



GUIDELINES FOR COMBINED DEGREE/CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS
November 2024

I. Definitions

A. Definitions and Categories of Internal Combined Programs

Multi-level programs: The program of study includes a combination of undergraduate and graduate-level course work and degrees/certificates.

Graduate-level programs: Course work and degrees/certificates for both programs (whether joint or dual) are graduate level.

Joint programs: Student is concurrently enrolled in two programs, and both degrees are awarded simultaneously upon completion of both programs.

Dual programs: Student is concurrently enrolled in two programs and degrees may be awarded in different terms.

The most common internal combined programs, all of which involve combinations of GW programs, are bachelor's/master's, master's/master's, and master's/graduate certificate combined programs; other multi-level programs involving, for example, master's/JD, and PhD/MD also exist. Thus, there are four potential combinations of combined degree/certificate programs internal to GW:

1. **Multi-level joint programs:** bachelor's/master's programs that require the degrees/certificates to be awarded simultaneously
2. **Multi-level dual programs:** bachelor's/master's programs that may award the degrees/certificates sequentially
3. **Graduate-level joint programs:** graduate programs that require the two degrees/certificates to be awarded simultaneously
4. **Graduate-level dual programs:** graduate programs that may award the degrees/certificates sequentially

B. Definitions and Categories of External Combined Programs

External combined programs can be bachelor's level, multi-level, or graduate/professional level. For external combined programs, which involve GW in partnership with at least one other university, foreign or domestic, "joint" and "dual" generally have different meanings than for internal combined programs:

External joint programs: Two or more universities collaborate to create a single program, and students who complete the program earn one credential.

External dual programs: Two (or more) universities collaborate to offer a combined program in which students earn two related degrees/credentials, one from the first university and one from the second, based on a program of studies in which some course work is typically counted toward both credentials.

The joint degree approach may make sense when two universities have complementary strengths that allow them to create a new program that neither could create by itself. However, a joint program requires considerable planning time and ongoing coordination and is generally not advisable or common for that reason. The dual degree approach, most often done with an international partner university, is easier to establish and more common.

In addition to differentiation by the level, timing of awarding degrees/certificates, and institution(s) involved in awarding the degrees/certificates, a key distinguishing feature of programs is the timing of admission, which should be carefully planned. At the time a program is established, the school must indicate when applicants can be admitted to the program. Multi-level programs may be designed to admit students prior to their first year, as in the only such program at GW currently, the [seven-year dual bachelor's/MD program, an integrated program](#) involving SMHS and CCAS. More typically, because high school students are rarely certain of their career goals, undergraduate students are admitted to bachelor's/master's combined programs as upper-class students (normally, by the first semester of their junior year). Graduate-level combined programs may allow either simultaneous or sequential application and admission.

II. Internal Combined Programs

More specific information about internal combined programs, multi-level and single-level, is provided in this section.

A. Approval and Review

As with all academic programs, new combined programs, as well as substantial changes to existing combined programs, must be approved, through CourseLeaf or its successor system, by the appropriate department(s), Dean(s), and Academic Affairs prior to public announcement of the program, acceptance of applications, or student enrollment in the program. **Combined programs cannot be self-determined or ad hoc.** Approval by the

Board of Trustees is required only when a new doctoral program is proposed. Approval by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is required only when a program is offered at a new location in which at least 50% of the coursework is taught at the new location. (Information about substantive change can be found at: <https://academicplanning.gwu.edu/substantive-change>.)

As with all new programs, the justification for the program, admissions criteria, curricular requirements for completion of the program, and learning outcomes must be clearly articulated. Specifically, the proposal must clearly state the following, among other items of information required in CourseLeaf:

1. When prospective students can apply and be admitted to the program (e.g., before their first year, in their junior year, or within the first year of a graduate degree program).
2. How admission requirements to the programs will be modified (e.g., in multi-level programs, through the setting of higher than usual GPA requirements; criteria to be met after initial provisional admission).
3. The specific courses and number of credits that may be double-counted, if any.
4. Any plans to enrich students' experiences (e.g., in multi-level programs, during the undergraduate phase through special seminars, undergraduate research; in graduate-level programs, through an integrative capstone course).
5. Whether different credentials will be awarded simultaneously or sequentially.

