Guidelines for For-Credit Certificate Programs

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(Policy history: Original guidelines adopted in May 1997; Revised, October 2000; Revised and adopted by UAPC, April 19, 2012; Administrative revision 04.17.2014)

I. GENERAL INFORMATION FOR ALL CERTIFICATE TYPES

DEFINITION: A certificate program is a designated set of for-credit courses focused upon a specific topic or theme. Certificates give students the opportunity to pursue a subject of interest in a formalized way and to have completion of the course of study recognized by the awarding of the certificate. After approval, the for-credit certificate is documented on the student’s UW-Madison transcript and becomes part of the official student record. Certificates add opportunities for flexibility not available in majors and degrees.

CATEGORIES: Certificate programs fall into several categories that are tied to the student’s status.

Undergraduate Certificates: Available to degree-seeking UW-Madison undergraduates; are offered at an undergraduate level of content and intensity are designed to complement undergraduate degree/majors; 12-21 credits. May be open to University Special (non-degree seeking) students who hold a bachelor’s degree if provisions for these students are planned and approved by program faculty, school/college academic planning council and University Academic Planning Council.

Graduate and Professional Student Certificates: Available to degree-seeking graduate and professional students (GRAD, LAW, MED, PHARM, VMED “careers” and any careers that may be added at the post-baccalaureate level); designed to complement graduate or professional programs of study; usually 9-12 credits.

Capstone Certificates (Post-baccalaureate level): For University Special (non-degree seeking) students who hold a bachelor’s degree or equivalent; at least 9 graduate/professional level credits (rarely more than 16 credits); designed to "cap off" undergraduate educational experience or to
offer a focused professionally oriented educational experience. Students apply, are admitted, and enroll as prescribed by the capstone certificate program.

**Not-for-credit Certificates:** Offered by various units; not formally approved through this process; based on not-for-credit activity; may carry continuing education units (CEUs); not posted to the UW-Madison student transcript. Consult the Division of Continuing Studies. Policy guidelines for Non-Credit Certificates were approved in June 2011.


**TRENDS IN CERTIFICATE AWARDS:** [http://apir.wisc.edu/students-degrees.htm](http://apir.wisc.edu/students-degrees.htm)

**RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS**
Originally certificates were intended to be a resource neutral approach to recognize a course of study that a student would complete along the way to completing their degree and major. Over time, certificates have become more prominent in the program array, more complex in their design, and often require devoted resources or put resource demands on other units. Faculty who propose certificates should plan for resources that support instruction, student services, compliance with state and federal regulation, and other demands. Faculty should understand how the certificate offering is related to degree and major offerings. For undergraduate certificates, faculty should design the certificate so that it does not extend time to degree. Certificates may not be subdivided into options or other sub-plans.

**APPROVAL OVERVIEW**
Specific details about the approval process are provided in the guidelines for each certificate category. All certificates require approval by the program faculty who are sponsoring the certificate program (most often a department). Subsequently, the school/college that houses the certificate considers the certificate for approval. After school/college approval, the dean forwards the proposal to the provost. The Graduate Faculty Executive Committee will consider graduate/professional and Capstone certificates. Continuing Studies will be consulted on certificates that serve University Special students. For all categories of certificates, the provost will seek a recommendation for approval from the University Academic Planning Council. All certificates must be accompanied by statements of support or concurrence from departments or academic units that provide courses and from schools/colleges/divisions that may have overlapping interests with the certificate. Refer to the detailed guidelines for the specific category of certificate.

**SUNSET PROVISIONS**
Certificate programs that meet all three of the following three conditions may be discontinued at the discretion of the provost:

a. The sponsoring unit and the program faculty are unresponsive to requests from the Office of the Provost for information about the status of the certificate program.

b. No student has had the certificate recorded to their official student record and their transcript for three consecutive years.

c. The certificate program has not completed a review five years after implementation or the regular 10 year program review in a reasonable time.
These conditions signal insufficient interest by faculty and students to continue the program and provide a mechanism to discontinue a program when program faculty have left the university or are not otherwise available to formally request a discontinuation.

HISTORY
In the late 1970s, UW-Madison faculty first established guidelines for certificate programs when certificates were formalized and noted on the transcript. In the mid- to late-1990s there was an expansion of faculty interest and Capstone certificates were created as a new category. In 1997 the UAPC and the GFEC established guidelines for planning, approval, and offering of certificate programs. Those guidelines were expanded and updated in 2011.

