Undergraduate Standalone Certificate Exemption Guidance - 2023-2024 Year

A working group was convened to identify questions, concerns, and next steps for the standalone, stackable undergraduate certificates, specifically within the context of pending exemption requests for Mechatronics Technician (CTX46U) and Automation Technician (CTX47U). The work group identified questions or decisions needed related to admissions, financial aid, student support services, advising, registration, and enrollment, etc. The outcome of this exercise provides support for the pending exemption requests for Mechatronics Technician (CTX46U) and Automation Technician (CTX47U) certificates during the 2023-24 year, as well as a framework for tentative initial guidance and a foundation for future policy or process development. For the purposes of this exemption, the 2023-24 year will include the following terms: summer 2023, fall 2023, spring 2024 and summer 2024.

Certificate Definitions

OHIO’s current definition of an undergraduate certificate is as follows:

Undergraduate Certificate: These programs are for associate and bachelor’s degree seeking undergraduate students and provide a significant interdisciplinary academic experience intended to complement the major, broaden career possibilities, or allow study in an area of interest from a variety of perspectives. Students will be awarded the certificate and receive official recognition on their transcript when they graduate with an associate’s or bachelor’s degree. These certificate programs require:

- Courses from at least two disciplines, typically distinct departments
- 12 credits minimum
- 24 credits maximum
- Courses at the 3000 level or above are encouraged.

It’s proposed that upon approval of the exemption request, during the 2023-24 year, OHIO will exempt eligible students from the requirement that they pursue a degree while concurrently pursuing the Mechatronics Technician (CTX46U) and Automation Technician (CTX47U) certificates. A completed certificate will be awarded and noted on the official academic transcript regardless of degree conferral. Standalone financial aid eligible undergraduate certificates, where a prior associate degree is not required, must be at least 16 semester credit hours and 15 weeks in length. Standalone financial aid eligible undergraduate certificates, where an associate degree is required, must be at least 8 semester credit hours and 10 weeks in length.

Enrollment Management will continue to support Faculty Senate and UCC in developing formal standalone certificate definitions, as well as associated policy, and internal/external stakeholder communication.

Standalone Certificate Compliance Procedures for Federal Financial Aid Eligibility

For a standalone certificate to be eligible for federal financial aid, additional, ongoing data collection and reporting processes are necessary to comply with current and anticipated federal guidelines. Federal student aid is available only for certificate programs that meet the qualifications to obtain employment or advance in a field or career in a federally recognized occupation. Accordingly, anticipated federal regulations as were previously in place will require institutions to collect and disclose information about students who enroll in standalone certificates, including after enrollment. Ohio University must be prepared to comply with these anticipated guidelines in order to avoid disruption in students’ aid.

Requirements include both “disclosures” and “reporting” that currently includes the following: normal time to complete the program, recognized occupations (SOC code) for which the program prepares students, costs of the program including books/supplies and additional fees/expenses, URL for the program, number of students enrolled in specific timeframe as well as completion numbers, median loan debt, debt to earnings rate, licensure requirement, program placement rate.

For these two certificates, due to emerging practices and pending federal guidance, collection and submission of required information will need to be a collaborative process involving department/school, campus, Enrollment Management
offices, and other stakeholders. The Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships will provide a reporting template to guide the work in completing the necessary compliance activities required of standalone financial aid eligible certificates. The work group agrees that in the future, the academic school/department will be best suited to assume primary responsibility for collecting and submitting the required information, such as job placement and salary information, to Financial Aid on a regular schedule according to deadlines to be established.

Undergraduate Standalone Certificate Admission

To enroll as a certificate seeking student, a prospective student must complete a standalone certificate application, to be available online and from Undergraduate Admissions. This application will be a modification of the current degree-seeking application for admission. Current degree-seeking students who wish to pursue either the Mechatronics Technician (CTX46U) or Automation Technician (CTX47U) standalone certificates can do so by submitting a change of program form to the Russ College of Engineering and Technology.

Admission Guidelines:

Freshman applicants seeking admission to a standalone certificate will be eligible for admission if they have earned a high school diploma or equivalent and have not taken postsecondary coursework after graduating from high school. Transfer applicants will be eligible for admission if they have earned a cumulative GPA of 2.0 (4.0 scale) and are eligible to return to all previously attended institutions. A transfer applicant is defined as someone that has completed 9 or more semester (or 12 quarter) hours at another regionally accredited institution after graduating from high school. See Dual Enrollment section for CC+ eligibility.

