

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Proposal for an Integrated Degree Plan
BA (Biblical Text/Languages) + MDiv

Proposal.

Proposed Plan:

Students who major in Bible, Missions & Ministry may choose to apply for the Integrated Degree Program, which combines the 4-year BA and the 3-year MDiv into an integrated program that can be completed in six years rather than the usual seven years. Students who are in the Integrated Degree Plan will be awarded the bachelor's degree upon the completion of all requirements in their undergraduate degree plan, normally after four years of study.

To be admitted to the program, undergraduate students must:

1. be accepted as a major in Bible, which includes assessment of maturity and fitness for ministry based on diagnostic tools routinely administered in the sophomore year.
2. have earned at least 104 hours toward the BA degree by end of the junior year.
3. hold a 3.2 GPA at the end of the junior year.
4. have completed BGRK 332 with at least a "B."
5. apply and be provisionally accepted to the MDiv program.

Students entering the MDiv program may receive up to 18 hours of Advanced Standing by testing out of certain entry-level graduate courses. It would be rare and unusual for a student to test out of all 18 hours, it is common for a student to receive 12 hours of Advanced Standing credit. Bible majors should consider choosing undergraduate electives that would prepare them to test out of some of the following MDiv courses:

BGRK 611-612 Elementary Greek (6 hours)
BHEB 671-672 Introduction to Hebrew (6 hours)
BIBL 610 Advanced Introduction to the OT (3 hrs)
BIBL 620 Advanced Introduction to NT (3 hours)

Students who are in the Integrated Degree Plan may take up to four graduate courses (12 hours) during their senior year. Six of those hours must include the following, which may be counted as electives for the bachelor's degree:

BIBM 602 GST Orientation (fall; 0 credit)
BIBM 603 Foundations of the Theology of Ministry (fall)
BIBM 657 Contexts of Ministry (spring)

An additional six hours may be any graduate courses that the Chair of the Department of Bible, Missions & Ministry certifies as meeting the requirements of the student's undergraduate degree plan. Typical substitutions might include such courses as:

graduate course:	<i>in lieu of:</i>
BGRK 623 Seminar in Synoptic Gospels	BGRK 441 Exegetical Greek Seminar I
BGRK 624 Exegetical Seminar in Acts	BGRK 441 Exegetical Greek Seminar I
BGRK 625 Exegetical Seminar in Epistles	BGRK 442 Exegetical Greek Seminar II
BHEB 623 Intermediate Hebrew I	Hebrew Elective
BHEB 624 Intermediate Hebrew II	Hebrew Elective
BIBD 660 Intro to Systematic Theology	BIBT 491 Theology
BIBD 678 Philosophy of Religion	BIBP 478 Philosophy of Religion
BIBH 664 Advanced Restoration History	BIBH 383 Restoration History
BIBL 651 Pentateuch	BIBL 451 Pentateuch
BIBL 644 Prophetic Literature of OT	BIBL 454 Prophetic Literature of OT
BIBM 604 Homiletics	BIBM 493 Preaching

Summary (and see chart at end of this document):

BA: 128 hours, of which up to 12 hours may be graduate courses that would also count toward the MDiv. Normal time to complete the program: 4 years.

MDiv: 72 hours. Normal time to complete the program: 3 years.

Saving one year. A student who is admitted to the Integrated Degree Plan may take up to 12 hours of graduate courses in the senior year that will also count toward the BA degree. Any MDiv student may earn up to an 18 hours of Advanced Standing by demonstrating competency through examination. Any combination of Advanced Standing and Integrated Degree courses that adds up to 24 graduate hours will effectively shorten the normal MDiv degree completion time by one year.

For further details, contact the Department of Bible, Missions & Ministry.

Rationale for the Proposal.

