

## **UAC/GAC Subcommittee on Overlapping Credits in Combined Bachelor's-Master's Programs**

**Report, 14 March 2022**

The subcommittee proposes the following change to the current policy stipulating that for students in combined programs, “up to 12 graduate credits may be applied simultaneously to both the undergraduate and to the graduate programs.”

***Students enrolled in a combined bachelor's-master's program may apply graduate credits simultaneously to both the undergraduate and graduate programs subject to the following limitations:***

- 1. For master's programs that require 36 or fewer credits, a minimum of 18 credits must apply solely to the master's degree.***
- 2. For master's programs that require 36 credits or more, students may apply, at the discretion of the department(s) offering the degrees, graduate credits to both degrees up to a number not greater than 50% of the total number of credits required for the graduate degree in question.<sup>1</sup>***
- 3. Regardless of the number of overlapping credits, students in these programs must complete a minimum of the equivalent of two semesters of full-time graduate study after the completion of the undergraduate degree.<sup>2</sup>***

### Rationale

Current policy with respect to these programs caps the number of overlapping credits at 12. For example, if a student must complete 120 credits for a bachelor's and a minimum of 30 for a master's, the student may count 12 of those 30 graduate credits toward the 120 needed for the bachelor's, thereby earning both degrees with 138 credits. However, UAlbany offers many master's degrees with far more than the minimum of 30. Applying the same limit of 12 overlapping credits to these larger combined programs raises questions of proportion and fairness, in particular in the area of student time-to-degree. For example, as it stands

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<sup>1</sup> For example, a student pursuing a BS/MS in which the MS requires 60 credits may apply up to, but not more than 30 graduate credits toward the completion of the BS degree. The department or departments offering the degrees will stipulate the maximum number of credits students may apply to both degrees, which may be lower than the 12 credits or 50% limit allowable under this policy.

<sup>2</sup> Currently, a full-time load for a graduate student is 9 credits per semester, or 18 credits per academic year. Hence the need to allow only master's programs of 36 credits or more to allow up to 50% of their graduate credits toward the undergraduate degree: doing so would leave at least 18 credits for the student to complete as a full-time graduate student.

now a student may earn, a BA/MA in History with 138-150 credits, while another student may earn a Combined BS in Human Development/MS in Mental Health Counseling with 168-180 credits. Both students would be limited to counting 12 graduate credits toward the 120 needed for the bachelor's.

The subcommittee suggests that UAC and GAC consider the above change to the overlapping credit policy to serve the interests of fairness and balance, to allow students to complete these programs in a timely fashion, and to provide clear guidance to departments developing and administering these programs. This new policy provides greater leeway to departments in developing combined degree programs that will be attractive to students while holding them to appropriate academic standards and maintaining the integrity of both undergraduate and graduate education on this campus. It is important to note that departments will continue to have discretion under this policy, since if disciplinary norms and/or departmental judgment dictate that students overlap fewer credits than the 12 or 50% permitted, then departments may set the limit lower.

The subcommittee recommends maintaining unchanged current admissions and administrative procedures that apply to these programs:

*Although admitted to an integrated degree program, students will be considered as undergraduate students for the purposes of tuition, financial aid, and headcount identification until completion of 12 credits of graduate course work or qualified to receive the bachelor's degree. In the semester in which a student enrolls in the 13<sup>th</sup> credit of graduate coursework, he or she will be considered a graduate student for purposes of tuition, headcount identification, and eligibility for graduate assistantships, fellowships, and loans whether or not the student has completed the bachelor's degree.*

*Students' progress through the combined program will be reviewed in the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education to ensure timely completion of the undergraduate degree. Academic advisors of bachelor's-master's programs and students themselves should also attend to course enrollment choices that lead to timely completion of undergraduate requirements.*

This policy came into effect through Senate Bill 0809-11, and it helps ensure that students earn their undergraduate degrees in a timely fashion, paying the appropriate tuition and following applicable financial aid and billing policies. The subcommittee's recommendation reinforces the letter and spirit of this aspect of the combined bachelor's-master's degree programs by requiring two semesters of full-time study at the graduate level, a requirement consistent with the goal of providing students in these

programs with a firm grounding and experience in higher-level, post-baccalaureate study.

### Appendices

Policy relevant to overlapping credits in combined bachelor's-master's degree programs:

- A. SUNY CEO Memo 71-04, which allows the counting of graduate credits toward the undergraduate degree, and stipulates no limits to the number of credits that may overlap.
- B. Guidelines for Combined Baccalaureate-Master's Degree Programs, UAC 2/2/81, which is the original UAlbany policy on the issue. It stipulates the 12-credit overlap limit, but does not explicitly justify setting the limit at 12.
- C. Senate Bill 0809-11, an amendment of the 1981 UAC policy. This confirms the 12-credit limit, but tightens up the rules about tuition in order to prevent students from delaying the completion of their undergraduate degree.