

## **Guidelines for the Development of Certificate Programs University of Nebraska at Kearney**

### **I. Purposes of Certificate Programs**

Certificate programs provide a means for the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) to respond with a high degree of flexibility in meeting emerging needs for educational programs. They may address professional development needs of practitioners in a wide variety of areas, or they may provide focused areas of study for students pursuing other academic programs. Two broad types of programs are distinguished: (1) workshops and non-academic credit programs; and (2) academic certificate programs. These guidelines are intended to maintain uniformity at UNK with regard to certificate programs and related non-degree programs, and to set guidelines for the development and management of academic certificate programs. Any exception to these categories or policies should be approved through the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs.

**Workshops and Non-academic credit programs** are not considered certificate programs. They do not carry academic credit and typically involve 20 or fewer contact hours. These are generally professional development or continuing education programs and 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 a student's participation is maintained by the Office of the Registrar. Documents presented to students completing these workshops or non-credit courses must not resemble a UNK diploma, include the UNK seal, bear a UNK graduation date or contain the words "certificate" or "diploma."

**Academic certificate programs** provide substantial education at either the undergraduate or graduate 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 will be maintained by the department offering the certificate. Once completed, the department of record may notify the Office of the Registrar to have the certificate noted on the student's official UNK transcript. Any other certificate document is issued by the department offering the program.

Certificate programs may be offered at the undergraduate or graduate levels. Certificate programs must be based entirely on credit courses that have been approved through the formal university curriculum process. These programs of study are intended to be housed and supported within existing academic units. Courses in certificate programs are typically current courses offered in support of degree programs. Credit hours earned toward a certificate program are permitted to be applied to a degree program with departmental approval.

Each certificate program must have a designated program director who is responsible for administering the program (following the appropriate college's graduate or undergraduate academic affairs process for any changes to the program) advising and monitoring progress of

students and tracking program completion. The burden for all management of certificate programs rests with the departmental/college staff. The program director must ensure that processes are fair, students are properly informed, and that college and university standards are upheld.

## **II. Criteria for Certificate Programs**

1. Must include a minimum of 12 credit hours and must not exceed 24 credit hours.
2. Total number of hours must include any prerequisites.
3. Content, methodology, and workload for courses must be clearly defined and appropriate for the level and amount of credit awarded.
4. Has a clearly defined audience(s).
5. Is composed of an integrated, focused curriculum and based on specific learning objectives.
6. Includes an assessment plan/process focused on the achievement of the learning objectives.
7. Is able to stand alone or be part of another curriculum, but is not automatically earned by completing the requirements for a major.
8. Program must be built on current faculty and facility resources.
9. May be undergraduate or graduate.
10. At least two-thirds of the coursework for undergraduate certificates must be comprised of upper level courses (300 level or above).
11. Coursework must be completed with an earned grade of *C* or better in each course (higher at the discretion of the department/program) at the undergraduate level and a grade of *B* or better for each course at the graduate level. Pass/Fail grading will not be available with one exception: A maximum of one internship/practicum is permitted with a pass/fail grade and for no more than 3 hours credit counted toward the certificate.
12. No federal financial aid is available for students in certificate programs.

## **III. Process for Development of Credit Certificate Programs**

As with degree programs, all new certificate programs, as well as changes to existing programs, must be approved by the appropriate department(s), college academic policy committee, Dean, Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee and/or the Graduate Council and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs prior to public announcement of the program. Approval by the Board of Regents and the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education is required. In addition, each certificate program which includes the creation of new courses (totaling 50% or more of the program) must be registered with the university accrediting body (Higher Learning Commission of NCA). Certificate programs may not be delivered until all approval processes are in place.

As with all programs, the justification for the program, admission criteria for graduate certificates, learning objectives, and curricular requirements for completion of the program must be clearly articulated and evaluated. Program proposals must be prepared in the format available from the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs (attached).

Certificate programs should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are maintaining high standards of quality and contributing to the good of the department, college and University. The programs are included in the Academic Program Review (APR) of the department/program every five years. An inventory of all academic certificate programs is maintained by Academic Affairs (the Office of the Registrar and Institutional Research have authoritative lists of programs; Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies maintains a descriptive chart along with admission requirements).

