

Introduction

This white paper collates information about existing inter-institutional learning programs in order to consider the feasibility of encouraging growth in this area of programming across SUNY institutions. The vision supported by this white paper is that when meritorious students set foot on one of the 64 SUNY campuses to study, they will clearly understand that there is a path for them to pursue their education at the highest level they choose. This white paper articulates possibilities for inter institutional programs or pathways involving a graduate program for faculty members to consider when pursuing this vision.

Background

Motivation

Although there is a very active [SUNY Transfer Task Force](#) to facilitate the transfer between community colleges and undergraduate degree programs, the extension to transferring from undergraduate programs to graduate programs, or from graduate programs to PhD programs has not been tackled by the Transfer Task Force yet. Faculty members will benefit from detailed guidelines about the different options available to them when designing inter institutional programs. Scholars have studied and recommended joint graduate programs (de Roiste et al. 2015), in particular joint doctoral programs (Cantrell Harris and Williams 2001), while identifying potential roadblocks (De Caro-Barek and Stokert 2024).

Program Design

The following process is recommended when designing inter institution programs:

- 1) Identify a need for a new program that would be impractical to develop within a single SUNY institution. Faculty members may consider faculty expertise and availability, potential students, equipment, labs, other resources and considerations. Inter institutional programs would, ideally, synergistically build on several SUNY institutions and departments so that the combined program would be stronger than if programs were developed separately.
- 2) Start informal discussions with faculty members at other SUNY institutions to gauge whether there is a common interest in developing an inter institutional program. The development of collaborative activities with other institutions may precede this step and naturally lead to a joint program offering.
- 3) Create a preliminary plan for the design of the proposed program.

- 4) Seek support and help from administrative leaders, whose help will be crucial for the success of this academic endeavor.
- 5) Questions about financial aid and differential tuition between SUNY campuses would have to be considered, discussed, and resolved, in order to ensure the smoothest student experience.
- 6) The more programmatic work is conducted upfront by faculty members and administrators, the most seamless will be student experiences.

Constraints/Logistical Questions

- Transfer credits between institutions are regulated at the campus level. For example, at SUNY Oswego, 9 credits can be transferred from another institution, including another SUNY campus, into a master's degree, and 6 into a graduate certificate.
- Graduate programs and campuses can be searched at <https://www.suny.edu/programsearch/index.jsp>
- Courses across the SUNY system can be located at <https://explore.suny.edu/courses>.
- SUNY Cross Registration resources are available at <https://www.suny.edu/crossregister/index.xhtml> and at <https://www.suny.edu/crossregistration/>.
- SUNY Transfer and Articulation resources are available at <https://system.suny.edu/student-success/transfer/>.
- SUNY forms for program proposals, new or modified, are available at <https://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/acaproplan/app/forms/>.
- The New York State Education Department (NYSED) provides resources for inter institution programs, including a searchable directory of NY state registered programs at <https://www.nysed.gov/content/inventory-registered-programs-higher-education>.

SUNY Inter Institution Graduate Programs Models

Depending on needs and possibilities, we can see at least the following SUNY Inter Institution graduate programs models:

- One graduate program with courses from multiple institutions
- Bachelor's to Master's (4+!) Programs
- Master's to PhD (2+3) Programs
- Pathways
- Articulation Agreements
- Microcredentials

Other forms of inter institution programs may be considered, for example non-credit-bearing training or workshops, or on-boarding opportunities. These opportunities may be more approachable as preliminary attempts across institutions.

Inter Institution Single Award Programs

Any graduate program can be proposed with graduate courses from different SUNY institutions. This can be the case for master's programs and graduate certificates in particular. Form 2B New Graduate Degree Program Proposal or Form 2C New Certificate Program Proposal lay out requirements for the creation of programs registered jointly with one or more institutions. In this case, each institution is required to provide:

- Partner institution's name and 6-digit SED Code.
- Name, title, and signature of partner institution's CEO (or append a signed letter indicating approval of this proposal).

