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Guidelines for Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's Programs

Terms

- Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs: This document refers to programs in which students share limited credits between their undergraduate and graduate degrees to facilitate completion of both degrees. Such programs are also known as 4+1 Bachelor's/Master's programs, 5 Year Programs, 5-year dual degree programs, or Combined Bachelor's/Master's programs.
- Shared credits: Graduate level credit hours taken during the undergraduate program and then applied towards graduate program requirements will be referred to as Shared credits.

Introduction and Rationale

Loyola University Chicago has long included its Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's degree programs as one of its attractions for undergraduates. Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs offer students the opportunity to integrate learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These highly selective degrees are designed for undergraduates who can accomplish master's level work at the same time as they complete their bachelor's degree. Such programs allow exceptional students to efficiently earn two degrees and jump-start their career by completing the Master's degree in less time than it would take to complete both degrees separately.

These guidelines apply to all Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs at Loyola University Chicago. These guidelines are intended to bring uniformity to current and future programs, simplify communication of requirements to students, faculty, and staff, and to raise the overall profile of these programs so that they provide Loyola's most advanced undergraduate students with an exceptional undergraduate and graduate educational experience.

These guidelines serve to

- regularize the overall structure of existing programs
- establish uniform admission standards to attract the most capable undergraduates
- set baseline expectations for coursework such that the student begins graduate coursework while still earning an undergraduate degree while preserving the rigor of the master's program
- simplify coordination amongst various offices that serve these students to improve operational efficiency and student satisfaction

Proposals for new Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs should carefully consult this document to ensure that they conform to these guidelines. Existing programs should note where they do not conform to these guidelines and submit a program modification by December of 2022, with changes effective by the fall of 2023.

Admission Requirements

Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs are designed to enhance opportunities for advanced training for Loyola's undergraduates. Admission to these programs must be competitive and will depend upon a positive review of credentials by the program's admissions committee.

Accordingly, the admission requirements for these programs may be higher than those required if the master's degree were pursued entirely after the receipt of a bachelor's degree. That is, programs may choose to have more stringent admissions requirements in addition to those minimal requirements below.

Requirements:

- Declared appropriate undergraduate major,
- By the time students begin taking graduate courses as an undergraduate, the student has completed approximately 90 credit hours, or the credit hours required in a program that is accredited by a specialty organization,¹
- A minimum cumulative GPA for coursework at Loyola that is at or above the program-specific requirements, a minimum major GPA that is at or above the program-specific requirements, and/or appropriate designated coursework for evaluation of student readiness in their discipline.²

Students not eligible for the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program (e.g., students who have not declared the appropriate undergraduate major) may apply to the master's program through the regular admissions process. Students enrolled in an Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program who choose not to continue to the master's degree program upon completion of the bachelor's degree will face no consequences.³

Ideally, a student will apply for admission (or confirm interest in proceeding towards the graduate degree in opt-out programs) as they approach 90 credit hours. Programs are encouraged to begin advising students early in their major so that they are aware of the program and, if interested, can complete their bachelor's degree requirements in a way that facilitates completion of the program. Once admitted as an undergraduate, Program Directors should ensure that students are enrolled using the plan code associated with the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program. Using the plan code associated with the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program will ensure that students may be easily identified as they move through the program. Students will not officially matriculate into the master's degree program and be labeled as a graduate student by the university, with accompanying changes to tuition and Financial Aid (see below), until the undergraduate degree has been awarded. Once admitted to the graduate program, students must

¹ Programs that have specialized accreditation will adhere to the admissions criteria provided by, or approved by, their specialized accreditors.

² The program will identify appropriate indicators of student readiness for graduate coursework (e.g., high-level performance in 300 level courses). Recognizing differences between how majors are designed, we do not specify a blanket requirement.

³ If students choose not to enroll in the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program, they still must complete all of the standard requirements associated with the undergraduate degree (e.g., a capstone).

meet the academic standing requirements of their graduate program as they complete the program curriculum.

Curriculum

Level and progression of courses. The Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs are designed to be competitive and attractive to our most capable students. Students admitted to Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs should be capable of meeting graduate level learning outcomes. Following guidance from the Higher Learning Commission, only courses taken at the 400 level or higher (including 300/400 level courses taken at the 400 level) will count toward the graduate program.^{4,5, 6} Up to 50% of the total graduate level credit hours, required in the graduate program, may come from 300/400 level courses where the student is enrolled in the 400 level of the course. Further, at least 50% of the credit hours for the graduate program must come from courses that are designed for and restricted to graduate students who have been admitted to a graduate program at Loyola (e.g., enrolled in plan code that indicates the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program, typically ending with the letter "D").⁷

