

GUIDELINES FOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

The George Washington University

These guidelines are intended to increase uniformity at GW in the use of the terms for certificate programs and related non-degree programs and to set guidelines for the development and management of most rigorous of these offerings, academic certificate programs. Three broad types of programs are distinguished: (1) workshops and short courses; (2) non-academic credit certificate programs; and (3) academic certificate programs. Any exceptions to these categories or policies should be approved through Academic Affairs.

Workshops and short courses are not considered certificate programs. They do not carry academic credit and typically involve 20 or fewer contact hours. While a document may be produced and distributed to acknowledge participation in these types of activities, it must only acknowledge the student=s attendance and involvement and cannot be considered a formal recognition of accomplishment. The document does not represent proof of completion of a certificate program, an evaluation of the student=s level of performance during the program, or a certification of attainment of any specific level of knowledge or competence. No official record of this documentation of students' participation is maintained by the Registrar=s Office. Documents presented to students completing these workshops or short courses must not resemble a GW diploma, include the GW seal, bear a GW graduation date, resemble a GW diploma, or contain the words Δcertificate@ or Δdiploma.@ These may be called a "Recognition of Participation" or "Confirmation of Participation."

Non-academic credit certificate programs are generally professional development programs and often involve the awarding of a certificate of completion and continuing education units (CEUs). All new non-academic credit certificate programs are to be offered through GW Solutions, a University enterprise, unless it delegates its authority. Admissions requirements and standards may vary by program. No academic credit will be awarded for these programs, and no academic record or enrollment verification will be maintained by the Registrar=s office; instead, records of course work taken and program completion will be maintained by GW Solutions. Documents may be issued to provide an assessment of competence, a record of course work taken, or confirmation of program completion. However, these documents cannot carry the GW seal, bear a GW graduation date, resemble a GW diploma, or contain the word "diploma." While these programs may be rigorous and require a substantial investment of time, they, unlike academic certificate programs, generally do not articulate into a degree program.

Academic certificate programs provide substantial education at either the graduate or undergraduate level. The programs center on a coherent and relatively free-standing body of knowledge and skills, and their completion, therefore, represents the achievement of competence in a well-defined domain. Records of course work and program completion must be maintained by the Registrar=s Office and show on the student=s official GW transcript. The certificate document is issued by the Registrar=s Office.

An academic certificate program can be:

- § a free-standing program that bears little resemblance to existing degree programs (for example, a new interdisciplinary program or an attempt to test the market to determine whether a new degree program will succeed);
- § a subset of courses offered as part of an existing curriculum for a degree program; and/or
- § a credential for students who elect not to finish a degree in which they enrolled.

There are four general categories of academic certificate programs at GW: undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, graduate, and post-master=s.

The curriculum requirements for both the undergraduate and post-baccalaureate certificate programs include undergraduate-level course work. The difference between the two programs is in admissions requirements: the post-baccalaureate certificate program requires an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution as a prerequisite for admission, while the undergraduate certificate requires only a high school diploma or equivalent.

Graduate and post-master=s certificate programs are composed of graduate-level course work. Applicants to graduate certificate programs must have successfully completed an undergraduate degree prior to admission; post-master=s certificate programs require successful completion of a master=s degree prior to admission.

Academic certificate programs must include a minimum of 12 credit hours and more typically require 15 or 18 hours. Any exceptions to these minimums must be approved by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The content, methodology, and workload for all courses applied toward the program must be clearly defined and appropriate for the level and amount of credit awarded.

Administration

Each certificate program must have a designated program director who is responsible for administering the program (including keeping the school and Academic Affairs fully informed of any changes in the program) and meeting the needs of its students. Involvement of school-level admissions and student services staff may be less in many certificate programs than in degree programs. This puts a greater than usual burden on departmental staff to ensure that admissions criteria and processes are fair, that students are treated properly, and that school and University standards are upheld.

Approval and Review

As with degree programs, all new certificate programs, as well as changes to existing certificate programs, must be approved by the appropriate department(s), Dean, and Academic Affairs prior to public announcement of the program, acceptance of applications, or student enrollment in the program. Approval by the Board of Trustees is not required. After school review processes are complete, a Master Program Data form and Master Course Data forms (for any new courses) must be submitted to the office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Planning and Special Projects for approval by Academic Affairs. To enable certificate programs to be launched quickly in response to market need, Academic Affairs fast-tracks review of certificate programs, and departments and schools are encouraged to develop their own streamlined approval. As with all Master Program Data forms, the justification for the program, admissions criteria, and curricular requirements for completion of the program must be clearly articulated.

Certificate programs should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are maintaining high standards of quality and contributing to the good of the department, school, and University. The programs will be included in the academic program review of each department/program every five years. In addition, it is the responsibility of the schools to monitor new certificate programs during their first four years and to initiate procedures to phase out or terminate programs that do not meet standards of quality or are not financially viable.

An inventory of all academic certificate programs is maintained by Academic Affairs (the Registrar's Office and Institutional Research have authoritative lists of programs; Research and Graduate Studies maintains a descriptive chart).