To allow students to graduate with their undergraduate class and to obtain a sense of achievement and a credential en route to the graduate degree, it is desirable to structure combined bachelor's/master's programs as dual programs. If a multi-level joint program is offered, students must be informed, in writing, prior to beginning the program that they will not be awarded their undergraduate degree or be allowed to participate in the University commencement ceremony until all requirements for both degrees have been completed. Graduate-level programs can be either joint or dual; joint may be preferred when students must conform to a specific course sequencing plan to meet the requirements of both programs; a dual program would generally allow more flexibility.

As programs are being proposed, departments/programs must work with the Office of Student Financial Assistance and the school's/college's graduate studies office to determine student eligibility for various types of financial assistance.

Combined programs should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they maintain high standards of quality and contribute to the benefit of the students, department, school, and University. Combined programs will be included in the academic program review (APR) of each department/program every seven years. In addition, it is the responsibility of the schools to monitor new combined programs during their first four years and to initiate

procedures to modify, phase out, or terminate programs that do not meet standards of quality or are not financially viable.

Academic Planning maintains an inventory in CourseLeaf of all combined programs. The Registrar's Office and Institutional Research have authoritative lists of programs, and programs are made known to the public through department and school websites and are included in the "Combined" programs list in [Find Your Program](#) on the GW website.

B. Program Administration

Each combined program must have a designated program director or advisor responsible for counseling and monitoring prospective and current students and serving as a point of contact for prospective and current students and university administration offices. These advisors/directors ensure that admissions criteria and processes are fair, prospective applicants are well-informed about the admissions requirements and the program, students are advised and monitored, and school and University standards are upheld.

The program director/advisor for each program in a combined program must work with his/her dean's office and the other program's director/advisor to develop written guidelines for their program, clearly stating:

1. When an applicant can apply and be admitted to the combined program (e.g., as incoming first-year students, in the first semester of their junior year, anytime during their graduate degree program).
2. Application requirements and admissions standards.
3. Financial aid eligibility.
4. The maximum number of credits that can be double-counted (see guidelines under *Academic and Curriculum Requirements* for a particular school) and any rules regarding which courses can be double counted
5. When students can begin taking course work in the program – in particular, when undergraduate students in multi-level programs can begin taking graduate courses.
6. When each degree will be awarded.

Additionally, schools need to establish policies and processes for students whose plans or academic standing change during their combined program. Guidelines must be established for students who:

1. Elect to drop out of a combined degree program. Undergraduate students who change their minds should be counseled about other options at GW and not be counted as dropouts from the graduate program.

2. Are not approved to continue beyond the bachelor's level or are suspended or dismissed from one of their combined programs; these students, too, may need counseling about their options.
3. Are in a graduate-level program, but either have academic difficulties in one component of the program or decide not to complete both. Schools need to confirm whether students will be allowed to continue on in only one part of the program.

C. Admissions Requirements and Procedures

Admissions standards should be set for each degree/certificate component of the combined program by the department and school offering the specific degree or certificate. Admissions criteria and processes need to be communicated clearly so that prospective students know what is required in the way of academic credentials, standardized test scores, prior course work, work experience, reference letters, and any other background or supporting documents. The department/program should include information about combined programs and their requirements on their websites, in promotional materials, and in the Bulletin. Information on multi-level programs will also be included in undergraduate admissions materials, and graduate-level program information will be included in graduate admissions materials.

D. Application Fees

Applicants applying simultaneously to more than one school or department must normally pay two application fees and submit a separate application and supporting documents to each school and department unless there is a documented policy to the contrary. If the applicant has already enrolled at GW in an undergraduate or graduate certificate or degree program or is an alumna of GW, the application fee is waived.

E. Admissions Requirements

Admissions requirements for a component of a multi-level combined program may be set somewhat higher than those usually required for admission to the degree or certificate, to (a) ensure that students will be able to succeed at the level of the course work required, and (b) prevent compromising the quality of the educational experience for others. Specific guidelines for admissions criteria for different combined programs are listed below.

1. Multi-level Programs Admission Prior to the First Year

Care should be taken to establish high standards of admission aimed at ensuring that the student will be regarded as an attractive candidate for undergraduate support and for the graduate or professional program three years hence. Admission standards and processes need to be decided upon in coordination with Undergraduate Admissions.

