Accelerated Bachelors to Masters (ABM) Special Review Committee:
Final Report & Recommendations

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After careful review of information from peer institutions and surveying trends in graduate education, the ABM Review Committee recommends that URI approve an ABM program. URI has an opportunity to remain current with existing offerings from our peer institutions instead of placing our undergraduate and graduate programs at a competitive disadvantage. Seven out of ten schools identified by the Delaware Study as peer or aspirational institutions offer some form of similar accelerated program, most include double counting of credits from undergraduate to graduate school, and many allow a larger number of credits to count toward both degrees than what is proposed in the URI graduate school proposal.

Our committee met eight times over October 22 – December 3, 2018 to realize our assigned charges. Our initial efforts concentrated on information gathering and synthesis, with an emphasis on identification of any prohibition in URI’s current policy or rules that would require change in order for ABM programs to be approved. Within our interpretations described below, we found no specific barrier or prohibition to the double counting of credits for undergraduate and graduate degrees. In follow-up efforts, we consulted with the graduate school Associate Dean, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and the Faculty Senate staff in ascertaining detailed information regarding process and procedure. Extensive and comprehensive review of the University Manual, Graduate School Manual, URI Catalog and review of external institutional processes for accelerated programs comprised elements of this inquiry. Our process recommendations regarding ABM programs and approval procedures are followed by our responses to the specific charges that were assigned to the committee by the Faculty Senate.

**ABM Process Recommendations** (Committee charge is highlighted in gray)

In addition, we ask that you consider that if the ABM framework is approved, how subsequent proposals should be reviewed (through the Curriculum and Standards Committee and/or the Graduate Council, or a special committee).

*Recommendations regarding ABM proposals and the review process*

We recommend utilization of the Notice of Change form if neither the individual undergraduate nor graduate program change 25% or more of program requirements in the ABM proposal. Mere double counting of credits does not constitute a change in program requirements. If programs do exceed 25% or more in requirement changes then the modified change form is appropriate.
Further, we recommend these revisions to the process outlined in the Graduate School ABM memo:

1. If an ABM proposal seeks to combine existing undergraduate and graduate degrees, there will be no need for JCAP review. In the event a new ABM requires the formation of a completely new master’s degree, then JCAP evaluation will be necessary.
2. Submit the Notice of Change to the appropriate college curriculum committee(s).
3. Once approved by the college curriculum committee(s), the proposal will be sent to the Faculty Senate and then forwarded to the Graduate Council and if appropriate, the Curriculum and Standards Committee. It is likely that both groups need to review each ABM proposal. These committees need to communicate with each other so non-conflicting information is returned regarding the proposed ABM.
4. Once approved by these bodies, the proposal would go to the Faculty Senate for final approval.

The GSM Appendix K instructs the use of the Modified Form [For New Interdisciplinary Minors, and New Tracks/Options/Sub-plans/Concentrations, revised 12/2016]. To the review committee, this seems excessive for programs that are not seeking additional resources, such as the Computer Science BA/PSM and BS/PSM ABM proposals.

In an email exchange, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs Laura Beauvais provided an interpretation that neither bachelor’s nor master’s degree requirements are changing to create an ABM program. Instead, the change is the counting of credits, and that concept falls within the Notice of Change threshold.

Recommended clarifications and revisions for Graduate School Manual (GSM) Appendix K

- The Graduate Council must address if double counted credits are limited within the framework of advanced standing (max of 2/5 of the total number of credits) or if they are mutually exclusive and thus separate contributors to the total number of credits. See the response to Concern #1 below. Consider referencing existing extensive GSM language for advanced standing within Appendix K to clarify this issue.
- ABM approvals should require a mechanism for coordination between the Graduate Council New Program Committee and the Faculty Senate Curriculum and Standards Committee.

Recommended clarifications of transcript and degree status

- The Graduate School cites a need for a new Enrollment Services code for students in each ABM program. It is unclear as to why a new code will be needed as the student is earning the same degree as non-ABM students. Our concern is that graduates coded differently may be counted separately from graduates from a non-ABM program.
- The practices of how credits are designated and recorded for graduate and undergraduate study must be presented clearly to ABM students.
The committee saw a recent case in which Advanced Standing credits, taken at URI while an undergraduate, were noted as “transfer” credits in the graduate portion of the transcript. The committee did not know if this is unintentional language, a nuanced difference between policy language and transcript language, or an intentional distinction that the general category of transfer credit (GSM 7.21) includes advanced standing credits. Thus we do not know if this language choice raises GSM 7.22 as a barrier to double counting credits. See Concern #1 below.

The committee assumes that double counted courses are allowed to transfer into a URI Ph.D. program within the 30 credits of a master’s thesis. Decisions about these credits being counted by Ph.D. programs at other institutions after a bachelor’s or master’s is awarded is outside of URI’s control.

