Policy on Review of Certificate Programs
Approved by L&S APC, November 16, 2005
Updated June 2012, per UAPC Review Requirements

Overview

"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."


In the College of Letters and Science, certificate programs play various roles in our students’ academic experiences. For example, certificate programs allow our faculty to organize coherent programs of study around topics to enhance existing majors, as when students pursuing the International Studies major earn any of several certificates focusing on regions around the world. Certificates provide recognition that students have pursued studies in interdisciplinary areas that span departments (as with the ethnic studies programs, Folklore, Medieval Studies, and Archaeology). Certificates can be used to organize disparate undergraduate breadth requirements into a meaningful and useful program (Integrated Liberal Studies) or provide additional certification of expertise at the graduate level (Women’s Studies, Material Cultures). These programs provide access to areas where scholarship and resources at UW-Madison have recently coalesced (Celtic Studies) or are still emerging (Middle East Studies). Less frequently, a certificate program might serve as a “proving ground” for an area of study, providing a foundation on which a degree program may later be established—the undergraduate majors in Jewish, Religious, and Women’s Studies all began as certificate programs.

Certificate programs generally call for fewer credits than majors (15-24 vs. 27-40) and are usually very flexible. The approval process is relatively brief, a condition that affords the faculty an opportunity to explore new areas for academic programming. (Please see http://wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/obpa/uapccertificates.htm for more information on the process for seeking approval of a certificate.) Campus oversight of certificate programs is limited, and the faculty has a large degree of local control over these programs. Certificates, unlike majors, are not subject to UW System rules related to Academic Program Review, nor do they rise to the attention of the annual “low-enrollment program” reporting requirement. Yet those very advantages pose challenges. If a small program driven by the energies of a few people loses the interest of those members, the program may falter. If departments cooperating in an interdisciplinary program don’t communicate or plan course offerings, students may lack access to courses offered with sufficient frequency, or at appropriate levels, to complete the program. If the program loses a long-term director or administrator, it may lose the institutional memory that ensured that the Registrar’s Office was informed of declarations, drops, and completions. A certificate program may long suffer from limited course offerings, flagging faculty interest, falling enrollments, structural problems, and other issues that call into question whether the
program is meeting its original academic purpose—or if that purpose is still necessary and relevant. The L&S Academic Planning Council has therefore recommended that a process be implemented to perform a brief evaluation of certificate programs.

**Reporting Cycle**

- Certificate programs managed by academic departments and programs subject to the regular review of degree programs should be included in the review of those departments/programs, according to the schedule established by the Provost and Dean.
- Interdisciplinary centers, institutes, and programs that manage certificate programs should include information about those programs in their regular documentation about the center or institute. “Regular documentation” might include the annual report to the dean or oversight committee, grant renewal applications (if appropriate), budget/funding requests, etc. Annual reports are not necessary; however, a report should be submitted at least once every five years.
- New certificate programs should submit a follow-up report no more than five years after the program is established, except in cases where an earlier report is submitted under the conditions provided above. After submission of the first report, subsequent reports will follow the above cycle.

**Report Contents**

In light of the limited level of resources usually dedicated to certificate program administration, the information required by the APC is also limited. Reports on certificate programs include the following information:

*Note: this list of reporting requirements has been updated to conform to UAPC Guidelines on Certificate Program Review (June 2012).*

1. Recommendation regarding program continuation
2. Program description and context, including mission, requirements, learning goals, relationship to other units
3. Demonstrated need for the program, recruitment/outreach to populations served by the program
4. Program administration and resources, including administrative and advising processes. Where appropriate, this also includes evaluation of fiscal models that support the program.
5. List of participating faculty and staff, with department affiliation noted
6. Total number of students enrolled/declared in the program, average time for program completion
7. Courses actually offered or for which students received program credit, by semester, including enrollment data for “core” (introductory) and/or “capstone” courses
8. Program completion - number of certificates awarded annually. "Professionally oriented" programs should include placement data.
9. Assessment of student learning - assessment plan and summary of annual assessment activities (especially those leading to requests for curricular changes)
Report Submission

Materials should be addressed to the Dean, who will bring them forward for review and consultation by the L&S Academic Planning Council. Information on certificates offered in collaboration with other units (e.g., Graduate School, Continuing Studies) will be shared as needed.

Updated: 6/22/2012 9:09:00 AM