

SPECIAL REPORT
of the
ACADEMIC MATTERS COUNCIL
concerning
THE DEFINITION OF CERTIFICATES

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Background

The current definition of a “certificate” states that “a certificate program involves specialized areas of study, from which a significant proportion of the requirements must go beyond the requirements of any specific major.” This restriction prevents a student from using the same set of courses to receive both a certificate and a degree. This whole policy, however, predates the online era, and did not anticipate situations in which students might be far removed from the campus, not enrolled in any degree program.

Continuing and Professional Education (CPE) has been offering certificates for years, but they have not been approved through the regular University process. They have sometimes been called “certificates of completion,” but more often they have simply been called “certificates,” even though they have not been formally reviewed and approved. With the growth of online offerings through CPE, there has been increasing interest in certificates. The Provost's Office, the Vice Provost for University Outreach, and the Division of Continuing and Professional Education have been working to regularize CPE certificate offerings by bringing them through the appropriate approval process.

Issue

As these proposals have begun to come through the process, however, they are running up against the “significant proportion” restriction. A certificate designed for an off-campus, non-degree population might appropriately be composed of courses that significantly overlap with the degree requirements in some field. The risk of double-dipping does not generally exist, because the non-matriculating student will not be applying the coursework to anything other than the certificate.

Recommendation

The AMC, therefore, recommends a small change to the current definition, so that it would read “a certificate program involves specialized areas of study, from which a significant proportion of the requirements must go beyond the requirements of any specific major for matriculating students.” The change simply adds the final three words.

This change would preserve the current restriction for matriculating students, but would open up the possibility of certificates that overlap degree requirements for non-matriculating (non-degree) students. It would not by itself change any certificate requirements, nor would it resolve other issues about online certificates that AMC is considering. But without such a change, further progress on regularizing the CPE certificates will be stymied.

This change is proposed as an interim measure, a minimal adjustment that will clear up one obstacle. AMC will continue to consider issues related to certificates offered through CPE, and may propose additional policy changes in the future.

MOVED: That the Faculty Senate approve the following definition of a certificate program:
52-07 “a certificate program involves specialized areas of study, from which a significant proportion of requirements must go beyond the requirements of any specific major for matriculating students,” as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 07-047.