Why certificates and not minors: In the mid-1980s, an ad hoc committee studied the value of certificates versus minors. They concluded that certificates better fit the intentions of this non-major type of offering. Certificates offer more flexibility because they can be attached to any degree, unlike minors, which are traditionally offered in association with specific degrees. Given that certificates are established, and given that some certificates functionally act as minors, it now seems redundant to add minors. (Minors are available only in association with teacher certification programs within the School of Education and in association with research doctoral degrees.)

ACCREDITATION CONSIDERATIONS
UW-Madison’s accreditation status does not currently allow for the awarding of pre-baccalaureate level certificates or degrees.

Certificates that meet all four of the following conditions require approval by the Higher Learning Commission (as of 2008 and 2010):
- Half or more of the courses are associated only with the certificate and are not also associated with any degree program or available to degree-seeking students (Interpretation: courses created just for the certificate and outside the subject areas that are available to degree-seeking students; for example, establishing a Nursing certificate if there is no Nursing degree program),
- Certificate curricular requirements are comprised of credit bearing courses,
- The certificate is free-standing and does not require that students be degree-seeking students,
- Students in the program are to be eligible for federal financial aid (under Title IV).

COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REGULATIONS
In some cases, certificate programs may be subject to federal US Department of Education regulations that differ from regulations associated with majors and degrees. For example, certificate programs available to University Special students designed to prepare students for specific occupations must comply with “gainful employment” regulations promulgated by the US Department of Education (effective October 1, 2011). Consult the director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research (www.apir.wisc.edu).
IV. CAPSTONE CERTIFICATES

Capstone certificates are open to University Special (non-degree seeking) students who hold a bachelor’s degree or an equivalent credential. They are designed to attract new students who would not otherwise enroll at UW-Madison. They seek to “cap off” the undergraduate experience or to provide a focused educational experience in a format that is friendly to working professionals. The curriculum may represent a more practice-oriented subset of an existing graduate discipline or field of study. In addition, Capstone certificates are intended to allow for innovative formats for delivery or program design.

Capstone certificate programs are expected to be a focused collection of courses that afford the student a record of coherent academic accomplishment. Completion of the course of study is recognized by the awarding of the Capstone certificate, which is recorded on the UW-Madison transcript and becomes part of the official student record. No degree is awarded.

The Graduate School is responsible for academic approval and oversight. Tuition levels and full-time credit load policies are based on Graduate School policy, unless otherwise approved for the Capstone. The Division of Continuing Studies is responsible for broad administrative oversight, including student admissions administration and student record policy.

GUIDELINES AND STIPULATIONS FOR NEW CAPSTONE CERTIFICATES

Proposals for new certificates must originate from and be prepared by members of the faculty. Proposals must describe the purpose of the certificate, the details of the curriculum, provisions for oversight, advising, and how the stipulations associated with certificates will be met.

1. Capstone certificate name. Also specify the sponsoring unit(s) and program faculty—Identify which academic department and which school(s)/college(s) will be the sponsoring unit for the certificate. This unit is the academic home that is responsible for student progress, governance, staff and resources that support the certificate. Include a name for the initial faculty director of the certificate program and list key faculty.

2. Timeline for implementation.

3. Supporting letters/memos – Append to the packet memos or letters of support and concurrence from other academic units that will have overlapping interest. Letters should be included for each department and school/college that supplies participating faculty and courses. If there are other units that offer programs with very similar names or content, communications should be included that signal concurrence with the proposal.

4. Governance – Describe how the certificate program will be governed. If the sponsoring unit is a school/college or a department then governance will be more straightforward than if the sponsoring unit is a center or other unit. Will it be part of a regular department? Will it have an executive committee? How will program faculty be identified? What will be the process for the transition of the faculty program director? Who will appoint the faculty program director and to
whom will the faculty program director report? In summary, include a succession plan in the proposal.

5. Purpose, rationale, justification – What is the purpose of the Capstone certificate program? How does it contribute to the mission of the sponsoring unit(s)? What gap in the program array is it intended to fill? How does it serve the intended purpose of the Capstone certificate? Who is the audience? What is the evidence that there is a societal and student demand for the certificate program experiences? Proposals for new Capstone certificates must provide a demonstrated need for such a program: this provision must be defined in terms of external markets (i.e. external demand for the skills associated with such a certificate) and must describe how the capstone program will attract new student enrollments.

