

Policies and Procedures for the Development and Delivery of Certificates for Post-baccalaureate Study at Radford University

1.0 The Foundations for Certificate Initiatives at Radford University

1.1 History. Radford University has a distinguished history of providing a wide range of academic opportunities that meet the ever changing educational needs of our students and the extended community. In recent years, Certificates have become an increasingly important component of the total range of educational opportunities offered by comprehensive universities.

1.2 Certificates. A Certificate is a linked series of academic credit-bearing courses that does not lead to a degree, but rather has a clear and focused academic topic or competency as its subject; meets a clearly defined educational need of a constituency group, such as required continuing education or accreditation for a particular profession; responds to a specific state mandate; or provides basic competency in an emerging, generally interdisciplinary topic.

A Certificate may enhance the education of matriculated (degree seeking) students as well as provide continuing education to non-matriculated (non degree seeking) students. The Certificate indicates to a prospective employer that the university validates the particular collection of courses as a coherent substantial area of study; and while the award of a Certificate means the holder has completed the required courses and related work at an acceptable level of academic accomplishment, it neither certifies nor licenses the student, nor does it guarantee the ability of the student to put into practice what has been studied. Nationally, Certificates range from 3-60 credit hours; however it is anticipated that RU Certificates will generally range from 9-18 credit hours.

1.3 Purpose. The purpose of this proposal is to establish policies and procedures to promote the development and delivery of educationally sound Certificates at the post-baccalaureate level that maximize the strengths and expertise of the university in responding to the needs of the students and the extended community. The policies and procedures outlined in this document are intended to be congruent with current university policies and procedures and provide a mechanism for Certificate development and delivery that follows established routes for approval and review, as well as established practices for student admission and progression. They are also consistent with the norms established by other universities, as reported by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS).

2.0 Development of Certificates at Radford University

2.1 Leadership and Development. Certificates will adhere to the rigorous academic standards of the university and will follow established routes for development and delivery. The Certificate design encourages collaborative partnerships between the university and professionals working in the field, to respond in a flexible and timely manner to specific educational and professional development needs. The identification of need may originate from the community or the university; curriculum development and design will occur at the department and college level; administration will occur primarily in the College of Graduate and Extended Education; and the ultimate success of the Certificate will reflect a collaborative partnership between the community and the essential academic and student support areas of the university.

Once a need is identified, there must be sufficient "desire" to continue exploration expressed by both the university and community for the process to begin. If this initial level of engagement occurs, then:

- i. **A "Certificate Team"** will be developed consisting, in most cases, of faculty, CGEE staff, and where appropriate, representatives of the professional community. This team will be considered to be an on-going working unit that will develop, and if approved, manage the Certificate for the initial 3-year "life-cycle" of the Certificate.
- ii. **The Role of the Academic Units.** Decisions about Certificate curriculum development and design should substantially take place at the departmental and college level. Faculty are the catalyst for the development and central to the implementation of Certificates, and faculty work load and academic support issues are paramount to the certificate planning, approval and review process; therefore, these academic issues should be addressed at the on-set, following established protocol. A faculty member will act as the coordinator of each Certificate Team; faculty will comprise the majority of the Certificate Team; and, faculty will initiate the approval process through academic curriculum channels. Once approved, faculty will provide guidance and mentorship to Certificate students, and it is assumed that in most cases, the faculty involved in the development of the Certificate will also teach Certificate courses, although this does not have to be the case. At the time of Certificate review, it is once again the input of the academic unit that will be central to the decision to continue or terminate the Certificate.
- iii. **The Role of the Community Partners** is to be advisors-- acting as representatives of their industry, professional associations, or agencies. During the development process, the community partners will play a valuable role in the assessment of needs and encourage awareness and sensitivity to issues such as scheduling and delivery

modes for the targeted population; during implementation, the community partners will assist with marketing the Certificate, providing potential internship and practica sites; and, during the review process they will provide advice on the continued demand and role of the Certificate within the community.

iv. The Role of the CGEE is to work collaboratively as part of the team during the development phase to provide guidance, support, and an overall analysis of the fiscal and administrative viability of the Certificate. Once approved, the CGEE Office of Continuing Education will coordinate Certificate student recruitment and retention and provide administrative oversight. During the review process, the CGEE will provide data to determine the overall fiscal and administrative viability of continuing the Certificate.

