

Background on Guidelines for Graduate Certificates **Approved by the Faculty Senate April 22, 2020**

Preface

Graduate Council proposes modifications to the existing *Guidelines for Graduate Certificates* academic credential, expanding it so that non-degree-seeking students (Graduate Certificate Students) may be admitted into these programs and may earn the for-credit credential.¹

At this time, Graduate Certificate programs are open only to Rice graduate students already enrolled in degree programs. The Faculty Senate approved these guidelines for Graduate Certificates on March 10, 2014, two months after similar guidelines were approved for undergraduate Certificate Programs.

Currently, there are four Graduate Certificate programs at Rice:

- 1) University Certificate in Teaching and Learning,
- 2) University Certificate in the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality,
- 3) University Certificate in Critical and Cultural Theory, *and*
- 4) University Certificate in Gnosticism, Esotericism, and Mysticism.

When Graduate Council initially developed the guidelines for Graduate Certificates in 2014, the members of Graduate Council discussed the possibility of non-degree-seeking students enrolling in Certificate programs. This discussion was tabled because, at the time, Rice did not have the infrastructure to effectively handle (1) the extensive federal government regulations and required reporting about “gainful employment” (which has since been suspended by the current federal government) and (2) the administration of receiving and reviewing applications and admitting students into non-degree-seeking programs. Because no department had expressed an interest in developing a proposal for a non-degree-seeking certificate, the Graduate Council decided to only develop guidelines for certificates for degree-seeking students until the aforementioned issues could be addressed in the future.

Many of our peer institutions have for-credit Graduate Certificates programs that are “stand alone” in that a student can be admitted and enroll in a University Certificate program without being a degree-seeking student. This has not been the case at Rice where only degree-seeking undergraduate or graduate students can pursue a for-credit University Certificate.

Former Provost Miranda asked Graduate Council in Spring 2018 to revisit the guidelines for Graduate Certificates in order to open them to non-degree-seeking students. In Fall 2018, Graduate Council established a subcommittee to develop new guidelines and worked with the full Council in 2018-19 and 2019-20 to refine them. We have been able to move forward now because the Office of Institutional Effectiveness has put into place an exit survey for all

¹ A resolution of the Faculty Senate, “*Guidelines for Graduate Certificates*”, approved by the Faculty Senate on March 10, 2014, and amended November 12, 2014.

graduate programs that includes individuals leaving Rice with a University Certificate. Information about gainful employment is being collected should federal regulations require it in the future. Admissions has been clarified too. Admissions to Graduate University Certificate programs will be overseen by the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies with minimum standards of admission enforced by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Graduate Certificate Students are non-degree-seeking students who are seeking a Rice University Graduate Certificate, but are not seeking a Rice degree. These students are only permitted to take the defined courses within the Graduate Certificate program. These students will be afforded the resources that they need to be successful in their coursework, while also conserving scarce resources for degree-seeking students. Rice University already has a history of some graduate students having greater access to resources than others and offering appropriate levels of access to visiting students. For example, full-time doctoral students have access to a medical insurance subsidy while other students do not. Students taking for-credit courses have access to the library to enable them to be successful in their coursework while Rice Learners (who take non-credit courses) have access to the library as a member of the public. Students taking courses on campus are eligible for parking. Students that are away from campus are not required to pay the student health fee. University services such as dining are open to all students, faculty, and staff as well as the public. Access determinations will be made by the relevant offices and stakeholders (i.e., parking will determine parking availability). When a population of student needs are anticipated to be or are not being met, redress can be sought through the relevant office or through the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

A Related Item

At the present time, there is confusion about the designation “certificate” on campus. This is the result of several programs granting school-sponsored certificates prior to the approval of the Graduate Certificate credential by the Faculty Senate in 2014. This was the case with SWGS, CCT, and GEM which awarded “school” certificates prior to the establishment of University Certificates by Faculty Senate. All three programs have since been approved by Faculty Senate as University Certificates.