6. Curriculum – Describe the Capstone curriculum (at least 9 graduate/professional level credits) and the sequence of coursework. Describe how the program is appropriate to be offered at the post-baccalaureate level. Are the courses offered on a regular basis? Have all departments that offer certificate courses provided a memo stating that they have space in the courses and that they will communicate with the certificate faculty program director about any plans for changing course offerings? Faculty may propose the same curriculum in both the Capstone and the graduate/professional certificate format.

The curriculum plan should account for the following stipulations:

a) The Capstone certificate should generally require 9 to 12 credits (although exceptions may be allowed) of graduate or professional level course work (courses numbered 300 or above). Additional undergraduate-only credits may be added if appropriate for the capstone design (courses numbered lower than 300). However, courses numbered below 300 may not subsequently be counted in graduate programs nor will they be accorded grade points on the transcript.

b) The certificate curriculum should be designed so that it does not put undue burden on a student, recognizing that a core audience for Capstone certificates is working professionals who may not be able to pursue full-time study. A Capstone certificate may be offered in a part-time format or in a full-time, time-compressed, intensive format.

c) Courses approved for Credit/No Credit grading may be included in the curriculum.

d) Courses taken pass/fail or audit may not be included in the curriculum and may not be counted toward completion of the Capstone.

e) The course requirements for the Capstone certificate program must be defined discretely enough so that the requirements are readily verified and so that exceptions are rarely needed.

f) Courses to be included in the certificate must be approved by the school/college curriculum committee when the proposal is advanced. The Capstone certificate may not be implemented until the core courses are approved by the University Curriculum Committee.

g) Special topics courses may be included in Capstone certificate curricula only if all offerings of the special topics course satisfy the requirement.

h) A process should be developed for considering exceptions and substitutions; the Capstone certificate should be designed so that exceptions are rarely required. Any substitution or exception that is made should be added to courses that meet the requirements for certificate
program so that substitution/exception is available to all students. Resources allotted to the program must be appropriate to handle the one-on-one advising required to allow exceptions. Exceptions requiring dean’s action require assistance by the academic dean in DCS-ACSSS. If the program faculty elect to establish a “no exceptions and substitutions” policy, that should be specified in the proposal.

k) All of the Capstone requirements must be earned in residence at UW-Madison. In keeping with other policy, credits earned in distance-delivered UW-Madison courses also count as credits earned in residence. Prior academic work from other universities or taken in the course of a degree-seeking program at UW-Madison may not be used to satisfy Capstone requirements.

7. Overlap limits – Specify if a student may not a student may earn the Capstone certificate and any other closely related major/degree or certificate program. Excessive overlap in credentials is not allowed.

8. Assessment and program review – Specify the major learning goals associated with the Capstone program? How do the curricular requirements relate to the learning goals? Provide an assessment plan that demonstrates how the program faculty will regularly evaluate student learning and how these goals are being met? Provide a statement in the proposal that the sponsoring unit understands that there is a requirement for program review five years after implementation and regularly after that.
(Note: Consideration of certificates for approval by UAPC may be delayed if reviews of other academic programs in the same department or unit are past-due.)

Assessment and program review planning should account for the following stipulations:

a) An active plan for assessment of student learning is required. At least one assessment activity must be conducted annually. Evidence from assessment of student learning and program effectiveness should be the basis for considering curricular changes.

b) Program review is required at the five year mark and at least once a decade after that (every 5 years for L&S certificate programs). The review is conducted in concert with the Division of Continuing Studies, the Graduate School and the home school/college.

c) Low-enrollment certificate programs (fewer than 5 certificates in 5 years) will be subject to review. Note that only certificates that are reported to the Registrar’s Office are counted and it is a requirement to follow RO procedures for reporting certificate completion.

9. Admission to the Capstone certificate program - Describe admission requirements. Describe who will make admissions decisions and how the admissions process will be managed. The admission process is planned with and coordinated with DCS-ACSSS.+

Admissions planning should consider the following stipulations:

a) Capstone students are enrolled as University Special students. Degree-seeking students may not participate in Capstone certificates.
b) To be eligible for admission to a Capstone program, a student must hold an earned bachelor’s degree or equivalent credential from an accredited college or university.