The documents required to support an application for standalone certificate admission will depend on the highest level of education of the applicant:

- Applicants who have completed a high school education or its equivalent must submit an official high school transcript showing the date of graduation or GED diploma.
- Certificate applicants with prior college coursework or degree(s) must submit official transcripts from all colleges or universities previously attended.

Admitted students will earn transfer credit for coursework completed at other institutions per OHIO’s undergraduate course transfer policy.

Undergraduate Admissions must receive a completed application, including all credentials required to support admission, no later than two weeks prior to the first day of classes. Applications or documents submitted late will be considered as processing timelines and space permits.

Note: Enrollment Management is exploring admission processes that may improve flexibility for prospective students, including the ability to offer conditional admission based on unofficial transcripts in order to expedite enrollment services. There are system limitations related to the awarding of financial aid that will need to be investigated and addressed in order to move in this direction, and the EM division will provide updates to processes as they become available.

Change of Level

An Ohio University standalone certificate student will be admitted and enrolled into the “certificate” career level. If the student wishes to enroll in a degree program (undergraduate, graduate, or medical), they must apply for admission to a degree-seeking program. However, once enrolled in a standalone certificate program, a student can pursue multiple certificates by submitting an update of program form and will not need to reapply for admission, as long as the additional certificates have the same admission guidelines as the two covered in this exemption.

Enrollment & Registration Logistics

Course Registration

Students will be placed in a registration group based on the hours earned at Ohio University and will register for classes with other undergraduate students.

The Registrar’s Office will monitor and report to the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships if the student enrolls in classes that do not apply to the certificate so that their financial aid hours may be adjusted as needed. Certificate
students will need to be advised through academic advising that they may register only in classes that apply toward the certificate. PeopleSoft delivered functionality does not provide a sustainable solution for prohibiting a group of students from registering in the vast number of classes offered by Ohio University.

**Double Dipping**

A successfully completed course will be able to satisfy course requirements in multiple certificate programs if the curriculum is proposed and approved by the appropriate academic processes.

**Certificate Degree Audit and Awarding of Credential**

All certificates have a degree audit report available to the student and the academic advisor. The student will need to apply for graduation in the semester in which they want their certificate to be awarded. There is a $25 application fee for graduation. All certificate completers receive a physical certificate from the Office of the University Registrar. No other entity is authorized to produce a “certificate.” Note that certificate completers are not included in commencement exercises.

**Residency Rule**

At least 50% of the course credit for a certificate program must be completed with native Ohio University course credit. Academic colleges have the discretion to require more than 50% if proposed and approved by the University Curriculum Council.

**Academic Advising & Student Support Services**

For the 2023 – 24 year, academic advising for Ohio University Lancaster standalone certificate students enrolled in these certificate programs will be provided by the OHIO Lancaster Student Services Office. Future conversations will need to take place regarding academic advising best practices in order to ensure certificate students will receive the most appropriate and necessary academic support possible.

**Dual Enrollment / College Credit Plus**

This exemption will allow for Pickerington Local School District students who are enrolled in OHIO’s College Credit Plus program to take courses that lead to either of the Mechatronics Technician (CTX46U) and Automation Technician (CTX47U) standalone certificates. However, since standalone certificates require a high school diploma or GED for admission, CC+ students will not be eligible to enroll in a certificate program code until completion of high school. CC+ students should complete an interest form, which will need to be created, to the OHIO Lancaster Student Services Office indicating which certificate(s) they intend to complete. CC+ students can apply to a standalone certificate program during their senior year of high school and receive an offer of admission up to one term out from high school graduation. After graduating from high school, and if all certification requirements have been satisfied, the student will need to apply for degree conferral for the certificate to be awarded at the end of the summer semester. There is a $25.00 application fee that will be added to the student’s OHIO account.

Note, new procedures and practices will need to be developed and implemented in order to fully integrate standalone certificates into existing automated dual enrollment / CC+ workflows. We anticipate that much of the activity during the exemption period will be manual and all parties involved should be prepared to provide support with necessary resources. Ongoing conversations will be needed between the department, campus and enrollment management functional offices on matters related to implementation and CC+ operations.

**Additional Considerations**

Ohio University’s Undergraduate Catalog serves as the institution’s official repository of policies. In absence of guidance in this document, polices in the undergraduate catalog shall apply.

The items in this document were discussed in relation to the exemptions requested for the Mechatronics Technician (CTX46U) and Automation Technician (CTX47U) certificates. While efforts have been made to make these considerations applicable to future certificates, any additional standalone certificate or similar exemption will require its own review.
Signature

Elizabeth Sayrs, Ph.D.
Ohio University, Executive Vice President and Provost