

The Graduate School

Principles and Policies on Combined (Bachelor/Master) Degree Programs

Background

The University of Florida provides a mechanism in which selected undergraduate students, identified on the basis of superior academic performance may pursue a plan of study with an intended result of achieving both the bachelor and master degrees in an efficient, abbreviated time frame.

Definition

For purposes of this document and related processes, a “Combined Degree Program” is a planned and thoughtfully developed set of academic experiences that together may lead to the achievement of both the bachelor and master degrees. In general, the structure of such programs allows the undergraduate student to:

- register for and complete a prescribed set of graduate level courses during the junior and senior years of the undergraduate degree program;
- have those graduate credits used toward the bachelor’s degree; and
- subsequently, use those same credits toward the master’s degree.

Principles and Processes

1. Academic units (typically departments, but perhaps in some instances colleges or other entities) make a determination that a combined degree program aligns with their pedagogical objectives and the best interests of their students. Approval to develop and offer such a program is sought and obtained. The specific attributes and requirements of the combined degree program are clearly described. The academic basis for allowing specified credits to be counted toward both degree must be explicitly stated, indicating how the particular credits are germane to each degree. The approved program is noted in both the Provost’s office and the Graduate School, reflecting their respective responsibilities for the undergraduate and graduate degree components of the program.

2. Approval of a combined degree program occurs in either of two ways. Proposed combined degree programs that align with a template model (see: <https://approval.ufl.edu/start-new-request/new-degree-program-combined-ugradgrad-12-double/>) may be put forward with an expectation they will be approved promptly and can begin almost immediately. Proposed combined degree programs varying from the template model must be more thoroughly reviewed and formally approved (see <https://approval.ufl.edu/start-new-request/new-degree-program-combined-ugradgrad-/>).

The primary approval path is through the University Curriculum Committee and the Office of Undergraduate Affairs, but other offices, specifically including the Graduate School, the Office of Institutional Research, the Office of Institutional Assessment, are informed and their input may be sought. Formal approval is granted by both the Office of Undergraduate Affairs and the Graduate School.

3. After approval, the academic unit devises a process in which a selected subset of undergraduate majors (presumably those at the highest levels of academic success and motivation) can be identified and offered an opportunity to participate in the combined degree program, along with an advising process to facilitate student progress toward the ultimate achievement of both degrees.

4. Typically, this will involve planning for the student to take 12 semester hours of graduate-level credit while he/she is classified as an undergraduate student. It is assumed that the graduate courses selected for this inclusion are determined on a pedagogical basis. Most commonly, they would be more advanced replacements for undergraduate courses that would be taken by students who are completing the undergraduate major in the traditional manner of pursuing the “freestanding” baccalaureate degree. The inclusion of graduate-level credits toward the undergraduate degree may not in any way diminish the quality of that undergraduate degree (for example by “bumping” undergraduate level courses considered essential to the degree.) Nor may the inclusion of the graduate-level course work have the effect of extending or lengthening the “time-to-degree” for the baccalaureate portion of the program.

5. An individual student’s participation in a combined degree program must be formally approved by both the undergraduate and graduate degree programs, as manifested in advising signatures from both programs. The student’s participation is formally recorded. Except in the most unusual of circumstances, this formal approval must occur before the onset of the senior year as an undergraduate. Approved participation is manifested in a plan of study that identifies the graduate level courses and credit hours to be used toward both degrees. Changes to the combined degree plan of study are permitted but must be approved, formally recorded and accomplished before the undergraduate degree is awarded. Students may not be approved for participation in a combined degree program after completion of the undergraduate degree.

6. During the junior and senior years as undergraduates, participating students apply for admission to The Graduate School and the master’s degree component of the combined degree program. Their applications for admission to the graduate (the master’s degree) component of the combined degree program are evaluated following the same process and criteria as all applicants to that graduate degree program, although it is common for there to be expectations that combined degree students will have superior GPAs, GRE scores or other attributes relevant for admission to the particular master’s degree program. Those who are not offered admission to the master’s degree component, or who choose not to pursue the master’s degree are still eligible to earn their bachelor’s degree in a timely fashion and may use the graduate credits earned toward that undergraduate degree.

7. Students offered admission to the master’s degree component of the combined degree program will begin their master’s degree and the 12 semesters hours (or other approved quantity) of graduate credit taken during their junior and/or senior years as an undergraduate will be credited toward their master’s degree, assuming grades of B or better, and with the understanding that the content of the courses makes a bona fide pedagogical contribution to the master’s degree. The mechanism for accomplishing this step is a formal transfer of credit, which is initiated by the academic unit responsible for the Master’s degree component of the combined degree program. The transfer of credit request should be submitted promptly...during the student’s first semester of matriculation in the Master’s degree.

8. All of the normal requirements for the particular master's degree must then be achieved, but with the 12 graduate level semester hours taken during the undergraduate program being credited toward the master's degree, it is expected that the latter can be completed in an abbreviated time-frame.

Caveats and Cautions

1. It is expected that the graduate-level courses to be included in both degrees are selected with care and intent. For some combined degree programs, it may be that a single list of graduate-level courses is developed and would be taken by all students pursuing that particular combined degree program. In other programs, it may be that subsets from a longer list of graduate-level courses are identified for each participating student, depending on the academic circumstances and aspirations of the students.
2. Except for combined degree programs formally approved as diverging from the template model, no more than 12 graduate-level credit hours may be identified for inclusion in the combined degree program. The exact graduate courses to be used for each student's combined degree program must be identified and completed prior to completion of the bachelor's degree.
3. The degrees are expected to be "combined" in content. The expectation is the graduate level courses selected for inclusion in the undergraduate degree must be germane, relevant and contributive to the requirements for the bachelor's degree, **and** for the subsequent master's degree.
4. Similarly, the two degree programs are expected to be "combined" in time. It may occur that participating students complete the bachelor's degree component in a spring semester and are best served by delaying the start of their master's degree program until the subsequent fall semester (especially for master's degree programs offering coursework in sequences that begin only in the fall). But in general, it is expected that combined degree programs are composed of a single contiguous and continuous set of closely related courses and other academic activities. Barring unusual medical circumstances or other unanticipated events, a gap of more than two semesters between completing the bachelor's degree and beginning the master's degree is not permitted.
5. Apart from the specific courses and credit hours approved for a particular student's combined degree program of study, graduate-level coursework completed while a student is classified as an undergraduate may be transferred to and used toward a subsequent graduate degree only in limited circumstances aligned with Graduate School policy. In general, more than one half of the credits required for the award of a graduate degree must be earned after formal admission to, and matriculation in that graduate degree program.