Specific Faculty Senate concerns

**Concern #1:** Double counting credits represents a substantial change from existing policy for obtaining an MS degree and is currently not allowed. Graduate School Manual Section 7.22. Only graduate-level courses that have not been used as part of a conferred degree are eligible for transfer credit. There is one exception: Transfer of credits that have been used as part of a conferred degree is strictly limited to the 30 or fewer credits from a previously-earned master’s degree that can be applied to a doctoral degree.

Chapter 7 of the URI Graduate School Manual (GSM) refers to transfer students and transfer credits from other institutions. With the definition of transfer credit provided in section 7.21, we lack confidence that this applies to URI students continuing in a master’s degree as that conflates movement from one degree to another to transferring from another institution.

**GSM 7.21.** 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.

The language of GSM 7.22 arises within this usage of transfer credits as referring to credits from a school other than URI.

**GSM 7.22.** Only graduate-level courses that have not been used as part of a conferred degree are eligible for transfer credit. There is one exception: Transfer of credits that have been used as part of a conferred degree is strictly limited to the 30 or fewer credits from a previously-earned master’s degree that can be applied to a doctoral degree.

To the extent that transfer credit does not infer credit at URI, section 7.22 is not applicable. Instead, double counting is a distinct process that recognizes or allows the use of URI earned
credits for two degree options. GSM section 7.2 defines transfer credits as a distinctly different process.

Numerous precedents exist at URI for double counting credits:

- Double and triple majors sometimes count courses across majors, functionally counting earned credits toward more than one earned degree
- General education credits apply across multiple bachelor’s degrees
- AP and test credits are also applied to a degree although they are not earned at URI
- Graduate certificates allow double counting of courses for graduate degrees and certificate requirements, essentially allowing the use of a set of courses for two distinct requirements
- Dual enrollment applies the same credits to both a bachelor’s degree and a high school diploma (200-RICR-10-00-1)

Section 7.28 of the Graduate School Manual includes double counting in that a student in two URI graduate programs (1 master’s and 1 Ph.D., or 2 master’s) may petition that 1/5 of credits in the masters are also applied to the Ph.D., or up to 1/5 of each master’s uses credits from the other program.

GSM 7.28. A student who is simultaneously enrolled in two different master’s programs may request that credit for some graduate work in one program be counted toward degree requirements in the other program. The number of credits from one program that may be counted toward a second may not exceed one–fifth of the credits required in the second program. For example, consider simultaneous enrollment in two programs of 30 and 45 credits, respectively. The 30–credit program could include 6 credits from the second program; the 45–credit program could include 9 credits from the first. The total savings for the student would thus be 15 credits.

A student who is simultaneously enrolled in two different programs, one a master’s program and one a Ph.D. program, may petition that up to one–fifth of the master’s program credits be counted toward degree requirements in the Ph.D. program. Transfer credit, advanced standing, and credits by examination (for a master’s degree program) may be counted toward both programs as long as they satisfy the one–fifth rule above and meet all of the requirements of sections 7.20–7.27 and 3.33. Credit is granted to both programs only when the request is recommended by the student’s major professor and the Graduate Program Directors for each program and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

An explicit prohibition that we found regarding double counting of credits is in Section 8.20.52 of the University Manual (UM), which indicates that no course required in a major program may be used for both the major and minor, while courses from other curricula can be applied to both. For example: BIO 341 can apply toward a biology minor for a chemical engineering major but not for a biology major. Double counting for a bachelor’s and master’s would mean that a
course relevant for the bachelor's degree can be applied to a master's but not a minor in the same field. This suggests that while double counting is not prohibited, limits have been placed institutionally on double counting in specific instances.

UM 8.20.52 No course required in a major program (30–36 credits) may be used to apply to both the major and minor fields of study. Courses from other curricula that are recommended or required for the major may apply to the minor. Courses in General Education may be used for the minor. Courses in the minor may not be taken under the pass–fail grading option.  #05–06–35 #16–17–22

Advanced standing already allows courses completed as a URI undergraduate to be applied to a graduate degree, up to a maximum of 2/5 of the degree credit requirements.