Close consultation with Undergraduate Admissions is required. When an offer of

admission is made, the student should be apprised of the performance standards that must be met to remain in the combined program. Higher minimum academic requirements may be set by individual schools or programs; they should never be lower than those required for graduate/ professional students in the program.

2. Undergraduate Admission to Multi-level Programs

Current undergraduates interested in applying to a multi-level program should generally do so after earning 75 credits and before their last year, preferably in the first semester of their junior year. They must submit a completed Graduate Admissions Application and, depending on the school/college, either designate through that application that they are applying for a particular combined bachelor's/master's program or file a Combined Degree Application Form with the school's graduate admission office (e.g., see [CCAS Combined Degree Application Form.pdf](#) for an example).

Application requirements should be the same as for any graduate applicant, including, if applicable, test scores, statement of purpose, and recommendations. In most cases, admissions standards should be more rigorous than those for other graduate applicants simply because students will be taking graduate courses as undergraduate students and must, therefore, have solid academic skills to succeed.

The graduate admission office ensures that a student record is created in Banner and the student's graduate and undergraduate record is coded to reflect their combined program status. To avoid negatively impacting financial assistance, the graduate application for admission must be entered for the appropriate admit term. For dual programs, this will generally be the first semester following the anticipated awarding of the undergraduate degree. For joint programs, the admit term should be the first semester after a student is expected to have completed 117 undergraduate credit hours.

Students admitted to dual multi-level programs should be notified that they are expected to follow a program of study that will ensure completion of their undergraduate degree by their stated admit term. Should this timeline change, students must notify their undergraduate and graduate advisors and the graduate admissions office.

3. Admission to Graduate-level Programs

Applicants to a graduate-level combined degree program must submit a separate completed Graduate Application for Admission and all required supporting documents to each of the two programs. They should indicate in the online application that they are applying to an approved combined program involving a second graduate program and the school to which they are applying. Where required by a school/college, a Dual Program Application form should also be submitted to the graduate admissions office of the relevant school.

After the application has been reviewed by the faculty of each of the programs involved, the school's admission office should send out a decision letter. Offers of admission must include detailed guidelines about the combined program (see *Program Administration*, above). If a student is denied or declines admission to one of the programs, the school should notify the admissions office for the second program.

Students cannot apply for the second element of a combined program after they have completed one of the elements of the combined program, whether it is a combined graduate certificate/master's program or a master's/master's program. School/college rules differ and should be consulted, but students in Columbian College are advised to apply for a combined program before they have completed 50% of each program's credits. Regardless of school, students in a graduate certificate program must enter the master's program in a combined program of interest before earning 12 credits in the certificate program to benefit from any double counting of credits allowed in the combined program. Similarly, students in a master's program cannot complete its requirements and then claim they should belatedly receive a certificate based on some or all of the credits they earned during their master's work. Both are inconsistent with the concept of a *combined* program.

In addition, students cannot be enrolled in a combined program if there is no approved combined program with the elements the student wants to be offered, although they are free to complete both programs in conformity with the relevant school's normal transfer credit rules. Finally, students should not be enrolled in more than two programs at GW at the same time.

F. Enrollment Deposits

A graduate enrollment deposit is not to be required from students admitted to a multi-level program, but each school can decide whether or not to require multiple enrollment deposits from graduate-level program applicants.

G. Coding/Tracking

All applicants for combined programs must be appropriately coded and entered in the Banner student information system, following guidelines established by the Office of the Registrar.

1. Multi-Level Programs

Admitted Prior to the First Year:

Coding and tracking integrated multi-level programs should generally follow the processes established by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions for first-year admission programs.

Admitted While an Undergraduate:

The graduate admissions office needs to ensure that a new admissions record is created for the student in Banner. Specific processes must be followed to correctly code and track multi-level student to avoid negatively impacting student financial aid.

2. Graduate-Level Programs

Students who are applying to graduate-level programs must be coded in Banner as being in a dual or joint degree program or in a combined master's/graduate certificate program. The "higher" program should be designated as the primary curriculum and the other as the secondary curriculum, with master's programs coded as secondary to doctoral and JD programs, and certificate programs as secondary to master's programs. If programs are at a comparable level (e.g., two master's programs), the first program to which the student applied should be coded as the primary curriculum.

