

## Fast Track Program Guidelines

The proposed program will enable outstanding senior undergraduate students to satisfy degree requirements for master's degrees while completing their undergraduate studies. The program is designed to encourage our most gifted students to complete a master's degree at UTA and is intended to offer these gifted students, who are highly sought after by other institutions, incentives in money and time saved to remain and complete an advanced degree at UTA. We also hope that this program will help build a relationship with these students that will increase the likelihood that they will remain and pursue doctoral degrees.

### Overview of the Fast Track Program

The proposed program is designed to ensure that gifted students will complete and receive their bachelor's degrees on time while simultaneously making substantial progress in master's level studies. Graduate programs will participate on a voluntary basis. Participating programs will use the guidelines presented below to develop applicant screening practices and degree requirements that will ensure student success and preserve the educational quality of their undergraduate and graduate degrees. Once applicants have been screened and selected to participate in this program, they will complete a rigorous and carefully selected set of organized advanced undergraduate and graduate courses. These courses may be used to satisfy both undergraduate and graduate degree requirements. The guidelines contained in this proposal set an upper limit on the number of hours that a student might count toward both the bachelor's and the master's degree. Participating programs may decide to allow fewer hours to count jointly, but in no case may the jointly counted credit hours exceed the maximum specified below.

This proposal defines the minimum requirements that will be required of applicants and participating students. Programs may increase the rigor of these requirements or impose additional ones, but in no case may they act to reduce them. Participating programs should understand that only outstanding and academically capable students will be allowed to pursue the proposed course of study.

Undergraduates will apply when they are within 30 hours of completing their bachelor degrees. They must complete at least 9 hours of specified undergraduate coursework that a program feels are necessary and/or have predictive value regarding success in advanced coursework prior to making application. Performance in these courses will be used to aid in selecting qualified students. Once admitted, students will be allowed to take a mixture of advanced undergraduate and graduate courses that may be used to satisfy both bachelor's and master's degree requirements. Graduate and undergraduate courses included in this program will be selected because they meet the educational requirements of both the undergraduate and master's degree plans.

Students need not complete the program to receive their bachelor's degrees and may elect to end participation at any time. Graduate and undergraduate courses completed while participating in the Fast Track program will be selected so that they may be applied to the bachelor's degree even if the student exits the program before completing all available courses. Those who successfully complete the program will be automatically admitted to the Graduate School prior to completing remaining requirements for the master's degree. They will not be required to take the Graduate Record Examination, complete an application for admission to the Graduate School or pay an application fee.

The Fast Track program differs in two important ways from 5-year "stacked" programs currently offered at UTA. It allows students who do not complete the program to use any of the specified graduate course credit in their undergraduate degree plan. This will insure their graduation will not be delayed by taking graduate courses. Thus the Fast Track program avoids a problem with timely degree completion that can arise in many 5-year programs. Additionally, unlike 5-year

programs, the Fast Track program will enable students to receive their bachelor's degrees prior to receiving their master's degree and being admitted into a graduate program.

### **Key Elements of the Fast Track Proposal**

Program participation will be voluntary and will follow the general guidelines presented below.

Programs proposing that up to 9 hours of course work be shared between a student's undergraduate and graduate course work are normally approved. Programs suggesting more than 9 hours of shared course work need to provide a strong rationale.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, when senior-level students are within 15 hours<sup>2</sup> of completing their undergraduate degree requirements, they may take up to 9 hours of graduate level coursework designated by their programs and apply these credits to both degrees.

Programs choosing to participate will be asked to 1) select at least 9 hours of organized undergraduate coursework that will be used, in part, to screen potential participants; 2) select a set of advanced undergraduate and graduate courses that accepted students will take that will meet the educational requirements of both graduate and undergraduate degrees; 3) establish grade point requirements for participating students. Only organized courses (e.g., no independent study courses) may be included in the approved set of courses. Each course included among those that will be used as joint credit must make a specific and unique contribution to the student's degree plans. Undergraduate and graduate courses with significant overlapping content may not be used to satisfy degree requirements. For example, students may not take both the undergraduate and the graduate versions of a course cross-listed as both an undergraduate and graduate course.

Students must adhere to the specified degree plan. No other courses may be substituted for those selected for screening applicants or for joint credits toward both degrees unless reviewed and approved by a program's Graduate Advisor, Graduate Studies Committee and the Dean of Graduate Studies once a program has designated these courses. Changes in the courses used to select students or to satisfy degree requirements will take effect in the semester following final approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

### **Student Qualifications and Admission Procedures**

**Qualifications:** All applicants must complete at least 9 hours of prerequisite coursework as specified by participating programs and earn a GPA of at least 3.3 in these courses. Programs may elect to require a higher GPA and more than 9 hours of requisite work. These courses may or may not number among those approved for joint credit. For example, they may be basic 2000

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<sup>1</sup> At present, credits cannot be applied to more than one degree's requirements. This will change under the current proposal and specified credits will be counted in both the bachelor's and master's degree plans. The rule that no more than 9 hours of advanced undergraduate credit may be used to satisfy master's degree requirements will continue to be in effect.

