

SPECIAL REPORT
of the
ACADEMIC MATTERS AND GRADUATE COUNCILS
concerning
GUIDELINES FOR ACCELERATED MASTER'S DEGREE OPTIONS

Presented at the
695th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
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Background

For the past several months the Provost's Office, the Graduate School, the Registrar's Office, and the Faculty Senate have been working to develop guidelines for accelerated Master's degree programs, which are sometimes known as "5-year Master's," "4+1" programs, "combined bachelor's/Master's" programs, and similar terms. The purpose of such programs is to reduce the calendar time necessary to complete a baccalaureate/Master's sequence, with a number of benefits for students, programs, and the institution. Interest in these approaches has increased dramatically, and a number of departments are developing or considering such programs.

The campus has never had formal policies or guidelines in this area, and it has been difficult to advise departments as to how to structure proposals or how proposals would be reviewed. In addition, existing policies for graduate credit transfer and the like were not designed with this kind of program in mind.

Recommended Approach

After considering programs under development at UMass Amherst and examining best practices at other institutions consensus has been reached among the participating parties on a set of guidelines for accelerated Master's programs that should provide clarity and consistency, maintain high academic standards, and provide considerable flexibility to departments wishing to put this kind of program in place. The guidelines also establish a streamlined process for developing and reviewing proposals.

Some of the key features of the guidelines:

1. Up to nine credits (twelve for high-credit programs) of graduate work taken while enrolled as an undergraduate may be counted toward both the Master's degree and the baccalaureate degree for students in an approved accelerated option (the current 6-credit general limit on transfer of credits into a graduate program remains). Total credits taken across both programs must equal at least 30 plus the minimum required for the baccalaureate degree (typically 120). Proposals may identify graduate courses to be taken while the student is enrolled as an undergraduate that will satisfy both undergraduate and graduate degree requirements, where appropriate in terms of content coverage. This approach is similar to the policy already in place for dual Master's degrees. An illustration of examples of course overlap is attached.
2. If they wish, departments can tailor their accelerated options for certain populations of students (e.g., Five College students) or limit them to certain concentrations (e.g., non-thesis option).
3. Establishing an accelerated option does not create a new degree program, nor does it alter the requirements of any degree. Students will enter accelerated Master's options through the standard graduate admissions process, but with a somewhat earlier decision process.
4. Proposals may be submitted through a one-page template (draft attached).

This policy should clarify standards and practices, streamline the approval process, and allow departments, students and the institution to operate with a common set of expectations. The recommended approach provides appropriate flexibility but also maintains a clear focus on high academic standards, and will place UMass Amherst in the mainstream of practice among leading public universities.

MOVED: That the Faculty Senate approve the Guidelines for Accelerated Master's Degree Options, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 10-043.
45-10

Definition

An accelerated Master's degree option is an explicit arrangement of graduate admissions and courses and other requirements to enable a student to complete the requirements for a baccalaureate degree and a specified Master's degree in less calendar time than would be required through normal sequential enrollment. Although such arrangements are sometimes referred to as "five-year" programs, "4+1 programs," or "combined bachelor's/Master's programs," it is important to keep in mind that they do not refer to a distinct or different kind of degree program. The reduction in calendar time does not result from a reduction in content. The requirements for the bachelor's and Master's degrees remain unchanged; what changes is how they are organized.

Operation

There are a number of ways in which calendar time may be reduced. Some involve methods of completing graduate requirements prior to formal enrollment in a graduate program, and some simply involve scheduling techniques.

Early completion. This approach allows the undergraduate student to get a "head start" by satisfying requirements for the Master's degree before actually enrolling in the graduate program. In considering early completion the following should be kept in mind:

- An accelerated Master's option requires minimum total credits, taken across both programs, equal to 30 plus the minimum baccalaureate credit requirement. The typical undergraduate degree requires 120 credits, so the credit minimum for the accelerated option would be 150 unless a higher undergraduate requirement applies.
- The Graduate School will accept for transfer nine credits into any approved accelerated Master's degree option, and proposals for twelve credits will be considered for accelerated options involving Master's degrees of more than 36 credits. The courses eligible for transfer must be described in the proposal.
- Graduate courses may satisfy requirements for the baccalaureate degree if: 1) they fulfill content requirements as appropriate (i.e., they are at least equivalent to required undergraduate courses); and 2) they are specifically identified in the proposal and in the student's conditional acceptance to the Master's program (see below). Required graduate internships must be completed while enrolled as a graduate student.
- Undergraduates may register for courses at the 500 level without special permission. Undergraduate enrollment in courses at the 600-level and above is also possible through the normal registration process with permission of the instructor and the program. It is expected that programs will provide necessary access to courses for undergraduate students participating in an accelerated option.
- At all times it must be clear to the student whether and how a course will apply to a graduate degree. Programs should exercise care to emphasize that only courses specified in an approved accelerated option will be automatically applied to the Master's degree, and only if taken after conditional acceptance to the Master's program. The Graduate School will consider any other requests for transfer of credit under normal procedures.