Most confusion about the use of the term “certificate” comes from the fact that this term is also used to designate completion of a group of non-credit courses that are not university academic credentials, and thereby not recorded on the student’s official academic transcript. All programs (past and present) with the word 'certificate' in their title or advertisement must be formally approved by Graduate Council and the Faculty Senate. All other programs are expected to use different labels (e.g., program completion, workshop participant) to ensure that formal certificates carry a specific, recognized meaning for the university.

Guidelines for Graduate Certificates

Replaces the “*Guidelines for Graduate Certificates*” originally developed and recommended by Graduate Council in March 10, 2014; Approved by Faculty Senate in November 12, 2014; These Spring 2020 revisions proposed to include Stand-Alone Certificates.

Final Document (March 30, 2020)

Overview

Post-baccalaureate Graduate Certificate programs are formally recognized academic programs of study attesting to a level of competence or to the development of skills in a particular area or field. They are intended for students who may or may not be enrolled as Rice degree-seeking students. Graduate Certificates are offered in these areas both to recognize students who have achieved this level of competence or skill and to encourage students to pursue these areas, which the faculty has designated as having significant value in the graduate curriculum. A certificate comprises a specific grouping of courses and related activities (such as internships) that either:

1. forms a coherent yet distinctive complement to the major of a degree program, **or**
2. leads to the acquisition of specific skills or professional expertise.

Graduate Certificate programs are distinct from degree programs (i.e., certificates are not degrees).

A Graduate Certificate program is not intended to substitute for a graduate degree but may be taken by degree-seeking graduate students to complement their graduate program. Post-baccalaureate students seeking a graduate certificate but not enrolled in a degree program are explicitly not a subset of graduate students, but will have the distinct classification “graduate certificate students”.

The governance and administration of Graduate Certificate programs is and will be exactly analogous to graduate degree programs.

Graduate Certificates should benefit the University and the Rice graduate community. As such, Graduate Certificate programs may be (1) restricted to Rice degree-seeking graduate students or (2) restricted to non-degree-seeking post-baccalaureate students or graduate certificate students or (3) open to both Rice degree-seeking graduate students and graduate certificate students. Initial program proposals must make the argument for one of these audiences and any change in the audience of the graduate certificate requires the approval of Graduate Council and Faculty Senate.

All academic departments, all schools, and the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies are eligible to submit proposals for the creation of new Graduate Certificate programs. All proposals must originate from those entities. Proposals must be endorsed in writing by the appropriate dean(s), as well as the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

For inclusion in Rice University's official curriculum, all Graduate Certificate programs must be formally approved by the Graduate Council and the Faculty Senate. Graduate Certificate programs will be reviewed by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies after the fifth year of the program and again every five years. These reviews will follow the format proscribed by Graduate Council's Evaluation of New programs. This review should also assess the positive and negative impact of this program on other programs at Rice. As with any graduate program, the processes to eliminate a graduate program may be indirectly triggered based on the assessments of Graduate Council, but the review to establish whether a graduate program should be eliminated is different from the routine performance reviews of departments and graduate programs. These are outlined in the "Elimination of Graduate Program" document on the Faculty Senate website.

As an official academic credential, the awarding of Graduate Certificates is ultimately overseen by the faculty and president of the university with conferral performed three times a year, at the end of each semester. Degree-seeking graduate students will have their certificates conferred concurrently with their Rice degree while graduate certificate students will have their certificates awarded at the end of the semester of the completed coursework. Successful completion of the certificate will be posted on the student's official academic transcript at that time. Rice's commencement ceremony will not include recognition for graduate certificate students. Degree-seeking graduate students who leave without completing a degree but who have completed the requirements for a graduate certificate may petition the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for the awarding of the Graduate Certificate.

