

Guidelines for Graduate Certificate Programs

The Graduate School

Loyola University Chicago

INTRODUCTION

A graduate certificate program offers a series of structured and coherent courses to a target audience that may include traditional and nontraditional students as well as working adults. It is designed to broaden students' educational experiences and to complement knowledge and skills already attained. As a result, students usually acquire additional professional skills that will enhance their competitiveness in the job market. Graduate certificate programs are sometimes used as a means to attract working professional adults who may not necessarily be interested in seeking an additional traditional degree, but rather seek to gain additional knowledge and skills.

GUIDELINES

ACADEMIC FOCUS: Describe the academic focus of the proposed certificate program and the extent to which it is structured to provide a coherent course of study. Will the certificate program be developed from existing courses or from new courses?

TARGET AUDIENCE: Describe the target audience (traditional, nontraditional, working adults).

RELEVANCE: Provide a justification or rationale for the certificate program, including disciplinary trends, enrollment trends, and potential student demand.

PROGRAM IMPACT: Graduate certificate programs should not have an adverse impact on an existing degree program. Programs should not substitute for or duplicate existing programs. Graduate certificate programs can be completed as either a stand-alone program serving as an extension to a student's bachelor's or master's degree, or in conjunction with a student's graduate program.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS: Describe how the certificate program relates to the department's priorities and the university's mission.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS/PROCESS: Students applying to a graduate certificate program must be formally admitted in a manner similar to existing degree programs. Requirements for admission into the program are proposed as follows:

- A minimum requirement of a completed Bachelor's Degree;
- A formal application into the program which includes a completed application form, transcripts, and 2 letters of recommendation;
- A one-page statement of purpose describing each student's objectives for study and how the program of study relates to his or her discipline or career.
- A minimum GPA of 2.7.

Admission decisions will be made by an admissions committee composed of graduate faculty. Admission into the program will incorporate the same minimum requirements defined by the Graduate School. However, GREs will not be required.

CURRICULUM: Describe the graduate certificate curriculum. Include any online education components. Provide a list of courses. Credit should range from a minimum of 12 credit hours to a maximum of 18 credit hours. A capstone course is recommended.

REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPLETION: The proposed requirements for completion of a 12-18 credit program are designed to be completed within one year for students enrolled full-time. Students admitted into the program for the fall semester should be able to enroll in all the necessary courses within the academic year and should be able to complete their final project by the end of the academic year. Part-time students should be able to complete the program in three years. Students cannot earn more than one C grade.

The program should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate students working toward their degree in the university as well as those students who already have a degree and are seeking additional expertise and skill sets applicable to their work environment. Course selection and the sequence of courses can be agreed upon by the student and the program director to help students complete the program and gain the necessary skills.

OUTCOMES/ASSESSMENT: What are the expected program outcomes and assessment methods? Program outcomes must be consistent with the department's mission and objectives. Examples of assessment methods and procedures used are: formative and summative assessment measures, direct and indirect measures, and evaluation rubrics.

GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT: Based on new Federal legislation enacted July, 1, 2011 institutions offering certificate programs must disclose information on gainful employment and other statistics. In order to be eligible for funding under the Title IV programs, an educational certificate program must prepare students for "gainful employment in a recognized occupation." As such, a Gainful Employment Disclosure must be completed that provides information on the following:

- Program Name & Length
- Related Occupations
- Total Tuition Costs and Required Fees
- Debt at Program Completion
- Program Completion in Normal Time
- Job Placement of Program Completers

GOVERNANCE: Describe the academic oversight of the graduate certificate program, including the function and expectations for the graduate certificate program director and the certificate program committee.

Addendum
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In the Guidelines for Certificate Programs approved in 2014, the Guidelines indicated that the certificate program should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate students working towards their degree in the university as well as those student who already have a degree and are seeking additional expertise and skill sets applicable to their work environment. What was not addressed in the guidelines were the following issues: (1) how students currently enrolled in other programs could receive a certificate while working on their degree; (2) how students completing the certificate not enrolled in a degree program can apply their credits toward the degree in question.