2.2 Approval & Review Process.

If the "Certificate team" determines that a specific Certificate is viable, the proposal will proceed through established university curriculum approval channels; and once approved, will be implemented as planned.

- i. **Internal Approval:** The route for the approval of specific Certificates within the university will follow the established path for curriculum proposals at the graduate level. The origination of any such proposal will be with the affected faculty, department(s) and college(s) proposing to offer the Certificate; therefore their endorsement is first and foremost. The length of time required to add a new Certificate program will depend on the complexity of the program being proposed. For example, it is anticipated that a "fast track" Certificate (one that includes no new courses in the curriculum; no new faculty required; and, admissions and completion requirements following established practice) could be completed within 2-3 months; while a Certificate that requires the development of new courses; significant faculty considerations; and/or exceptions to admissions and progression criteria is likely to take 6-12 months for development and approval. Changes to existing Certificates (such as the addition of courses) will be made through the established curriculum approval process, as well.
- ii. **External Approval:** Certificates do not require approval by SCHEV. Responsibility for reporting and record keeping will occur within the CGEE Office of Continuing Education and the Registrar's Office, in accordance with SCHEV and SACS requirements. Departments with external accreditations are responsible for determining the impact and implications of Certificates within their academic areas.
- iii. **Certificate Review & Termination.** Certificates are intended to be fluid and responsive to a specific need at a specific time; therefore, a "sunset clause" will require review of all Certificates on a 3-year cycle,

with an automatic provision for the revision or termination at that time. Termination of a Certificate prior to the 3-year cycle can occur at any time that it is no longer financially or administratively viable provided that students admitted to the Certificate have been offered at least one cycle of courses.

National trends indicate that 50-70 % of Certificates continue to be offered after the first cycle.

2.3 Curriculum Considerations.

- i. Certificate terminology.** A Certificate is never to be referred to as a "program" which has a precise, technical meaning defined by the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE). Use of simply the term "Certificate" or "Certificate for post-baccalaureate study" or "Graduate Certificates" is recommended.
- ii. Certificate Description.** A graduate or post-baccalaureate Certificate is one that requires at a minimum that the applicant have a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution; that the curriculum be of depth and breadth consistent with degree programs that require a bachelor's degree; that the curriculum ensure a level of sophistication consistent with students who possess a bachelor's degree; and that progression and completion standards be comparable to related post-baccalaureate degree programs. It should also be noted that a number of universities which are predominately master's institutions do offer post-master's graduate Certificates.
- iii. Program Requirements.**
 - The duration (credit hours) of a Certificate marks a principle distinction between Certificates (non-degree) and degree programs. Certificates are of shorter duration and most Certificates at Radford University should range from 9 – 18 hours, however this can vary if the number of credit hours or courses is a result of practice in a certain profession.
 - A Certificate curriculum may specify completion of a fixed set of courses or a combination of specifically required courses and approved electives in one or more categories. If elective courses are permitted, a full listing of possible courses appropriate for the Certificate must be provided as part of the Certificate approval proposal.
 - If the Certificate varies in any way from established university and academic discipline requirements for admission and progression (including meeting course pre-requisites), a plan and method for applying exceptions must be explained and approved as part of the Certificate proposal approval process.
 - Some Certificates may have completion requirements other than coursework. These additional requirements may include

laboratories, internships, practica, and projects. These additional requirements are usually a function of a tradition within a discipline.

iv. Relationship between degree programs and Certificates.

Generally, at least part of the curriculum of a Certificate is also contained in the curriculum of a related degree program or programs; however there are clear distinctions between degree programs and Certificates. Certificates tend to have a more skills-oriented, job-related, or application-focused orientation; and they can “stand-alone”-- meaning that it is not necessary to earn them in conjunction with a degree.