To facilitate students' seamless registrations in courses, one solution may be to offer one course globally, but with one section at each institution, even if the course is taught by one instructor from one partner institution at a time. Certificate programs may benefit a great deal from inter-institutional collaboration as they often target highly specialized fields where experts may span several institutions.

In the case where the inter institutional programs exist at different institutions already, the joint offering of the program through a multi-institution program can be accomplished through Form 3B.

The same principles apply to program modifications (Form 3A).

Bachelor's to Master's (4+1) Programs

As of Spring 2025, 152 examples of 4+1 programs combining a Bachelor's and Master's degree are available. These are also referred to as multi-award or dual-degree programs. However, most of these programs are within the same SUNY institution, making them multi-award programs, but not multi-institution programs. The creation of such programs can be requested using Form 3B entitled 'Revision New from Existing' dedicated to the creation of new program(s) from existing program(s).

Recently however, the [Office of College and University Evaluation \(OCUE\)](#) has limited the registration of programs offering options for students to earn multiple degrees in less time to cases where one of the awards leads to licensure. Existing multi-award programs can continue to operate, but new applications will be limited to those involving licensure in one of the programs. OCUE recommends the following mechanism to offer accelerated multi-awards:

- Mapping shared-credit combinations of registered programs offered by one or more institution; and
- Articulation agreements, which can mention admission requirements and credit transfer articulation between registered programs offered by one or more institution.

Programs leading to licensure are administered instead by the [Office of Professions \(OP\)](#). and as such are exempt from the limitations of OCUE for new dual-degree programs.

Master's to PhD or Post-master's Programs

As of Spring 2025, five examples can be listed within the SUNY system, with the University of Albany, Binghamton University, and the University of Buffalo being the culminating experiences. Per NYSED regulations, these programs are officially registered under the PhD granting institution.

- SED 30489, Albany, Social Welfare MSW/PhD
- SED 87406, Albany, Social Welfare MSW/PhD
- SED 32811, Albany, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies/Sociology MA/PhD
- SED 33407, Binghamton, Art History MA/PhD
- SED 35811, University of Buffalo, Social Work/Social Welfare MSW/PhD

However the same Form 3B provides the ability to create such programs across several institutions.

An example of multi-institution dual-degree comes from SUNY Optometry, offering an [affiliation program](#) with 24 colleges and universities in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania through which highly qualified students may complete a joint BS or BA degree and OD (Doctor of Optometry) degree in just seven years instead of the usual eight.

Pathways

When a new dual-degree program cannot be created, according to OCUE, informal programs can be created in the form of pathways. These have been more difficult to research, since such pathways do not need to be officially registered, but are educational paths that each department and school can encourage in an informal way. OCUE recommends "institutions of higher education to advertise and offer students the following pathways" to degree completion:

- Shared-credit combinations of registered programs offered by one, or more than one, institution; and
- Admission and credit transfer articulation agreements between registered programs offered by one, or more than one, institution. (OCUE, 2020).

Many SUNY campuses advertise these pathways to their students. For example, [SUNY Oswego](#) offers 4+1 pathways designed for students to transition into a master's degree upon completion of a bachelor's degree. Most undergraduate degrees are completed within four years. With guided advisement and well-planned registration a master's degree could be completed in as quickly as one additional year. These pathways also offer a tuition advantage through combined enrolment policies allowing students to take a limited number of graduate courses at the undergraduate tuition rate.

Nothing prevents such pathways to be created at any level and across several SUNY institutions, thus presenting an alternative to registered 4+!, 3+2, or other types of dual-degree programs. With careful planning and advertisement, these pathways can offer very valuable academic opportunities to students.

Articulation Agreements

Articulation agreements represent negotiated inter institution agreements that clearly outline opportunities and conditions for the successful and seamless transfer between two institutions. These agreements may be general institution to institution agreements, however they may pertain to specific program to program articulations. Dual degree agreements outline all the conditions to be met to enable students to combine degrees from two SUNY institutions (Ex: BA/MA, 3+4 BS/DPharm, 3+3 BS/DPT etc.). Conditions may include requirements students must meet in terms of grades, curriculum validated, application process, duration, and location, among others.

