



Title: Academic Certificate Policy
Effective Date: March 25, 2022
Issuing Authority: Provost
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Purpose

This policy serves to establish guidelines and definitions for credit-bearing certificate programs.

Scope

This policy applies to the curricular and academic review of credit-bearing certificate programs. All references to certificates within this policy shall refer exclusively to credit-bearing certificates.

Exclusions

This policy does not apply to non-credit bearing certificates. Non-credit bearing certificates are addressed in the Continuing Education Activity Oversight Policy.

Definitions

As used in this policy, the following term(s) have the meaning specified below:

Certificate Program: a program providing limited, specialized education or training in a specified field or area of focus. Mercer University certificates reflect (1) emerging academic areas; (2) professional development goals; or (3) a focused body of knowledge, capacities, and achievements in a specific field that do not constitute a degree program. All Mercer certificates support the mission of the University and the degree-granting academic unit from which it emanates.

Policy Statement

All certificates must be authorized by a degree-granting academic unit of the University. Each academic unit must follow the University's curricular process for approval of credit-bearing certificate programs.

All University admission and academic policies apply to credit-bearing certificates and the students enrolled.

A. Types of Certificates

Credit-bearing certificates are categorized in three dimensions— level, availability,

and length. Each dimension must be addressed in the development of a certificate.

1. Levels

- a. Postsecondary: Admission requires secondary diploma or equivalent. The program content is at the undergraduate level. Postsecondary certificates may also be referred to undergraduate certificates but are reported to outside agencies as postsecondary. IPEDS categorization of postsecondary certificate programs by length.
- b. Postbaccalaureate: Admission requires a bachelor's degree. The program content is at the master's level. Postbaccalaureate certificates may also be referred to as graduate certificates but are reported as postbaccalaureate.
- c. Post-master's: Admission requires a master's degree. The program content is at the graduate level.

2. Availability to Students

- a. Degree-seeking: Available to students seeking a degree. The degree must be specified. The certificate is embedded in the degree program; may be eligible for financial aid.
- b. Non-degree: Certificate seeking only; not eligible for financial aid

3. Length of Program

The length of certificate programs will vary and will likely be determined by the learning objectives. Twelve to 18 credit hours is typical. A minimum of nine (9) credit hours must be course-based. Certificate programs with fewer than 12 credit hours require an experiential learning element.

*[Note: IPEDS has organized postsecondary certificate programs by length. This information serves as a reference.]

B. Minors versus Certificates

Both minors and credit-bearing certificates are course-based and indicated on a transcript. Undergraduate minors are broader in focus than certificates and, like majors, require a specified number of advanced 300-400 level course work. Minors may only be earned by degree-seeking candidates. A credit-bearing certificate is typically a smaller number of credits with a more specific focus than a minor. A certificate may be available to non-degree seeking students.

Requirements for an undergraduate minor at Mercer University were determined by the Undergraduate Council on 01/08/2015 (revised 02/05/2015).

C. Concentrations/Specializations/Emphases/Tracks vs. Certificates

A concentration/specialization/emphasis/track is a structured area of study within an academic program. Such a plan of study represents a cohesive part of a larger program of study. While a certificate program may complement or serve as part of a program of study,

and may have prerequisite requirements, it is structured to independently develop proficiency in a particular field or subject. Concentrations, specializations, emphases, tracks, and certificates can appear on the student transcript.

D. Requirements for Certificates

Mercer certificates reflect (1) emerging academic areas; (2) professional development goals; or (3) a focused body of knowledge, capacities, and achievements in a specific field that do not constitute a degree program. A certificate is intended to foster incremental or targeted development in an area of specialty or competency within a discipline or field of study. Credit-bearing certificates are earned either in conjunction with or independent of a baccalaureate degree, a master's degree, or postbaccalaureate professional degree, so they may be suitable for either degree-seeking candidates or non-degree candidates.

Certificates are designed by academic units to accommodate the parameters of the discipline or field of study, as well as the specific educational needs of the intended students.

A credit-bearing certificate consists of a group of courses often ranging from 9-18 credits. These courses are typically found within a current program and are developed, supervised, and evaluated by offering academic unit(s). Additional supervised requirements (such as internships, service learning, study abroad, portfolios, etc.) may be added to the course requirements.

