TO: Programs Committee of UCC  
FROM: Certificates Task Force  
DATE: 11/30/2015  
RE: Task Force Recommendations

The Certificates Task Force was created in spring 2015 by the Programs Committee of UCC in order to address recurring questions about the definitions of certificates at Ohio University, and to accommodate requests from units interested in new types of certificates. The task force met ten times from March 16th –November 9th, 2015; the full task force membership is listed at the end of this memo. A full summary of the task force recommendations is attached.

The Task Force has four main recommendations:

1) Reclassify the existing two kinds of certificates into three kinds. Current certificates are either interdisciplinary or “provide an opportunity for skill development” for non-degree students. This recommendation clarifies the definitions of existing certificates, and adds stackable graduate certificates as a new category.

2) Consider requests from carefully-vetted certificates to be stand alone and financial aid eligible. OHIO does not currently have certificates that are subject to gainful employment regulations, nor does it have the resources in place to comply with those regulations. However, financial-aid eligible certificates may be important to some academic units (e.g., CHSP, College of Business).

3) Form a working group to address process and implementation issues with certificates. The current process is labor-intensive, and may be able to be modified. Stackable certificates and potentially financial aid eligible certificates will require new processes to be developed.

4) Facilitate a pilot of undergraduate stackable certificates in the BS TOM. This pilot does not change the requirements of the major, but regroups upper-level electives into certificates.

Issues related to the above recommendations that may need clarification by the Programs Committee and/or EPSA are included in the attached recommendations document.

Additional issues related to certificates were identified by the task force but not included in the recommendations are listed below; the Programs Committee of UCC may wish to address these. These include:

- Determining how the term “certificate” can be used. In addition to non-curricular certificates, there are “certificates” on campus that are curricular but have not been approved through UCC.
- Working with Regional Higher Education to look at certificates that lead to an associate’s degree. The task force had discussions about this, but anticipates that a concrete proposal will come to the Programs Committee of UCC from the regional campuses.
The task force intends to continue meeting to discuss micro-credentials, co-curricular transcripts, and other types of recognition of student knowledge and skills. Any recommendations from these discussions will be submitted separately.

Certificates Task Force Members
Deb Benton, University Registrar
Kelly Broughton, Programs Committee
Brad Cohen, Instructional Innovation
Rob Drapcho, Undergraduate Admissions
Jody Lamb, College of Fine Arts
Michael Kushnick, CHSP
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David Thomas, University Curriculum Council
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Marty Tuck, Regional Higher Education
Certificates Task Force
Recommendations on Certificates
11/30/2015

**Recommendation I.** Reclassify the existing two kinds of certificates into three kinds to include stackable graduate certificates, and clarify the language in the current certificate definitions

A. Interdisciplinary certificates [unchanged from current policy]
   1. Undergraduate interdisciplinary certificates
      i. Undergraduate interdisciplinary certificates require courses from at least two disciplines,\(^1\) and provide a significant interdisciplinary academic experience intended to complement a major program of study, broaden career possibilities, or allow students to study an area of interest from a variety of perspectives.
      ii. 15 credit minimum\(^2\)
      iii. At least 2 courses at the junior level or above.
      iv. Undergraduate interdisciplinary certificates may be for degree and/or non-degree seeking undergraduate students according to the UCC policy; however, the catalog indicates that undergraduate certificates are only available to bachelor’s degree-seeking students.\(^3\) The Programs Committee of UCC should clarify this policy conflict.
   2. Graduate interdisciplinary certificates
      i. Graduate interdisciplinary certificates require courses from at least two disciplines, and provide a significant interdisciplinary academic experience intended to complement a major program of study, broaden career possibilities, or allow students to study an area of interest from a variety of perspectives.
      ii. Graduate interdisciplinary certificates may be for degree and/or non-degree seeking students
      iii. 14 credit minimum
      iv. 20 credit maximum

B. Graduate specialized certificates\(^4\)

\(^1\) The Programs Committee of UCC may wish to clarify the definition of “interdisciplinary” for interdisciplinary certificates. For example, can two different disciplines housed within a single department count toward an interdisciplinary certificate (e.g. art history and studio art)?

\(^2\) The Programs Committee and/or EPSA may wish to determine whether there should be a maximum number of credits for an undergraduate certificate.

\(^3\) The language in the catalog states: “The certificate programs listed here are open to all students pursuing baccalaureate programs at the University, regardless of college or major. The equivalent of minors, these interdisciplinary programs can complement your major, broaden your career possibilities, or allow you to study an area of interest from a variety of perspectives. You will be awarded the certificate and receive official recognition on your transcript when you graduate. Please note that these certificate programs are not related to teaching or other professional certification conferred by outside agencies.” See http://www.catalogs.ohio.edu/content.php?catoid=39&navoid=2403.

\(^4\) The current language in the Guidelines to Certificates and Minors document does not require that specialized certificates be only at the graduate level, but the task force could not identify any at the undergraduate level, so this
1. Specialized certificates are not required to be interdisciplinary, but provide an opportunity for skill development or achievement of certification for non-degree-seeking students, often in the workforce. May be related to external agency licensure, endorsements, or certifications. [current description]
2. 9 credit minimum [note: current policy is 14 credits]
3. 20 credit maximum [current policy]
4. May be for degree and/or non-degree seeking students [current policy]

C. Graduate stackable certificates [new category]
1. Stackable certificates should provide a coherent academic course of study that may be within a single discipline or program, or may be multidisciplinary.
2. A stackable certificate is intended to be combined ("stacked") with other stackable certificates and/or other requirements to lead to a graduate degree. A capstone or integrating experience is recommended for graduate degrees composed of stackable certificates.
3. 9 credit minimum\(^5\)
4. Graduate only
5. May be for degree and/or non-degree seeking students

Departments/schools or colleges who wish to propose curricular innovations should discuss their ideas with the Programs Committee of UCC.