Graduate Certificate Guidelines

1. **Graduate Certificate Requirements:**
 - a. Minimum Course requirements
 - A minimum of 4 courses (minimum 12 semester credit hours) of graduate-level study (coursework at the 500 level or above).
 - b. A minimum overall GPA of 2.67 or higher in all Rice coursework.
 - c. All coursework taken to satisfy Graduate Certificate requirements must be:
 - Rice for-credit graduate-level courses that appear in the university's Course Catalog.
 - Taken on a standard letter-grade basis. (Courses taken for the certificate cannot be taken on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory or Pass/Fail basis.)
 - d. Transfer credit may not be used to fulfill any Graduate Certificate course requirements.

- e. Graduate certificate students are eligible to enroll **only** in those courses identified as required for the Graduate Certificate.

2. Multiple Graduate Certificates

- a. Degree-seeking graduate students may pursue more than one Graduate Certificate, provided that the course requirements and credits in each certificate are unique and non-redundant with each other.
- b. Graduate certificate students may apply to and enroll in more than one Graduate Certificate program at the same time, but they must apply and seek admission to each Graduate Certificate program separately. Similarly, the course requirements and credits in each certificate should be unique and non-redundant with each other.

3. Admission

a. For Degree-seeking Graduate Students

- i. Applicant approaches the Graduate Certificate program to obtain admission and authorization to be in the Graduate Certificate program.
- ii. Applicant obtains the permission of the student's primary degree-granting graduate program.
- iii. Student formally declares pursuit of the Graduate Certificate by submitting the "*Graduate Declaration and Change of University Certificate Form*" to the Office of the Registrar.

b. Graduate Certificate Students (Non-degree-seeking post-baccalaureate students)

- i. Applicant applies for admission via the online application managed and administered by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, or its designate.
- ii. Certificate program leadership will review the applications in accordance with Policy 501.
- iii. As with degree-seeking graduate students, if an applicant does not meet the minimum standards for graduate admission as defined in the General Announcements, the program may seek an exception to admit an applicant from the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Exceptions will be rare and exceptional and will be documented to be included in the five-year review of the program.
- iv. Separate and different admissions criteria may be established for degree-seeking graduate students and graduate certificate students.
- v. Graduate certificate students will have appropriate access to university resources and services, but this access may or may not be at the same level as that of graduate students. Additional costs and marginal costs of graduate certificate students to university services must be covered by the Graduate Certificate programs.

Graduate Certificate Proposals

Proposals for the creation of new post-baccalaureate graduate certificate programs should be submitted to the Chair of the Graduate Council and should include:

1. Rationale for the Post-Baccalaureate Graduate Certificate Program

- a. What is the target audience for the Graduate Certificate (Rice graduate students and/or graduate certificate students)?
- b. What is the need or demand for the Graduate Certificate?
- c. How is the Graduate Certificate different in structure and purpose from other graduate programs? If the certificate is affiliated with a degree already offered, how will it complement that degree?
- d. How does the Graduate Certificate potentially impact other existing Graduate Certificates and degree programs? Is there any potential for the Graduate Certificate to attract students to the detriment of existing graduate programs?
- e. How will the Graduate Certificate enhance and positively impact the reputation of the university?

2. Graduate Certificate Requirements

- a. Provide a list of required courses, electives, other requirements, and the total minimum number of hours required. See *Graduate Certificate Guidelines* section above for relevant information.
- b. Provide assurance that the courses proposed for the satisfaction of the certificate are offered regularly enough to allow for timely completion of the Graduate Certificate requirements.
- c. Indicate if any of the courses required for the certificate program are restricted to students admitted to the Graduate Certificate program.

3. Administration of the Graduate Certificate Program

- a. Identify the faculty who will have primary roles in administering the Graduate Certificate including participation in the admission process and advising student participants.
- b. For Graduate Certificates offered outside of existing department or programs, provide a list of members of the governance committee that will oversee the curriculum for the certificate, appoint advisors, and alert relevant administrators of any course or non-course deficiencies in curricular offerings for the Graduate Certificate.

