



## Fast-track 4+1 Programs

The fast-track 4+1 program allows high achieving students to earn both a baccalaureate and a master's degree in 5 years. All participants complete at least 30 hours of graduate credit to earn the graduate degree. A portion (up to 12 hours) of the graduate coursework also counts toward graduation requirements at the baccalaureate level, following a dual-enrollment model like that available for high-school/college dual enrollment. SACSCOC requires that an institution ensure that post-baccalaureate degrees include a minimum of 30 hours and that coursework include a knowledge of literature in the discipline as well as participation in research or professional practice. The standard does not require that all graduate coursework be taken while the student is classified as a graduate student. The 30-hour requirement is tied to the level of the course, not the level of the student. However, the burden is on the institution to demonstrate quality and integrity of both the undergraduate and graduate program experience. This requires that the program separately track and assess fast-track undergraduate student achievement of both undergraduate learning outcomes and graduate learning outcomes.

### Basic Program Requirements

- Must be highly selective—only available for students identified as exceptional as determined by academic performance, standardized test scores and/or other indicators of success supported by program data.
- No more than 12 hours of graduate work can be taken as an undergraduate.

### Requirements for Admission to Fast-track 4+1 Programs

- Must be working toward a baccalaureate degree - students coming in with a bachelor's degree are not candidates for the fast-track program but can be admitted as graduate students if they meet qualifications for admission.
- Must submit official graduate application to the university/program.
- Must have completed 90 hours toward the declared baccalaureate degree (be classified as a senior) prior to admission into fast-track, with at least 30 hours completed at UTRGV.
- Must have completed foundational, benchmark or other key courses in the major as determined by the faculty.
- Must meet all GPA requirements established by the program (see standards for GPA calculation).
- Must meet GRE, GMAT or other entrance requirements established by the program.
- Faculty review must determine that the candidate is qualified to enter graduate program based on department standards for graduate applicants.
- Note: Once admitted to a fast-track 4+1 program, students must be coded in the SIS as fast-track students until they complete the baccalaureate requirements, after which they are coded as entering graduate students.

### Standards for GPA Calculation May Include One or More of the Following:

- Minimum overall institutional GPA of 3.5, matching graduation with honors (3.5)



- Discipline specific GPA of 3.25 or higher - GPA in the major as defined in the undergraduate catalog (major required courses, prescribed electives, concentration courses, and support courses).

Discipline specific GPA of 3.25 or higher - GPA in foundational, benchmark or other key courses in the major identified by the faculty.

### **University Process to Establish Fast-track 4+1 Programs**

- Program must opt-in to the program and follow processes to obtain approval for fast-track 4+1 program
- Program must apply to offer Fast-track program
  - Program must describe any program specific admission requirements/processes and demonstrate that the requirements meet or exceed minimum university requirements (required GRE scores, number of students per fast-track cohort, minimum GPA, other)
  - Program must identify up to 5 graduate courses that may be applied to undergraduate requirements. These are the only courses that undergraduates may take as part of the fast-track program.
  - Program must identify which undergraduate course each graduate course will replace in the undergraduate curriculum. This is a one-to-one replacement. No substitutions will be permitted. **NOTE:** Any courses listed as part of the program cannot be cross-leveled/co-convened.
  - Program must describe how they will assess fast-track 4+1 program, achievements of participants, develop assessment plan.
- Program must demonstrate that proposal has been reviewed/approved at the department and college levels (college curriculum committee, dean's office)  
University Undergraduate and Graduate Committees must approve the program plan and list of courses included in the fast-track program. **(NOTE: This will occur at a joint meeting of the Undergraduate and Graduate Committees. Joint meetings will be held a minimum of once per year. The Committees will establish firm deadlines for submitting program proposals. Proposals not submitted by the deadline will not be reviewed until the next joint committee meeting.)**

### **Student Participation Standards**

- Undergraduates enrolled in graduate courses must complete all requirements for the graduate course that graduate students must complete.
- Undergraduates must maintain a 3.0 or better in graduate coursework. All grades below a B in graduate courses may not apply toward the graduate degree but may count toward the undergraduate degree requirements.
- A student may not take more than 12 credit hours in total at the master's level.
- All undergraduate participants in the fast-track 4+1 program must be advised each semester by both undergraduate and graduate advisors.

### **Other University Process Considerations**



- Applicants to fast-track 4+1 programs, in their senior year, are specially coded in the SIS as fast-track participants.
- Upon completion of their senior year, their status is changed to graduate student status.
- University must ensure students understand that failure to achieve a B or better in the graduate coursework taken at the undergraduate level will increase the length of time to graduate degree.
- University must ensure that students understand that failure of a graduate course will negatively impact their undergraduate GPA.
- University must determine how it will address GPA calculation at the undergraduate level for participants in fast-track programs. Some institutions award CR only and do not include graduate coursework in undergraduate GPA calculation unless the grade is below a B. Others include graduate coursework in both the undergraduate and graduate GPA calculations.
- Undergraduate and graduate advisors must work together. In some institutions, fast-track participants cannot enroll in graduate courses without first meeting with a graduate advisor.
- With most fast-track programs, students pay tuition by level of course, not level of student, so graduate classes are charged at graduate tuition rates. The University will need to determine at what tuition level the student will be charged and ensure that the students are aware of any differences in charges for graduate courses taken during the completion of their undergraduate experience.



**Relevant SACSCOC Policy: 9.2** - The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. The institution provides an explanation of equivalencies when using units other than semester credit hours. The institution provides an appropriate justification for all degree programs and combined degree programs that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit. **(Program length)**