1. Most seminaries, including our GST, normally admit a number of students who did not major in Religious Studies as undergraduates and need to get up to speed for the critical study of Religion at the graduate level. Many students begin the MDiv program without Greek or Hebrew and with little background in Bible, Christian History, Theology or related disciplines. Undergraduate majors at ACU, however, have a solid grounding in these areas, so that by the end of their junior year some of them are competitive with many first-year MDiv students.
2. Standard practice allows a graduate program to reduce the total number of hours required for a master's degree by giving Advanced Standing credit based on competencies achieved through undergraduate courses. The practical effect of this system is that an undergraduate course may count double for both a bachelor's and a master's program. We propose to turn that system on its head, allowing advanced students to reduce the number of hours in their undergraduate program by receiving undergraduate credit for graduate courses. The practical effect would be to allow *graduate* courses to count double for both a bachelor's and a master's program. This would make both the undergraduate and the graduate programs stronger, and it would push students to reach higher earlier in their educational careers.
3. The proposed plan would help us **recruit strong undergraduate students** who know they want careers in ministry or in academics and are highly motivated.
4. The proposed plan would help us **capture our best and brightest** undergraduate majors who otherwise might be tempted to apply to high profile seminaries elsewhere.
5. The proposed plan would help our students **reduce debt load**. Students in the Integrated Degree Plan could save a year's worth of tuition and living expenses, which would help them achieve a more manageable debt load.

Compliance Issues.

Association of Theological Schools (ATS).

1. The ATS will allow advanced standing credit for up to 25% of a degree program (Educational Standard 7.4.3). That would translate to 18 of the 72 hours required for the MDiv at ACU.
2. The **ATS allows** a seminary to develop a 3+3 plan, whereby advanced undergraduate students are provisionally admitted to the MDiv program after only three years of undergraduate study, and the university waives the fourth year of undergraduate study based on successful completion of the first year of graduate courses. This plan preserves the integrity of the MDiv by keeping all 72 hours of that program intact, and it strengthens the BA by granting undergraduate credit for graduate courses.
3. The 3+3 plan was fairly common in the 1950s and 60s but disappeared in the 1970s and 80s. Recently, however, several seminaries have begun exploring this plan again with the approval of the ATS.
4. This proposal is not a true 3+3 plan, because it allows only 12 hours of graduate courses to count toward the bachelor's degree. A true 3+3 would allow 24 hours. So this proposal is careful to preserve the integrity of the ACU undergraduate program while also allowing advanced students to move more quickly into and through the MDiv program.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

1. **SACS standards.** Our proposal meets or exceeds all of the following standards:

SACS Standard 3.4.4 “The institution has a defined and published policy for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, advanced placement, and professional certificates that is consistent with its mission and ensures that course work and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and comparable to the institution’s own degree programs. The institution assumes responsibility for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution’s transcript. (See Commission policy “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”) (Acceptance of academic credit)”

SACS Standard 3.5.2. “At least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. In the case of undergraduate degree programs offered through joint, cooperative, or consortia arrangements, the student earns 25 percent of the credits required for the degree through instruction offered by the participating institutions. (See Commission policy “The Transfer or Transcribing of Academic Credit.”) (Institutional credits for a degree).”

2. **SACS Policy Statement: “Collaborative Academic Arrangements.”**

“Institutions describe collaborative academic arrangements in many different ways, most commonly identifying them as dual or joint educational programs, affiliations, partnerships, consortial agreements, and other similar terms. Dual enrollments—high school students taking college courses for concurrent credit—are not included in this policy.”

→Our “Integrated Degree Plan” would be an “other similar term.” The idea of “Dual enrollment” mentioned here is similar to what we are contemplating. “A dual educational program is one whereby students study at two or more institutions, and each institution awards a separate program completion credential bearing only its own name, seal and signature.”

→This policy statement comes close to describing what we want to do, except that we contemplate a collaboration between two departments within our University and not a collaboration between two different institutions.

3. SACS standards establish a minimum of 120 semester hours for a bachelor’s degree. Our proposed Integrated Degree Plan **exceeds SACS standards** with a 128-hour BA degree.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

1. The proposed plan would violate Rule 13.103 (c):
“(c) Institutions shall not consider any hours for which a student has enrolled as part of a master’s or professional degree program without first completing a bachelor’s degree in the calculation of the number of hours required for a bachelor’s degree or the equivalent until the student has completed a minimum of **120 hours** required for the bachelor’s degree or equivalent.”
2. The THECB governs public institutions in the state of Texas and does not have jurisdiction over private institutions such as ACU. Although ACU generally complies with THECB standards on a voluntary basis, this proposal could be construed as an exception.

Precedents.

