Policies and Procedures for Graduate Certificate Programs

Graduate School of the College of Charleston, SC Policy on Graduate Certificate Programs

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a. Introduction

Graduate certificate programs may be created within the structure of the Graduate School. Students may be awarded these certificates upon completion of a well-defined program of coursework. The graduate certificate is not defined as a degree by the Graduate School, rather, it is a focused collection of courses that, when completed, affords the student some record of coherent academic accomplishment in a given discipline or set of related disciplines. Moreover, the graduate certificate is not viewed as a guaranteed means of entry into a graduate degree program. While the courses comprising a graduate certificate may be used as evidence in support of a student’s application for admission to a graduate degree program, the certificate itself is not considered to be a prerequisite. The didactic material encompassed within a graduate certificate program may represent a more practice-oriented subset of an existing graduate discipline. The title of any graduate certificate program may or may not contain the word certificate, depending on the tradition in the discipline proposing the program.

b. Process of Approval for New Graduate Certificate Programs

Proposals for new graduate certificate programs are created and submitted by constituent graduate faculty. They must be accompanied by endorsement from the department heads and deans of the schools in which the contributing coursework is housed, as well as from those academic units whose students or programs could be impacted by the creation of the new graduate certificate. New graduate certificate programs in areas where joint graduate programs are conducted with other universities will normally be endorsed by the collaborating departments at the other institution. The Graduate Council considers all graduate certificate program proposals for academic merit. Those meeting the criteria set forth by the Graduate School are then recommended to the Faculty Senate and the Provost for approval. Upon approval of a graduate certificate program, the constituent graduate faculty must contact the Director of Graduate Admissions to develop an Internal Announcement of Approval. This document outlines the major acronym, requirement rules, IPEDS code, and other details that are necessary for input into SIS. It also provides the timeline for addition of the certificate program to the on-line application process.
c. Criteria for Approval

The overarching principles applied to the assessment of the academic quality of proposals for new graduate certificate programs include:

1. The proposed sequence of coursework must offer a clear and appropriate educational objective at the post-baccalaureate level.

2. The proposed program will achieve its educational objective in an efficient and well-defined manner.

3. A demonstrated need for such a program must exist. This provision may be defined in terms of either external markets (i.e., external demand for the skills associated with such a certificate) or internal academic needs (i.e., the need for a critical mass of students in a given discipline).

4. The number of graduate credits may not be fewer than 12 and no more than 18 credits.

d. Student Eligibility and Admission Criteria

The prerequisites and general criteria of eligibility for admission to any graduate certificate program include:

1. An earned baccalaureate degree or its equivalent from an accredited college or university is required.

2. Each program sets the minimum grade point average, minimum TOEFL scores, standardized test scores, whether or not certificate courses may be counted towards the related master's degree program, and other similar criteria as part of the application. Greater flexibility than that found in graduate degree admission requirements is intentionally built into graduate certificate programs so that the needs of the target student population may be met, if it is appropriate to do so.

3. A maximum of 6 credit hours towards any certificate program may be accepted as transfer credit.

4. Graduate students who are currently enrolled in a graduate program of study leading to a degree, and who wish to pursue a simultaneous graduate certificate within the Graduate School must apply to the certificate program before the last semester of their degree program. The Dean of the Graduate School, upon request by the certificate program coordinator, may grant exceptions to this policy. The application fee will be waived by the Graduate School for currently enrolled students.

5. Certificate-seeking graduate students who are not currently enrolled in a master's program will be admitted into a separate classification within the Graduate School, as "Certificate Graduate" students, as defined by the Graduate Council. This separate classification will permit keeping of University-wide statistical and enrollment data for certificate programs, and will allow inclusion of such efforts in the annual reports and academic planning. The Graduate School will note successful completion of a certificate program on the student's transcript upon completion.
N.B.: The rationale for requiring formal enrollment in graduate certificate programs is based on the need for proper allocation of instructional resources and the desire to afford the certificate students equal access to the desired graduate courses. Departments and programs are better able to plan offerings of the appropriate graduate courses if they are aware of the upcoming demand for such courses. This demand can best be gauged by knowledge of the number of students in the program. By registering as graduate students, the certificate-seeking students will have timely access to graduate courses offered by departments and schools.

6. Students currently in a certificate program who wish to change their status to degree-seeking must apply to their program of choice. If they are currently-enrolled certificate students at the time of their application, they may request an application fee waiver based on their status as a current student. Materials required by the certificate application process may be included in the master's application package; the certificate student must supply any additional materials required by the degree-seeking program.

7. Graduate alumni interested in obtaining a certificate that includes components of their master's program should contact their program director for specifics.

8. Students pursuing a graduate certificate will be required to meet the same academic requirements as those defined for degree-seeking students.

9. A Certificate Graduate student may enroll on either a part-time or a full-time basis, as determined by the certificate program coordinator. Students enrolled on a full-time basis will have access to many of the same campus services as other full-time graduate students.

10. Master’s certificate students will not be eligible for federal financial aid, internal scholarships or internal grant support. There are private or alternative options. Information is available in the financial aid office.

**e. Certificate Program Review**

All graduate certificate programs will be reviewed within the course of regular graduate program assessment and review, as defined by the Graduate Council.

**f. Application Procedure for a New Certificate Program**

For consideration by the Graduate School, proposed new graduate certificate programs must contain the following information:

1. A statement of the educational objectives of the program;

2. A statement of the proposed course sequence associated with the certificate, including titles and course descriptions both for existing courses and any new courses that may be developed;
3. A statement of how the proposed course sequences associated with the certificate will meet the stated educational objectives;

4. A statement of the need for the proposed program and the basis for such a need, supported by either externally or internally derived data;

5. The names of the faculty associated with or contributing to the certificate program, either by teaching one or more of the courses associated with the program or participating in the design of the course sequence. Adjunct faculty associated with the program should also include up-to-date curriculum vitae;

6. The name and curriculum vita of the faculty member who will be designated as the coordinator of the program, for purposes of communication with the Graduate School.

7. If the proposed graduate certificate program contains no new courses, no new faculty, no additional costs, and maintains the admissions and academic standing requirements of a related degree program, the proposal will be given expedited review in the approval process.