- Certificates are available to both degree seeking and non-degree seeking students who meet the entry requirements; therefore students may choose to earn only a Certificate; earn a Certificate while enrolled in a degree seeking program; or return to earn a Certificate after completion of a degree.
- For degree seeking students, credits used toward a graduate degree may be applied to a Certificate.
- For non-degree seeking Certificate students, the decision as to what Certificate courses may count towards degree requirements must be determined using the criteria for admission to the specific degree and program of study.
- Certificate proposals should clearly articulate the process and criteria for students wishing to move from non-degree to degree status, including the specification of admissions criteria that may apply. Any Certificates that desire exceptions to established graduate policies must seek approval through the appropriate university channels.

v. Free-standing” & “Add-On” Certificates. A “free-standing” Certificate, by definition, is one that exists in a discipline, or area of study, in which the university does not offer a related degree. As a contrast, a Certificate offered in a discipline where such a related degree is offered is termed an “add-on” Certificate. Radford University considers it appropriate to offer Certificates both in the areas of existing degree programs, and in other area—particularly interdisciplinary fields--- where no degree program exists; noting that the established curricular and fiscal approval procedures will ultimately determine the viability of offering the Certificate.

vi. Impact of Certificates on Existing Programs. A concern often expressed by universities contemplating offering Certificates is whether or not the Certificate will threaten existing degree programs. Research by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) indicates that this was not the case for over 90% of respondents; and most reported increased enrollment in existing masters degree programs as a result of persons beginning coursework toward a

Certificate and subsequently deciding to apply to a masters program. Since graduate degrees require that at least 80% of the hours in the overall program must be in 600- or 700- level courses, Certificate development teams should address this and other similar issues.

- vii. New Course Development.** It is likely that Certificates will include both existing courses as well as new courses, designed specifically for the Certificate. Because of the fluid and short-term nature of most Certificates, the use of Special Topics Classes provides a viable option for the initial Certificate offerings. During the Certificate review process, if the determination is made to continue to offer the Certificate, the courses would be established through the regular curriculum approval procedures.
- viii. Course Offering & Enrollments.** Determination on course offerings would be according to the approved Certificate plan, and would fall within the established guidelines and procedures for offering on-campus and extended education classes. In some instances, Certificate students will enhance the enrollment in courses scheduled as part of the regular course offerings for degree seeking students; in other instances, the course may be offered specifically to meet the needs of a group or cohort of Certificate students. In all cases, established enrollment management plans (minimums / maximums, etc.); extended education revenue sharing procedures, distance education procedures, and other mechanisms for determining the viability of course offerings will apply, according to established university policy and procedure.

2.4 Academic Unit Considerations

- i. Faculty Work-load & Evaluation Considerations.** Faculty assignments and compensation will follow established procedures. Generally, faculty will not receive additional financial compensation for their role in the development and management of the Certificate; however, it is within the purview of the departments, their deans, and the CGEE dean to consider these faculty load issues in terms of the initial development and on-going management of specific Certificates. In terms of evaluation, promotion, and tenure—participation in the development and management of a Certificate would be considered “University Service.”
- ii. Instruction** of Certificate students enrolled in a regularly scheduled course, will be considered part of the regular enrollment; instruction for a Certificate course taught in addition to the regularly scheduled courses, will be a faculty load issue to be addressed through established departmental and college channels;

instruction by qualified adjuncts may be appropriate for some courses because of the skill-based orientation of many Certificates; and, instruction in summer school, extended education courses, internships, practica, and the like will follow established compensation guidelines.

- iii. **Faculty** teaching Certificate courses at the graduate level must obtain full or associate graduate faculty membership.
- iv. **Advising and mentoring** of Certificate students will be a shared role between the faculty and the CGEE staff. Faculty will provide advice related to curricular and professional development; while the prescriptive advising functions such as registration, progression and completion issues will be tracked and managed by the CGEE, Office of Continuing Education.

2.5 College of Graduate and Extended Education Considerations

The CGEE views the development of Certificate initiatives as congruent with the mission of the College, in that Certificates utilize established on-campus and extended site venues and resources for meeting outreach initiatives; and also offer an opportunity to enhance enrollment and recruitment initiatives for existing graduate degree programs. The current administrative structure and resources of the CGEE are sufficient to manage the initial phase of development and implementation of the Certificate initiatives at Radford University.