Microcredentials

Microcredentials represent a stackable academic achievement in a focused area, such as Data Analysis or Digital Media Design. They can be awarded for credit or not for credit, for professional competency or advancement. They generally combine two to four courses that upskill a student or professional. Like for pathways, they are informal, however can be transcribed for student success. These microcredentials can also combine courses from several institutions. They may also be advantageous to combine with a particular degree program, to add an important skill or certification to enhance the competencies acquired through a particular degree program.

SUNY to/from non-SUNY Models and International Models

The inter institutional approaches listed above can also be considered with external institutions, to or from SUNY, including involving international institutions.

As of Spring 2025, 43 examples can be listed as programs combining Master's and PhDs between SUNY and non-SUNY universities. The majority of these programs involved the programs between NYS Statutory Colleges and Cornell University.

Identifying Gaps in Offerings

Research is underway to compile a list of gaps in SUNY program offerings, where undergraduates who wish to continue on to graduate programs look elsewhere because of a lack of such programming in the SUNY system. Once we have knowledge of these gaps, they may offer potential for inter-institutional collaboration across the SUNY network to develop new programs that satisfy these areas which are currently not satisfactorily covered.

Non-SUNY Inter Institution Graduate Programs Models

New York City Inter-University Doctoral Consortium

The Inter-University Doctoral Consortium (IUDC) is a collaborative initiative among several prestigious universities in the greater New York City area, designed to enhance the academic opportunities available to doctoral students. Through the IUDC, eligible Ph.D. candidates can enroll in graduate-level courses at participating institutions, thereby broadening their academic horizons and fostering inter-institutional scholarly engagement.

Participating Institutions:

- Columbia University (including Teachers College)
- New York University
- Princeton University
- Rutgers University–New Brunswick
- **Stony Brook University**
- The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY)
- Fordham University
- The New School.

Eligibility Criteria:

To participate in the IUDC, students must meet the following requirements:

- **Enrollment Status:** Be a matriculated Ph.D. student in good academic standing at one of the participating institutions.
- **Academic Progress:** Typically, students should have completed at least one year of full-time doctoral study.

- **Program Relevance:** The desired course should not be available at the student's home institution.

Registration Process:

1. **Consultation:** The student discusses potential course selections with their academic advisor to ensure alignment with their research and academic goals.
2. **Form Completion:** The student fills out the IUDC Registration Form, providing necessary personal and course information.
3. **Approval Sequence:** The form must be signed in the following order:
 - Home institution's department chair or program director
 - Home institution's IUDC coordinator
 - Course instructor at the host institution
 - Host institution's IUDC coordinator
4. **Submission:** After obtaining all required signatures, the student submits the form to both their home and host institutions' registrars.
5. **Registration:** The student registers for the course at both institutions, adhering to their respective procedures and deadlines.

Financial and Academic Considerations:

- **Tuition:** Students pay tuition to their home institution. However, certain fees, such as lab fees, may be assessed by the host institution.
- **Grading:** Grades earned in consortium courses are reported to the home institution and are included in the student's academic record.
- **Policies:** While enrolled in a consortium course, students are subject to the academic policies of the host institution.

Benefits of the Consortium:

The IUDC offers several advantages to doctoral students:

- **Expanded Course Access:** Students can enroll in specialized courses not available at their home institution, enriching their academic experience.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Engaging with faculty and peers across institutions fosters valuable academic and professional connections.
- **Resource Utilization:** Participants gain access to the libraries and research facilities of the host institution during their enrollment.

