This document provides guidelines for using uniform terms when assigning titles to and referencing certificate and related non-degree programs. It also provides guidance for developing and managing the most rigorous of these offerings, i.e., academic certificate programs. Three broad types of programs are distinguished: (1) workshops and short courses; (2) non-academic credit certificate programs; and, (3) academic certificate programs. Any exceptions to these categories or policies must be approved through the Office of the Provost.

These guidelines also apply to programs that are offered through, or in partnership with, a third party. The use of GW’s name or any aspect of its visual identity, including logos and/or the University seal, in publicity, marketing, or any other documents or communications is limited to programs that have been approved by the Office of the Provost and include the continued involvement of GW faculty and ongoing oversight by the appropriate academic department and school/college. Such use also must adhere to the University’s identity standards, as defined by the Division of External Relations.

**Attributes of Non-Degree and Certificate Programs**

**Workshops and short courses**

Workshops and short coursesare not considered certificate programs. They do not carry academic credit and typically involve 20 or fewer contact hours. While a document may be produced and distributed to acknowledge participation in these types of activities, it may only acknowledge the student’s attendance and involvement and cannot be considered a formal recognition of accomplishment. The document does not represent proof of completion of a certificate program, an evaluation of the student’s level of performance during the program, or a certification of attainment of any specific level of knowledge or competence. The Office of the Registrar does not maintain an official record of this documentation of student participation. Documents presented to students completing these workshops or short courses must not resemble a GW diploma, include the GW seal, bear a GW graduation date, or contain the words “certificate” or “diploma.” These may be called an “Acknowledgment of Participation” or “Confirmation of Participation.”

**Non-academic credit certificate programs**

Non-academic credit certificate programsgenerally are professional development programs and often involve the awarding of a certificate of completion and continuing education units (CEUs). All new non-academic credit certificate programs must be approved by the department and school/college and reported to the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment. Admissions requirements and standards may vary by program. No academic credit is awarded for these programs.

No academic record or enrollment verification is maintained by the Office of the Registrar; instead, records of coursework taken and program completion must be maintained by the offering department or school/college. Documents (e.g., a “Certificate of Completion”) may be issued to provide an assessment of competence, a record of coursework taken, or confirmation of program completion. However, these documents must not resemble a GW diploma, include the GW seal, bear a GW graduation date, or contain the word “diploma.” While these programs may be rigorous and require a substantial investment of time, they, unlike academic certificate programs, generally do include courses that can transfer into a degree program. **Students enrolled in non-academic credit certificate programs must be informed that the Office of the Registrar does not maintain any records of coursework taken and that students who complete the program are not considered alumni.**

Regular active status faculty who teach in a non-academic credit certificate program must be paid in the form of supplemental compensation. Departments may not use C-funds to pay faculty salaries. Teaching in these programs may not count as part of a faculty member’s academic teaching load.

**Academic certificate programs**

Academic certificate programsprovide substantial education at either the graduate or undergraduate level. The programs center on a coherent and relatively free-standing body of knowledge and skills, and their completion represents the achievement of competence in a well-defined domain. Records of coursework and program completion must be maintained by the Office of the Registrar and appear on the student’s official GW transcript. The certificate document is issued by the Office of the Registrar. An academic certificate program can be a:

• free-standing program that bears little resemblance to existing degree programs, e.g., a new interdisciplinary program or an attempt to test the market to determine whether a new degree program will succeed;

• subset of courses offered as part of an existing curriculum for a degree program; and/or,

• credential for students who elect not to finish a degree program in which they were enrolled.

**Curriculum Requirements for Academic Certificate Programs**

There are four general categories of academic certificate programs at GW: undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, graduate, and post-master’s.

The curriculum requirements for both the **undergraduate** and **post-baccalaureate certificate programs** include undergraduate-level coursework. The difference between the two programs is in admissions requirements. The undergraduate certificate requires a high school diploma or equivalent only and the post-baccalaureate certificate program requires completion of an undergraduate degree from a regionally accredited institution prior to admission.

**Graduate and post-master’s certificate programs** are composed of graduate-level coursework. Applicants to graduate certificate programs must successfully have completed an undergraduate degree prior to admission. Post-master’s certificate programs require successful completion of a master’s degree prior to admission.

Academic certificate programs must include a minimum of 12 credits, though more typically they require 15 or 18 credits. The content, methodology, and workload for all courses applied toward the program must be clearly defined and appropriate for the level and amount of credit awarded. Because of the small number of courses included in a certificate, these programs should not have concentrations associated with them.

**Administration of Certificate Programs**

Each certificate program must have a designated program director who is responsible for administering the program, including meeting the needs of its students and keeping the school/college and the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment fully informed of any changes in the program.

**Approval and Review**

As with degree programs, all new certificate program proposals as well as requests for changes to existing certificate programs are submitted into the CourseLeaf system for review and must be approved by the appropriate department(s), Senior Associate Dean, and Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment prior to public announcement of the program, acceptance of applications, or student enrollment in the program. Approval by the Board of Trustees is not required. All CourseLeaf submissions must clearly articulate the justification for the program, admissions criteria, learning outcomes, and curricular requirements. See <https://academicplanning.gwu.edu/program-approval-process> for detailed information on this process.