H. Student Financial Assistance

When establishing a multi-level combined program, departments and programs must work with the Office of Student Financial Assistance and the school graduate studies office to determine student eligibility for various types of financial assistance. Students in multi-level programs should be informed at admission that they will not be eligible for undergraduate financial assistance once they have matriculated into their graduate program and that they will not be eligible for graduate student support until after their undergraduate degree has been completed.

To retain eligibility for undergraduate federal and institutional financial aid, the number of graduate courses for which an undergraduate student is registered in any given semester or summer session must be less than half of his/her total course load.

I. Academic and Curriculum Requirements and the Double Counting of Credits

Students admitted to combined programs will, at a minimum, be required to meet the academic standards and timeline for completion that are in place for each component of the program.

Double counting of credits is not required, but has traditionally been a component of combined programs because it allows the student to save both time and money. The number of credits that may be doubled-counted may vary somewhat between these programs and should be determined by each school and approved as part of the combined program approval process in CourseLeaf based on the following general guidelines.

1. For the credit to be double-counted, all of the following conditions must be met:
 - a. the course work must be approved by the relevant departments as applying toward both program requirements;
 - b. the student must have received a grade of *B* or better; and

- c. the course work must have been taken for graduate credit; and
- d. all requirements of both programs must be met.

2. Double Counting in Bachelor's/Master's programs

It is common practice in junior-admission combined bachelor's/master's programs to allow students to accelerate their education and save money in the process by "double counting" graduate courses taken as an undergraduate toward both the bachelor's and the master's degree. Indeed, this is the primary appeal of a combined program. Double-counting courses is akin to offering a tuition discount, as the student ultimately requires fewer credits than usual to complete both degrees. GW's guidelines for approving junior-admission combined bachelor's/master's programs have allowed up to 25% of the coursework for the master's degree to be double counted. Other universities that allow double counting in combined programs generally allow a similar percent (between 6 and 12 credits) to be double counted. However, not all such programs double count credits; some lay out a schedule that allows students to complete both degrees efficiently.

Because of its implications for program revenue, the issue of double counting should be carefully considered when a new combined program is proposed. The proposers of each bachelor's/master's program must analyze the likely demand for and value of the program and any financial considerations in deciding whether tuition discounting of up to 25% is appropriate.

3. Double Counting in Graduate Certificate/Master's Programs

For combined graduate-level certificate/master's programs within the same discipline, all course work completed for a graduate certificate may be double-counted if the courses in the certificate are part of the master's program. Where the certificate and master's program curricula are more substantively distinct because they are in distinct programs in the same department or are in different departments or schools, the involved departments and schools should formulate a clear policy on the amount and nature of double counting permissible based on the substantive similarities and differences between courses in the two programs, the attractiveness of the combined program, and any financial considerations. The "25% rule" should be followed unless there is clear justification for double counting more or fewer credits.

4. Double Counting in Combined Graduate-Level Degree Programs

The departments and deans involved need to decide on their double counting policy in advance of offering the combined program and communicate it to prospective students through their websites and the Bulletin. The policy on double counting for the combined program must be mutually agreeable to the two programs and their dean or deans depending on whether the combined program falls within a single school or involves two schools. Typically, each participating program counts some of the credits taken in the other program toward its degree. Double counting rules are

generally consistent with the 25% rule but can appear to be more generous because both programs agree to approximately 25% double counting. For example, the MBA program, requiring either 46.5 or 56 credits, depending on the version) may agree to accept up to 12 credits taken in a partnering master's degree (based on approximately 25% of the averaged MBA credit totals), and the partnering master's degree program may agree to double count either 6 or 9 credits from the MBA curriculum toward its master's (6 or 9, depending on whether the master's is a 33- or 36-credit program). This formulation allows 18-21 double counted credits but it must also require students to complete all existing requirements for both programs.

J. Advising, Support, and Academic Progress

Prior to matriculating into a combined degree program, the student must be provided with accurate information about unique advising, registration, or graduation policies or requirements.

