

Accelerated Bachelor's-Master's Track Program Planning Guidelines

The University of North Florida provides exceptional undergraduate students with the opportunity to complete the requirements for both the bachelor's and master's degrees at an accelerated pace. Accelerated tracks allow students to get a head start on their graduate education by taking graduate courses during their junior and senior undergraduate years. In most programs, up to 12 credit hours of graduate work also count toward a baccalaureate degree, thus reducing the time it takes to get both degrees.

This document provides guidance for deans, chairs, and program directors interested in implementing an accelerated bachelor's-master's track for their programs.

Advantages

An accelerated bachelor's-master's track provides a number of benefits to academically qualified students and to the university:

- Students can save up to one year in tuition expense and time compared to the traditional track of enrolling in graduate coursework only after completing their baccalaureate degree.
- Programs can “fast-track” graduate admission by reducing the requirements for accelerated-track students, who then save time and money.
- An accelerated track allows students to enter the workforce more quickly and with the graduate-level knowledge and skills desired by many employers.
- Undergraduate students can take advantage of some forms of undergraduate financial aid to pay for their graduate coursework, especially for those students who enter UNF with Advancement Placement and dual credit towards their baccalaureate degree completion.
- Accelerated tracks enable departments to recruit exceptional UNF undergraduates to pursue graduate degrees at UNF, which not only has a positive impact on the scholarly atmosphere of the university, but helps UNF to improve a number of metrics by which its performance is evaluated.

Accelerated tracks have been in existence at a wide variety of US universities for several years; a recent study found that currently 88% of universities offer them. They are generally considered to be a useful option for exceptional students, although they must be designed carefully to ensure academic rigor and to meet the expectations of regional and disciplinary accreditors.

Curriculum Design

The core element of an accelerated track is the ability for undergraduates to enroll in as many as 12 credit hours of graduate coursework that counts towards fulfilling their baccalaureate degrees. Upon completion of the baccalaureate degree and acceptance into the graduate program, these graduate courses are also applied towards the graduate degree requirements. The following illustrates how the track works:

		Undergraduate Credits (120 credits)	Freshman 30 credits	
			Sophomore 30 Credits	
Apply to participate in Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's Program	Graduate Credits (up to 12 hours of graduate coursework count for both)		Junior 30 Credits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains undergraduate status, but creates accelerated pathway. Still can access undergraduate financial aid for coursework that counts towards undergraduate degree completion Still need to apply to Graduate School and meet admission standards. Once BA/BS awarded, become graduate students. 			Senior 30 Credits	BA/BS Degree Awarded
Graduate School "transfers" up to 12 credit hours of graduate courses (at least a B grade) taken as undergrad to also count toward grad degree				Graduate

Departments interested in implementing an accelerated track should consider whether to identify a specific sequence of courses for students on the accelerated track and/or whether the student is allowed to select graduate courses of interest that will apply to both degrees. Either way, it is critical to have a defensible academic rationale for the shared coursework that affirms that the academic cohesion and rigor of both the undergraduate and graduate programs are not compromised—and perhaps strengthened—by the accelerated track's curriculum.

Programs will need to identify the minimum requirements for a student to be authorized to enter an accelerated track, as well as any changes in the admission requirements to the graduate program for students entering via an accelerated track.

To create an accelerated track, the following steps are required:

1. The intent to develop an accelerated track needs to be communicated to the college dean(s) and the dean of the Graduate School, each of whom must also approve the specific curriculum plan. The Graduate School dean will solicit input from Academic Affairs and the provost before issuing approval.
2. The plan for implementing an accelerated track needs to be approved by the Faculty Association via the APC process, which will also serve as the mechanism for alerting other administrative units of the track's implementation. The APC documentation

needs to clearly explain how an accelerated track minimally does not compromise the academic integrity of the undergraduate and graduate programs.

3. If substantial changes are made to either the bachelor's or master's degree, or to its coursework, a substantive change notification will need to be submitted to UNF's regional accreditation body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

For cross-level courses (e.g., 4000/5000-level cross-listings), a student on an accelerated track would not be able to enroll in the 4000-level course, have that count towards fulfilling their undergraduate requirements, and then enroll in the 5000-level version and have that count towards both the undergraduate and graduate requirements.

Student Eligibility

Once an undergraduate has attained junior status, they would be eligible to apply for an accelerated track. Furthermore, the following would be required:

1. Completion of at least 15 undergraduate hours in their major.
2. Attainment of a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.00 in their major.
3. Attainment of a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.00 overall.

Specific programs can identify more rigorous academic requirements for participation in an accelerated track. Eligibility for participation on an accelerated track does not guarantee admission into the graduate program (see section below).

While students can apply for participation in an accelerated track on their own initiative, it is highly recommended that instructors, advisors, and program directors encourage especially promising students to apply.

Accelerated Track Application

Prior to submitting the UNF Accelerated Track Application, a student is required to meet with the undergraduate and graduate program advisors regarding program requirements and procedures, and to establish a clear curricular pathway to both degrees. They are also required to consult with Financial Aid to determine any potential ramifications during the change from undergraduate to graduate standing (see section below).

