TO: Jean Pratt, Chair
   Academic Policies Committee

FROM: Erica J. Benson, Chair
   English Department

DATE: March 7, 2016

RE: Proposed Policy Change to Allow Graduate Credit to Count for Undergraduate Degrees for Dual Degree Programs

On behalf of the English Department, I am requesting to amend the policies regarding the enrollment of undergraduates in graduate courses. The current policy (cited below) appears in the 2015-16 Undergraduate Catalog (p. 33), and the proposed changes are underlined in red:

Enrollment of Undergraduates for Graduate Credit. Upon the recommendation of the student’s adviser, course instructor, and chair of the department offering the course, a University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire undergraduate student may be allowed to enroll in a limited number of graduate courses, provided he or she has a 3.00 undergraduate GPA and has the approval of the College Dean. Qualified students may take up to, but not exceed, a total of nine credits of graduate-level course work, unless enrolled in an accelerated graduate plan with a dual bachelor’s and master’s degree component. The graduate credits cannot be used to satisfy requirements for the bachelor’s degree, unless enrolled in an accelerated graduate plan with a dual bachelor’s and master’s degree component. Application forms for enrollment in graduate courses as an undergraduate may be obtained from the Registrar’s Office.

The proposed changes would provide exceptions to the policies that currently (1) limit undergraduate students to nine credits of graduate courses and (2) prohibit graduate coursework from counting toward an undergraduate degree. The English Department requests these changes to allow for the creation and implementation of an accelerated graduate plan with a dual bachelor’s-master’s degree component.

Description of Proposed Accelerated Graduate Plan in English: The English Department would like to admit outstanding undergraduate students to our Master of Arts programs in English: Literature and Textual Interpretation (540-808) and Writing (540-809) as part of an accelerated graduate plan that would allow students to earn their BA/BS and MA degrees within five years. Ideally, undergraduate students admitted to the accelerated plan would, in their senior year, enroll in four graduate-level courses (500-, 600-, or 700-level) that would count toward their undergraduate BA/BS in English and their graduate MA in English. During the dual degree period, students would pay undergraduate tuition and upon completion of the requirements for the BA/BS would begin paying graduate tuition. Students would complete the remaining degree requirements for the MA program and could graduate with an MA as soon as one calendar year after receiving the BA/BS. Students would satisfy or exceed all requirements for both degrees.
Many universities offer accelerated plans (often called “4 + 1 Programs”) for outstanding undergraduate majors who plan to pursue graduate study immediately after earning a baccalaureate degree; examples from English include Chapman, The Claremont Colleges (Claremont, McKenna, Pitzer, Pomona, Scripps, and Harvey Mudd) and Claremont Graduate University, Temple, Vanderbilt, Rutgers University-Camden, and Seton Hall. At present no institution in the UW System offers students an opportunity to earn an MA in English within a calendar year after they earn their BA/BS. We believe that the accelerated graduate plan could become a signature feature of UW-Eau Claire and aid in recruiting undergraduate students seriously interested in advanced study of English to UW-Eau Claire.

Dr. Gail Scukanec of Graduate Studies researched UW System policies and determined that the proposed accelerated plan does not run afoul of any System policies. Associate Vice Chancellor Mike Carney researched Higher Learning Commission (HLC) criteria and assumed practices to ensure that the proposed plan meets HLC expectations. HLC assumed practices include the stipulation that “[t]he institution’s policy and practice assure that at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work, rather than undergraduate courses credited toward a graduate degree” and references criterion “3.A. The institution’s degree programs are appropriate to higher education. (1) Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded. (2) The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.” The proposed accelerated plan requires students to complete the requirements for both the BA/BS degree and the MA degree as currently formulated, and these programs follow HLC criteria and assumed practices.

Benefits:

• Accelerated graduate plans have the ability to generate revenue for UW-Eau Claire at a time when we are striving to be more self-sufficient. For example, students in English’s proposed accelerated program would remain at UW-Eau Claire and pay graduate tuition for 21 credits more than they would if exiting with a BA/BS. Moreover, these plans—or at least our proposed accelerated plan—can be implemented at zero financial cost to the university, since accelerated-plan students would be in courses we are already offering at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

• Accelerated graduate plans have the potential to attract and retain students in graduate programs and increase SCH through the increase in enrollment, helping to ensure the future of graduate programs without any additional resource allocation. In addition, unique programs could be created through this policy change.

• The opportunity to apply for admission to an accelerated graduate plan could increase UW-Eau Claire’s four-year graduate rates, contributing to the University Guidepost of having 50% of our students graduate within four years. We expect that an accelerated graduate plan would motivate undergraduate majors interested in graduate study to perform exceptionally well in their classes and complete their bachelor’s requirements in four years (or fewer).

• Dual enrollment programs would provide significant savings for students completing both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Under our proposed accelerated plan, students would save $5,934.24 in graduate tuition (at current credit hour rates) since twelve credits (four courses) would count toward both their undergraduate and graduate programs and would be paid for at the undergraduate tuition rate.

• It is our intention to have a rigorous and holistic admissions process, ensuring that students admitted to the proposed accelerated graduate plan will be our very finest majors and that students of underrepresented groups will be at the center of our recruitment and retention strategies, contributing to the University Guidepost of having 20% of our student body be students of color. We believe that both of these strategies will serve to strengthen our graduate program.
Potential Drawbacks:

• Students would be able to graduate with both undergraduate and graduate degrees with fewer credits than if they completed these degrees in a non-accelerated plan. We acknowledge that students take fewer credits overall, but even so they will still be meeting the outcomes and credit requirements of both degree programs. We allow credits to double count at the undergraduate level in several instances; for example, with double majors, we allow the university requirements and general education courses to count for both majors; between double majors as well as majors and minors, we permit credit overlap; between majors/minors and general education requirements we allow credits to double count.

• Some concern has been raised that admitting undergraduate students into graduate courses could lower standards in those courses, but we have seen time and again that our best undergraduate students meet or exceed the expectations we have for graduate students, especially in our undergraduate/graduate double-numbered courses.

• A student might decide not to continue through the MA program. In that case, the student would still have earned the BA/BS at the end of four years and will have had an enhanced undergraduate experience.

While these potential drawbacks are important to bear in mind, we believe that they are far outweighed by the benefits that would come to students, departments, and UW-Eau Claire through the policy change that would allow for dual enrollment plans. We hope the APC will enact the policy change that would make it possible to establish this innovative, broadly beneficial accelerated graduate plan.

Prior Approvals/Endorsements for Accelerated Graduate Plan in English: The English Department Graduate Faculty approved the proposed accelerated graduate plan on October 2, 2015. The College of Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee endorsed the plan on February 18, 2016. Dr. David Leaman, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Dr. Mike Carney, Associate Vice Chancellor for Curriculum, Internationalization and Immersion; and Dr. Mike Wick, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean of Graduate Studies, have assisted in the development of the accelerated plan in English.