

Certificates at WOU Policy Revisions

Proposed by Ad Hoc Certificates Committee, February 2021

Process

March, 2020 - Ad Hoc Certificates Committee formed by Faculty Senate

Spring, 2020 - Reviewed existing policy and peer institutions; worked with Amy Clark (registrar) and Kella Heyer (financial aid) on questions

Fall, 2020 - Discussed double credentialing, upper division credit requirement, and possible financial aid issues; drafted policy revision

Winter, 2021 - Finalized policy revision & other aspects of proposal

Members

- Amy Clark, Registrar
- Cindy Ryan, Education and Leadership
- Earlene Camarillo, Social Science
- Jaime Marroquin, Humanities
- Joshua Schulze, Education and Leadership
- Kristen Klay, Humanities
- Lars Söderlund, Humanities
- Melissa Cannon, Behavioral Science
- Steve Taylor, Natural Science & Mathematics
- Stewart Baker, Library

Charge

- 1) review our existing regulations on certificates at WOU
- 2) compare these to other certificate regulations, for example from outside accrediting bodies in your fields
- 3) discuss and weigh considerations such as how much required upper-division is appropriate, how much double-dipping with majors/minors is acceptable, how do proposals articulate the value of the certificate in jobs/career advancement for students, how are the included courses ideally related, what are best practices for disseminating availability of offered certificates at WOU, what do students physically receive when awarded a certificate, and anything else that comes up in discussion
- 4) Determine any appropriate changes/updates to the current WOU requirements and develop a draft proposal to bring to faculty senate executive committee

1 - Review existing regulations

Existing regulations:

- [Current rules from 2014 ARC revision](#) and [minutes from February 2014 meeting where it was passed](#)
- [Curriculum page for faculty](#) (click “certificates”)
- [List of current certificates](#) (sort by “certificate” column)

2. Compare to other regulations

[List of peer institutions](#)

Rules and regulations vary by institution and by outside body

Institutions do not usually publish internal requirements, either

3a. How much upper division?

No consensus about this in peer institutions or external bodies.

Answer may be different depending on the type of certificate being discussed.

For example, it does not make sense to require upper-division courses in an elementary language certificate, as these map to externally recognized standards such as [CEFR](#).

In other cases, our current standard of 12 upper division credits may be fine.

3b. How much double-dipping is acceptable?

Northwest Accrediting Body has no straightforward rules - just curriculum based on learning outcomes. They recommend a 2-course overlap, but this is just a recommendation.

The key is that there needs to be some **clearly articulated difference** in certificates and other credentials we offer (such as minors).

This difference could be:

- Specific learning outcomes
- A unique set of courses
- Following externally defined standards
- Capstone experiences or other completion requirements
- Etc.

3c. How do proposals articulate value?

1. Program determines value of certificate
2. Program determines outcomes to articulate value
3. Ongoing assessment of certificates confirms outcomes are being met

The creation of a metric could be a useful future step.

Values should be tied to external guidelines, standards, or other bodies if applicable.

3d. How are courses ideally related?

This depends entirely on the certificate.

In some cases, it makes sense for certificates to be a sequential series of courses, where completion of one leads into another. (e.g. language certificates)

In other cases, giving students freedom to select from various courses and taking them in any order may be more appropriate. (e.g. professional writing)

Again, the key is clear articulation of how the courses relate to one another and lead students to the certificate's outcomes.

3e. What are best practices for dissemination?

Currently, there is no central location on the WOU website where students can learn about certificates. This information is also scattered throughout the catalogue, making it difficult to learn what certificates are available and how to complete them.

A central website would improve the visibility of WOU's certificate offerings and make it easier for students and faculty alike to understand what a certificate is.

More clarity could also be added to the catalogue.

3f. What do students physically receive?

Per Amy Clark:

Students apply to graduate for degrees and certificates via Wolf Web.

Once awarded, the diplomas and certificates are distributed in the same way (electronic and hard copies are mailed).

3g. Other things: Financial Aid

Students must meet additional requirements to be eligible for financial aid while earning a certificate.

Students must be enrolled 12 hours per term for 3 terms.

3g. Other things: undergraduate certificates and post-bacc students

Rules for students wanting to earn an undergraduate certificate when already having a bachelor's degree.

These students may be able to apply as a post-baccalaureate student or non-degree-earning, but additional clarity and further discussion is required.

3g. Other things: stand-alone certificates

Further discussion is also required for stand-alone certificates, such as whether students can enroll and earn *just* a certificate, without earning a degree.

This could be a good revenue stream for the university, especially in an online setting or at the Salem campus.

Changes may be required to enable this in Banner and other places.

3g. Other Things: Assessment

Capstone experiences are one way for certificates to articulate value, but typically need to be offered as distinct courses, rather than outside of courses.

Assessment of individual courses, rather than the certificate as a whole, could be used to determine whether the certificate meets its outcomes.

Degree Tracks might also be able to show assessments of students enrolled in certificates.

More discussion is needed around capstone experiences and assessment of certificates in general.

Assessment will vary by certificate and program, but needs to be clearly articulated.

3g. Other things: Flowcharts

Lars Soderlund created flowcharts for students and faculty to understand the purpose of a certificate, how to earn one, and how to propose one. These documents could be placed on a central certificates website for ease of access.

[Flowcharts document](#)

3g. Other things: Interdisciplinary certificates

It's unclear whether interdisciplinary certificates or ones not housed within an existing division or department would still need to go to the HECC or through a more rigorous process before being approved.

4. Determine appropriate changes and updates

Our changes are not radical, but seek to clarify the existing policy on proposals to allow a better understanding of requirements for faculty submitters of certificates and WOU's reviewing bodies, like the curriculum committee.

- Clarify that certificates are useful for advancement, not just employment
- Clarify double credentialing and list possible options for avoiding it
- Remove HECC proposal from submission requirements (it's not required)
- Clarify upper-division requirements and exceptions
- Reinforce that certificates can still be approved if they do not follow WOU's requirements, so long as they match external standards, meet competencies from external bodies, or if some other acceptable reason is clearly articulated in the certificate submission process

Ad Hoc Committee's Proposal:

1. Make suggested changes to “transcripted certificates at WOU” document
2. Add suggested language about certificates to the catalogue
3. Create and maintain a central page on the WOU website that contains all relevant information about certificates
4. Curriculum committee and other bodies continue refining instructions and guidance for faculty as needed
5. Ad hoc certificates committee continue meeting to answer questions about stand-alone certificates, assessment, and any other outstanding concerns