Stony Brook Example:

IUDC student participation involving Stony Brook University provides the following figures:

Spring 2024

Outgoing from SBU: 14

Incoming from other: 2

Fall 2024

Outgoing from SBU: 22

Incoming from other: 2

As can be seen, Stony Brook has more outgoing students than incoming students in IUDC. This can be explained by its location. Also, historically, the IUDC program was only offered to students enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences programs, but in 2024 Stony Brook partnered and joined the IUDC program for Engineering students as well. However only one Stony Brook Engineering student has enrolled in the program.

Conclusion:

The Inter-University Doctoral Consortium exemplifies a commitment to academic collaboration, providing doctoral students with the opportunity to enhance their education through access to a diverse array of courses and resources across esteemed institutions in the New York City area.

California System Inter Institutional Programs

The California System offers a number of initiatives fostering inter institutional collaboration, in particular in educational endeavors. The following illustrate some inspiring examples.

CSU/UC Joint Doctoral Programs:

California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC) are joining forces in the offering of joint doctoral programs and have made available a [handbook](#) presenting guidelines for the successful planning and preparation of such programs. This handbook provides very useful insights for the creation of joint graduate programs in general. These initiatives, counted as 22 on a provided [table](#), have shown to be successful since many of them have been in operation since the 1960's and later.

Cal-bridge Program:

According to its website, "[Cal-Bridge](#) is a statewide network of all three segments of the California higher education system—CSU, UC, and community colleges—together forming a comprehensive, end-to-end pathway for the diverse undergraduates of California to successfully matriculate to PhD programs, achieve their PhD, and then join the STEM professoriate in California and nationally or become leaders in the California science and technology workforce" (<https://calbridge.org/>). Velasquez et al. (2023) reference the Cal-bridge program in California as an example:

To bridge this mentorship gap, resource-constrained universities could partner with resource-replete universities or medical schools. One model to adapt includes the Cal-Bridge pilot in California, where California State University (CSU) under-represented students are paired with mentors at CSU and University of California campuses — so far, 87% of participants have enrolled in graduate programs of which 66% are first-generation college students. To help medical schools establish Cal-Bridge-like programs, the AAMC could recommend

best practices (e.g., virtual meetings) and a mentorship toolkit, as done for the Group on Women in Medicine and Science. (p. 1757)

UCSD/CSUSM Joint Doctor of Education:

“The [University of California, San Diego](#), and [California State University, San Marcos](#) jointly offer a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership. This cohort based three year (including summers) Doctor of Education degree is designed to enable education leaders to participate in a research-based program while still working in an educational setting.”

“Faculty members from both institutions will serve as instructors for all courses, as well as dissertation advisors. Where appropriate, practitioner-scholars will join faculty members in delivering instruction. Instructors bring an extensive background in leadership practice and theory. Students will experience a dynamic blend of scholarly inquiry and practical application from instructors who are actively engaged in understanding the nature of leadership”

(<https://eds.ucsd.edu/graduate/doctoral/jdp/index.html#Faculty-&Staff>).

UC Berkeley Joint Doctoral Program in Special Education:

“Doctoral students from all UC campuses are encouraged to participate with the **UC SPEDDR Center for Research (Research in Special Education, Disabilities, and Developmental Risk)**. UC SPEDDR is a California-wide multi-UC campus research unit that aims to enhance the ability of the UC system to attract from a national pool of talented students, win large extramural grants, improve national visibility, and enhance the doctoral preparation of the next generation of research, teacher education, and other related public service doctorates”

(<https://bse.berkeley.edu/academics/additional-degree-programs/joint-doctoral-program-special-education>)

Resources and Handbooks from the CSU System:

<https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/administration/academic-and-student-affairs/academic-programs-innovation-and-faculty-development/program-development/Pages/doctoral-degree-planning-resources.aspx>

Review Process for Proposals for CSU & UC Joint Doctoral Degree Programs:

https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/administration/academic-and-student-affairs/academic-programs-innovation-and-faculty-development/program-development/Documents/Jt_Process_New_Degrees_rev.pdf

Wisconsin MBA Consortium

The University of Wisconsin features an [MBA consortium](#) which emphasizes the core values of: innovation, inclusivity, collaboration, flexibility, and access (West 2019). It is a fully online program, with opportunities for an MBA or a Certificate.