Scheduling. Another way of accelerating degree completion is for the graduate program to offer courses or other requirements over the summer. Summer offerings can allow the student to begin the graduate program immediately upon graduation from the baccalaureate program.

For programs at or near the minimum 30-credit requirement for a Master's degree, summer courses might represent a substantial fraction of total degree requirements and, combined with some course overlap, easily allow for Master's degree completion within one calendar year from award of the baccalaureate degree.

Substantial acceleration is also possible for degrees with higher credit requirements, especially if two summers are utilized. For programs with a required internship or practicum, it might be possible to schedule that activity in the first summer if sufficient coursework has been transferred in.

Admissions, Advising and Financial Aid

From an admissions standpoint, at the undergraduate level the student applies normally to an undergraduate program. There is no application to nor enrollment in a “combined” program. Unless otherwise specified, an undergraduate wishing to participate in an accelerated Master’s option will apply to the Graduate School by November 30 in the junior year. Applicants must satisfy normal admissions requirements for the Graduate School unless specific exceptions are included in the proposal (e.g., waiver of GRE requirement). The baccalaureate degree must be completed prior to enrollment in the graduate program. The Graduate School will make a decision on conditional acceptance to the program, effective immediately following expected completion of the baccalaureate degree. The acceptance will specify the conditions to be satisfied in order to enroll in the Master’s program. These conditions will include, but not be limited to, the graduate courses or other work to be completed while still enrolled as an undergraduate. Under normal circumstances, this will allow three undergraduate semesters in which to satisfy the conditions. A student who does not satisfy the conditions within three semesters, and who has not yet completed the baccalaureate degree, may petition for an extension and deferral of admission to a later date. A student who does not satisfy the conditions within three semesters but who has earned the baccalaureate degree may petition for entry into the Master’s program, but without assurance of participating in the accelerated option.

As an undergraduate, the student’s only involvement with the graduate program is through application for conditional acceptance and completion of the stipulated coursework or other conditions. Graduate programs offering accelerated options assume the responsibility for advising prospective and participating students, and for making students aware of the terms under which courses taken to satisfy graduate requirements can be applied to undergraduate requirements.

From a financial aid standpoint the student is eligible for aid based upon the student’s normal enrollment status at any given point in time. The student will be an undergraduate until completing those requirements, and will be a graduate student once enrolled in the Master’s program.

Approval Process

The basic building block of an accelerated option is an approved Master’s degree. The degree requirements are not different for students pursuing the accelerated option; the only variation is in the timing of the admissions process and in how coursework is organized. A department with an existing Master’s degree can propose an accelerated option consistent with these guidelines using the “Proposal for Accelerated Master’s Option” template. If a department does not have an existing Master’s degree, then one must be created through the normal program approval process. If a department wishes to propose changes to an existing Master’s degree in conjunction with consideration of an accelerated option, then a separate program revision proposal must be submitted.

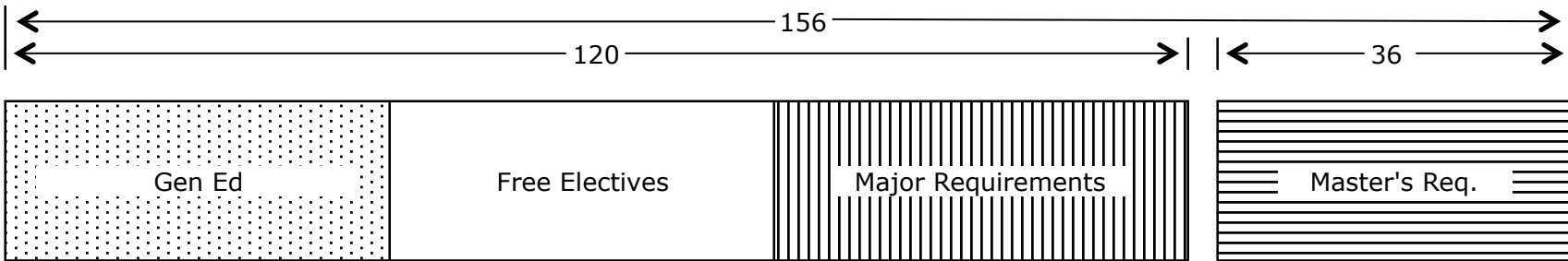
An accelerated option may apply to a Master’s program in its entirety, or to certain concentrations within it (for example, a non-thesis option only, or a concentration requiring a particular course sequence). If use of one or more concentrations in this way is desired, then the necessary concentration must either already exist or be proposed separately as a program revision.

Proposals for accelerated Master’s options will be treated as a form of program revision. Proposals should be submitted to the Faculty Senate Office, and will be reviewed by the Graduate Council and the Academic Matters Council, which will forward a recommendation to the Faculty Senate.

