



CREDIT-BEARING CERTIFICATE

What are certificates?

A certificate program provides limited, specialized education or training in a specified field or area of focus. In higher education certificates can be awarded in academic, vocational, and continuing professional education. Certificates can be credit-bearing or non-credit bearing.

Mercer often collaborates with industry and community to determine educational and professional needs. Mercer certificates reflect (1) emerging academic areas; (2) professional development goals; or (3) a focused body of knowledge, capacities, and achievements in a specific field that do not constitute a degree program.

All Mercer certificates support the mission of the University and the degree-granting academic unit (College/School) from which it emanates. All certificates have clear learning outcomes and a curriculum map.

This document pertains to credit-bearing certificates only. Non-credit certificates are addressed in the Continuing Education Activity Oversight Policy.

Types of certificates

Credit-bearing certificates are categorized according to three dimensions – level, availability, and length. All must be addressed in the development of a certificate.

Levels:

- Postsecondary - requires secondary diploma or equivalent; offers content at the undergraduate level; sometimes referred to as an undergraduate certificate, but reported to outside agencies as postsecondary
- Postbaccalaureate – requires a bachelor’s degree; offers content at the master’s level; sometimes referred to as a graduate certificate, but reported as postbaccalaureate
- Post-master’s – requires a master’s degree; offers content at the graduate level

Availability to Students:

- Degree-seeking – Available to students seeking a degree. The degree must be specified. The certificate is embedded in the degree program; may be eligible for financial aid
- Non-degree – Certificate seeking only; not eligible for financial aid

Length of program:

The length of certificate programs will vary and will likely be determined by the learning objectives. Twelve to 18 credit hours is typical. A minimum of nine (9) credit hours must

be course-based. Certificate programs with fewer than 12 credit hours require an experiential learning element.

*[Note: IPEDS has organized postsecondary certificate programs by length. This information serves as a reference.]

Minors vs. certificates

Both minors and credit-bearing certificates are course-based and indicated on a transcript. Undergraduate minors are broader in focus than certificates and, like majors, require a specified number of advanced 300-400 level course work. Minors may only be earned by degree-seeking candidates. A credit-bearing certificate is typically a smaller number of credits with a more specific focus than a minor. A certificate may be available to non-degree seeking students.

Requirements for an undergraduate minor at Mercer University were determined by the Undergraduate Council on 01/08/2015 (revised 02/05/2015).

Concentrations/Specializations/Emphases/Tracks vs. Certificates

A concentration/specialization/emphasis/track is a structured area of study within an academic program. Such a plan of study represents a cohesive part of a larger program of study. While a certificate program may complement or serve as part of a program of study, and may have prerequisite requirements, it is structured to independently develop proficiency in a particular field or subject. Concentrations, specializations, emphases, tracks, and certificates can appear on the student transcript

Requirements for certificates

Mercer certificates reflect (1) emerging academic areas; (2) professional development goals; or (3) a focused body of knowledge, capacities, and achievements in a specific field that do not constitute a degree program. A certificate is intended to foster incremental or targeted development in an area of specialty or competency within a discipline or field of study. Credit-bearing certificates are earned either in conjunction with or independent of a baccalaureate degree, a master's degree, or postbaccalaureate professional degree, so they may be suitable for either degree-seeking candidates or non-degree candidates.

Certificates are designed by academic units to accommodate the parameters of the discipline or field of study, as well as the specific educational needs of the intended students.

A credit-bearing certificate consists of a group of courses often ranging from 9-18 credits. These courses are typically found within a current program and are developed, supervised, and evaluated by offering academic unit(s). Additional supervised requirements (such as internships, service learning, study abroad, portfolios, etc.) may be added to the course requirements.

Credit-bearing certificates must be at least 9 credit hours. For credit-bearing certificates under 12 credit hours, an experiential component is required and all credits must be earned at Mercer. For credit-bearing certificates 12 credits or more, at least 2/3 of the courses used to complete

the certificate must be earned at Mercer. Credit-bearing certificates having more than 18 credits must provide justification for the additional credit hours. No more than 1/3 of the required courses for the post-secondary certificate can be used to meet other academic requirements (major, minor, concentration, emphasis, specialization, track, etc.). If a student completes the postbaccalaureate or post-master's certificate, then chooses to continue study for the major, all credits earned by certificate may be used to meet the requirements of the major.