GSM 3.33. Advanced Standing Credits: 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. In instances where a student plans to take a course or courses while in one degree program so as to apply those credits to a more advanced degree at a later date, the student must request and receive written prior approval from the Dean of the Graduate School before enrolling in said course(s). Credits earned at the University of Rhode Island by a non–matriculating student may be applied as advanced standing toward degree requirements only upon the recommendation of the student’s major professor and the Graduate Program Director and with the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School. 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. (Preceding portion of Section 3.33 updated by Graduate Council 20 April 2015) The following cases apply:

a. For a Master’s degree program, advanced standing credits may not total more than two–fifths of the degree requirements. Transfer credit for courses taken elsewhere (see Section 7.20) and credits by examination or equivalent (see Section 7.30) must also fit within this two–fifths limitation.

b. For Ph.D. students admitted without a Master’s degree, advanced standing credits may not total more than one–fifth of the credits necessary to meet degree requirements. Credits by examination or equivalent (see Section 7.30) must also fit within this one–fifth limitation.

c. Ph.D. students admitted with a Master’s degree in the same or a closely related area are limited to a maximum of 6 or 9 advanced standing credits as described in Section 7.21c–d.

As summarized above, we recommend clarification of Appendix K of the Graduate School Manual to articulate if students will be allowed to utilize advanced standing credits in ABM programs. The Graduate School Manual sections 3.33 and 7.21 specify a maximum of 2/5 of
master’s credits can be satisfied by advanced standing and transfer credits. It is possible that double-counted credits (up to 1/3 of program credits) would also be within this 2/5 limit. Our committee has concerns that ABM programs will be limited by exclusion of advanced standing and double counted credits as many programs offer required courses on a two year cycle, unnecessarily limiting the expansion and use of ABM programs. With some undergraduate programs featuring 4 credit courses, the ABM structure as identified encourages an emphasis on completion of graduate (3 credit) courses possibly to the detriment of students completing their undergraduate degrees in programs such as Political Science. ABM students may choose three 3-credit graduate courses rather than two 4-credit undergraduate courses, creating a risk of failing one course and completing neither program.

At some institutions, double counting is limited by State-level practices. For example, we were told that Rochester Institute of Technology limits the number of double-counted credits for Engineering BS/MS programs as a consequence of New York Education Department requirements. Our review of the Rhode Island Board of Education regulations suggests that such a restriction is not a concern in Rhode Island. The most relevant statute we find is


Award of degrees – curriculum and government

It shall also be the duty of the president and a committee of the faculty, with the approval of the board of governors for higher education, to arrange courses of study conforming to all acts of Congress, and prescribe any qualifications for the admission of students and any rules of study, exercise, discipline, and government as the president and committee may deem proper.

We interpret this as delegating decisions, such as double counting of credits, to the University.

We recognize that some programs may not wish to allow for double counting of credits. We recommend that double counting be a possibility for ABM programs but not a requirement.

**Concern #2:** Only URI students are able to double count credits. This creates two different set of requirements for students earning the same degree. If undergraduate credits at URI are good enough to double count toward the MS degree, why not allow credits from UConn or UMass to also double count?

There are limits for transfer students under the current system. Not all courses count, and there is strict accounting for the requirements that they do fulfill (e.g. a 300 level course taken elsewhere may only transfer in as a requirement met in the general education program and awarded credits, not counted toward the 300/400 level credit requirements). Functionally, all
transfer students have a different set of requirements for the same degree as non-transfer students at URI.

This practice is a norm at peer institutions. UNH, UVM, UND, U Maine, NC State, and U Delaware allow for between 6 and 15 credits to be double counted between a Bachelors and Masters for students accepted into their program. Our inquiries have found this practice at other universities also (see Appendix). For example, a survey by Michael Greenfield of comparable programs at a range of institutions demonstrates a range of double counting credit practices in order to create accelerated programs for students enrolled in undergraduate programs at designated institutions: Drexel (allows replacement of some general education courses with graduate coursework), Johns Hopkins (allows a 50% tuition reduction for graduate programs), University of Michigan at Dearborn, University of New Haven, Northwestern University, Purdue University, RIT, Texas A & M, University of Toledo, and Wayne State each allow double counting of a specified number of credits. To the extent that information is available, it appears that each of these schools limits double counting to credits at their own institution. The URI Kinesiology Early Contingent Physical Therapy option provides a type of precedent for this practice at URI, where credits are waived at the doctoral level for students taking graduate physical therapy credits counted toward their bachelor’s degree in Kinesiology.

Students have the ability to transfer to URI as undergraduates and then apply for an ABM program as well.

Concern #3: Students only have 2 years after enrolling in the ABM program to complete their MS degree otherwise their credits are not double counted. Students enroll in the ABM program as juniors which means they only have one year to complete their MS degree (after their BS requirements). This is a tall order for many students who, for a variety of reasons, require additional time (i.e. family, work, disability etc.). The consequence of not completing in one year is not having up to 1/3 of credit requirements (10 credits in most cases) not double count. That means those students with difficult circumstances are required to take more coursework (3-4 additional classes).

The committee shares this concern and recommends that Appendix K be revised to reflect that once students matriculate into a graduate program, the rules and procedures that apply to all graduate students should apply to these students. We do not see why ABM students should be a separate class of graduate students, and we have concerns that 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.