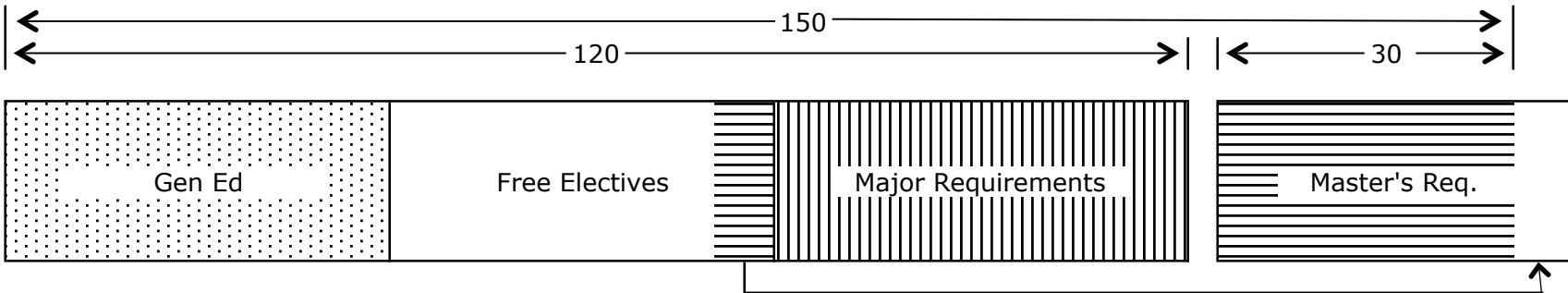
Examples of Possible Baccalaureate/Master's Course Overlap

(120-credit BA/BS, 36-credit Master's, 6-credit overlap)

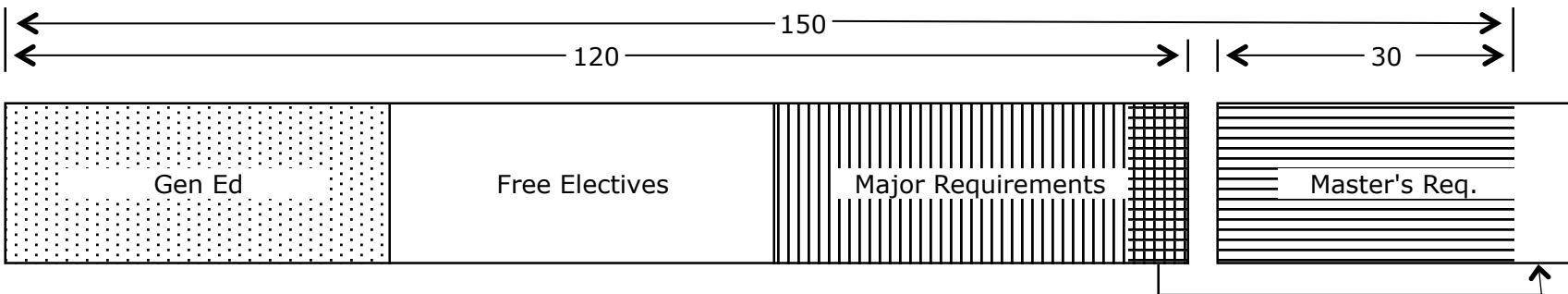
A. Current sequential degree completion



B. Unrelated baccalaureate field; 6 credits of graduate work taken while an undergraduate apply to Master's



C. Closely related baccalaureate field; 6 credits of graduate work taken while an undergraduate apply to B.A. and Master's



Proposal for Accelerated Master's Option

Master's program/concentration:

Related B.A./B.S. (if overlap):

Complete a separate template for each Master's program/concentration and Master's/Baccalaureate combination, if applicable. Acceleration applies only to variations for which templates are provided.

Undergraduate applies to Master's program: **11/30 of Junior year** (Please consult with Graduate School prior to specifying date other than 11/30 of Junior year).

Please check one. This accelerated option pertains to:

Existing Master's degree or concentration

Proposed Master's degree (separate approval required)

Proposed concentration (separate approval required)

Please describe any restrictions to the option (e.g., restricted to UMass Amherst undergraduates, Five College students, etc.)

Description of Accelerated Option

At right, please describe the typical course of study for a Master's student. Use specific courses, if appropriate, or course categories (e.g., core course, program elective, free elective). Please include any required theses, practica, exams, or other requirements. Show corresponding credits for each requirement (see examples).

Master's 1 (Fall)	Master's 1 (Spring)	Summer	Master's 2 (Fall)	Master's 2 (Spring)
0	0	0	0	0

0

Below, please show how these requirements would be configured in the proposed accelerated option. Indicate any graduate courses that would apply to undergraduate degree requirements in **boldface**.

Junior	Senior	Summer			
0	0	0	0	0	0

0

Below, please provide a brief rationale for the proposed accelerated option, including specific rationale for transfer of more than 9 credits to the Master's program.