

**The Graduate School  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

**POLICY ON TRANSDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS OF STUDY**

The Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill encourages the development of programs in graduate education that are responsive to changing disciplinary, professional, economic, and social circumstances. These programs may be developed by restructuring existing academic programs across currently-defined disciplinary boundaries. In other cases, the disciplines themselves may need to be redefined. These transdisciplinary programs are the focus of this policy.

Typically, transdisciplinary programs are of three distinct types. Consideration of the following principles specific to each of the different degree types may help in selecting the type of program to be established and submitted for review.

- **Dual Degree** programs must balance structural efficiency with individual program integrity. They result in the awarding of *two degrees* from two different disciplines (for example, the JD/MPA program or the MCRP/MPH program).
  - Proposals should clearly indicate how the two degrees can be earned in ways that preserve the integrity of each of the component degree programs, while at the same time affording students a reasonably efficient program that does not simply replicate the independent programs of the two component degrees. Of particular importance is how the core content of each degree is completed as part of the dual degree curriculum.
  - Students must apply to and be accepted by both programs individually before beginning in either academic program. In a practical sense, this means that students should apply to both academic programs at the same time, or apply to the second program no later than during their first year of the first program. Dual degrees will not be awarded after the curricular requirements have already been met without initial application.
  - Students in officially recognized dual degree programs, other than the MD-PhD program, must apply to graduate for both degrees at the same time, even if the requirements for one degree are completed sooner than the second degree.
  - The administrative issue of most concern is often the number of courses allowed to be double counted from one master's degree to the other. Credit exchanges above the normal 30% level (i.e., the "30% rule" for the transfer of course credit in master's programs) are approved through a separate process detailed below.
  
- **Joint Degree** programs are those from which a *single degree* is awarded by two or more UNC constituent institutions or a UNC institution and a non-UNC educational institution who are participating in a joint degree program (for example, the PhD in Biomedical Engineering at Chapel Hill and NCSU).

- Proposals must follow the regular institutional processes for the approval of new degree programs at each participating institution before being submitted to the Board of Governors for approval.
  - Certification of the following must be agreed to by the proposing units: admission process, registration and enrollment process for students, committee process for graduate students, plan for charging and distributing tuition and fees, management of transcripts and permanent records, academic policy comparisons, and participation in graduation.
  - Strong, shared ownership of a joint degree program is crucial to its successful approval and implementation. Proposals must identify the faculty working groups that will take the lead on planning the joint program structure and curriculum, as well as take the lead on implementing the joint program across the participating institutions.
  - A joint degree must carry the name of each participating institution on student diplomas.
- **Interdisciplinary Degree** programs award a *single degree* for courses of study that involve work in multiple disciplines, but are not identified with a formal department (for example, the PhD in Materials Science).
    - Proposals must follow the regular institutional processes for the approval of new degree programs at each participating institution before being submitted to the Board of Governors for approval.
    - Proposals should place emphasis on defining the boundaries of the degree field. Intellectual coherence is critical, as is clearly defining the structure of the program (course work, practica, lab work, examinations, thesis, etc.)
    - Reviewers will be especially attentive to issues of fit between field conceptualizations and the structural integrity of the proposed program.

Great variety is present in the particular intellectual and academic needs of transdisciplinary programs of study, and The Graduate School endeavors to accommodate these needs as each case requires. There are a number of general principles typically applied in The Graduate School's review of program proposals:

- What is motivating the development of this new degree program? Provide background and environmental rationale.
- What is the intellectual and practical aim of the proposed program? Provide a rigorous account of the intended outcomes.
- What is the proposed structure for the program, including academic requirements, academic standards, faculty involvement, administrative support, and resources? What are the plans for anticipated difficulties and inherent complexities in managing interdisciplinary endeavors?

### **Proposal Submission Process**

Those who wish to propose transdisciplinary programs are encouraged to seek advice, comment, and examples when putting their proposals together. It may be useful to seek advice from students, faculty, and administrators who are involved with existing transdisciplinary

programs, particularly those within the same disciplinary family (natural sciences, medical sciences, professional schools, social sciences, humanities, and the arts). **The Graduate School should be involved as early as possible to provide guidance in the planning process.**

In the case of new *joint degrees* or *interdisciplinary degrees*, the University of North Carolina Academic Program Development Procedures will be followed. The broader themes and questions raised in this policy should be addressed in the new degree proposal documentation.

*Dual degree* proposals should first be created and approved by the appropriate groups in each participating unit. Aside from the general principles above, materials should include:

- a description of the participating units/degrees
- an overview of the existing academic course of studies, with particular emphasis on the core content for each component degree
- the rationale and demand for the new dual degree
- the structure and resource support for the new dual degree
- guidelines for academic eligibility and meeting Graduate School regulations
- the advising and support systems for students
- any other supporting materials to assist with a thorough review of the request
- A letter of support from the Chair or Director of each participating unit stating faculty support must also accompany the proposal.

Dual degree proposals should be submitted to The Graduate School for review:

1. In cases where the “exchange” (i.e., double-counting) of courses involves less than 30%, The Graduate School will bring the proposal before the Academic Policy Committee for review and approval. It is expected that most dual degree programs will fall in this range given the need for students to complete core requirements of both degrees.
2. In cases where the course credit exchange is greater than 30%, the process is the same as above, though The Graduate School will coordinate a review process by the Academic Policy Committee and the full Administrative Board of The Graduate School.
3. After its review of a submitted proposal, The Graduate School will determine whether to approve the proposal and offer feedback to the requesting units.