requests to usual graduate admissions practices.
- Describe the advising and support systems for prospective and current students.
- Provide sample programs of study for students, including variations depending on the students' backgrounds (e.g., AP credits).
- Include any other supporting materials to assist with a thorough review of the request, including letters of support from participating campus units as appropriate.

Programs will be reviewed periodically as part of the Office of the Provost's Program Review process occurring approximately every eight years.

Program Implementation

Undergraduate Advising

- Programs are encouraged to provide strong advising for students interested in dual bachelor's-master's degree programs. It may be appropriate to identify one faculty member as the director of the dual program to oversee advising and tracking of prospective and current students.
- Students and faculty should work together to determine how individual backgrounds affect degree completion. Because the curriculum timing will be tailored to each student, it will be important to provide timely and focused advising so students can complete both degrees according to schedule. It is expected that the undergraduate degree will be completed in no more than four years.

Curriculum Considerations

- Programs should review their curriculum structure and course offerings to ensure students can complete both degrees in a timely fashion. For example, if a program admits an undergraduate student to the master's degree program in a spring term, are sufficient graduate courses offered to make adequate progress?
- Programs should also consider the proper sequencing of courses, especially when some advanced courses are only offered once a year or once every two years.
- The SACS accreditation guidelines discussed above must be adhered to when advising

students about curricular requirements for both degrees. **The same course cannot be counted toward both degrees.**

Graduate Admissions

- Programs should consider if they want more than one admissions deadline to accommodate undergraduate students beginning the master's program outside the usual sequence. For example, if an undergraduate student earns the bachelor's degree after the seventh semester of study, the student will need to apply to the master's program for spring admission.
- As part of their dual program proposals, programs may request a waiver of specific graduate admissions requirements, such as the GRE exam or letters of recommendation. Note that approval for these waivers will be granted only for UNC-Chapel Hill undergraduates participating in the dual bachelor's-master's degree program. It will not apply to other master's program applicants from outside UNC-Chapel Hill.
- Students should work with faculty advisors in their intended program to discuss their readiness and appropriate course plan before applying to a dual bachelor's-master's degree program. Students must apply to the master's program no later than the semester they intend to earn the bachelor's degree. Typically, this would occur after the sixth, seventh, or eighth semester of study at UNC-Chapel Hill.
- The Graduate School will automatically waive application fees for UNC-Chapel Hill undergraduate students applying as part of dual bachelor's-master's degree programs.
- Upon admission to the master's program, students will maintain two active plans in the campus student information system. They will remain enrolled in their undergraduate plan until the bachelor's degree is earned. Graduate programs may rescind an admission offer to their master's degree program if the student does not successfully complete the bachelor's degree within program standards.
- Upon enrollment in the master's program, students will be classified as graduate students. Students must be classified as graduate students in the Graduate School for at least two semesters of residence credit. Appeals to waive this rule in exceptional cases will be considered on an individual basis.
- Admission to the master's program does not guarantee admission to a doctoral program. Students must be given permission to proceed to the doctoral program or submit a new application in accordance with their program's guidelines.

Financial Aid and Funding

- If students are working on requirements for the bachelor's degree, they are eligible for undergraduate financial aid, including merit and need-based grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans. Students will remain classified as undergraduates for tuition purposes until after the bachelor's degree is earned.
- Once students earn the bachelor's degree and become enrolled graduate students, they

become eligible for graduate financial aid, including limited departmental aid, work-study assistantships, and loans. Loan limits are generally higher for graduate students.

- Upon admission to master's programs, students will be eligible for Graduate School funding, including merit fellowship nominations and tuition support. The normal funding cycles, deadlines, and policies will apply.
- Undergraduate merit-based scholarships are limited to eight semesters of undergraduate study. Graduate scholarships will have different parameters, usually stated in their award letters. Need-based aid is not restricted if students remain academically eligible and enrolled in their degree programs.
- Undergraduate students should be aware of the UNC System General Administration tuition surcharge that applies if students enroll in too many undergraduate credit hours. Students should consult with their academic advisors as part of their registration planning.
- Programs should ensure prospective and current dual program students discuss their financial aid situation early with the Office of Scholarships and Student Aid and receive individualized counseling.

Note: For proposals involving *brand new* degree programs not yet authorized on campus, the campus and University System guidelines for degree program development will be in effect. Information on planning and establishing brand new graduate degrees can be found online at: <http://gradschool.unc.edu/policies/newdegree.html>