#### **IV. Admissions Requirements and Procedures**

Admissions standards should be set for each graduate certificate program by the department and college offering the program. Undergraduate certificates require full compliance with UNK Admission requirements for non-degree students. Admission criteria and processes must 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. Federal financial aid is NOT available for students enrolled in certificate programs. This fact should be shared with students at the time of application.

Even if admission requirements for the certificate program are somewhat different than those in the most closely related 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 course as degree candidates. The minimum requirements for the certificates are listed below.

Undergraduate Certificate: High school diploma or equivalent.

Graduate Certificate: Undergraduate degree from an accredited institution.

Certificate programs should be listed in application materials, and, preferably, applicants should be able to complete the same online application form as degree program applicants. All applicants for academic certificate programs must be appropriately coded and entered in the student information system.

**International Students** must meet full admission criteria and provide all documentation necessary including financial certification, TOEFL or other scores and evidence of previous educational background. Unless they are specifically admitted as part of an exchange/study abroad program, international students must be enrolled in a degree-seeking program at UNK. Questions about eligibility for certificate programs should be addressed by the International Education Office on a student-by-student basis.

#### **Transfer Credit**

The amount of transfer credit counted toward the certificate, if any, from other institutions will be determined by the department/program. The maximum amount of transfer credit approved cannot exceed one-third of the credit hours required for the certificate program. For transfer 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 five years prior to admission to the certificate program; it must be approved by the department/program 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 at the undergraduate level, and a grade of *B* or better in each course for which transfer of credit is sought toward a graduate certificate.

### **Student Rights**

The college 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 may obtain UNK student ID cards and have access to all of the services available to degree-seeking students. Students enrolled in online certificate programs will be entitled to any services that are normally available to online degree candidates.

### **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. Policies for registration, grading, and academic progress should be the same as those for degree programs (for example, processes for course withdrawals, times lines for *Incompletes*, academic deadlines and so on).

Each certificate program should also have a time limit for completion of the program 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 with that time period. The limit may be at the discretion of the department/program, but should ensure that the entire program is completed within a three to five-year timeframe.

### **Registration and Program Completion**

Certificate students must be appropriately coded and registered in the UNK 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 completed by the department/program advisor in order to verify all requirements are met. Notification should then be sent to the Office of the Registrar, so that the certificate can be noted on the student's official transcript.

The department/program will produce the certificate document and either mail it or present it directly to the student.

Certificate students **do not** participate in university commencement ceremonies. A graduation fee is not charged. Certificate-offering colleges and departments are encouraged to hold separate ceremonies or adopt other appropriate methods for honoring the achievements of students awarded certificates.

### **Concurrent/Sequential Completion of Graduate Degree Programs**

Colleges and departments must set clear policies regarding the admission of certificate program students to relevant degree programs. These policies should specifically address the conditions under which the 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.**

When courses taken while in the certificate program can fulfill requirements of an existing degree program, the college and/or department 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 and should specify how recent the course work must be in order to provide appropriate training. 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.

Colleges 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. These students would need to meet in full, the normal admission requirements for the degree program. Alternatively, and at the graduate level, 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 college or 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 clearly stated in recruitment materials and in letters of admission.

Students may also be allowed to pursue a certificate and a degree offered by different departments or colleges, particularly when a certificate program in one department or college would allow a student to obtain specialized expertise that complements his or her degree program in another college or department. Prior to enrolling in the two programs, the student must obtain approval from the appropriate dean's office(s) and departments/programs. The colleges 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 and ensure that the work is appropriately recent.

Students concurrently enrolled in both a degree and a certificate program should be coded in the UNK student information system as such. Students must have the degree program coded as their primary curriculum and the certificate as their secondary curriculum.

Academic certificate programs are especially useful in giving working adults the skills and knowledge they need to advance their professional development. These guidelines are intended to support the University of Nebraska at Kearney's commitment to offering only educational experiences of the highest quality.

This policy once approved should be revisited at the end of three years to determine if changes are needed and if the provisions are meeting the needs of the students and UNK.