Proposal to Establish Two Approaches to Combined Undergraduate/Graduate Study by Students at other SUNY Campuses

Background

UAlbany has long supported combined undergraduate/graduate programs. Established as cooperative agreements within or between departments, these programs permit high-quality UAlbany students to begin graduate study on an accelerated basis by allowing them to count graduate courses toward both undergraduate and graduate requirements. For instance, students in the Political Science undergraduate major who are admitted to the “BA/MPA” program are allowed to count three masters-level courses (12 credits) in the Department of Public Administration and Policy toward both their MPA and undergraduate degree requirements. Students using this mechanism save both time and money, as students that retain undergraduate standing may pay undergraduate tuition for graduate coursework. The significant attraction is that highly qualified undergraduate students are able to advance continuously into graduate study while concluding the undergraduate program, maintaining academic focus and achievement while realizing economic benefit. UAlbany benefits in that these students complete 37 graduate credit hours here rather than seeking a degree at another institution.

Similar programs have not been established to date between UAlbany and other institutions within the SUNY System. However, there are strong reasons to establish such programs now. These include:

1. The need to capture a greater share of potential graduate students that reside in New York as the number of students reaching college age declines over the next 15 years.
2. The campus-wide need to grow graduate enrollments to meet goals in the NYSUNY 2020 plan.
3. Chancellor Nancy Zimpher’s desire for greater System-wide integration, or “systemness.”

Fundamentally, the campus should seek to make UAlbany “the path of least resistance” for high-quality students in the System that may wish to pursue graduate education – and maybe particularly professional graduate education.

For these reasons, we wish to establish two pathways for undergraduate students at “cooperating SUNY campuses” to participate in combined undergraduate/graduate programs where the graduate component is located at UAlbany. Hereafter, the examples and specific request is with respect to combined undergraduate/MPA programs, but the policy changes required and outlined below are general to any types of combined undergraduate/graduate program that include other SUNY institutions.
General features of both pathways proposed for the MPA program

Both pathways proposed below have several common features:

1. The GRE would be waived for admission to the combined program provided students:
   a. Have a GPA of at least 3.30 or higher
   b. Have completed at least two "quantitative courses" (lists of applicable courses to fulfill this requirement would be compiled with each cooperating SUNY campus)
   c. Are recommended by faculty of the cooperating SUNY campus
2. Students would be able to "double count" up to three graduate level courses (12 credits) toward both their undergraduate degree and their MPA degree.
3. All other requirements of the MPA degree would still apply, including participation in "Welcome Week" (a mandatory, week-long orientation program), completion of 480 hours of internship, and completion of a capstone.
4. The Department of Public Administration and Policy would negotiate with selected SUNY campuses based on the quality of students accepted to their undergraduate program, level of interest, ability to provide relevant undergraduate preparation for MPA study, and (for Pathway #2 below only) ability to provide graduate educational experiences commensurate with the Department’s standards.
5. The Department of Public Administration and Policy would identify faculty at each cooperating SUNY campus to serve as the program contact and coordinator for students. Such faculty would be given a term-limited courtesy appointment in the Department of Public Administration and Policy.

Pathway #1: Combined 3 + 2 / 3.5 + 2 Programs

Description

For Pathway #1, undergraduate students would complete either 3 or 3.5 years of undergraduate education (6 or 7 semesters) before matriculating into the MPA program. Students would be allowed to use up to three MPA courses toward requirements in their undergraduate major while still using those courses toward the requirements for the MPA. Students would be admitted to the MPA program provisionally: students must complete their undergraduate requirements and have been awarded a degree before the beginning of classes in the next regular term (e.g., if they begin the MPA program in the spring term they must hold their undergraduate degree before the first day of classes for the fall term; if they begin the MPA in the fall term, they must hold their undergraduate degree by the first day of classes during the spring term). Students may not use more than three courses toward both their undergraduate and MPA requirements.

-If a student fails to secure their undergraduate degree during their first term in the MPA program, the student will be placed on academic probation for one term. If a student fails to secure their undergraduate credential after their second term in the MPA program, the student will be dismissed from the program.
Policy variation/exceptions required

1. Approval for graduate study before the undergraduate degree has been completed.
2. Approval to accept three graduate courses for fulfillment of both undergraduate degree and MPA degree requirements.

Justification

Graduate Studies already admits students to graduate programs without their undergraduate credential in hand. For instance, seniors who are admitted to graduate study during the spring term are admitted with the understanding that they must have their credential in hand before beginning fall classes. However, in practice, audits of such students do not identify those who have failed to complete their undergraduate requirements before classes begin. Effectively, all students admitted directly from their undergraduate program into graduate study are given a one term “grace period” in which to complete their undergraduate degree. Our proposal also provides a term in which to complete undergraduate requirements.

The existing UAlbany combined undergraduate/graduate programs are built around the concept of “double counting” masters courses toward both the undergraduate and graduate requirements. Our proposal limits double counting to three courses, as is true of UAlbany combined programs.

Pathway #2: Coordinated Course Offerings

Description

Under Pathway #2, undergraduate students would remain in residence at their undergraduate institution through graduation from their program. Each cooperating SUNY campus would establish and/or modify up to three courses taught at the graduate level that would map directly onto UAlbany’s MPA curriculum. The Department of Public Administration and Policy would work with each campus to make sure that the courses created/modified fully conformed to the academic expectations and standards that govern the MPA core. The Department would also regularly monitor the quality of instruction and the performance of students who had completed courses at cooperating SUNY campuses to make sure deficiencies did not manifest themselves later.

The cooperating SUNY campuses would allow their undergraduates to count up to three graduate courses approved for use toward the MPA toward undergraduate requirements.

Students would matriculate to UAlbany upon completion of their undergraduate degree. UAlbany would count up to three of the pre-approved courses toward the MPA degree requirements. No more than three courses may be used toward fulfillment of both undergraduate and graduate degree requirements.

Policy variation/exceptions required
1. Approval to accept three graduate courses for fulfillment of both undergraduate degree and MPA degree requirements.

2. Approval to automatically accept “transfer” of three graduate courses from a cooperating SUNY campus into the MPA program.

Justification

As noted before, existing UAlbany combined undergraduate/graduate programs are built around the concept of “double counting” masters courses toward both the undergraduate and graduate requirements. Our proposal limits double counting to three courses, as is true of UAlbany combined programs.

Transfer credit is already a well-established practice within the University. To receive transfer credit students in the Department of Public Administration and Policy must present evidence of the transferred course’s rigor and the student’s performance therein to a faculty member who teaches the course most similar to what the student wishes to transfer. The faculty member must then approve the transfer, with a counter signature by the chair of the Department. Here, this process would be automated through the Department’s “pre-approval” process and regular monitoring of curricular content and instructional quality.