Admissions Requirements and Procedures

Admissions standards should be set for each certificate program by the department and school offering the program. Admissions criteria and processes need to be communicated clearly so that prospective students know what is required in the way of academic credentials, standardized test scores, prior course work, work experience, and any other background or supporting documents.

Even if admissions requirements for the certificate program are somewhat different than those in the most closely related undergraduate and graduate program, the intent should be to ensure that students will be able to succeed at the level of the course work required. Their presence in the classroom should not in any way compromise the quality of the educational experience for others, particularly if certificate students are taking the same courses as degree candidates. The minimum requirements for the different levels of certificates are listed below.

Undergraduate certificate: High school diploma or equivalent (i.e., GED)

Post-baccalaureate certificate: Undergraduate degree from an accredited institution

Graduate certificate: Undergraduate degree from an accredited institution, and evidence of a background of academic excellence suggestive of the ability to complete graduate-level work (e.g., a minimum undergraduate grade point average of 2.80 or better, satisfactory GRE scores, successful completion of relevant course work at the graduate level, positive letters of recommendation, and/or evidence of professional experience relevant to the graduate certificate).

Post-master's certificate: Master's degree from an accredited institution

Although admissions processes may be simplified for certificate programs (or handled within the department or program, rather than at the University or school level), admissions procedures should be comparable to those for degree programs. Information about the program and its requirements should be made available to prospective students through the web, brochures, and other means; letters of admission or denial should be sent to each applicant; applications should be processed in a timely fashion, and so on.

Certificate programs should be listed in application materials and, preferably, applicants should be able to complete the same online (or paper) application form as degree program applicants. Even if an alternative application form is used, applicants must be charged the same application fee (currently \$60).

All applicants for academic certificate programs must be appropriately coded and entered in BANNER student information system, following the guidelines detailed in the *Graduate Recruitment and Admissions Handbook*.

Each school and department/program can decide whether or not to require an enrollment deposit and, if required, the amount.

International Students: Visas and English as a Foreign Language

Any student who requires an I-20 or IAP-66 visa from the University must provide appropriate financial certification to the admissions office and be processed through the International Services Office.

All applicants who are citizens of countries where English is not an official language are required to submit scores from either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the academic IELTS. Exceptions may be made for applicants who hold a degree from a university located in a country in which English is the official language and also the language of instruction at the university. Exceptions may also be made for students enrolled in GW programs in which the language of instruction is not English. The recommended minimum TOEFL score for admission is 550 on the paper exam or 213 on the computer exam. The recommended minimum for the academic IELTS is an overall band score of 6.0, with no individual band score below 5.0. Higher minimums may be required by some schools and programs. TOEFL and IELTS scores may not be more than two years old.

These applicants will also be required to take the GW English as a Foreign Language (EFL) placement test before registering for classes. Those who score 600 on the paper TOEFL test, 250 on the computer TOEFL test, or receive an overall band score of 7.0 on the academic IELTS (with no individual band score below 6.0), are exempted from taking the placement test. Depending on the test results, students may be restricted in the number of courses that can be taken in addition to EFL courses.

Transfer Credit

The amount of transfer credit toward the certificate, if any, that will be allowed from other institutions, or from GW courses taken on a non-degree basis, should be determined by each school. The maximum amount of transfer credit approved cannot exceed one-third of the credit hours required for the certificate program. For transfer of credit to be approved, **all** of the following conditions must be met: the course work must be from an accredited institution and must have been taken within two years prior to the admission to the certificate program; it must be approved by the department as applying toward program requirements; and it must have been taken at an appropriate level (undergraduate vs. graduate-level course work). Additionally, the student must have received a grade of *C* or better for course work to be transferred toward an undergraduate or post-baccalaureate certificate, and a grade of *B* or better in each course for which transfer of credit is sought toward a graduate or post-master=s certificate.

Financial Assistance

Students enrolled in academic certificate programs may be eligible for federal loans provided the following conditions are met:

1. The certificate program requires a minimum of either 24 credit hours of undergraduate-level course work or 18 hours of graduate-level course work.
2. The student is enrolled at least half-time in a given semester (six credit hours for undergraduate programs and five hours for graduate programs)
3. The program has been duly approved by Academic Affairs (and an accrediting body, where applicable).
4. The program prepares students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation (defined as one listed in the Department of Labor=s Directory of Occupational Titles).

Certificate students that do not meet these criteria may be eligible for alternative loans, provided they are enrolled at least half time in each semester.

Tuition awards may be given to on-campus graduate and post-master=s certificate program students if a department/school wishes to do so and has the resources. However, due to the limited amount of graduate support dollars available, it is recommended that this support be reserved for students in graduate degree programs.

Student Rights

The school and/or department/program is responsible for providing each certificate student with materials that clearly describe the program=s requirements, policies, and procedures.

Students in on-campus certificate programs who have met their financial obligations to the University are issued GWorld cards and have access to the following University services:

- § Ability to establish a GW e-mail account
- § Use of the Smith Center and the Health and Wellness Center
- § Use of all general use and program-specific library and computing facilities
- § Use of University and school-specific career center services

Students enrolled in off-campus certificate programs will be entitled to any services that are normally available to off-campus degree candidates at the same location. Those enrolled in certificate programs offered through distance education will be eligible for any services provided to students in comparable distance education degree programs.

