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Illinois Tech Accelerated Bachelor's Degree Proposal

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Accelerated Bachelor's Degree Proposal

The following document outlines a proposal to offer accelerated bachelor's degrees. Such degrees would require a minimum of 90 credits and be designed to be completed in 3 years, rather than the traditional 4. The first of these degrees in the U.S. were launched in 2023 [source]. Degrees of this nature have recently been approved by HLC [see HLC policy] and other accrediting bodies, and offer an exciting opportunity to reach more students through relevant education.

Summary Proposal

Accelerated bachelor's degrees are degrees intended to be completed in 3 years, rather than the traditional 4. They must: consist of a minimum of 90 credit hours; meet all standard university core curriculum requirements; meet all accreditation requirements; undergo regular and rigorous assessment. The requirement that the final 45 credits of a degree be completed at Illinois Tech applies to accelerated programs. Additionally, they must clearly be designated as "accelerated" degrees in all communications.

Additional approval of any accelerated degree is considered a pilot, with two assessment cycles to be completed in the first 5 years. At the conclusion of this pilot period, if the assessment finds that the degree is meeting learning outcomes, the degree is considered permanently approved.

Accelerated bachelor's degrees must not be offered in areas where such acceleration would undermine students' ability to meet licensure or other professional requirements.

Mission Alignment and Alignment to HLC Criteria

Accelerated Bachelor's degrees have a clear alignment to the university's longstanding mission and current strategic priorities. Additionally, we are well situated to launch such degrees in a way that meets HLC accreditation criteria.

Criterion 1 Mission Alignment

Illinois Institute of Technology has as its central mission "To provide distinctive and relevant education in an environment of scientific, technological, and professional knowledge creation and innovation." Further, the university has as its founding purpose the provision of quality education to students of all backgrounds and preparing our students for meaningful roles in a changing industrial society. Offering

an accelerated, 3-year bachelor's program for students aligns with this mission by making education more affordable and accessible while retaining our academic rigor and focus on career readiness.

Criterion 2 Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

Illinois Tech will ensure that accelerated programs are described transparently on all university materials. The accelerated bachelor's degree programs will be clearly labeled as accelerated programs (for example: "B.S. in Game Design and Experiential Media" is the name of the traditional 4-year program while "Accelerated B.S. in Game Design and Experiential Media" would be the name of the 3-year program).

Messaging will make clear that these accelerated degrees are tailored for those with a more focused professional interest, and students in these programs are less likely to have significant free electives or the capacity for a minor. These degrees serve students eager to complete their education and join the workforce. But, they meet the same rigorous academic standards we apply to all our degrees.

All students, on either the traditional or accelerated degree pathway, will have the same admission standards, complete the same core curriculum requirements, and have access to the same university supports and resources. This is central to establishing and maintaining the rigor of all bachelor's degrees on campus, both standard and accelerated.

Messaging will make clear that the accelerated option is for those students intending to enter the workforce, not primarily those pursuing graduate study. Because students meet the same admission standards, students who initially matriculate into the 3-year program will have the ability to convert to the standard program if they decide to do so.

The majority of programs for which this is appropriate are those that do not require licensure, and in the event a program in a licensure-based field considers developing an accelerated bachelor's, the approval process will include review of any possible licensure issues for students.

Criterion 3: Teaching and Learning for Student Success

Accelerated programs must go through the standard program review and assessment processes that are used for all degrees on campus. Proposals are reviewed by the relevant academic unit(s), department chair(s), and dean(s) as well as the Undergraduate Studies Committee and the broader faculty council.

The first 5 years of any accelerated degree are considered a pilot period, during which the program must be assessed at least twice. At the end of 5 years, the program can either be sunset or made permanent, based on the recommendations of the program faculty.

Accelerated bachelor's programs are reviewed alongside their traditional-length counterparts. Faculty should be alert to and address any significant disparities and, if such weaknesses cannot be addressed through revision, the program must be sunset. If concerns are raised on an initial evaluation, and the program does not show improvement at a second evaluation, the program should be placed on probationary status; if a third evaluation shows improvement, it may be taken off this status, but if there is no improvement, the program must be sunset.

Accelerated program proposals must make explicit whether the learning outcomes for the program are comparable to or distinct from those for the traditional length program. If there are significant differences, programs should have easily distinguishable names to aid in clarity. Accelerated and

traditional programs with the same major should be assessed on a similar cycle but through distinct processes (ie, artifacts for the two programs should not be combined).

Any major, including one offered as part of an accelerated bachelor's program, must have at least 33 credit hours in the major. Further, any bachelor's degree program must meet the core curriculum standards, regardless of whether that degree is traditional or accelerated.

Criterion 4 Sustainability, Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The Undergraduate Studies Committee, University Faculty Council, and general faculty body will all be consulted to refine and review the accelerated bachelor's process as proposed in this document. The proposal will be revised based on feedback at each stage, and a minimum of two town halls to discuss the proposal will be held prior to full faculty review.

Illinois Tech is currently undergoing a strategic planning process, with a focus in part on meeting more learners where they are. To date, we have pursued this through strategic partnerships with online education vendors and with international partner institutions and campuses, including, notably, a campus in India. Accelerated bachelor's degrees align clearly with this strategic goal and will make the university more accessible for our diverse student body, particularly our large population of first-generation college students and returning students.

Many of the degrees we offer feed into professions where experience and education are equally valued; providing opportunities for students to more efficiently complete a rigorous degree will serve students in these fields well, enabling them to enter the workforce more quickly or, if returning, to complete their degrees with a level of focus appropriate to their professional expertise and ambitions. Accelerated bachelor's degrees are a logical extension of the university's strategy and our goal to meet learners where they are and to serve students of all backgrounds.

Example: Standard vs. Accelerated Bachelor's in Game Design and Experiential Media

The following shows a standard vs. accelerated GEM degree, premised on the revised SHI and COM core proposal. The accelerated B.S. covers all required major and core curriculum classes, but significantly reduces the number of free electives. This is a less flexible, but more efficient option for interested students.

Standard vs. Accelerated B.S. in Game Design and Experiential Media		
	Traditional B.S.	**Accelerated B.S.**
GEM core	36 credit hours	36 credit hours
Ethics Requirement	3 credit hours	3 credit hours
Graphics Requirement	6 credit hours	6 credit hours
Technical Electives	15 credit hours	15 credit hours
STEM Module	16 credit hours	16 credit hours
CS requirement	(fulfilled by GEM requirements)	(fulfilled by GEM requirements)
IPRO	6 credit hours	6 credit hours
COM sequence	6 credit hours	6 credit hours
SHI Module	(fulfilled by GEM requirements)	(fulfilled by GEM requirements)
Free Electives	32 credit hours	2 credit hours
Total	**120 credit hours**	**90 credit hours**