Abilene Christian University.

1. ACU policy establishes a **minimum of 128 semester hours** for a bachelor’s degree. Our proposed Integrated Degree Plan would meet or meet ACU standards with a 128-hour BA degree, of which 12 hours would be graduate-level courses.
2. ACU has an **established precedent** of a Health Professions Cooperative Degree plan in the Biology and Chemistry & Biochemistry departments. In this plan, ACU has awarded bachelors degrees to certain qualified students who satisfactorily completed three years of prescribed work at ACU (a minimum of 104 hours) plus one year at a recognized professional school (see *ACU 2012-2013 Catalog*, pp. 53, 57, and 129). In other words, for a 128-hour bachelor’s degree in biology or chemistry, ACU has agreed to waive 24 hours (the senior year) upon satisfactory completion of the first year of graduate study in a medical school or similar health professions school. The proposed BA/MDiv Integrated Degree Plan would require 116 (instead of 104) hours of undergraduate courses and then waive only 12 undergraduate hours based upon satisfactory completion of 12 hours of graduate study.
3. The proposed BA/MDiv Integrated Degree Plan would bear a **clearer ACU stamp** than the existing Health Professions Cooperative Degree plan in that all 12 hours of graduate courses in the senior year would be taught by ACU faculty and would bear a clear ACU imprint.

Precedents at other Institutions:

1. Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota offers a 3+3 degree plan in cooperation with two local undergraduate institutions. This program, approved by the ATS and the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, is essentially the format we are proposing.
(<http://www.sfseminary.edu/about/index.php?id=179&rootid=173&parentid=173>)
2. The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary offers a 3+3 plan tailored for adults that allows students to complete both bachelor's degree and MDiv in six years. Students take the full MDiv curriculum, and up to 32 credit hours of the MDiv curriculum may also count toward the 120 hours of the bachelor's degree at the University of Dubuque. They also offer a 3+2 plan leading to BA and MAMC in five years. (http://udts.dbq.edu/33_program.cfm)
3. Reportedly ATS is aware of at least four other seminaries around the country that are currently exploring 3+3 plans similar to the one proposed here.
4. SMU Lyle School of Engineering offers a "4+1 Accelerated Master's Degree Program" that allows students to apply during their junior year of undergraduate studies to begin taking up to 9 hours of graduate courses that will count toward both bachelor's and master's degrees.
(<http://www.smu.edu/Lyle/Undergrad/ProspectiveStudents/Academics/UndergradAcceleratedProgram.aspx>)
5. UT Austin McCombs School of Business offers an "Integrated MPA Degree Plan" that allows students to earn BBA and MPA simultaneously.
(<http://new.mcombs.utexas.edu/MPA/Integrated-MPA/Curriculum/Degree-Requirements.aspx>)

Final Considerations.

The following elements will also help make the proposed Integrated Degree in Biblical Text a good choice for participating students:

1. Students will still meet all Gen Ed requirements including the Capstone course and Writing Intensive requirement.
2. Students who choose this route will still participate in the DBMM Senior Blessing.
3. Students will pay for the first four years (128 credit hours) at the undergraduate block tuition rate. They will pay for the last two years (48 credit hours) at the GST tuition rate, to which GST scholarships will apply.
4. Students will begin GST mentoring in year four, when they begin taking MDiv courses.
5. Students who drop out before completing the master's degree program may nevertheless earn the BA when they have met all the requirements of their BA degree program as laid out in the University Catalog and in this Integrated Degree Plan.

Sample Integrated Degree: BA Biblical Text + MDIV

This is a sample schedule to illustrate how it is possible to complete the BA+MDiv in six years. Additional semesters may be necessary if you are required to complete courses listed in the right-hand column or if you repeat courses. Consult with your academic advisor before changing the sequence of courses. Some courses are not offered every semester and **some courses have prerequisites**. Check the course description in the current catalog for details. Failure to complete courses in the recommended sequence may delay graduation.

