

Combined Bachelor/Master's Program

Introduction

WPI undergraduates can begin work on a graduate degree by enrolling in a combined Bachelor's/Master's program. This accelerated course of study allows students to obtain an MS degree after only five years of full-time work (i.e., typically one year after completion of the BS). Students often obtain the BS and MS in the same field or department, but with careful planning some students complete the combined BS/MS program in two different fields; the combination of a BS in Civil Engineering and an MS in Fire Protection Engineering is a common example. (Throughout this section, "MS" will be used to refer to all Master's-level degrees; most students who complete the combined program obtain the MS).

Planning your Program

Because BS/MS students use some approved courses to satisfy the requirements of both degrees simultaneously, it is crucial for them to plan their curriculum early in their undergraduate career.

The specific course and MQP requirements for a BS/MS program are determined individually, so students should consult with their own advisor as well as the graduate coordinator in the department in which they plan to pursue their MS degree early in their Junior year. This consultation, or series of consultations, should produce a slate of approved undergraduate courses that will be used for graduate credit. Sometimes the instructors of these courses will ask BS/MS students to complete additional work, or will otherwise hold them to higher standards of achievement.

A student's advisor and graduate coordinator will also determine what role the MQP will play in the BS/MS program. Sometimes the MQP provides a foundation for a thesis. In cases where the BS and MS are not awarded in the same field, the MQP usually relates to the graduate program's discipline.

Once the specific course and MQP requirements have been established, students complete a Course Selection Form which is submitted to the relevant department(s) for approval. This written agreement constitutes the set of conditions that must be met for a student to complete the BS/MS program. They are a plan for completing the requirements for both degrees and they will not supersede or otherwise obviate departmental and university-wide requirements for either degree. The completed, signed form must be submitted to the Registrar before the student may matriculate in the combined program.

How to Apply

Students almost always apply for admission to the BS/MS program in their Junior year, typically after they have established their curriculum and other program requirements and completed the Course Selection Form with their faculty advisors. Applications are submitted to the Office of Graduate Admissions and are processed with all other graduate applications. Once a decision has been reached, the Office of Graduate Admissions will notify the student, usually within six weeks of completing the application.

Program Requirements

Only registered WPI undergraduates may apply for admission to the combined BS/MS programs. Students are considered undergraduates, no matter what courses they have completed, until they have met all of the requirements for the Bachelor's degree. In order to receive the BS and the MS, all of the requirements for both degrees must be completed.

In most departments a student may take up to four years to complete the Master's portion of the BS/MS program. There are exceptions, however, so students are advised to discuss their timetable with the appropriate advisor or graduate coordinator. Students who stop registering for classes for an extended length of time may be asked to petition the Committee for Graduate Studies and Research to continue their program.

Credit Equivalence and Distribution

No more than 40% of the credit hours required for the Master's degree, and which otherwise meet the requirements for each degree, may be used to satisfy the requirements for both degrees. In some departments, students may not double-count more than 30% of their graduate credits. Consult the graduate catalog for the requirements of your program.

Effective in the fall 2011 semester, Undergraduate students taking graduate courses may use the conversion factor: 1 graduate credit = $\frac{1}{6}$ undergraduate unit. The policy was put into place to recognize the additional academic challenge of graduate studies with an appropriate increase in academic credit. All credit increases will be manually processed through the Registrar's Office and may not be completed the same day of registration; therefore, your initial bill may not reflect the credit conversion.

Please note that this change might have an impact on students' planning, especially if enrolled in a BS/MS program. More importantly, it also can impact overload calculations. Here are some examples:

- If a student is registered for 5 undergrad courses and 1 grad course: the student has $\frac{5}{3}$ plus $\frac{1}{2}$ units (or 2 and $\frac{1}{6}$ units total) => No overload
- If a student is registered for 3 undergrad courses and 3 grad courses: the student has $\frac{3}{3} + \frac{3}{2}$ units (2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ units total) => $\frac{1}{6}$ unit overload

Please note that the standard course load for WPI students is one unit per term (exclusive of ROTC and Physical Education classes, which do not count toward overloads). Students who register for more than $\frac{7}{3}$ (or 21 credits) per semester will be charged accordingly. Overload charges are computed at the beginning of B term and at the beginning of D term based on the course and project load included in the student's final term registration. Please note that project work is credit-bearing and is included in overload calculations.