Guidelines for New Certificate Programs

Office of Academic Affairs

Definition

A certificate program is a related cluster of credit bearing courses that constitutes a coherent body of study within a discipline or set of related disciplines.

Purpose

The purpose of a certificate program is to serve the needs of both matriculated and non-degree students interested in developing specific skills and knowledge for personal and/or professional development. The certificate alone is not intended to prepare a student for gainful employment in a recognized occupation. Programs should carefully consider the gainful employment implications of their program prior to development. The following resources may be helpful in making gainful employment determinations of the proposed program:

http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=41638

http://ifap.ed.gov/GainfulEmploymentInfo/

Programs are encouraged to contact the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of General Counsel to determine whether or not their proposed program will require Gainful Employment reporting.

Even though certificate programs are not degree-bearing, they are usually designated on a student’s official transcript and are as much a reflection on Tulane’s quality of education as any other assemblage of courses. As a result, careful consideration should be given to the creation of a new certificate program based not only upon need and interest, but also upon how the program fits into Tulane’s educational portfolio.

Curriculum

Certificate programs typically comprise less than one half of the credit hour requirements for the most closely-related degree program. For example, a graduate certificate in public health would require 15 credit hours, which is roughly one-third of the 42 credit hour requirement for the master of public health degree. Similarly, a post-baccalaureate certificate program in digital design in the school of continuing studies requires 30 credit hours, which is 50% of the 60 credit hour requirement for the associate degree in digital design. There are therefore no specific guidelines on the number of credit hour requirements for a certificate program. Rather, the credit hours required for the certificate are dictated by the disciplinary degree requirements. Requests for exceptions to these guidelines may be taken up on a case-by-case basis.

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Method of Instruction

Certificate programs should be delivered in the same format as all other courses offered by the home department or program. At Tulane, this is traditionally the face-to-face lecture style (synchronous) course. Online (either synchronous or asynchronous) courses are allowed, but there are two important issues to consider when proposing online instruction: 1) accreditation; and 2) state authorization.

As per university accreditation guidelines published by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), no program comprising greater than 25% of credit hours via online instruction may be offered without prior approval from SACS. Certificate programs based upon greater than 25% of the credit hours from online instruction should allow additional time in the approval process in order to obtain the necessary SACS approvals. Programs should consult the SACS document “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs” in the development of their proposal:


Federal laws regulating state authorization to offer courses and/or degrees via online instruction may impact the ability of a program to offer online instruction in certain locations. These laws are currently scheduled to go into effect in July 2014, but the proposed legislation is currently under review and interpretation. Programs are encouraged to consult with the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of General Counsel to review whether or not Tulane is authorized to deliver courses to students in the proposed states of instruction.

Assessment

As with all academic programs, learning objectives and program outcomes must be established and assessment methods must be designed for all certificate programs. The certificate program outcomes are often a subset of the outcomes for the most closely-related degree program. The assessment methods may be different, however, particularly if culminating experiences (capstones, theses, practicums) are not part of the certificate program. Certificate program developers are encouraged to contact the Director of Institutional Assessment for assistance with their assessment plans. In all cases, a program outcomes assessment form must be developed and completed prior to the establishment of the certificate program. Certificate programs must also submit annual assessment plans in accordance with institutional procedures. Information on assessment plans can be found at:

http://tulane.edu/assessment/plans.cfm

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Approval Process

Certificate programs must go through the same approval process as new degree programs.

1. **Implementation Date.** Establish a certificate program implementation date. This might typically be the beginning of a fall term. All ensuing actions are timed according to this implementation date.

2. **18 Months Before Implementation Date.** A proposal or prospectus for the new certificate program is developed in consultation with Academic Affairs that is consistent with the school’s constitution and/or governance structure (such as review by a school curriculum committee). For certificate degree programs that involve more than one school, an approval process that is consistent with the constitutions of all the involved schools is followed.

3. **One Year Before Implementation Date.** The proposal must go to the SACS Compliance Certification Committee for review and action under the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Substantive Change Policy:


   If necessary a Substantive Change Communication is submitted to SACS by the SACS Liaison in the Office of Academic Affairs.

   If the non-degree certificate program is to be Title IV eligible (financial aid is to be made available to students in the non-degree certificate program), the necessary documents must be filed with the U.S. Department of Education through Tulane’s Office of Financial Aid. Contact the Director of Financial Aid (504-865-5723) for further information. This process can take 3-12 months depending on a number of factors, including whether or not the certificate program is stand-alone or affiliated with an existing degree program.

4. **Implementation Date.** Upon final approval by SACS, students may be admitted into the new certificate program. A “New Program Approval Form” ([http://registrar.tulane.edu/departmental_forms](http://registrar.tulane.edu/departmental_forms)) must be completed and returned to the Registrar’s Office to activate tracking of requirements and transcripting of the certificate.