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1 University of New Hampshire allows double counting of 12 credits, University of Vermont: 6 credits, University of North Dakota: 15 credits, University of Maine: 9 credits, North Carolina State: 12 credits, University of Delaware: 6 credits.

2 For a detailed report on individual programs and details, please see the attached Appendix.
One of our concerns includes the reality that 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. A time limit puts these desirable experiences at a disadvantage.

An additional factor arises with mandatory graduate courses in small programs that are offered each 2 years yet expect a senior undergraduate course as a prerequisite (e.g. International Relations). The proposed time deadline for double counting credits would penalize ABM students in alternate years if a required course is unavailable. Biennial course offerings will generally cause negative impacts on ABM students if a time limitation remains in place.

There is however an issue of truth in advertising such that if this is an accelerated program then programs should properly advise students of a viable path toward completing the ABM on an accelerated timeline.

Peer institutions overwhelmingly either leave time limits to individual programs to identify/establish or have no identified limits, with the single exception of North Carolina State. When colleagues at peer institutions were asked if students delayed their degree completion without a strict time limit, a common reply was that students are motivated to finish so they can stop paying tuition. To the extent that ABM programs are revenue generators for URI, the students have a financial motivation to finish an ABM degree as quickly as possible.

We note that the existing examples of double counting credits do not impose time limitations on the double counting. For example, 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.

**Concern #4: Role of ABM coordinators as specified overlaps with roles of major faculty advisors, graduate program directors, and the Graduate School.**

- All faculty in department - determine admission requirements
- Major faculty advisor – approve POS, submit nominations for graduation
- Graduate director – respond to questions from potential applicants/is essentially serving as the ABM coordinator but each department can decide how best to handle their graduate program and students.
- Graduate School – maintain files on active students, keep records of the number of students who have participated in the ABM program, report statistics to administration

Our committee agrees with this concern and believes that this should be determined by each program. There is potential to increase and duplicate effort and associated costs. Our recommendation is that this role be neither required nor prohibited.
Computer Science Accelerated BS-MS and BA-MS Proposal Review

The computer science (CSC) proposals followed the procedure as outlined by the Graduate School. A consequence of omissions in the design of the Modified Form is that the catalog description and the catalog location (undergraduate and/or graduate programs) are missing from the proposals. Also, this is a program that would benefit from removing the strict one-year post-bachelor’s completion requirement. The proposals explicitly state a two-year period to complete the courses after (a) being admitted to the program and (b) completing the bachelor’s degree. (See E2(c) Curriculum, “Admitted to CSABM - After Receiving Bachelors, p 8.) Students who utilize that second post-bachelor’s year would lose access to double counted credits under the time limitation currently described in GSM Appendix K. A concern is that many students may gain employment before finishing, losing their double counted credits.
## Appendix

Combined Bachelors / Masters information from AIChE, Informal Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Double count?</th>
<th>Accel method</th>
<th>Other comments, e.g. time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drexel</td>
<td>12 quarter cred grad courses replace gen eds</td>
<td>no time limitations (of 45 in masters) now is 4 quarter credits</td>
<td><a href="https://drexel.edu/undergrad/academics/accelerated-degrees/">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johns Hopkins</td>
<td>2 of 10 courses</td>
<td>50% tuition reduction in grad yrs</td>
<td><a href="https://engineering.jhu.edu/academics/combined-bachelors-masters/">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan-Dearborn</td>
<td>9 of 30 credits</td>
<td>no time limitation</td>
<td><a href="https://umdearborn.edu/cecs/departments/mechanical-engineering/undergraduate-programs/41-bioengineering-program">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ New Haven</td>
<td>(some)</td>
<td>double counting dictated at state of CT level</td>
<td>Information not clear on-line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern</td>
<td>up to 3 courses</td>
<td>interleaving courses</td>
<td>no time limitations (depends on program) (many students w/ AP credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdue</td>
<td>9 credits of free elective</td>
<td>~50% of combined programs lead to an MBA</td>
<td><a href="http://catalog.purdue.edu/content.php?catoid=9&amp;navoid=11212">Link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIT</td>
<td>6 to 9 credits (non-engr)</td>
<td>BS+MS in 5 yrs</td>
<td>BS CHE, MS Materials (vs BS+coop in 5 yrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M</td>
<td>2 courses – credit by exam for ugrad courses after taking grad courses (program specific)</td>
<td><a href="https://engineering.tamu.edu/academics/fasttrack.html">Link</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. Toledo</td>
<td>6 to 8 credits</td>
<td>no time limitations that chair knows of</td>
<td>no obvious web page describing combined program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wayne State Univ.  16 of 32 credits
https://gradschool.wayne.edu/faculty/agrade

up to 6 years is OK, thesis is possible
department-specific requirements