



Guidelines for Suspending or Discontinuing Certificate Programs

(See also Policy and Guidelines for Certificate Programs, adopted April 2012. This policy was drafted June 2012, based on Policy and Guidelines for Suspending or Discontinuing Degree/Major programs, which was adopted by UAPC in May 2012.)

Definitions

Suspending admissions – no admissions are allowed to the certificate. This status is allowed for a period of up to three years. Such a suspension allows time for program faculty to make a determination of whether the certificate program will be re-opened or permanently discontinued. A report and proposal is due at the end of the specified time period to re-open or to discontinue the program; this report is submitted to the provost.

Discontinuation – a request to permanently close a program.

Typical Reasons for Suspending/Discontinuing a Certificate Program

Proposals to suspend admissions to or discontinue certificates arise from a number of circumstances. The circumstances that most often occasion such a request are:

- The program is a low-enrollment program that no longer serves needs of students, faculty, and the mission of the university. According to UW-Madison program review guidelines, programs that award fewer than five (5) certificates in a five-year period are deemed “low enrollment” and are to be reviewed and considered for discontinuation. A certificate offered at more than one level (undergraduate/special, graduate/professional, Capstone) is counted separately in each category.
- The program is part of a restructuring plan that will result in a merger or re-organization of existing programs. Such proposals originate with faculty when they judge that program goals are more effectively achieved through renewal and restructuring that may require that one or more programs be formally discontinued.
- The program has student enrollment and student interest, but a range of circumstances – often budgetary or resource allocation issues – compel the program faculty and school/college dean to seek suspension of admissions or program discontinuation.

The following sunset provisions are specified in the guidelines for certificates. 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 the certificate program faculty have left the university or are not otherwise available to formally request a discontinuation.

Planning Considerations and Process

In all cases, suspending admissions or discontinuing a certificate program requires the same open and transparent process, widespread communication, documentation of concurrence by other interested and affected units, and participation in shared governance as is required to gain approval for a new program. Planning and proposal development will involve consultation and communication with a wide range of academic, administrative, and student support units. During their lifespan, certificates become integrated with other academic programs and student services. The suspension of an academic program must be managed so as to minimize any potentially adverse impacts. Appropriate and timely notice must be given to all interested groups. Throughout the planning process faculty and staff should consult with their dean's office, the director of Academic Planning and Analysis, the Registrar's Office, the Graduate School, the Office of Undergraduate Advising, the Division of Continuing Studies, and others as appropriate to the certificate.

Certificate program faculty are required to provide a teach-out plan for students who are enrolled in the program, but are not required to make provisions for students who stopped out. If a certificate program is discontinued while a student is stopped out, completion of that certificate is not generally available to the student upon return.

Proposals to suspend admissions to, discontinue, or restructure academic programs go through the following steps:

1. Reviewed and approved by the program faculty (department).
2. Reviewed for approval at the school/college level (usually at the academic planning council or equivalent governance body). Following approval by the school/college academic planning council, proposals are forwarded to the provost.
3. For undergraduate certificates, the proposal will be reviewed for approval by the University Academic Planning Council. For graduate/professional and Capstone certificates, the proposal will be reviewed for approval by the Graduate Faculty Executive Committee (GFEC). GFEC actions will be reported to the UAPC as automatic consent items.

4. Proposals that receive approval are reported by the Provost's Office to all of the impacted UW-Madison offices (Office of Admissions and Recruiting, Office of the Registrar, University Communications, Catalogs, Office of Undergraduate Advising, Graduate School, Madison Budget Office, and so on). The provost also reports the suspension of admissions or discontinuation to UW System Administration in keeping with relevant policy requirements.

Proposal Guidelines

Although there are various circumstances that may culminate in a decision to suspend admissions or discontinue a certificate program, there are common issues that should be addressed in proposals. Program faculty and staff who seek to suspend or discontinue programs, especially those with robust student enrollments, should explore the issues in depth, and should confer with their deans and other constituencies and advisors as their discussions proceed. Suspension of a program that has not enrolled students for some time will be more perfunctory than for a program with substantial enrollment.

Proposals to suspend admissions or discontinue a certificate program should include:

1. An explanation of the precipitating circumstances or rationale for the proposal. Such explanations may be based in the unit's mission/focus and consequent realignment of resources with those changes; substantial changes/redirection of fields/courses of study; declining faculty and student interest in the field of study; negative assessment of program quality and concern about the ability to deliver programming of acceptable quality to students; budgetary considerations; or other forces. The explanation need not be lengthy, but sufficient detail should be provided so that shared governance groups can understand the situation.
2. An explanation and evidence of efforts made to confer with and to notify parties affected by this change. This should include, but may not be limited to: faculty and staff who contribute to the program; academic units that provide resources (courses, advisement, faculty, budget) to support the program; and students currently enrolled in the program. Obviously, these efforts will be extensive for programs with robust student enrollments and may be minimal for programs that are low-enrollment or no-enrollment.
3. An overview of the "teach-out plan" that explains how students who are enrolled in the certificate will complete the certificate. Enough detail should be provided to assure those reviewing the proposal that a plan to support students is in place, although the exact details may evolve as implementation proceeds. The purpose of the teach-out plan is that it should convey how program quality will be maintained and ensured through the teach-out period for enrolled students. Students who have declared an intention to complete the program must be supported with courses, advising, and other services to complete the program. The faculty should plan to continue teaching required courses or make reasonable exceptions to those requirements to facilitate student completion of the requirements. In some cases, the faculty may need to adjust program requirements to

maintain quality throughout the teach-out period. Such a change in curricular requirements may require approval by the school/college curriculum committee.

4. Stopped out students (a student who was a previously enrolled degree-seeking student who suspended enrollment for one or more fall and/or spring term(s) and who subsequently seeks to re-enroll): If a student was enrolled in a certificate program and then stopped out, and the certificate program was discontinued while they were stopped out, the certificate program will not be available to them. Program faculty may make exceptions in the 2 years after a program is discontinued.
5. For proposals to suspend admissions to a certificate program, admissions may be suspended for up to three years. By no later than the end of three years, the program faculty must submit to the provost a proposal to re-open admissions or to discontinue the program. Proposals to suspend admissions must include a timeline for submitting a report and proposal to the Office of the Provost on the final status of the program. (The Office of the Provost/director of Academic Planning will track and follow up on these actions.)
6. Timeline and advance communication plan. Decisions to suspend admissions or discontinue a program should be made using a transparent and open process. Timelines will depend on circumstances; they will be longer for programs with more enrolled students and immediate for programs that have had no student enrollment for many years.

Once suspension of admissions or discontinuation is approved, it is imperative that the program provides clear communication to prospective students and enrolled students about the availability and future of the certificate on all of the websites that the program contributes information to. Programs should also consult with admitting and advising units to make sure that communication about the program status is well documented and communicated.

7. Suspension/Discontinuation of Related Programs. The proposal to suspend or discontinue a certificate must also specify any related academic components that are to be discontinued. For example, courses, a PhD minor or Subject listing of the same name may also need to be changed and the proposal should explicitly request the change for those components.

Why are these guidelines necessary?

Suspending or discontinuing a certificate program may have impacts that go beyond the immediate program faculty, staff, and the enrolled students. Careful planning, as outlined in this document, ensures wide communication and attention to these wider impacts, and ensures that program quality is maintained throughout the teach-out period.