With the exception of graduate-level certificate/degree programs in the same department, each student entering a combined program should have an advisor in both components of their program. These individuals, with assistance from their deans' offices, should jointly determine how the relevant departments and/or schools will work together to advise the student, monitor academic progress, and establish formal lines of communication. For instance, it must be determined who will provide departmental and school approval for registration transactions and special requests; who will advise the student about courses to take at different points in the program; and when primary advising responsibility will pass from one component of the program to the other.

It is important that the academic performance of all students in combined programs be carefully monitored, particularly to ensure that a multi-level student's overall GPA and GPA for graduate courses do not drop below 3.00 (or higher, based on school policy). Students in multi-level programs should also be formally evaluated prior to the start of the graduate year to reconfirm that they are qualified and well-prepared to begin the graduate program, with the understanding that they can be terminated from the combined program for lack of acceptable undergraduate performance.

Programs of study should be established as early as possible to ensure that course work for both multi-level and graduate-level combined programs is appropriately sequenced and scheduled to ensure students' timely completion of program requirements. Multi-level dual programs typically defer formal admission to the graduate program until the student has successfully completed all requirements for the bachelor's degree. While students who fail to meet requirements can request their admissions to the graduate program be deferred, they should not be allowed to move into graduate study without being formally admitted.

Advising of students in bachelor's/master's programs should be designed to help students understand the graduate program's requirements, make a transition from an undergraduate student role to a graduate student role, stay on track to make a smooth

transition, and become socialized into the graduate program community. This can be facilitated not only by good advising but by extra steps such as inviting combined program students to department and program events of interest before they are officially graduate students and meeting with them as a group if there are enough of them so that they can support one another during their transition. If enrollments in combined programs grow, programs should consider further steps to help students develop a sense of identity and community and to strengthen advising and expand support systems.

In graduate-level combined programs too, advising by advisors in both programs is important and needs to be consistent. Thought should also be given to helping students integrate the two programs through advising, career services, integrative capstone courses, individualization of course assignments (e.g., enabling students in a master of education policy/JD program to focus on legal analysis of educational policies and laws while enabling students in a master of international affairs/JD program to focus on international law), and other means. Students in joint degree programs need to be advised on the importance of conforming to their prescribed program of study to complete their degrees simultaneously. Students enrolled in a dual graduate-level program involving two graduate levels (i.e., MD/PhD = level 05 and level 02) should be informed that they will have two separate transcripts and will need to be registered in each school until graduation. If both levels are the same (master's/master's or master's/graduate certificate), the student will have only one transcript listing courses from both programs.

K. Graduation and Academic Records

In addition to maintaining students' academic records and monitoring their progress, schools are responsible for communication with their counterparts in the students' second program, notifying them whenever there is a significant change in the student's academic status. Graduation clearance should also be coordinated between the different programs/schools.

Students enrolled in multi-level joint programs cannot participate in The George Washington University commencement until degree requirements have been met for both the graduate and undergraduate programs. Participation as a "walk-through" in school-specific graduation events upon completion of undergraduate degree requirements is at the discretion of the undergraduate school dean's office. Additionally, these students are eligible for graduation honors and awards only after completion of all requirements for both degrees.

L. Revenue and Expense Considerations and Tuition Pricing

1. Financial issues that arise in creating combined programs include the following: deciding whether to double count course work toward both degrees/credentials and, if so, how much;
2. Applying appropriate tuition rates and dealing with issues created by different tuition rates in different schools or programs; and

3. Budgeting and accounting for revenue and expense. Schools creating combined degrees should create a detailed budget of how revenue will be allocated, the cost of the program to students, and how financial aid will be awarded.

III. External Combined Programs (including International Combined Programs)

External joint or dual programs that involve GW and one or more partner institution, especially an international partner or partners, entail more complex planning and coordination than internal combined programs. As noted at the outset, a joint external combined program may make sense when a GW program can collaborate with a partner program at another university to create a new program neither could create on its own. However, dual programs are generally easier to establish and operate, especially in an international context, and are therefore recommended. It should be noted at the outset that there are other, less complex, options for international collaboration than dual degree programs. An undergraduate school or program, for example, may develop an agreement with another university to award transfer credit for certain courses from that university or develop a study abroad or student exchange program with that university. At the graduate level, a GW program may, through an agreement, establish a pipeline of students from a partner university by awarding tuition awards to qualified applicants or instituting a special transfer credit policy or by allowing students finishing their undergraduate degrees elsewhere to come to GW in their senior year and begin a GW master's program.