The UNF Accelerated Track Application form requires the student to identify the bachelor's to master's track that the student intends to complete and specifies the graduate courses that will count towards fulfilling both the undergraduate and graduate program requirements. Approval by program advisors, the department chair, and the Graduate School is required before the student is allowed to pursue the accelerated track.

Note that admitting a student into an accelerated track is making a commitment that as long as the undergraduate student performs as expected in graduate courses, the student will be admitted into the graduate program. Programs implementing accelerated tracks should make these expectations explicit before the student submits an application. For example, graduate programs with too few faculty advisors to work with new students should reconsider implementing accelerated tracks, as it would not be appropriate to deny an undergraduate who was admitted into the accelerated track entry into the graduate program simply because there are no available faculty with whom to work.

Bachelor's-to-Master's Transition

Until the baccalaureate degree requirements are completed, the student on an accelerated track is still considered to be an undergraduate student. Formal entry into the graduate program requires separate application using the UNF Accelerated Graduate Program Admission form when the student has entered the last undergraduate semester and has registered to graduate. The graduate program may choose to modify the list of required materials to be submitted; e.g., the program may opt not to require GRE scores or recommendation letters from students admitted via an accelerated track. The Accelerated Graduate Program Admission form must be approved by program advisors, the college dean(s), and the Graduate School, at which point the student is accepted into the graduate program but still retains undergraduate status.

Graduate student status is only conferred once the admitted student has completed the baccalaureate degree. At this point, the graduate courses identified on the accelerated track application and successfully taken as an undergraduate with a course grade of at least 3.0 will be transferred towards completing the graduate degree requirements. Note that these courses will not appear on the Banner transcript twice—they still appear as having been taken while the student was an undergraduate—but the courses are included in Banner's degree evaluation tool for determining progress towards graduate degree completion.

Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid

Financial aid is regulated by a variety of institutional, state, and federal regulations, all of which vary depending on the student's need, enrollment, course level, and program level. It is therefore required that students interested in an accelerated bachelor's-master's track consult with Financial Aid before applying to participate in this program. Some important considerations are listed below, but are meant only as a general guide and not as definitive policy since each student's situation is unique and the regulations change often.

- Tuition and fees for graduate courses taken while the student is enrolled as an undergraduate are charged at the graduate rates.

- Residency for tuition purposes is determined according to the student's level; all graduate students are classified as independent, regardless of age. Upon moving to graduate-level status, all students must re-establish residency as an independent for tuition purposes.
- Any graduate course taken at the undergraduate level will only be counted in a student's enrollment status for federal financial aid (Pell Grant, Student Loans, etc.) purposes if the graduate course fulfills an undergraduate/baccalaureate degree requirement.
- Bright Futures aid can be used to fund graduate courses that count towards the baccalaureate degree. Once a student is officially classified as a graduate student, they may be eligible for one term of Bright Futures funding (up to 15 credit hours).
- Florida Prepaid can pay for both undergraduate and graduate coursework.
- Pell Grant, FESOG, and FSAG funding is still available for students pursuing an accelerated bachelor's-master's track, but eligibility ends once the baccalaureate degree is *eligible* to be awarded, even if the student has not yet received the baccalaureate degree.
- Students on an accelerated track are not eligible for graduate program support (e.g., graduate scholarships, graduate assistantships) until they have completed their baccalaureate degree and are formally enrolled in the graduate program.
- Satisfactory Academic Progress for Financial Aid is measured at the end of each semester and is based on the requirements of the level the student is classified—i.e., whether they are officially an undergraduate or graduate student, not the level of the coursework taken.
- For Institutional Scholarships, students are allowed up to maximum of 100% of the number of credit hours required for the completion of a bachelor's degree or the number of semesters specified in the scholarship contract.
- For Foundation Scholarships, exceptions to enrollment and other requirements/criteria must be coordinated with the Associate Director of Foundation Scholarships on a case-by-case basis
- Graduate courses are included in Excess Hours calculations when they are used to fulfill baccalaureate degree requirements.

To reiterate, each student's exact situation is different. Advisors and program directors should encourage students to consult with Financial Aid before applying for an accelerated bachelor's-master's track or making any other change in status.

International Students

International students interested in participating in an accelerated bachelor's-master's track must consult with the International Center to determine the possible impact of participation on their student visas.

Departmental Checklist

Curriculum Design

- A maximum of 12 graduate hours are used to complete undergraduate requirements
- Identified a clear program of study for students
- Approval of College Dean
- Approval of Graduate Dean
- Approval of SACS liaison (if necessary)
- Program total length is at least 150 hours

Student Eligibility

- Admission criteria are clearly stated
- Additional requirements are identified

APC

- Summary statement
 - Related APC log numbers
 - Specified what is changing in the program of study
 - Intended student population
 - Admission criteria
 - Use of resources
- Letter of support from the Graduate School

Communication

- Consulted with the undergraduate advising office regarding the application process and admission criteria
- Consulted with related academic departments (if applicable)