Students must earn a grade minimum of "C" or, where appropriate, "S" in all courses required for the credit-bearing certificate.

Learning outcomes must be stated for certificate programs. An assessment plan for these outcomes must be developed. Yearly reporting is expected to inform the college/school and help determine re-approval.

Academic units must seek re-approval of certificate programs from the Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council every five years. In the case where re-approval is not sought or is denied, an appropriate teach-out will be required. The Councils will evaluate re-approvals based on enrollment, continued relevance, resources, adherence to policy, and achievement of learning outcomes.

All University policies apply to credit-bearing certificates and the students enrolled. These include: academic, grading, admission, academic progress, retention, direct instructional minutes, faculty credentials required to teach, continuous enrollment, leave of absence, and withdrawal.

Approval process

All certificates must be authorized by a degree-granting academic unit (College/School) of the University. Academic deans are charged with approving all postsecondary, post-baccalaureate, and post-master's certificates and are responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the certificate, including any course substitutions, adhere to the guidelines for certificates.

The process for developing new certificates begins with approval by the academic dean and consultation with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Program approval timelines may vary based on unit requirements, consultations, college/school meeting schedules, and University committee meeting schedules.

1. Required consultations: dean, OIE, other colleges/schools impacted, Enrollment Management, Registrar
2. Consultations as needed: Financial Planning; Provost/Enrollment Management/Finance (if pro forma is required)
3. Curriculum worksheets and the New Certificate Addendum are completed and presented to the unit curriculum committee representative.
4. Review, revision and approval within the college/school.

5. Formal curricular proposal is completed and submitted to the appropriate University committee (Undergraduate Council, Graduate Council, or Continuing Education Activity Committee).
6. Proposals approved by the University committees for non-degree certificates will require submission for approval from the Board of Trustees.

Admission of students

Degree-seeking students may enroll in credit-bearing certificates provided they meet any additional certificate-specific admission requirements and prerequisites that may be stipulated by the University or the College/School in which the certificate is housed.

Degree-seeking students may not concurrently pursue a non-degree certificate along with the degree.

Non-degree seeking students may enroll in credit-bearing certificates provided:

- they meet the admission requirements of the University at the undergraduate level for **postsecondary certificates**
- hold a bachelor's degree from a regionally-accredited institution for the **postbaccalaureate certificates** and meet the additional prerequisites for the certificate as stipulated by the College/School in which the certificate is housed
- hold a master's or post baccalaureate professional degree from a regionally-accredited institution for the **post-master's certificate** and meet the admissions requirements of the University as well as additional prerequisites for the certificate as stipulated by the College/School in which the certificate is housed

Students should formally declare their intention to pursue the certificate by submitting the appropriate form or written statement to the Office of the Registrar.

Financial Aid

Degree-seeking students who desire to complete an embedded certificate program as a part of their degree program may be eligible for federal Title IV aid provided they meet the eligibility requirements for their degree program. Non-degree seeking certificate students are not eligible for Title IV financial aid unless the certificate program is identified by the University as preparing the student for gainful employment in a recognized occupation and meets Title IV federal guidelines. This applies to all levels, including postsecondary, postbaccalaureate, and post-master's.

Certificate Completion

For certificates embedded in degree programs, the certificate will only be awarded at the same time and as part of degree completion. If a student completes the requirements for the embedded certificate, but fails to complete the degree program, then the certificate will not be awarded.

Documentation – transcript and certificates

Mercer University does not give certificate documents akin to diplomas. The completion of certificates appears on the student transcript. Certificate completion is placed on the transcript by the Campus Registrar. To track enrollments in certificate programs, create and use an Area of Study code for degree-seeking students and a certificate Program Version for non-degree students.

*IPEDS categorization of postsecondary certificate programs by length:

- Less than 1 academic year (2 semesters), or completion in less than 30 semester credit hours, or in less than 900 contact/clock hours
- At least 1 academic year but less than 2 academic years, or completion in at least 30 but less than 60 semester credit hours, or in at least 900 but less than 1,800 contact/clock hours
- At least 2 but less than 4 academic years, or completion in at least 60 but less than 120 semester credit hours, or in at least 1,800 but less than 3,600 contact/clock hours

Approved 10.18.18 **Undergraduate Council**
Approved 02.14.19 **Graduate Council**

Revised and Approved 3.24.22 **Undergraduate Council**
Approved 3.25.22 **Graduate Council**