FAQs for Accelerated Master’s Scholars Program

1. Are these 3+2 or 4+2 programs common? Have peer institutions implemented similar programs? What criteria do they use? What has their success rate been?

These programs are very common at a wide range of institutions and the trend has been growing rapidly, especially in science and engineering. (Ohio State, University of Texas, Berkeley, Stanford, University of Florida, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, MIT, University of Wisconsin, University of Virginia, Chapel Hill, Michigan State, University of Missouri, Texas A&M, Cal Poly, to name a few.) While the number of programs has been increasing they are not new; one of our presidential candidates (Campbell) earned a BS/MS in economics from the University of Chicago in 1973. We developed our criteria by examining what our peers are doing. While these programs vary in structure, they all cut a semester or two from the time required to obtain the degrees separately and allow for double-counting of coursework. From all accounts, these programs have been very successful. The demand, from both students and employers, is increasing.

2. Shouldn’t we be encouraging our top students to go elsewhere for their graduate education so their experiences are broader?

There has been a massive re-thinking of this and other policies in graduate education over the last decade. The idea that students should go elsewhere for their graduate education is one of many seemingly neutral policies that have serious adverse impact on women and minorities as well as anyone who lacks mobility. The idea that ‘serious’ students are mobile, with no responsibilities outside their education, seriously limits access for women, minorities, and anyone older than 22!

As the cost of higher education continues to increase, students are looking for savings, and these combined degrees are one way to do that. As is staying home rather than moving your family to pursue graduate education.

3. Will these undergraduates have the work ethic and maturity to succeed?

Some undergraduates do; some don’t. Some graduate students don’t. Since these are our own students in our own classes, the faculty should be able to identify those with sufficient maturity.

4. Shouldn’t we require GREs? What are the best predictors of graduate student success?

Currently the Graduate College does NOT require GREs; that is a departmental requirement. The GREs can be very helpful in predicting success when we know little about the particular undergraduate institution or the student’s motivation and work habits. Academic rigor varies among colleges; letters of recommendation are not terribly reliable. Since these are our own students, our intimate, first-hand
knowledge of their academic skills and how their performance in our classes is the best possible predictor. Direct, personal knowledge of performance at our university is the best predictor. In fact, we have a better basis for predicting success for AMSP students than for students from other universities!

5. Should students be required to complete all their general education prior to admission?

This was discussed at length in Undergraduate Council. Jerry Hogle confirmed that the vast majority of students in the College of Science and Engineering take general education courses throughout their undergraduate career. Having this as a requirement would reduce or even eliminate this as an option for science and engineering students. These are the disciplines where there is the most interest and demand. Any program that wants to make completion of general education courses a requirement may do so.

6. What if a TA is in a class with a student who is in a class she teaches?

This can happen now in co-convened classes. If it presents a conflict of interest in grading, the TA’s supervisor should do the grading. This is what is done now whenever an instructor feels a conflict of interest with regard to a particular student. Graduate students now are often in labs with undergraduate students, which is a more intimate experience than being in the same class.

7. Won’t these accelerated degrees water down the graduate degree?

No, the requirements for the master’s are exactly the same as for any other student.

8. Are the minimum standards too low?

These are only minimums; departments may have higher requirements. The graduate college minimums are also low: we only require a 3.0. Departments select the best qualified applicants. We assume they will for these programs, too. Departments want the best possible graduate students.

9. Will undergraduates be restricted to co-convened courses?

No.

10. Do we have data for UA that we can use to determine what the requirements should be for this program?

These are regular graduate programs, with the same requirements for completion. In terms of admission, departments should know what type of students will be successful in their programs. The students admitted into the AMSP should be
comparable to regular admits.

11. What would be reasonable indicators that a student is on track to receive his/her undergraduate degree?

Just as with any undergraduate, successful completion of courses, judgments of the faculty.