Credit-bearing certificates must be at least 9 credit hours. For credit-bearing certificates under 12 credit hours, an experiential component is required and all credits must be earned at Mercer. For credit-bearing certificates 12 credits or more, at least 2/3 of the courses used to complete the certificate must be earned at Mercer. Credit-bearing certificates having more than 18 credits must provide justification for the additional credit hours. No more than 1/3 of the required courses for the post-secondary certificate can be used to meet other academic requirements (major, minor, concentration, emphasis, specialization, track, etc.). If a student completes the postbaccalaureate or post-master's certificate, then chooses to continue study for the major, all credits earned by certificate may be used to meet the requirements of the major.

Students must earn a grade minimum of "C" or, where appropriate, "S" in all courses required for the credit-bearing certificate.

Learning outcomes must be stated for certificate programs. An assessment plan for these outcomes must be developed. Yearly reporting is expected to inform the college/school and help determine re-approval.

Academic units must seek re-approval of certificate programs from the Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council every five years. In the case where re-approval is not sought or is denied, an appropriate teach-out will be required. The Councils will evaluate re-

approvals based on enrollment, continued relevance, resources, adherence to policy, and achievement of learning outcomes.

All University policies apply to credit-bearing certificates and the students enrolled. These include: academic, grading, admission, academic progress, retention, direct instructional minutes, faculty credentials required to teach, continuous enrollment, leave of absence, and withdrawal.

E. Admission of Students

Degree-seeking students may enroll in credit-bearing certificates provided they meet any additional certificate-specific admission requirements and prerequisites that may be stipulated by the University or the College/School in which the certificate is housed.

Degree-seeking students may not concurrently pursue a non-degree certificate along with the degree.

Non-degree seeking students may enroll in credit-bearing certificates provided:

- they meet the admission requirements of the University at the undergraduate level for postsecondary certificates.
- hold a bachelor's degree from a regionally-accredited institution for the postbaccalaureate certificates and meet the additional prerequisites for the certificate as stipulated by the College/School in which the certificate is housed.
- hold a master's or post baccalaureate professional degree from a regionally-accredited institution for the post-master's certificate and meet the admissions requirements of the University as well as additional prerequisites for the certificate as stipulated by the College/School in which the certificate is housed.

Students should formally declare their intention to pursue the certificate by submitting the appropriate form or written statement to the Office of the Registrar.

F. Financial Aid

Degree-seeking students who desire to complete an embedded certificate program as a part of their degree program may be eligible for federal Title IV aid provided they meet the eligibility requirements for their degree program. Non-degree seeking certificate students are not eligible for Title IV financial aid unless the certificate program is identified by the University as preparing the student for gainful employment in a recognized occupation and meets Title IV federal guidelines. This applies to all levels, including postsecondary, postbaccalaureate, and post-master's.

G. Certificate Completion

For certificates embedded in degree programs, the certificate will only be awarded at the same time and as part of degree completion. If a student completes the requirements for the embedded certificate, but fails to complete the degree program, then the certificate will not be awarded.

H. Documentation – Transcripts and Certificates

Mercer University does not give certificate documents akin to diplomas. The completion of certificates appears on the student transcript. Certificate completion is placed on the transcript by the Campus Registrar. To track enrollments in certificate programs, create and use an Area of Study code for degree-seeking students and a certificate Program Version for non-degree students.

*IPEDS categorization of postsecondary certificate programs by length:

- Less than 1 academic year (2 semesters), or completion in less than 30 semester credit hours, or in less than 900 contact/clock hours
- At least 1 academic year but less than 2 academic years, or completion in at least 30 but less than 60 semester credit hours, or in at least 900 but less than 1,800 contact/clock hours
- At least 2 but less than 4 academic years, or completion in at least 60 but less than 120 semester credit hours, or in at least 1,800 but less than 3,600 contact/clock hours

Additional Resources

1. Continuing Education Activity Oversight Policy:
<https://policies.mercer.edu/continuing-education-activity-oversight/>
2. Stand-Alone Certificate Programs with Federal Aid Eligibility Policy:
<https://policies.mercer.edu/stand-alone-certificate-programs-with-federal-aid-eligibility/>

History

Approved October 18, 2018

Revised February 14, 2019

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