c) Capstone students apply to the University and are admitted through the Adult Career and Special Student Services office in the Division of Continuing Studies (DCS-ACSSS) in consultation with the Capstone faculty program director or designee. They carry a University Special student classification. Special students apply via an online application system by selecting the Capstone program of choice from a program list on the application. DCS-ACSSS codes the applicant for that program and defers final admission until a decision is made by the Capstone program faculty/staff. DCS-ACSSS serves as the advising, admissions, and academic dean’s office for all University Special students.

d) Programs who will seek to enroll international students must plan accordingly. International students (any student who needs a UW I-20 for a student visa) may only enroll in a program if the Capstone program is offered full-time, if students are enrolled full-time, and if the program has been approved to receive international students by the US government. That approval process is conducted through the Office of International Student Services and can be initiated after academic approvals are complete; such approvals may take up to a year. Note that fully online programs are not subject to this restriction because students do not need a visa.

e) Additional program-specific admission standards and criteria for satisfactory progress for students enrolled in a Capstone certificate are determined by the Capstone certificate program. In order to provide greater flexibility and meet the needs of specific target student populations, each Capstone program shall identify the minimum GPA for admission, any tests and minimum scores (for example GRE and TOEFL where applicable), and other similar criteria required of applicants to the program. These elements must be clearly specified in the program proposal, and clearly communicated to applicants and students. In planning, programs should give special attention to English-language proficiency for non-native English speakers and consider how proficiency will be determined in the admission process; ESL support is not generally available to students in Capstone programs.

10. Marketing and enrollment - What are the projections for enrollment and for annual numbers of students who complete the certificate? Is there available capacity in the core courses? What are contingency plans for enrollments that are much higher or lower than projected? What is the plan for marketing the Capstone program?

11. Progress and certificate completion – Describe plans for monitoring student progress. Describe plans for certificate completion and for communicating with the Registrar’s Office and the Division of Continuing Studies about who has completed the certificate. Planning should account for following stipulations:

   a) At the point of admission, Capstone students are coded in the student information system with the appropriate codes (the academic program code UNCS and appropriate plan code for the specific Capstone certificate). DCS-ACSSS generates a list of newly enrolled students for the new term with the program coordinator and assists the program coordinator with identifying students. DCS-ACSSS also coordinates communication with the Registrar’s Office.
b) The faculty program director and staff are responsible for being able to identify who is in the certificate program, for monitoring student progress, and for remaining conversant in DCS/ACSSS and Registrar’s Office practices relative to this consideration. DCS-ACSSS serves as the office of the academic dean for all University Special students and supports actions related to enrollment policy and the official student records such as credit limits, exceptions, grade changes, eligibility to continue, disciplinary holds, or withdrawal approval.

c) Capstone program proposals should specify standards for good academic standing. At a minimum, C grades must be earned on all course work attempted for the certificate program. Academic standing is verified by the program faculty and staff. (Only graduate-level work from the Capstone that is earned with a grade of B or better is eligible for subsequent application to a UW-Madison graduate degree program.)

d) Students may be enrolled part-time or full-time. Proposals should specify any enrollment considerations or limits or considerations related to curricular design and how the program plans to serve part-time or full-time students. (Note: International students on a student visa are only eligible for full-time study; programs seeking to serve international students should be aware of this consideration.)

e) It is a requirement that the certificate faculty program director or designee report which students have completed the Capstone certificate requirements to the Registrar’s Office and to DCS-ACSSS.

f) When the certificate is completed, the program faculty director or designee must notify the Registrar’s Office in order for the Capstone certificate to be recorded on the official student record and for it to print to the transcript.

g) Certificates are not awarded retroactively to students who completed the certificate requirements before the Capstone certificate proposal was approved, either while enrolled as a degree-seeking student or University Special (non-degree) student.

12. Advising and exceptions/substitutions – Describe how students will be advised and how the resource load of the additional advising will be met. How will exceptions to the specified curriculum be accommodated? Who will a student consult? Who will have sign-off authority on exceptions? Do the individuals or offices have the capacity to add this workload? Does the program have the resources to support all aspects of advising and student support? How will interactions with the school/college dean’s office, DCS-ACSSS, and with the Registrar’s Office be managed?

13. Financial Aid and Graduate Assistantships - Students enrolled in a Capstone certificate may be considered for merit-based financial aid by the department or program, as well as for need-based financial aid by the Student Financial Aid Office. Students enrolled in Capstone certificate programs are not eligible for TA, RA, PA or graduate fellowship support; these appointments are only available to degree-seeking graduate students.

14. Fiscal Structures - All Capstone certificate proposals must include a description of the fiscal structure used to support the program.