<sup>2</sup> Current rules allow undergraduate students who are in their final semester of study and who are within 15 hours of completing their degrees (six hours in one summer session) to take up to 12 hours graduate level coursework and apply these credits toward their master's degrees. (This is not referring to joint credit hours for undergraduate and graduate work.) Total registration may not exceed 15 semester hours in a semester (or 12 hours in the summer sessions). The current proposal will relax this rule for Fast Track participants, allowing them to take graduate level courses when they are within 15 hours of completing their undergraduate degrees. The current limit on the number of graduate credit hours (12-hours) taken as an undergraduate that can be counted toward the master's degree will not be altered under this proposal. Similarly, the current maximum number credit hours that can be taken in a long (15-hours) or summer session (12-hours) will remain in effect. However, undergraduates will not be allowed to enroll in more than 9 graduate credit hours per long semester or 6 graduate credit hours per summer session.

or 3000 level content courses or basic methodological courses applying only to an undergraduate degree plan or they may be courses that might count for joint credit if the student is eventually accepted into the Fast Track Program or a combination of both.

**Unconditional Admission:** Additional minimum qualifications are specified below. Participating programs may set more rigorous or specify additional requirements.

1. Must be within 30 hours of graduation with a BA or BS from UTA.
2. Must have completed at least 30 hrs of study at UTA with a 3.3 GPA or better.
3. Must have an overall GPA for all college courses of at least 3.3.
4. Must meet any other requirements imposed by the participating program.

**Provisional Admission:** A student may gain provisional admission if, during the semester in which application is made, he or she will complete any remaining courses needed to satisfy prerequisite requirements. Provisional admission will be changed to unconditional admission upon satisfactory completion of remaining requirements. Students failing to meet all requirements at the end of their semester of application will be removed from the Fast Track program. Any credits earned prior to removal from the program will be applied to the undergraduate degree only. None of the other benefits of the Fast Track program will apply. Provisionally admitted students who have been removed from the program may subsequently apply to graduate programs via the normal application process, paying all fees and meeting all relevant admission criteria. Admission will not be automatic as it will be subject to the normal admission practices of the program to which application is made and the Graduate School.

**Denial:** Students who are not admissible under the conditions specified above shall be denied admission to the Fast Track program. They may apply to graduate programs via the regular application process, paying all required fees and meeting all relevant admission criteria. Admission will not be automatic as it will be subject to the normal admission practices of the program to which application is made and the Graduate School.

## Application Procedures

**Application to the Fast Track Program:** Undergraduate students will complete an appropriate application form created by the Office of Graduate Studies for this purpose. This form will be submitted to the Graduate School. The Graduate School will send an admission worksheet and the application to the proper program for a decision to admit unconditionally, admit provisionally or deny admission. The Graduate School shall enter that decision into the student information system and provide notification to the student.

**Admission to the Graduate School:** Students completing their undergraduate degree requirements may apply to continue their studies toward their Master's degrees if they are in good standing in the Fast Track program. Students will submit an application for graduate admission in the semester in which they expect to receive their bachelor's degree. The starting semester typically will be the long semester immediately following the graduation semester. However, students may elect to delay their starting date as specified below.

A special application for admission to the graduate program in which they have begun their studies as Fast Track students will be created by the Graduate School. No fees, transcripts, or test scores will be required and, with the consent of the program's graduate advisor, admission will be automatic. Students planning to pursue a master's degree in a program other than the one in which they participated as Fast Track students must apply as a regular student, completing a full application, paying all fees and meeting all admission requirements. In such cases, admission will not be automatic and will be subject to the normal admission practices of the program and Graduate School.

### **Good Standing and Course Enrollment Clearance**

**Good Standing:** Students must maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.00 and must earn grades of B or better in all Fast Track-approved courses that will be used to satisfy undergraduate and graduate degree requirements. Students must enroll in at least 2 graduate courses and earn a B or better in all graduate courses taken prior to receiving their bachelor's degree. If a student does not complete the two required graduate courses or fails to make adequate grades, he or she will be obliged to leave the program and apply as a regular graduate student after receiving the bachelor's degree.

**Course Enrollment Clearance:** Students must obtain clearance each semester from the proper graduate advisor to take graduate courses that will be used to satisfy degree requirements. Advisors will monitor student progress carefully and advise accordingly.

### **Time Limit to Begin Graduate Studies**

A student may take off one long semester plus a summer after receiving the undergraduate degree before starting as a graduate student. An application for graduate admission must be completed and approved before post-baccalaureate studies can begin. Students returning after longer delays will have to apply as a regular student, completing a full application, paying all fees and meeting all admission requirements.

### **Model Programs**

Fast track programs similar to the one proposed here exist at many major universities where they are called fast track, 3-2, 4-1, or stacked programs. This proposal is modeled most closely after the Fast Track Program in place at the University of Texas at Dallas. Go to <http://utdallas.edu/> and enter "fast track" to search their website for details on how this program is implemented by various graduate programs.