CUNY Graduate School

The [City University of New York \(CUNY\) Office of Graduate Studies](#) offers an information hub dedicated to graduate programs, from master's to doctoral programs, offered by one of the 15 CUNY colleges. It features information sessions, and detailed information on the 15 CUNY Graduate Schools, enabling students to locate the next program according to their interests and backgrounds, hence building a connected graduate networked system across CUNY.

Recommendations

Recommendations for SUNY Administration:

The creation and maintenance of inter institutional programs could be facilitated by:

- Providing information, resources, examples, and initiatives to facilitate inter institution program creation and delivery, from the undergraduate level to the graduate level, including the PhD level, in all academic disciplines; and
- Considering the creation of inter institution consortia at the graduate level to facilitate the sharing of courses and research experiences for graduate students; and
- Providing students seamless access to all SUNY libraries and archives, to advertise laboratory and research resources SUNY-wide, and to facilitate their sharing across the System.

Recommendations for Campus Leadership:

The creation and maintenance of inter institutional programs could be facilitated by:

- Sharing the Graduate Academic Programs and Research Committee white paper on SUNY Inter Institution Graduate Programs Best Practices.

Recommendations for Faculty:

The creation and maintenance of inter institutional programs could be facilitated by considering:

- **Enrollment:** Enrollment in lower-enrolled programs might be bolstered when those programs offer a core course requirement for a multi-institution degree. Geographically remote campuses would draw students from more urban areas with online courses that contribute to a joint PhD or joint Master's program.
- **Resources:** Library, archive, laboratory, and other research resources would become available to a wider set of students and faculty, which would lead to growth in graduate programs across the SUNY system.
- **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Joint graduate degrees, either one or dual degree options, may contribute to making the richness of faculty expertise across the SUNY system equally available across all types of institutions, thus contributing to breaking silos and offering the highest educational quality anywhere in New York State and beyond.
- **Program Development:** The following process is recommended when designing inter institution programs:
 - 1) Identify a need for a new program (single award or multi-award) that would be impractical to develop within a single SUNY institution. Faculty members may consider faculty expertise and availability, potential students, equipment, labs, other resources and considerations. Inter institutional programs would, ideally, synergistically build on several SUNY institutions and departments so that the combined program would be stronger than if programs were developed separately.
 - 2) Start informal discussions with faculty members at other SUNY institutions to gauge whether there is a common interest in developing an inter institutional program. The development of collaborative activities with other institutions may precede this step and naturally lead to a joint program offering.
 - 3) Create a preliminary plan for the design of the proposed program.
 - 4) Seek support and help from administrative leaders, whose help will be crucial for the success of this academic endeavor.
 - 5) Questions about financial aid and differential tuition between SUNY campuses would have to be considered, discussed, and resolved, in order to ensure the smoothest student experience.
 - 6) Negotiating the equivalence of courses between universities, and the sequence in which courses should be taken may represent a challenge to overcome (Zhang 2017).
 - 7) The more programmatic work is conducted upfront by faculty members and administrators, the most seamless will be student experiences.

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They conclude that “negotiating the equivalence of courses between universities, and the sequence in which courses should be taken has been a challenge,” which is something that we also note could be a difficulty in any proposed SUNY inter-institutional programs.

Appendix

Samples/Templates

Multi-institution Program Form for Single Award Master’s Program ([Form 2B](#))

Multi-institution Program Form for Single Award Certificate Program ([Form 2C](#))

Multi-institution Dual Degree Program ([Form 3B](#))

Microcredential (institution specific, [Sample form](#))

Pathway (institution specific, [Example](#))

Articulation Agreement (program specific, [Examples](#))

Out-of-State Program ([Form 8A](#))

Out-of-State Articulation Agreement ([Form 8B](#))

Interdisciplinary Programs ([Examples](#))

SUNY Consortia ([Website](#))