If a program will be supported using standard general purpose revenue and tuition structures, describe what resources are allocated to the program. Is there sufficient capacity in the
The Division described Program commitment. Ongoing equivalence changes for planning the relevant units in the curriculum. If the program is suspended, it will not be effective sooner than the fall semester after approval. The faculty are responsible for seeking appropriate governance approval for suspending admissions or discontinuing the certificate program. The Capstone certificate program should maintain a website with current, accurate, and governance-approved details about the program. This website should be linked from the Division of Continuing Studies lists of Capstone certificate offerings.

APPROVAL PROCESS

1. Program faculty in the sponsoring unit will prepare a proposal according to the guidelines described above. Faculty are advised to consult with their dean and dean’s office, with the Division of Continuing Studies, the Graduate School, and with the Office of Academic Planning and Institutional Research in the planning stages.

2. The proposal should be approved by the sponsoring department(s)/unit(s). The department chair or equivalent academic leader forwards the proposal to the dean’s office for consideration.

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3. The school/college academic planning council (or equivalent) reviews the proposal. After approval by the school(s)/college(s), the dean’s office forwards the proposal, attachments, and cover letter of support to the provost and to the Division of Continuing Studies (copy to the director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research as well as the assistant dean of Academic Assessment and Funding in the Graduate School).

4. The director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research will coordinate with the Graduate School and the Division of Continuing Studies to review the proposal for alignment with the guidelines and to assure that all supporting documentation is provided.

5. The Graduate School will schedule the proposal for consideration by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee. Upon approval by GFEC, the director of APIR will consult with the provost and schedule the proposal for consideration at a University Academic Planning Council meeting.

6. The UAPC will review the proposal and recommend consideration to the provost. The provost will formally announce the approval of a new certificate program to University constituencies and to UW System Administration.

7. The school/college dean’s offices and the program faculty will consult with the Office of the Registrar to implement the program. A certificate program will typically be implemented in the fall semester following governance approval. A representative of the home school/college will call an implementation meeting so that all faculty and staff involved with admissions, student records, and other implementation considerations can fully review and confirm processes, roles and responsibilities.
V. PROGRAM REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Regular review of academic programs is a responsibility of the program faculty. Certificates are to be reviewed five years after implementation and every ten years thereafter (every five years thereafter in Letters and Science). The review is initiated and overseen by the school/college dean’s office, as are other program reviews. The Office of the Provost will provide annual reports to the schools/colleges about which programs are due for review. A certificate review may stand alone or be combined with the review of an appropriate major, department, center, or other unit.

PROGRAM REVIEW AND SELF-STUDY GUIDELINES: Reviews of certificates are ideally conducted as an abbreviated review of an academic major/degree). All program reviews begin with a self-study (completed by program faculty) and the focus of a certificate self-study will typically include the following elements:

1. Program Description and Context – includes program requirements, mission, learning goals, and relationship with other units
2. Demonstration of Need and Recruitment/Outreach – includes populations targeted, data to demonstrate need, and efforts to recruit/inform students
3. Program Administration and Resources – includes description of administrative and advising processes as well as a description and evaluation of fiscal model (if appropriate)
4. Faculty/Staff Participants – includes list of participating faculty, instructional staff, administrative staff with their role and department affiliation noted
5. Student Enrollment – includes total number of students enrolled/declared in the program compared to program enrollment goals as well as average length of program completion
6. Curricular Offerings and Enrollment Levels – includes courses actually offered or for which students received program credit, by semester and enrollment data for "core" (introductory) and/or "capstone" courses
7. Program Completion – number of certificates awarded annually (as recorded by the Office of the Registrar); and placement of “graduates” (if appropriate).
8. Recommendations – includes recommendation and proposals for curricular changes or administrative improvements
9. Assessment – includes the assessment plan and a summary of annually conducted assessment activities, including an analysis of the extent to which the program is meeting the specified goals. This assessment evidence should form the basis for any proposals for curricular changes.

PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS: The school/college dean’s office will follow established procedures for review and final reporting of the self-study. In the absence of school/college-specific guidelines, certificate program faculty and dean’s offices should refer to University guidelines. All program reviews include a review committee (formed by the school/college) and for certificate reviews should typically include at least three faculty members, including a member from the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC) for graduate/professional and capstone certificates (who serves as a member not as chair).

For details on program review policy, see http://apir.wisc.edu/programreview.htm.