



Guidelines for Noncredit Certificate Programs

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(Policy history: Original guidelines adopted September 8, 2011, Council of Outreach Deans)

I. General Information and Definitions

1. Definitions: A noncredit certificate program is a designated set of noncredit courses focused upon a specific topic or theme. Certificate programs give participants 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. There are two generally recognized levels of noncredit certificate programs on the UW-Madison campus:

- a. Certificate of Professional Development - recognizes completion of a set of courses in a specific area
- b. Certificate of Educational Achievement - recognizes a set curriculum plus an examination or other assessment of mastery

2. Noncredit certificate programs require the completion of a series of related core courses, and often additional elective coursework. Noncredit certificate programs are frequently more practice-oriented and applied than their for-credit counterparts, and have as a primary goal advancing a participant's workplace skills.

3. Noncredit certificate awards may be documented on the participant's continuing education transcript at the Pyle Center, and become part of the UW-Extension noncredit record.

4. Noncredit certificate programs offered by UW-Madison continuing education units and departments do **not** lead to the conferral of a degree as defined by UW-Madison, and will not be reflected on the UW-Madison academic transcript. It is important that all promotional materials and communications about noncredit certificate programs are clear that participation in a noncredit certificate program does not lead to the conferral of UW-Madison academic credits.

5. Noncredit certificate program curricula is often influenced and/or regulated by external professional organizations. Even so, noncredit certificates awarded by UW-Madison continuing

education units and departments may differ from certifications or licensure granted by those external organizations.

II. Guidelines for Proposals for New Noncredit Certificates

Proposals for new noncredit certificate programs should originate from members of the sponsoring unit (generally a continuing education unit or department). The proposal should describe the purpose of the certificate program, the details of the curriculum, administration, and fiscal management structure.

1. Sponsoring unit(s) and program faculty– Identify which continuing education unit or department, (or other unit) and which school/college will be the sponsoring unit for the certificate program. Include a name for the initial program director of the certificate program.
2. Program purpose – Proposals for the creation of new noncredit certificate programs must provide a demonstrated need for such a program. This provision must be defined in terms of external demand for the skills associated with such a certificate. What is the purpose of the certificate program? How does it contribute to the mission of the sponsoring unit(s)? What is the evidence that there is a societal, participant, and market demand for the certificate program experiences? Why is the program most appropriately offered as a non-credit certificate rather than as for-credit activity? Are there any plans to transition this program to a for-credit format?
3. Program Curriculum – Describe the certificate program curriculum. Provide a description of the proposed sequence of relevant coursework. Describe the major learning goals associated with the certificate program, and the plan to evaluate if these goals are being met. The proposed program should be able to achieve its educational objectives in an efficient and well-defined manner such that it can be completed in a reasonable time frame.
4. Enrollment, Recruitment, and Marketing – Identify certificate program enrollment goals, and how they will be achieved. How will participant enrollment projections be met? What efforts will be made to inform and recruit prospective participants? What are contingency plans for enrollments that are much higher or lower than projected?
5. Management and Fiscal Structure – Proposals should include a clear outline of the management structure of the certificate program, including identification of the program director. If a noncredit certificate program will be supported using a program-revenue or charge-back model, the proposal should include a description of the proposed fiscal structure, including identification of the proposed fund source (e.g. fund 131, fund 104, etc); a description of the proposed fee structure, and a proposed operating budget.

III. Noncredit Certificate Program Approval Process

1. The sponsoring unit will prepare a proposal according to the guidelines described above. Program Directors may want to consult with their Outreach Dean and with the Division of Continuing Studies 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 school/college Outreach Dean's office for consideration and approval.
3. After approval by the school/college Outreach Dean, the dean's office forwards the approved certificate program documents for informational purposes to the Dean of the Division of Continuing Studies. The Division of Continuing Studies will keep the official list of non-credit certificate programs.
4. Once annually, the dean of Continuing Studies will send a list of the non-credit certificate programs to the provost and to the director of Academic Planning and Analysis. The list will be annotated to identify changes since the prior year (additions, renames, discontinuations)

IV. Noncredit Certificate Program Tracking, Awards, and Reporting

1. Program admission standards and criteria for satisfactory progress for participants enrolled in a noncredit certificate program are determined by the certificate program.
2. The sponsoring unit has a responsibility to audit noncredit certificate program participants' progress to completion, to determine when a participant has completed the certificate requirements, to award the certificate, and to post the record of that achievement to the noncredit student record at the Pyle Center, where applicable. Noncredit certificate programs must inform the Dean of Continuing Studies of the number of certificates awarded by each program each year.
3. The sponsoring unit may create, produce, and award a certificate document to students who complete the program of study, if the program chooses for students to have a physical certificate.

ADDENDUM: Higher Learning Commission Regulation of Certificates

NOTE: Certificates that meet all of the following conditions *also require approval by the Higher Learning Commission (as of 2008 and as clarified by HLC in July 2010):*

- certificate requirements are comprised of credit bearing courses,
- the certificate is free standing and does not require that students be degree seeking participants,
- 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 (courses were created just for the certificate),
- students in the program are to be eligible for federal financial aid (under Title IV)

If your proposed certificate program meets these criteria, consult with your school/college Outreach Dean.