Accelerated Bachelors to Masters (ABM) Special Review Committee:
Final Recommendations to the Faculty Senate

James Baglama, Department of Mathematics
Matthew Delmonico, Department of Kinesiology
Michael Greenfield, Department of Chemical Engineering
Kristin Johnson, Department of Political Science

The Accelerated Bachelors to Masters (ABM) Special Review met 8 times to review the ABM framework developed by the Graduate School and met with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee once to discuss the final report. These are the recommendations as a result of these meetings.

Double Counting of Credits from a Bachelor’s to a Master’s Degree

The Special Review Committee reviewed language in the University Manual and the Graduate School Manual and found no restrictions that forbid double counting of credits from a bachelor's to a master's degree. Numerous current practices at URI that involve double counting of credits were identified, such as double majors and dual enrollment students (joint high school and college credit).

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee reviewed language in the Graduate Manual and found what it considers a restriction to double counting. Specifically, in Section 3.33 Advanced Standing Credits, “To be eligible, these credits must have been earned within a seven-year period before matriculating into the degree program in question and cannot have been used to fulfill any requirement of another degree.” However, the description of advanced standing credits in the Graduate Admission and Registration section of the University Catalog did not have this same restriction. The Special Review Committee had considered these sections in extensive discussions and included a recommendation that language of GM section 3.33 and GM Appendix K be clarified regarding the application of Advanced Standing credits within an ABM framework, including if double counted credits fit within a 2/5 limitation that is already applied to Advanced Standing and Transfer credits (GM sections 7.21-7.22).

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee also highlighted two existing programs where credits are double counted:

1. The Accelerated Bachelor’s-Master’s Degree Program in Speech-Language Pathology. Students in their sixth semester pursuing a B.S. degree in Communicative Disorders with 24 credits remaining at the 400/500-level may use those credits toward the M.S. degree in Speech-Language Pathology. This reduces the M.S. requirement from 54 credits to 30 credits.

2. The B.S. Program in Kinesiology and the Doctoral of Physical Therapy Program (DPT). This arrangement is slightly different from the previous one in that students, admitted to the DPT program through early contingent admission, are allowed to double count 26 credits from their DPT program toward their B.S. degree in Kinesiology.

Both of these examples differ from anticipated future ABM proposals in that the graduate degrees continue to require a number of credits that meets or exceeds the minimum standard, not counting the double-counted credits.

Recommendation #1: Allow double counting of credits from a Bachelor’s to a Master’s degree
Allow double counting up to one-third of the total credits required in the master’s program.

Students can earn credits toward an advanced degree in three ways, namely transfer credits, advanced standing or by examination or equivalent. In a master’s degree program the total of transfer credits, advanced standing credits, and credits by examination or equivalent may not exceed two-fifths of the program’s total credits (GM 7.20).

Transfer credits refer to credits earned for work taken at other accredited institutions of higher learning that the student wishes to apply toward satisfying URI degree requirements. Under usual circumstances, transfer credits may not exceed one-fifth of the total credits required in the program. (GM 7.20)

Advanced standing refers to credits taken at the University of Rhode Island by a non-matriculating student or by a student in one degree program before formally beginning another program. For a Master’s degree program, advanced standing credits may not total more than two-fifths of the degree requirements. (GM 3.33)

In master’s and Ph.D. programs in which the student does not have a master’s degree, a maximum of six credits may be allowed for competency based on experience outside the traditional academic setting and demonstrated by examination or equivalent. This maximum of six credits must fit within an overall maximum allowed for advanced standing and transfer credit.

Recommendation #2: Allow double counting up to one-third of the total credits required in the master’s program. These credits would be counted within the two-fifth limit earned by transfer credits, advanced standing credits, or credits by examination or equivalent.
Students enrolled in an ABM program are to follow the rules and procedures that apply to all graduate students

Once students matriculate into a graduate program, the rules and procedures that apply to all graduate students should apply to students enrolled in an ABM program. We do not see why ABM students should be a separate class of graduate students. Some concerns include:

- creating a separate category will create the potential for an ABM program to be another program that becomes subject to requirements about minimum numbers of graduates
- students who wish to complete original research or to earn clinical or research experience may be required to forfeit double counted credits in order to realize these experiences
- a strict timeline disadvantages students who might seek employment or be interested in a TA or GA experience
- existing examples of double counting credits do not impose time limitations on the double counting (ex. dual enrollment credits (high school and bachelor’s degree) do not expire if the student requires more than a typical time period to complete their bachelor’s degree)

Recommendation #3: Students enrolled in an ABM program are to follow the same rules and procedures that apply to all graduate students including the opportunity to pursue a thesis or non-thesis option without a more restrictive time to completion. The time restriction on double-counted credits that is stated within GM Appendix K should be removed.
The review committee also made observations regarding approval and implementation of ABM programs.

- If an ABM program does not change the requirements of the individual bachelor’s or master’s degree or does not require new resources, then using the Notice of Change form rather than the Modified Form can be sufficient. This eliminates the need for a budget review.
- Coordination between the Faculty Senate Curriculum and Standards Committee and the Graduate Council New Programs Committee will be useful to facilitate approvals of new ABM programs.

Recommendation #4: Use the Notice of Change form when a proposed ABM program does not change the requirements or resource requirements of either the bachelor’s or master’s degree. Coordinate the reviews by the Faculty Senate and Graduate Council so conflicting recommendations are minimized.