Benchmark Information

The certificate programs at sixteen universities (13 plus the three programs from the external reviewers) were evaluated as part of the first Certificate application in the Graduate School. Policies on the relationship of the Certificate programs to other degree programs at the university addressed two issues that Loyola University Chicago is also considering: (1) application of the Certificate credits to a Master's degree program in the same department, and (2) Masters students earning a Certificate in another department and using credits to complete their home graduate program.

1. Two programs were taught in Schools of Continuing Studies rather than an academic department. These certificates were for Continuing Education only. The credits could not be used for a Master's degree.
2. Twelve programs permitted counting the Certificate courses toward the Master's degree in the same department. These programs were taught within an academic department, not a separate continuing education program. The courses taken were the same as those in the Master's program. Only one program did not accept all credits earned in the certificate program. They taught Certificate courses as part of an off-campus cohort model at specific government agencies.
3. Five programs specifically marketed the Certificate program to students in Master's programs in other departments. All credits taken in the Certificate program could be counted as electives toward the other Department's Master's degree.

Programs considered:

- University of Colorado – Denver (external review)
- Western Michigan University (external review)
- Bridgewater State University (external review)

- Minnesota State University -- Mankato
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- University of Nebraska – Omaha
- University of Nebraska – Lincoln
- CUNY – School of Continuing Studies
- Eastern Michigan University
- University of Missouri
- Georgia Tech
- University of Southern California
- Florida State University
- Indiana State University
- Kansas State University
- University of North Dakota

Additionally, we looked at the ways in which these issues were addressed at three additional institutions and here at Loyola University Chicago. At Duke University, it appears that many certificates were offered for students already seeking a Master's or PhDs at Duke. At St. Louis University, in at least one certificate allowed courses taken as part of the certificate program to follow the student into the degree program. At Fordham, courses taken towards a certificate could be applied toward graduate degree and Master's students could get certificates as part of their degree programs. In LUC's Quinlan School of Business, certificate students may continue to the MBA program with full credit for the courses taken for the certificate.

Recommendations:

1. Policy regarding transfer credits from Graduate Certificate Programs to Master's Programs

Certificate programs can range from 12 to 18 credits. One argument in developing such programs is that they can provide a pathway to a Master's degree program. A certificate program may encourage working professionals to return to school due to the shorter time commitment and help them to overcome potential academic anxiety after being out of college for some time. For some of these students continuing on with a Master's degree will make sense.

For the students who transition from a graduate Certificate program at LUC to a Master's program at Loyola, all credits taken in the certificate program would count toward a corresponding Master's program administered by the same department if the following conditions apply:

1. The student has fulfilled all requirements for admittance into the Master's program.
2. The certificate program uses courses that are the same as those in the corresponding Master's program, e.g. both types of students enroll in the same classes taught by the same professors as in the Master's program.
3. All grades are a B or higher.

4. The student continues the Master's program immediately following completion of the certificate program or within one academic year. For certificate students who return for a Master's degree after more than one year has elapsed, students would be limited to transfer of only six credits, comparable to the acceptance of graduate transfer credit from another program.

2. Policy regarding students from other departments completing a Graduate Certificate

Master's students are able to earn a Certificate in a different department if they meet the following requirements:

1. For Master's programs of 36 credits or more, a Certificate of 12 credits can be earned in another field. The Certificate 12 credits can count as electives in the Master's program.
2. For Master's programs of less than 36 credits, a Concentration can be listed on the student's transcript if all class for the Certificate program have been taken as electives. If the student wants to earn a Certificate instead, only 6 credits of the Certificate classes can be counted as electives in the Master's program. Additional classes will need to be taken to complete the Certificate.
3. Any department may limit the number of credits taken outside of the department that would apply to their own degrees. This may restrict the ability of students to earn a Certificate without taking classes beyond the Master's degree requirements.