

ACCELERATED MASTER'S PATHWAYS

Guidelines for Accelerated Master's Pathways

Terms

- *Accelerated Master's Pathways (AMP)*: This document refers to pathways in which students share limited credits between their undergraduate and graduate degrees to facilitate completion of both degrees. Similar programs have previously been known as Accelerated Bachelor's/Master's Programs, 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 undergraduate and graduate program requirements will be referred to as shared credits. Undergraduate courses (i.e., courses offered at the 300 level or below) cannot be counted as shared credits nor count toward the master's degree.

Introduction and Rationale

Loyola University Chicago has long included its Accelerated Master's Pathways as one of its attractions for undergraduates. Accelerated Master's Pathways offer students the opportunity to integrate learning at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These highly selective pathways are designed for undergraduates who can accomplish master's level work at the same time as they complete their bachelor's degree. Such pathways 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 and at a lower cost than the sequential completion of the two degrees.

These guidelines apply to all Accelerated Master's Pathways at Loyola University Chicago. These guidelines are intended to bring uniformity to current and future pathways, simplify communication of requirements to students, faculty, and staff, and to raise the overall profile of these pathways 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 pathways
- 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 or modified Accelerated Master's Pathways should carefully consult this document to ensure that they conform to these guidelines.

Pathway Model

Loyola University Chicago follows an Accelerated Master's Pathway model, which allows master's programs to accept qualified applicants

from any undergraduate major. Specific qualifications are outlined in the Admissions Requirements section below.

Admission Requirements

Accelerated Master's Pathways are designed to enhance opportunities for advanced training for Loyola's undergraduates. Admission to these pathways must be competitive and will depend upon a positive review of credentials by the program's admissions committee. Accordingly, the admission requirements for these pathways may be higher than those required if the master's degree were pursued entirely after the receipt of a bachelor's degree. That is, master's programs may choose to have more stringent admissions requirements for their AMP in addition to those minimal requirements below.

Requirements:

- Declared undergraduate major.
- By the time students begin taking graduate courses as an undergraduate, the student has completed or is approaching approximately 90 credit hours, or the credit hours required in a program with specialized accreditation.¹
- A minimum cumulative GPA for coursework at Loyola that is at or above the pathway-specific requirements, a minimum major GPA that is at or above the pathway-specific requirements, and/or appropriate designated coursework for evaluation of student readiness in their discipline.²
- Undergraduates from any major may apply to an Accelerated Master's Pathway model; however, applicants must have completed pathway-specific prerequisite coursework and/or meet minimum GPA requirements to be considered for admission.³

Students not eligible for admission to the Accelerated Master's Pathway may apply to the master's program through the regular admissions process. Students enrolled in an Accelerated Master's Pathway who choose not to continue to the master's degree program upon completion of the bachelor's degree will face no consequences.

Ideally, a student will apply for admission in their junior year as they approach 60 to 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 master's program. Once admitted as an undergraduate student, a Student Group relevant to the master's program will be assigned in LOCUS to provide a tracking mechanism for Undergraduate Advising and the Graduate Program Director. Students with a relevant Student Group will be able to enroll in their shared 400-level credits according to guidelines provided by the master's program in the Academic Catalog. 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 AMP, students must meet the academic standing requirements of their graduate program as they complete the program curriculum.

¹ Programs with pathway/s 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 Master's Pathway, they still must complete all of the standard requirements associated with the undergraduate degree (e.g., a capstone).

Curriculum

Level and progression of courses

The Accelerated Master's Pathways are designed to be competitive and attractive to our most capable students. Students admitted to Accelerated Master's Pathways 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}

In general, graduate level coursework should not be taken by an undergraduate prior to admission into the Accelerated Master's Pathway. Exceptions may be granted: a) for professional programs where curriculum for the Accelerated Master's Pathway is designed to begin earlier; b) if a particular graduate level course is only offered once every 2-3 years, and a student has demonstrated the necessary ability to be successful; or c) in rare cases, the Graduate Program Director may authorize enrollment in a 400-level course for a highly qualified and highly motivated undergraduate who has not yet been admitted to the graduate program, 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.

⁴ If students wish to transfer credits from another university to Loyola University Chicago, the program's Graduate Program Director will review the relevant syllabus(es) to determine whether it meets the criteria for a 400-level course or higher.

⁵ Programs with specialized accreditation requirements that allow programs to offer graduate curriculum to undergraduate students will conform to those specialized accreditation requirements.

Shared credits

While 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, the curriculum for the AMP in the academic catalog will specify the maximum number of shared credits that are permitted. Depending on the connection of the master's program with the undergraduate major(s), an undergraduate may count shared credits as general electives towards their undergraduate degree requirements.

The program's Graduate Program Director will designate the number of credit hours to be shared through the Academic Catalog, and that number will be shared through advising and through the 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. Shared credit hours taken during the undergraduate program will be included on the master's transcript but courses will not be listed on the transcript and graduate credit hours will not be included in the graduate GPA calculation.

Student Advising

In collaboration with the Office of Graduate and Professional Enrollment Management, master's 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 student 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 Program Director will closely advise students and monitor student enrollment in courses to ensure the proper courses are selected for degree completion.

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. In offering the option of an Accelerated Master's Pathways, 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.