Certificate programs should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are maintaining high standards of quality and contributing to the good of the department, school/college, and University. The programs are included in the academic program review of the department or program. In addition, it is the responsibility of the school/college to monitor new certificate programs during their first four years and to initiate procedures to phase out or terminate programs that do not meet standards of quality or are not financially viable.

The Office of Academic Planning and Assessment maintains an inventory of all certificate programs in the CourseLeaf database; the Office of the Registrar and Institutional Research have authoritative lists of all academic programs; and the Office of Student Financial Assistance maintains a list of all certificate programs that have been approved for federal financial aid.

**Admissions Requirements and Procedures for Academic Certificate Programs**

The admissions and academic requirements, students’ rights, and administrative processes listed below are generally not applicable for non-academic certificate programs.

Admissions standards should be set for each certificate program by the department and school/college offering the program. Admissions criteria and processes must be clearly communicated so that prospective students know what is required in the way of academic credentials, standardized test scores, prior coursework, work experience, and any other background or supporting documents.

Even if admissions requirements for the certificate program are somewhat different from those in the most closely related undergraduate or graduate program, the intent should be to ensure that students can succeed at the level of the coursework required. A student’s presence in the classroom should not in any way compromise the quality of the educational experience for others, particularly if certificate students are taking the same courses as degree candidates.

The minimum requirements for the different levels of certificates are as follows:

* **Undergraduate certificate**: High school diploma or equivalent (i.e., GED).
* **Post-baccalaureate certificate**: Bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited institution.
* **Graduate certificate**: Bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited institution, and evidence of a background of solid academic work that indicates the ability to complete graduate-level work (e.g., a minimum undergraduate grade-point average of 3.0, satisfactory GRE scores, successful completion of relevant coursework at the graduate level, positive letters of recommendation, and/or evidence of professional experience relevant to the graduate certificate).
* **Post-master’s certificate**: Master’s degree from a regionally accredited institution.

Although admissions processes may be simplified for certificate programs, admissions procedures should be comparable to those for degree programs. Information about the program and its requirements should be available to prospective students through the department/school website, brochures, and other means; letters of admission or denial should be sent to each applicant; applications should be processed in a timely fashion; and so on.

Certificate programs should be listed in application materials and applicants should follow the same admissions processes and pay the same application fee as degree program applicants. All applicants for academic certificate programs must be appropriately coded and entered in the Banner student information system, following University guidelines.

Students enrolling in a certificate program are required to pay a matriculation fee. This fee is not charged to those who are concurrently enrolled in a degree program, or who have previously enrolled as a student at GW and have a Banner student code of D (Old Grad, New Degree) or R (Readmit).

**International Students: Visas and English as a Foreign Language**

**Visas**

An I-20 or DS-2019 is issued to international students who are enrolled full-time in a certificate program; students enrolled in a graduate certificate program must take a minimum of 9 credits each semester and students in undergraduate certificate programs must take a minimum of 12 credits each semester. In addition, students who require an F or J visa from the University must provide appropriate financial certification to the admissions office and be processed through the International Services Office.

**English as a Foreign Language**

All applicants who are citizens of countries where English is not an official language are required to submit scores from an acceptable English as a Foreign Language (EFL) test: The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the academic IELTS, or the PTE Academic.

Exceptions may be made for applicants who hold a degree from a university located in a country in which English is the official language and the language of instruction at the university. Exceptions may also be made for students wishing to enroll in GW programs in which the language of instruction is not English. Certificate students who will not be enrolling in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, must provide current minimum EFL scores.

**Transfer Credit**

The number of transfer credits, if any, earned at other institutions or from GW courses taken on a non-degree basis that may be counted toward the certificate should not exceed one quarter of the credits required for the certificate program

For transfer of credit to be approved, **all** of the following conditions must be met: the coursework must be from a regionally accredited institution and must have been taken within two to five years prior to admission to the certificate program, depending on the rate of change in the field of study; it must be approved by the department as applying toward program requirements; and it must have been taken at an appropriate level (undergraduate- vs. graduate-level coursework). Additionally, the student must have received a minimum grade of *C* in coursework to be transferred toward an undergraduate or post-baccalaureate certificate and a minimum grade of *B* in coursework to be transferred toward a graduate or post-master’s certificate.

**Title IV Student Financial Assistance**

Federal regulations define any certificate program as a “gainful employment program.” Those programs seeking approval for federal student financial assistance (Title IV) eligibility should contact the Office of Student Financial Assistance to obtain forms and instructions about data requirements that must be completed when seeking approval for Title IV eligibility. Students may receive financial assistance once the certificate program has been approved for Title IV eligibility. New certificate programs that significantly alter the mission of GW, are not related to existing degree programs, or represent a significant departure from existing educational program offerings also must be approved by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education through its “substantive change” process. The Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment assists with the substantive change process. A minimum of 90 days is required to obtain approval.