Creation of a dual degree program should ultimately depend on the dual degree program's having clear and compelling goals and contributing positively to the strategic priorities, mission, and reputation of GW as well as to the educational benefit of students. International partnerships can not only enhance GW's reputation worldwide but better prepare students for life and work in global contexts.

The partner university should be accredited and of at least the international standing and quality as GW. The specific partner program and the GW program to be involved should also be of similarly high stature and quality, and the students admitted to the program should have the strong academic records and language proficiency demanded of a dual degree program.

It is advisable that a program or department contemplating an international educational partnership first meet with its dean to articulate its goals and define the approach it wishes to take. After preliminary planning, representatives of the school/program should then meet with the Office of International Programs (OIP) to understand what kind of international agreement would best achieve their goals and what specifics will need to be worked out with the partner university and memorialized in a signed agreement. Planning should also involve relevant GW offices such as undergraduate admissions, study abroad, international services, and housing to address any new challenges posed by a proposed program.

If a dual degree program is to be established, GW and its partner university need to agree upon and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) describing the combined program and its rationale, curriculum, admission requirements, and administration, and more, making clear what students in the program will do where and when to earn two degrees, any double counting of

credits proposed, and administrative details. More specifically, the MOU should describe the program and its curriculum, admission criteria, enrollment expectations, language of instruction, administration (with details on who will be responsible for everything from student recruitment to degree clearance), faculty/personnel, visa details, local facilities, housing, travel, and insurance provisions for students and faculty, emergency response, financial arrangements, and term of the agreement and its termination provisions.

The Office of International Programs (OIP) will offer standard agreement language, and at the undergraduate level, help developing program-specific language. The standard reviewers of the MOU, which is routed through SharePoint, are: OIP, OGC, Privacy, Budget, and Deputy Provost's Office. If it is a graduate-level agreement, the originating school needs to develop the program-specific language and route the agreement through the appropriate reviewers. OIP ensures, both via email records and SharePoint, that this occurs. Program proposers should expect both the planning and the ongoing management of an international combined program to be labor-intensive.

Some dual degree programs involve students earning a degree at the partner institution and then completing a second degree at GW, with some courses from the first program counting toward the GW degree through a double counting agreement. Other programs may involve students completing requirements of the two degree programs in some other pattern—for example, through students in the two universities doing some of their work at the partner university in a study abroad arrangement.

With regard to undergraduate students enrolled in dual bachelor's degree programs involving an international partner or partners, the GW bulletin specifies the following residency requirement: "To earn a bachelor's degree, students must earn at least 60 credits at or through GW, which may include a University-authorized study abroad and study away program. At least 30 of the 60 credits earned at or through GW must be in upper-level courses (numbered 2000 or above); at least 12 credits in upper-level courses must be in the major field, and at least 6 credits in upper-level courses must be in the minor field, if sought." At the graduate level, students in dual degree programs should complete all of the requirements for the GW degree and should complete at least half of the credits for the GW degree at or through GW and follow applicable school/college transfer credit policies. In combined programs involving partner universities, GW should maintain control of the GW program.

If the GW program is the same program the school/college already offers, no action in CourseLeaf is required; the SharePoint agreement system will hold the record of the new dual degree program. If the program is a modification of an existing program, approval of the modifications through CourseLeaf is required. If at least 50% of a GW educational program or dual degree is taught at a location that is geographically separate from GW's main campus, the GW program must submit a substantive change request for an additional location, which must be approved by Middle States before the program can be offered. Information about the substantive change process can be found at the Academic Planning [website](#).]

Care should be taken to ensure that course offerings at both institutions will allow students to complete the combined program in a timely manner. Both institutions should also commit to

regular program reviews to ensure the quality of the combined program. As in internal combined programs, care should be taken in setting rules for the double counting of course credits, taking into account the extent of similarity of courses in the two programs, program demand, and financial considerations.

Because international joint and dual degree programs and other educational agreements involving international partners are approved through MOUs approved by and accessible to Academic Affairs through SharePoint, Academic Affairs should create, maintain, and make available a list of these programs so that others in the University are aware of existing agreements with universities abroad and so that these special programs can be made known to prospective students.

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