Accelerated Graduate Programs Process Design

Opportunity Statement There is growing interest by academic programs at MU to create accelerated graduate programs (AGP) which blend the 4th year of undergrad and the 1st year of graduate school. These programs allow students to complete a bachelor's and master's in 5 years rather than 6.

Challenges

- A template programs can use to create these programs does not exist. Newly created accelerated programs may have different administrative processes, making the programs difficult to manage for administrative offices (Graduate Studies, Financial Aid, Registrar).
- If a student is admitted to an AGP, this would have direct consequences on their financial aid, cost of education, and when they receive their bachelor's degree.
- There may be conflicts with the Collected Rules and with the HLC with these types of programs.

Goals

- Create guidelines that programs can follow to create accelerated programs
- Allow for dual credits for a BA and MS for the same courses.

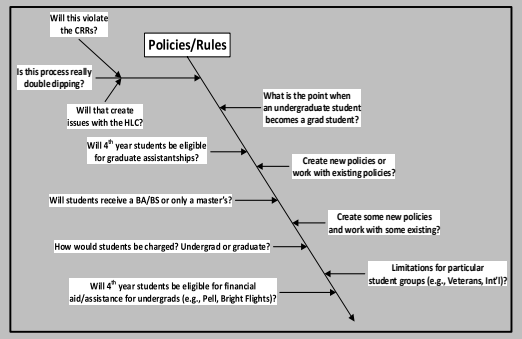
Beneficiary value

- ***Students*** will enter the job market more quickly with a reduction in their cost of education.
- Providing ***programs*** with a template will make the process of creating an AGP transparent. Also, having an accelerated program option may increase the number of master's students within a program.
- By leading this effort, ***Grad Studies and the Grad Faculty Senate*** will become the authority on how to create these programs in a way that maintains both academic and administrative integrity.
- Creating a template that programs will follow will create a standardized process ***administrative offices*** *can* follow rather than having numerous programs with varying processes.

Issues Identified Through brainstorming, the team identified 39 issues that may make creating and implementing accelerated degrees difficult. The issues were grouped into 4 categories:

- Policies/rules (e.g., financial aid eligibility, billing, receive BA/BS or only MA/MS)
- Communication (e.g., what to call the students, what to call courses, how to communicate with stakeholders)
- Processes (e.g., who should approve, transition from UG to GRAD, process needs to be created since none exists)
- Clear standards (e.g., programs need a compelling reason to create, basic student qualifications, impact on UG graduation rates)

As an example, the figure below represents issues identified within Policies/Rules:



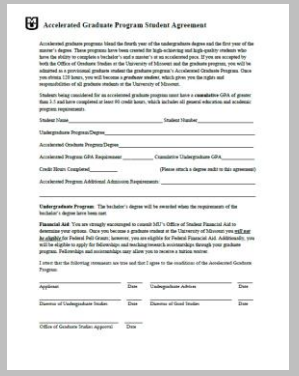
Information Gathering A pilot survey was sent to 9 Registrar's offices; 8 responded. The survey revealed that manual administrative work can make these programs burdensome, particularly for financial aid offices. Additionally, the programs are underutilized. No issues occurred with accreditors. Because the survey was sent to only other registrar's office, the team decided to create a more comprehensive survey to send to registrar's, grad schools/studies and financial aid offices.

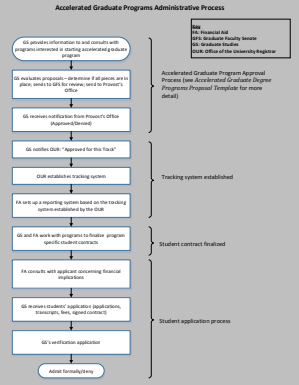
Select results

- 59 individuals completed the survey; respondents represented grad schools/studies (51%); registrars (30%); financial aid (14%); and academic affairs (5%).
- 88% have accelerated programs; over 70 different programs were identified, representing many academic disciplines.
- 79% indicated their universities do have credits that count toward both the UG and GRAD.
- The BA/BS can be conferred at different points (e.g., after requirements of BA/BS met; upon completion of both degrees).
- Varying responses provided to the question "When do accelerated students transition from UG financial aid eligibility to GRAD eligibility?"
- A key problem managing these programs is that stakeholders (faculty and students) do not understand processes. Some of this may be due to poor communication between administrative offices and stakeholders.

Outcomes Based on survey results and issues identified at the onset of the project, the team developed tools to help in the creation and administration of accelerated programs:

1. *Accelerated Graduate Degree Programs Proposal Template.* Provides guidance to programs on how to propose accelerated programs.
2. *Student Agreement. S*pecifies the basic requirements needed to apply, when the BA/BS will be conferred, and a recommendation to consult Financial Aid about aid limitations (below).
3. *Process maps (2)*. 1) Outlines approval process for accelerated programs; 2) Administrative processes for managing accelerated programs (below).


Accelerated Graduate Program Student Agreement



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