3.0 Student Eligibility, Admission and Progression Criteria and Considerations.

3.1 Admission Criteria. The minimum Certificate student admission criteria are the same as those in effect for post baccalaureate "non-degree seeking" status. A specific Certificate may set reasonable admission requirements or restrictions beyond the minimum specified by the CGEE. Procedures and protocol for evaluating criteria that are above the University's minimum standards should be addressed in the Certificate proposal process. Since it is assumed that all Certificates will meet minimum standards, any individual exceptions should follow standard protocol.

3.2 Admission Process. Prospective Certificate students are likely to initially inquire about Certificates from a variety of points of contact-- faculty, CGEE staff, Admissions, community partners, the university web site, and others.

- i. **Early in the inquiry process**, students should complete a "*Certificate Contact Form*" and contact the CGEE, Office of Continuing Education. It will be the responsibility of the Office of Continuing Education to

insure that the student has accurate information and understands the admission criteria to both the university and the specific Certificate; as well as, to provide a preliminary assessment of whether the student meets the criteria for entry into the Certificate; and to advise the student of the next course of action.

- ii. **Next, students appearing to meet the general criteria**, should be instructed to consult with the Certificate faculty coordinator, if they have not already done so, to discuss issues related to the student's educational and professional objectives, and the specific Certificate course offerings, schedule, and so forth.
- iii. **If the Certificate appears to be a viable option, the next step...**
 - **Degree seeking graduate students** will apply by submitting an approved "Change of Major Form" to the CGEE, where it will be processed and the appropriate Certificate designation will be added for tracking and reporting purposes.
 - **Non-Degree seeking students (Certificate only)** will apply to the CGEE as "Non-Degree Student" admission status, PLUS submit any additional information requested by the specific Certificate. The CGEE Office of Continuing Education will coordinate the review of applications based on the protocol established for that Certificate, and if approved, process the application following established CGEE procedures for notification, coding, and tracking.

3.3 Procedure for non-degree Certificate Students to transfer into a degree program. A student desiring to switch to a degree status must apply through the CGEE and must show evidence that they have met all entry requirements. All university policies apply. Students who have been in a degree seeking status and have been suspended or dismissed from the university may not apply for readmission as a non-degree Certificate student.

3.4 Financial Aid. Following established university and State Department of Education guidelines, degree students will be eligible for financial aid based on their degree seeking status; and non-degree seeking (Certificate only) students will not be eligible for financial aid.

3.5 Course Transfer and Articulation issues.

- i. **Because of the minimal number of credit hours required for a Certificate** (generally 9-18 credit hours), the maximum number of credits that may be transferred into a Certificate from another university is 1 course (no more than 4 credit hours).
- ii. **In areas where a need could be better met by "joining forces,"** the development of articulation or joint Certificate agreements

between universities is encouraged. Agreements should be approved as part of the Certificate approval process, and other appropriate university channels. These approved agreements would negate the 1 course transfer policy; however students must complete a minimum of 50% of the Certificate hours at Radford University.

- iii. **Courses completed at RU prior to the development of the Certificate**, or prior to a student's entry into the Certificate may count, if approved by the Certificate Team.

3.6 Progression

- i. **Advising.** For non-degree seeking (Certificate only) students, the CGEE Office of Continuing Education will act as the primary advisor; for students enrolled in current degree programs their current academic advisor will continue to be their primary advisor, and the CGEE will serve in the capacity of tracking the student's progress and completion of the Certificate.
- ii. **Registration.** Degree seeking students will be advised and register for degree and Certificate courses during their regular registration access period. Non-degree (Certificate only) students will register following established registration procedures for "special non-degree seeking" status students.

3.7 Completion & Transcript Designation. Students must submit a "Certificate Completion Application" to the CGEE, Office of Continuing Education no later than Census Date of the semester in which they intend to complete the Certificate requirements. Upon review and verification of requirements by the CGEE, Office of Continuing Education; and, at the conclusion of the semester in which the student completes her/his final requirements, the Registrar's Office will award a *Certificate of Completion* and the student's Transcript will note completion of the Certificate. Non-degree seeking (Certificate only) students will not be eligible to participate in the Radford University Commencement ceremony.

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