

**SPECIAL REPORT**  
of the  
**GRADUATE COUNCIL**  
concerning an  
**AMENDMENT TO THE  
SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDELINES FOR  
GRADUATE CERTIFICATE PROPOSALS**  
(Sen. Doc. No. 09-023)

Presented at the  
744<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate  
January 29, 2015

**MEMBERSHIP**

<b>Neal Abraham</b>	<b>David Kotz</b>
<b>Jane Baran</b>	<b>Beth Lang</b>
<b>Lori Baronas</b>	<b>John Lopes</b>
<b>Tom Braden</b>	<b>Michael Malone</b>
<b>D. Anthony Butterfield</b>	<b>Ernest May</b>
<b>Leslie Button</b>	<b>John McCarthy</b>
<b>David Ford</b>	<b>Daniel Morales</b>
<b>Steve Goodwin</b>	<b>Dani O'Brien</b>
<b>Linda Griffin, Chair</b>	<b>Lee Riecki</b>
<b>Mark Hamin</b>	<b>Juan Manuel Ruiz-Hau</b>
<b>Alice Harris</b>	<b>Frederic Schaffer</b>
<b>Cynthia Jacelon</b>	<b>Holli Selman</b>
<b>A Yemisi Jimoh</b>	<b>Patrick Sullivan</b>
<b>Arthur Kinney</b>	<b>Nathan Therien</b>
<b>Kevin Klement</b>	<b>David Vaillancourt</b>
	<b>Anna Waltman</b>

## Graduate Certificate Credit Requirement

### *Summary*

This is a proposal to change the minimum number of credits for a graduate certificate from 15 to 9. When it is adopted, new proposals for graduate certificates could be brought forward with minimum credit requirements of 9 or more. Existing graduate certificates would remain unchanged, unless a change of credits is requested by the offering department and approved by the Senate through the program revision process.

### *Rationale*

The current policy, in which undergraduate and graduate certificates have the same minimum number of credits, establishes a false equivalency between undergraduate and graduate coursework. The typical load of an undergraduate is 15 credits; thus, an undergraduate certificate requires the equivalent of a semester's coursework. Graduate courses are considerably more challenging and most graduate students have teaching or research responsibilities, so the typical load of a graduate student, especially at the doctoral level, is 9 credits; thus, a graduate certificate requires the equivalent of 67% more time than an undergraduate certificate.

It is no surprise, then, that graduate students earn certificates much less often than undergraduates do. Averaged over the past three years, the ratio of undergraduate certificates awarded to undergraduate degrees awarded is 4.6%. The ratio of graduate certificates awarded to graduate degrees awarded is 2.7%. Setting aside the effect of two IGERT grants, which provide fellowship funding to students pursuing their respective certificates, the graduate certificate to degrees ratio falls to 1.7%.

UMass Amherst peer institutions that offer nine-credit graduate certificates include Rutgers, Penn State, UConn, Delaware, and Colorado.

### *Letter of Specialization*

The campus's existing mechanism for recognizing 9 credits of coursework, the letter of specialization, does not meet the needs of graduate students. It "recognizes study in a specialized field related to or part of a student's major" ([http://www.umass.edu/senate/guide/AP\\_general\\_info\\_and\\_defs.htm](http://www.umass.edu/senate/guide/AP_general_info_and_defs.htm)). Graduate students, particularly at the doctoral level, are already (becoming) specialists in their discipline and derive no benefit from further attestation to that fact. Graduate students need a realistically attainable way of demonstrating work outside their discipline, and the 9-credit graduate certificate will meet that need.

### *Assessment*

The Graduate Council is charged with evaluating graduate certificates every five years after they are approved (Sen. Doc. No. 09-001). Thus, the consequences of this change can be assessed beginning five years after the first under-15 credit graduate certificate is approved.

*Formal proposal*

Amend section I of Sen. Doc. No. 09-023 *Supplemental Guidelines for Graduate Certificate Proposals* to read as follows:

*I. Approval Criteria*

*A. The proposed curriculum must offer a clear and appropriate educational objective at the graduate level.*

*B. The proposed sequence of courses must express a clear educational objective to be achieved in an efficient and defined manner.*

*C. All courses must be graduate level (numbered 500 or higher) and taught by members of the Graduate Faculty.*

*D. Graduate certificates must require 9 or more credits. If a graduate certificate requires fewer than 15 credits, then at least 9 of the required credits must be earned in courses numbered 600 or higher.*

*E. A perceived need for such a certificate should exist. This provision might be defined in terms of either external markets (e.g., external demand for the skills associated with such a certificate) or internal academic needs (e.g., the need for a critical mass of students in a given discipline.)*

*F. If the area of study for a certificate requires new courses, those courses must be approved by the Faculty Senate Course Approval process.*

*G. Proposals should be submitted following the Faculty Senate Program Approval Guidelines. Upon approval, the Graduate School will update its documentation and procedures to include the new certificate.*

**MOVED: 18-15 That the Faculty Senate approve the Amendment to the Supplemental Guidelines for Graduate Certificate Proposals, as presented in Sen. Doc. No. 15-024.**