Students enrolled in academic certificate programs may be eligible for federal loans provided the following conditions are met:

* the certificate program requires a minimum of 24 credits of undergraduate-level coursework for an undergraduate or post-baccalaureate certificate, 18 credits of graduate-level coursework for a graduate certificate, or 12 credits of graduate-level coursework for a post-master’s certificate;
* the student is enrolled at least half time in each semester (6 credits for undergraduate programs and 5 credits for graduate programs);
* the program has received the final approval of the Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment (and an accrediting body, where applicable); and,
* the program has been approved as a “gainful employment program” and is eligible for Title IV student financial assistance.

Certificate students who do not meet these criteria may be eligible for alternative loans, provided they are enrolled at least half time in each semester.

Tuition awards may be given to on-campus graduate and post-master’s certificate program students if a department or school/college wishes to do so and has the resources. However, due to the limited amount of graduate support dollars available, it is recommended that this support be reserved for students in graduate degree programs.

Detailed information regarding Title IV certification is available on the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment website at academicplanning.gwu.edu/program-approval-process.

**Student Rights**

The school/college and/or department/program is responsible for providing each certificate student with materials that clearly describe the program’s requirements, policies, and procedures and ensure that all federal regulations are met.

Students in on-campus certificate programs who have met their financial obligations to the University are issued a GWorld card, may establish a GW email account, and have use of the Lerner Health and Wellness Center, all general use and program-specific library and computing facilities, and University and school/college-specific career center services.

Students enrolled in off-campus certificate programs are entitled to any services that are normally available to off-campus degree candidates at the same location. Those enrolled in certificate programs offered through distance education are eligible for any services provided to students in comparable distance education degree programs.

**Academic Requirements**

To ensure continued high academic standards, departments/schools should make clear to applicants requisites for success in the program and maintain the same standards when teaching courses to certificate students that are applied when teaching degree candidates. Each certificate program should set minimum grade performance standards no lower than those for the most closely related degree program. Undergraduate and post-baccalaureate certificate students must maintain a minimum grade-point average of 2.0, and graduate and post-master’s certificate students must maintain a minimum grade-point average of 3.0. Additional scholarship requirements may vary.

Policies for registration, grading, and academic progress should be the same as those for degree programs, e.g., processes for course withdrawals, time lines for Incompletes, and so on. It is the program’s responsibility to warn students if they are in academic peril. As in degree programs, students should receive pre-termination letters if they earn a grade of *F* or do not maintain the required minimum GPA. Students in certificate programs are expected to be continuously enrolled and actively engaged in fulfilling the requirements of the program each semester of the academic year until the certificate is awarded. The policies and processes for continuous enrollment, leave of absence, and withdrawal are the same as those for students enrolled in degree programs.

Each program should also have a time limit for completion of the certificate to ensure that students’ knowledge is up-to-date and to encourage them to maintain progress. A reasonable limit is three years, with allowance for one or more semester breaks within that time so long as the entire program is completed within the three-year limit. The limit should be no more than four years.

**Registration and Program Completion**

Certificate students must be appropriately coded and registered in the Banner student information system for all coursework that applies toward the certificate. Certificate students do not participate in University graduation ceremonies.

**Concurrent Enrollment in a Graduate Degree and Certificate Programs**

Students may concurrently pursue a certificate and a degree offered by different departments or schools, particularly when a certificate program in one department/school would allow a student to obtain specialized expertise that complements their degree program in another department/school. With the approval from relevant dean’s office(s) and departments/programs, up to 100 percent of the courses required for the certificate may be applied toward the degree.

Applicants applying to more than one department/school must submit a separate application to each and, including supporting documents, unless there is a written policy to the contrary. Students enrolled in both a certificate and a degree program must have the degree program coded as their primary curriculum and the certificate as their secondary curriculum.

**Sequential Completion of Certificate and Graduate Degree Programs**

Departments/schools must set clear policies regarding the admission of certificate program students who wish to enroll in a relevant degree program once the certificate program has been completed. These policies should specifically address the conditions under which such students may apply and be admitted to a degree program that is related to a certificate program, e.g., whether they must meet the same or similar entrance requirements as other degree applicants, whether they will be given any preference in admissions, etc. In all cases, program materials and letters of admission should clearly state that admission to the certificate program does not guarantee admission to any other program at the University.The application fee is waived for students currently enrolled in certificate programs when applying to a GW degree program.

When courses taken while in the certificate program can fulfill requirements for an existing degree program, the school/college should establish a clear policy regarding transfer of certificate credits into degree programs, defining in each case how many credits and which courses can count toward which degree(s). The policy can allow from zero to all credits completed in the certificate program to count toward a degree and should specify how recent the coursework must be to provide appropriate training. When the certificate program is composed entirely of coursework required for an existing degree, it may be appropriate to count all work completed toward the degree program.