

Ad Hoc Committee on Certificates

June 2020 update

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:
 1. how much required upper-division is appropriate,
 2. how much double-dipping with majors/minors is acceptable,
 3. how do proposals articulate the value of the certificate in jobs/career advancement for students,
 4. how are the included courses ideally related,
 5. what are best practices for disseminating availability of offered certificates at WOU,
 6. what do students physically receive when awarded a certificate,
 7. 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

Committee Members

- Amy Clark, Registrar
- Cindy Ryan, Education and Leadership
- Earlene Camarillo, Social Science
- Jaime Marroquin, Humanities
- Joshua Schulze, Education and Leadership
- Kimberly Jensen, Social Science
- Kristen Klay, Humanities
- Lars Söderlund, Humanities
- Melissa Cannon, Behavioral Science
- Robin Smith, Social Science
- Stewart Baker, Library

Spring 2020

- Meetings in April and May with faculty members of committee and registrar, Amy Clark, to discuss general areas of concern around certificates and the bulleted items of the charge.
- Q&A with Kella Heyer from financial aid about implications of standalone certificates.
- Received updated list of peer institutions from Institutional Research based on 2017 IPEDS and other data.

Financial Aid Issues

- What would be the barriers to allowing students to get federal funding for stand-alone certificates?
 - All certificates need to meet minimum eligibility of credits to allow federal funding. “At least one academic year that leads to a certificate”
 - At least 36 credits in length and at least 30 weeks of instruction time.
- Are there currently any barriers to students getting stand-alone certificates without federal funding?
 - No. Financial Aid just needs to know that courses/programs are ineligible when they enter WOU’s system.
- Are there steps required to get a certificate authorized for financial aid? If so, how long does that typically take?
 - Weeks to months. Sometimes longer, especially if a program is brand new and not being offered elsewhere.
- Should we avoid certificates that don’t meet the 36-credit/30 week minimum? (ie “micro-certificates” that motivate enrolled undergraduate students to take smaller sets of classes without taking a full minor.)
 - Main concern is that this would be confusing for students. Especially if students transfer somewhere else and want their “certificate” that they earned, it would be unclear if they could receive it.
 - This could also impact undergraduate funding, if students decide to stop after they get a certificate.
 - Students clarifying their intent upon enrollment could clear up some problems, as reporting would then be clearer.
 - Making the certificates non transferable, and promoting them as a plus to majors should also help, as certificates are expected to boost enrollment and revenue.

Upper Division Requirement

- Currently, certificates bylaws require a minimum of 12 upper division credits
- It has been requested that some language certificates (i.e. basic and intermediate ones, including ASL) could be offered without the upper division credits requirement.
- The rationale here is that:
 - Basic and intermediate language classes (including ASL) are not upper division.
 - Language certificates provide skills officially assessed with written and oral examination and which would objectively enhance our students' employability within a vast array of institutions.

Double Credentialing

- Double credentialing: a student receiving two separate credentials for the same set of coursework
- E.g. a student earns a minor *and* a certificate for taking the same 36 credit hours
- Need to avoid this so that our certificates have actual value
- One way to avoid double credentialing would be to have certificates require some kind of capstone experience which is separate from what's required in similar minors/majors, whether that's a specific course, an internship or other practical application, a test, or other appropriate option.
- This is still under discussion, as existing certificates do not always require this, and it may not be needed or useful in the case of some certificates.

Draft Suggestions

Three things we have discussed so far:

- Certificates should have outcomes that are aligned with the university's mission, values, and/or goals. These outcomes should be distinct from any other degrees or programs and should lay out the specific skills/knowledge that students will achieve through the certificate.
- Certificates should be formed and maintained with some combination of
 - Alliance/compliance with an established, national or international body that influences and reflects a field's best practices
 - Adherence to the standards set up by a comparator analysis with other universities that offer similar programs
 - Guidance from an Advisory Board formed of professionals and/or educators working in the professional area served by the certificate
- Certificates must consist of a series of courses that are distinct from other credentials (e.g. a minor) or must require some measure of quality at their completion, such as a portfolio, test, or internship experience, evaluated by at least two faculty members according to an established rubric. The completion requirement will serve as both an indication to graduates and their instructors that the certificate was completed by a student who has gained the abilities the certificate is meant to foster and as an assessment measure for continual improvement of the certificate.

Other Discussions

- Ad Hoc Committee only one of several discussions around certificates
 - Curriculum Solutions Committee
 - ??? Others?
- Widespread discussion of what certificates at WOU should look like suggests a broad interest from faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders.

Next Steps

- Committee will continue to discuss issues around certificates in Fall Term 2021, and will present a formal proposal when ready