Academic Requirements

To ensure continued high academic standards, programs should make requisites for success in the program clear to applicants and maintain the same standards when teaching courses to certificate students as they apply when teaching degree candidates. Each certificate program should set minimum grade performance standards no lower than those for the most closely related degree program. At a minimum, undergraduate/post-baccalaureate certificate students must maintain a grade-point average of 2.0 or above, and graduate and post-master=s certificate students must maintain a grade-point average of 3.0 or above. Additional scholarship requirements may vary.

Policies for registration, grading, and academic progress should be the same as those for degree programs (for example, processes for course withdrawals, time lines for *Incompletes*, and so on). It is the program=s responsibility to warn students if they are in academic peril. As in degree programs, students should receive pre-termination letters if they earn a grade of *F* or do not maintain the required minimum GPA. Students in certificate programs are expected to be continuously enrolled and actively engaged in fulfilling the requirements of the program each semester of the academic year until the certificate is awarded. The policies and processes for continuous enrollment, leave of absence, and withdrawal are the same as those for students enrolled in degree programs.

Each program should also have a time limit for completion of the certificate to ensure that students= knowledge is up-to-date and to encourage them to maintain progress. A reasonable limit is three years, with allowance for one or more semester breaks within that time period so long as the entire program is completed within the three-year limit. The limit should be no more than four years.

Registration and Program Completion

Certificate students must be appropriately coded and registered in the BANNER student information system for all course work that will apply toward the certificate. Upon successful completion of all program requirements, a *Certificate Clearance* form must be submitted to the Registrar=s Office, so that the certificate appears on the student=s official transcript.

The Registrar=s Office will produce the certificate document and either mail it directly to the student or provide it to the school or department/program to present to the student.

Certificate students do not participate in university graduation ceremonies. Certificate-offering schools and departments/programs are encouraged to hold separate ceremonies or adopt other appropriate methods for honoring the achievements of students awarded certificates. A graduation fee should not be charged because certificate students do not participate in graduation ceremonies.

Concurrent/Sequential Completion of Graduate Degree Programs

Departments and schools must set clear policies regarding the admission of certificate program students to relevant degree programs. These policies should specifically address the conditions under which certificate students may apply and be admitted to related degree programs: whether they must meet the same or similar entrance requirements as other degree applicants, whether they will be given any preference in admissions, etc. **In all cases, program materials and admit letters should clearly state that admission to the certificate program does not guarantee admission to any other program at the University.** The application fee is waived for students currently enrolled in certificate programs when applying to a GW degree program.

When courses taken while in the certificate program can fulfill requirements of an existing degree program, the school should establish a clear policy regarding transfer of certificate credit hours into particular degree programs, defining in each case how many hours and which courses can count toward which degree (s). The policy can allow from none to all credit hours completed in the certificate program to count toward a particular degree. When the program is entirely composed of course work required for an existing degree, it may be appropriate to count all of the work completed toward the degree program.

Schools may also wish to allow simultaneous admission into a degree and a certificate program offered by the same department in order to accommodate particular student needs (e.g., the Physician Assistant Program=s joint M.S.H.S. and graduate certificate). These students would need to meet in full the normal admission requirements for the degree program. Alternatively, the policy for a particular program could be to admit students to the certificate program and simultaneously grant conditional admission to a kindred degree program. The student would then need to meet the conditions (e.g., to provide acceptable GRE scores) prior to being fully admitted. It is essential in this case, as well as when certificate program admission criteria are less rigorous than degree program admission criteria, to state clearly in the letter of admission that admission to the certificate program does not ensure admission to a kindred degree program.

At the other extreme, if a school/department views a certificate program as distinct in requirements and content from a related degree program and it would not be appropriate for the certificate students to be admitted to the degree program, this too should be clear in recruitment materials and in letters of admission.

Students may also be allowed to register concurrently in both a certificate and degree program in separate departments or schools, particularly when a certificate program in one department or school would allow a student to obtain specialized expertise that complements his or her degree program in another department or school. Prior to enrolling in both programs, the student must get approval from the appropriate dean=s office(s) and departments/programs. If a joint certificate/degree program has NOT been formally established, the schools and departments/programs involved should work with the student to identify the number of credit hours and specific course work, if any, that may apply toward requirements for both programs.

Applicants applying to more than one school or department must pay two application fees and submit a separate application and supporting documents to each school and department, unless there is a documented policy to the contrary. Students concurrently enrolled in joint programs must be coded in the BANNER student information system as being in a dual degree/certificate program. Students enrolled in both a certificate and a degree program must have the degree program coded as their primary curriculum and the certificate as their secondary curriculum.

Academic certificate programs, as well as the non-academic credit programs, workshops, and short courses described at the beginning of this document, are a rapidly growing form of higher education that can be especially useful in giving working adults the skills and knowledge they need to advance their professional development. These guidelines are intended to support The George Washington University=s commitment to offering only educational experiences of the highest quality.

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