

Guidelines for the Establishment of Combined Graduate and First Professional Doctoral Degree Programs awarded by Texas A&M University

Definitions

Combination programs represent *two degrees of either the same or different academic levels pursued and awarded simultaneously*. Combination programs may allow a shorter time for completion due to the “double-counting” of some coursework. In these types of programs, some of the same course credit hours are essentially “double-counted” within the university which may allow a shorter time for completion.

Combined degree programs should maintain the overall integrity and quality of each separate program and embody a coherent course of study which is evidenced by appropriate sequencing of courses, progressive learning, and advancement in a field of study.

Combined Master’s Programs - A combined master’s program represents two master’s degrees that are pursued and awarded simultaneously.

- i. For a student pursuing a combined master’s program, the minimum number of unduplicated combined credit hours should be 60 credit hours, 30 credit hours for each program.

Combined Master’s and Doctoral Programs - A combined masters and doctoral program represents a master’s degree and a doctoral degree (PhD, EdD, DEngr, or DrPH) that are pursued and awarded simultaneously.

- i. For a student pursuing a combined masters and minimum 60 or 64 credit doctoral (i.e., admitted with an approved master’s degree) program, the minimum number of unduplicated combined credit hours should be 78 credit hours.
- ii. Course credits up to the greater of twelve credit hours or one-third (1/3) of the total number of credit hours of the master’s degree plan may be double-counted toward the masters and doctoral degrees.
- iii. Students pursuing a minimum 90 or 96 credit doctoral degree (i.e., admitted without an approved master’s degree) who wish to also pursue a masters degree should be directed to the secondary masters degree process.

Combined Master’s and First Professional (doctoral) Programs - A combined masters and first professional doctoral program represents a master’s degree and a first professional doctoral degree (JD, MD, DVM, DDS, or PharmD) that are pursued and awarded simultaneously.

- i. For a student pursuing a combined master’s and first professional (doctoral) program, the minimum number of unduplicated combined credit hours is established based on the normal minimum number of credits for each first professional doctoral degree, limits on double counting imposed by the first professional doctoral program’s accrediting body, and limits on double-counted course credits accepted by the master’s program from the first professional doctoral degree.

- ii. Course credits up to the greater of twelve credit hours or one-third (1/3) of the total number of credit hours of the master's degree plan may be accepted by the master's degree from the first professional doctorate degree course credits.
- iii. The maximum number of course credits accepted by the first professional doctoral degree from the master's degree course credits should be consistent with the accrediting standards for the first professional doctoral degree. A separate justification should be included in the combined degree proposal which states why the number is consistent with the accrediting standards.

Combined Doctoral and First Professional (doctoral) Programs - A combined doctoral and first professional doctoral program represents a doctoral degree (PhD, EdD, DEngr, or DrPH) and a first professional doctoral degree (JD, MD, DVM, DDS, or PharmD) that are pursued and awarded simultaneously.

- i. For a student pursuing a combined minimum 60 or 64 credit doctoral (i.e., admitted with an approved master's degree) and first professional (doctoral) program, the minimum number of unduplicated combined credit hours is established based on the normal minimum number of credits for each first professional doctoral degree, limits on double counting imposed by the first professional doctoral program's accrediting body, and limits on double-counted course credits accepted by the doctoral program from the first professional doctoral degree.
- ii. The minimum number of unduplicated credit hours for a PhD student pursuing a combined PhD/DDS, PhD/DVM or PhD/MD program should be 60 credit hours for the PhD degree.
- iii. The maximum number of course credits accepted by the first professional doctoral degree from the master's degree course credits should be consistent with the accrediting standards for the first professional doctoral degree. A separate justification should be included in the combined degree proposal which states why the number is consistent with the accrediting standards.

Approval Process and Publication

Combined graduate and first professional doctoral programs must be approved as defined by the [University Curricular Processes](#).

- i. Academic programs must provide a clear academic justification for the use of double-counted credits which provides evidence that the integrity and quality of each program is not compromised. A justification for double-counted credits must (a) identify the specific courses that will count toward both degrees, and (b) offer a compelling, academic rationale as to why each course is applicable to the content area of each program, how rigor and integrity of each degree is maintained, and how the combination program embodies a coherent course of study.
- ii. In appropriate cases, the minimum number of unduplicated combined credit hours may be less than the minimum stated for and/or the maximum number of double-counted credit hours may be greater than the maximum established above. In such a case, justification for the deviation must also be provided which presents a strong case for how the quality and coherence of the individual degrees are maintained.

- iii. If the master's degree program includes thesis and non-thesis options, the minimum number of unduplicated combined credit hours must be stated for both options for a combined program including a master's degree.
- iv. For degrees in combined programs which have an approved distance and non-distance delivery mode, the program must state for each degree which delivery mode(s) is included in the combined program. If a combined program will include a combination of a non-distance degree and a distance degree, details should be provided on how the program will ensure that the non-distance degree safeguards are in place such that the maximum number of credit hours that can be taken through online delivery and still not be considered a distance program is not exceeded as a result of the double-counted courses
- iv. Students should declare their intentions to enroll in combined programs at the time of application to their graduate and professional programs or early in their education process. This will ensure the maximum benefit from a combined program.
- v. All approved combined master's programs will be listed in a separate section, "Combined Masters Programs," and all other approved combined graduate and first professional programs will be listed in a separate section, "Combination Programs," in the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* as well as in the individual college sections.
- vi. The minimum number of unduplicated hours (as outlined above) must be explicitly described in the *Graduate and Professional Catalog* description of each combined program.

Guidelines supported by requirements stated in the following standards and policies from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges Resource Manual (2018).

- Standard 9.1 Program Content
- Standard 9.2 Program Length

Approved by the Graduate and Professional Council on February 3, 2022