FR Fall (18 hours)	BIBL 101 Jesus: Life & Teachings (Majors)	ENGL 111 Composition & Rhetoric	CORE 110 Cornerstone	BGRK 221 NT Greek Begin I	Science (Courses in different areas- see ACU catalog)	Social Science/Humanities/ Fine Arts (See ACU catalog)	Required if condition of Admission: UNIV 011 Learning Strategies
FR Spring (18 hours)	BIBL 102 Early Christians: Life, Lit & Comm (Majors)	ENGL 112 Composition & Literature	Math 120 or higher Quantitative Reasoning	BGRK 222 NT Greek Begin II	Social Science/Humanities/ Fine Arts (See ACU catalog)	ENGL 200 - 299 Literature	
SO Fall (16 hours)	BIBL 211 Message of OT (Majors)	COMS 211 Speech & Rhetoric (pre-req ENGL 111/112)	CORE 210 Identity & Community (pre-req ENGL 112/CORE 110)	BGRK 331 Elem. Grk Readings I (Advanced Standing?)	PEAC 100 Lifetime Wellness (1hr)	Science (Courses in different areas- see ACU catalog)	May be required based on ACT or SAT scores: MATH: MATW 019 MATW020 MATW 030 ENGLISH: ENGL 003 ENGL 004 ENGL 106 ENGL 006 ENGL 107 ENGL 007
SO Spring (16 hours)	BIBL 320 Intro to Biblical Interpretation	ENGL 200 - 299 Literature (BA requirement)	BIBL 460, 453, 460, or 461 (non-duplicative)	BGRK 332 Elem. Grk Readings II (Advanced Standing?)	PEAC Exercise Activity (1 hr)	Track: BIBL 451 The Pentateuch	
JR Fall (18 hours)	BIBM 439 Teaching for Spiritual Formation	BCOR 310 God & the Good Life (pre-req junior standing)	BIBM 493 Preaching	Elective BHEB 471 Intro to Hebrew I (Advanced Standing?)	Elective	Track: BIBL 365 General Epistles	
JR Spring (18 hours)	BIBL 379 The Church or BIBL 491 Theology (Theology)	BMIS 420 Gospel in a Multi-Cultural World (Cultural Competency)	BIBM 391 Ministry in Context (pre-intern)	Elective BHEB 472 Intro to Hebrew II (Advanced Standing?)	General Education Elective	Track: BIBL 452, 453 or 454 (non-duplicative)	
SR Fall (12 hours) (6 hours)	Elective BIBM 603 Found Theol Ministry	BIBM 602 GST Orientation (0 hr)	BIBM 411 Field (2 hr) BIBM 491 Sr Capstone Writing Intensive (1 hr)		BIBH 380, 383, or 432 (Church History) BIBH 651 History of Christianity I	Track: BIBL 458 The Synoptic Gospels	Required only if unsatisfactory in High School: SCIENCE: 3 hrs FOREIGN LANGUAGE: 6 hrs
SR Spring (10 hours) (6 hours)	BIBM 657 Contexts of Ministry	BIBL 620 Adv Intro NT			PEAC Exercise Activity (1 hr)	Elective	
Year 5 Fall (12 hours)	(BIBM 629 or 609) = Context Immersion, summer and/or Year 5	BIBL 610 Adv Intro OT	BIBD 660 Systematic Theology I	BIBM 648 Chr Spirit Form		Up to 12 hours of undergraduate courses may be replaced by graduate courses on equivalent topics.	
Year 5 Spr (12 hours)	**Ministry Elective	BIBL 611 OT Theology (or BIBL 621 in spring)	**Missions/Ministry Elective	BGRK or BHEB Elective	BIBH 652 History of Christianity II	BA awarded on completion of 128 hours, of which up to 12 are graduate hours.	
Year 6 Fall (12 hours)	BIBM 658 Leading in Contexts	BIBH 664 Adv Restoration Hist	**Hist/Theol Elective	BIBL 621 NT Theology (or BIBL 611 in fall)		MDiv awarded on completion of 72 hours in the MDiv degree plan, of which up to 18 may be granted as Advanced Standing.	
Year 6 Spr (12 hours)	BIBM 679 Theological Reflection in Practice	**Ministry Elective	**Phil/Theol Elective	**Missions Elective			

Each course is 3 hours unless otherwise noted.

**** The program includes 12 hours Greek & Hebrew; 15 hours Text, 6-9 Theology; 9-12 History, 15 Missions & Ministry; 12 Contextual Education.**