In general, graduate level coursework should not be taken prior to admission into the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program. Exceptions may be granted for professional programs where curriculum for the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program is designed to begin earlier. On the recommendation of the program's Graduate Director, students may take one of their graduate level courses before they are admitted to the Accelerated Bachelors/Master's program if they have advanced abilities in their discipline and course offerings warrant such an exception.⁸ Undergraduate degree requirements outside of the major are in no way impacted by admission to an Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program.⁹

⁴ Existing Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's programs that allow courses below the 400 level to count toward the graduate degree must modify their degree requirements, with changes effective by the Fall of 2023. They may either create 300/400 level courses with additional requirements for the 400 level or replace 300 level courses with 400 level courses. Existing programs will be allowed to "teach out" students who are currently enrolled in programs that allow 300 level courses to count toward the master's degree.

⁵ If students wish to transfer credits from another university to Loyola University Chicago, the program's Graduate director will review the relevant syllabus(es) to determine whether it meets the criteria for a 400 level course or higher.

⁶ Programs with specialized accreditation requirements that allow programs to offer graduate curriculum to undergraduate students will conform to those specialized accreditation requirements.

⁷ In rare cases, the Graduate Director may authorize enrollment in a 400-level course for a highly qualified and highly motivated undergraduate, ensuring that the undergraduate's exceptional participation in the graduate class will not diminish in any way the experience of the graduate students regularly enrolled.

⁸ For example, if a particular course is only offered once every 2-3 years, and a student has demonstrated the necessary ability to be successful, the Graduate Director may allow a student to take a graduate level course to be shared prior to the student being formally admitted to the graduate program. See, also, footnote 7.

⁹ Students should not, for example, attempt to negotiate themselves out of a writing intensive requirement on the basis of admission to a graduate program.

Shared credits. Undergraduate courses (i.e., courses offered at the 300 level or below) cannot be counted as shared credits nor count towards the master's degree. Up to 50% of the total graduate level credit hours, required in the graduate program, may be counted in meeting both the undergraduate and graduate degree requirements. Of those shared credits, students in an Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program should begin their graduate program with the standard introductory course(s) for the program whenever possible. So that students may progress through the Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program in a timely manner, undergraduate programs are encouraged to design their curriculum such that a student can complete some required graduate credit hours while completing the undergraduate degree. For instance, some of the graduate curriculum should also satisfy electives for the undergraduate major.

The program's Graduate Director will designate credit hours to be shared through the advising form and master's degree conferral review process. Shared credit hours will not be marked on the undergraduate record as having a special status in the undergraduate program. They will be included in the student's undergraduate earned hours and GPA. Graduate credit hours taken during the undergraduate program will not be included in the graduate GPA calculation.

Student Advising

Programs should ensure that robust marketing and advising exists to identify qualified students early in their undergraduate career. Students should be encouraged to apply for the program at or before earning 90 credit hours. The program's Graduate Director will work with the program's Undergraduate Director to advise students on their applications. Graduate Program directors should ensure that transfer students are aware of the program and ensure they have access to advising to determine eligibility.

The Graduate Director will complete an advising form with the student's College/School/Institute's Advising office to ensure that all degree requirements of the bachelor's program are accounted for. The Graduate Director will closely monitor student enrollment in courses to ensure the proper courses are selected for degree completion. The Directors will recommend that if students are potentially interested in the Accelerated Bachelors/Master's program they enroll in the 400 level of a 300/400 level course (i.e., err on the side of more rigorous coursework).

Tuition and Financial Aid

The student will be charged undergraduate tuition until they have completed their undergraduate degree requirements. The student is eligible for undergraduate financial aid until the bachelor's degree is awarded. Once the student has earned the bachelor's degree they will matriculate into their graduate career. Upon matriculation into their graduate career, the student will be charged tuition at the graduate level and will be eligible for graduate financial aid as well as merit award consideration if the graduate program has such aid available. All undergraduate aid or scholarship awards will no longer apply once the undergraduate degree is awarded.

Graduation

Degrees are awarded sequentially. All details of undergraduate commencement are handled in the ordinary way as for all students in the School/College/Institute. Once in the graduate program, students abide by the graduation deadlines set forth by the graduate program. Students in these programs must be continuously enrolled from undergraduate to graduate degree program unless given explicit permission by their program for a gap year or approved leave of absence.

[November 2024 modification begins here] In offering the option of an Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's program, the university is making possible the acceleration of a student's graduate degree completion. It should be understood that students may not request deferral of their matriculation into the Master's degree program. If students would like to delay their graduate studies after earning the undergraduate degree, they may apply for admission to the traditional master's degree program. Any application of graduate credit earned while in the undergraduate program is subject to the policies of the graduate degree granting school.