Additional considerations:

• Graduate Council policy changes underway: Certificate seeking status, maximum non-degree status hours allowed should accommodate new graduate stackable certificate definitions.

• A program should specify how many credits from a certificate can count toward a degree and under which circumstances (e.g. minimum grades, time frame).

• A program should clearly outline any differences in admissions requirements for certificates vs. for a degree.

• The Programs Committee of UCC should consider whether to address how broad a stackable certificate should be (e.g., how many choices should be available within a 9 credit certificate). They may also wish to consider whether the different kinds of certificates should be transcripted differently.

\(^5\) Recommendation reflects current practice. The Programs Committee of UCC may wish to consider whether to limit specialized certificates to graduate only, or keep the current definition that allows specialized certificates at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

\(^5\) There was discussion about whether to name these smaller certificates something else, such as "mini-certificates," but the majority of the committee preferred to keep the term "certificate" and differentiate between certificates by labeling them with modifiers (e.g. "stackable").
• A common template should be developed and adopted for all certificates so that all information about the certificate is clearly visible to potential students: grade requirements, financial aid eligibility, time frame for completion, when/whether the certificate can be awarded independent of the graduate degree, whether any transfer credit can count toward the certificate, whether any certificate credits can count toward a degree, etc. A student should understand up front that certificates are awarded based on student status, and should understand the implications of various options. For example, students could enroll as degree-seeking students in a stackable certificate graduate degree, and receive financial aid. If they do not finish the degree, but complete the first certificate, it is not likely that we could award them the certificate without causing potential difficulties with their financial aid. A different student could enroll as a certificate student without financial aid and be awarded the same certificate without finishing the degree because they would be non-degree and non-financial aid eligible.

• The guidelines and form for submitting certificates for approval should be modified to reflect any approved changes to certificates (and any relevant OCEAN changes made when programs move to OCEAN).

Recommendation II. Consider requests from carefully-vetted certificates to be stand alone and financial aid eligible. To mitigate potential risks and to ensure compliance with gainful employment regulations, these certificates should be in areas where:

1) there is alignment of the certificate with employment opportunities,
2) there is an ability and willingness by the proposing program to track students as required (e.g., in professional degrees), and
3) a market assessment shows that there will be adequate enrollments to support the resources necessary for a stand-alone financial-aid-eligible certificate.

• Because OHIO does not currently have certificates that are both stand alone and financial aid eligible, the resources for complying with gainful employment regulations are not currently in place. Therefore a program proposing a stand-alone financial-aid-eligible certificate will need a commitment from the Provost’s office for these resources, and any such certificate should not be approved without a commitment to the necessary funding for compliance (e.g., in financial aid, registrar, reporting systems); the program should not be offered until the appropriate support is in place. This does not preclude pilot programs, which may help identify necessary support and resources, and in which the supporting department or area assumes the risks involved.

• Gainful employment regulations should be carefully monitored: they change frequently, and interpretations and clarifications are sometimes issued (e.g., the recent clarification that under some circumstances, it may be acceptable to issue a certificate to a financial-aid eligible degree-seeking student who does not complete a degree). According to the gainful employment regulations (Federal Register/Vol. 76, No. 113), “a program is now considered to lead to gainful employment if it has a repayment rate of at least 35 percent or its annual loan payment under the debt-to-earnings ratios is 12 percent or less of annual earnings or 30 percent or less of discretionary income.”
**Recommendation III.** Form a working group to address process and implementation issues with certificates. Current certificates use a manual process for application and verification. Is this appropriate/necessary? Will stackable certificates be handled the same way? Other needs/modifications of current processes should also be identified with input from certificate directors, admissions, registrar, financial aid, IT, institutional research, directors of assessment as appropriate, and so on.

**Recommendation IV.** Facilitate a pilot of the undergraduate stackable certificates as proposed by the ETM department for the BS TOM, a 2+2 degree completion program. This pilot would create an upper-level series of certificates out of courses that are currently required for the degree. Each of these certificates would be open to non-degree students with appropriate background as well as be part of the degree program for degree-seeking BS TOM students. A mid-point evaluation of the pilot should occur after two years, with a full evaluation after four years.

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**Current Guidelines for Certificates (for reference)**

**Academic Certificates at Ohio University**

1) Provide a significant interdisciplinary academic experience intended to complement a major program of study, broaden career possibilities, or allow students to study an area of interest from a variety of perspectives.

Or

Provide an opportunity for skill development or achievement of certification for non-traditional students (who are not required to be actively pursuing a major program of study at the university), often in the workforce. May be related to external agency licensure, endorsements, or certifications.

2) Can be designed for undergraduate students, graduate students, or non-degree students.
   - Undergraduate certificates: Minimum of 15 semester credits, no maximum
   - Graduate certificates: Minimum of 14 semester credits, maximum of 20 semester credits

3) Normally require courses from more than one discipline (except for specialized certificates designed for non-traditional students), and must include at least 2 courses at the junior level or above (for undergraduate certificates).

Note 1: The departments or schools represented in the certificate should normally be co-proposers of the certificate, or at least be included as patron departments in the approval chain for the certificate.

Note 2: If no certificate or other credential will be awarded by Ohio University but the department or school needs a program code for tracking purposes, please submit an administrative request to the chair of the programs committee for direct action. There is no need for a new program proposal.