4. Instruction for the Graduate Certificate Program

- a. Include a listing of current faculty members and their academic qualifications, at each academic rank, who will regularly teach courses and supervise students in the program, as well as any concrete plans for hiring of new faculty.
- b. Include a listing of existing courses that will serve the program, as well as a listing of new courses that will be developed.
- c. Include an explanation of how the new program will be run on a sustainable basis and how it will impact existing degree programs and faculty workload.
- d. Explain what measures will be needed to compensate for reallocated resources.

5. Admissions to the Graduate Certificate Program

While Admission is a formal process described above (in *Graduate Certificate Guidelines*), explain the standards and procedures for admissions that will be used by the certificate program leadership for your proposed certificate.

6. Accreditation for the Graduate Certificate Program

To comply with SACSCOC accreditation requirements and federal regulations, as well as best practices in curriculum design, the proposal must include:

- a. A description of program learning outcomes that are clear standards for observable, measurable student-centered outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviors;
- b. A curriculum map that relates the curricular components of the proposed Graduate Certificate to the specified program learning outcomes; and
- c. An assessment plan for measuring the success and effectiveness of design of the certificate curriculum after implementation. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is charged with assisting proposers with the development of these elements. In addition, the proposal must include a letter from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness indicating whether SACSCOC notification or approval is required and, if so, the schedule for notification or requesting approval.
- d. USDE requires that an assessment of students' post-certificate work achievement is assessed for non-degree seeking students (i.e., Regulations on Gainful Employment). This assessment will be conducted by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and included as a factor in the five-year review.

7. Resources needed for the Graduate Certificate Program

- a. Estimate the expected enrollment annually in the proposed program.

- b. Describe library and information resources that the new program would require.
- c. Describe physical facilities required to support the program.
- d. Describe non-tenure-track staffing required to support the program.
- e. Describe the impact on university services to serve Graduate Certificate students enrolled in the program. For more information or details on eligible university services, please contact the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
- f. Describe the impact on the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) and the estimate of the number of international students might enroll? What additional resources will be needed to serve these students? Please note there are strict federal immigration restrictions that might inhibit Rice's ability in certain cases to sponsor visas for international students. If international markets are a concern to your program, please consult with OISS prior to designing the program's curricula and purpose.

8. General Announcements (GA)

The proposed complete GA text and language as it would appear in the General Announcements if the proposal were approved. The GA text should include the official name of the Graduate Certificate and all documented course requirements, etc. The Office of the Registrar is charged with assisting proposers with the development of these elements.

9. Launch of the Graduate Certificate Program

A description, with timeline, of the process of launching the new program.

10. Budget for Graduate Certificate Program

- a. Start-up and ongoing costs; projected income, expenditures, and cash flow; contingency plans in case projected resources do not materialize.
- b. A long-term budget (covering at least five years), developed in consultation with and with the approval of the Budget Office.
- c. Letters that this budget has been reviewed and approved by the Dean(s) of the relevant school(s), the Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and the Vice President for Finance.
- d. If budget considerations do not apply, please state so and explain.

11. Risk Assessment of Graduate Certificate Program

Assess the risks for this new program (for example: sustainability of the program and staffing, reputation of the university, delivery of curriculum, impact on other existing

department and university programs, financial risk, etc.). Provide information about how the risks for the new program are/will be mitigated.

12. Documentation

Supporting letters from chair(s) of participating departments/programs (including potentially competitive certificates/programs) and the appropriate dean(s) verifying that:

- a. The proposed Graduate Certificate has been reviewed and received faculty approval through appropriate governance procedures;
- b. Resources to support the Graduate Certificate, as presented in the proposal, are available without impacting other courses and programs for at least five years;
- c. The competitive risk of the proposed Graduate Certificate to existing Graduate Certificates/programs has been assessed and mitigated.