

## **Approval Process for Graduate and Professional School Certificate Programs**

A graduate certificate program awards a certificate of completion to an already-enrolled post-baccalaureate student who completes a defined and limited set of additional requirements focused on a specific theme. It provides the student with a credential, typically for use on a resume or curriculum vitae, to document study in a particular sub-field during the course of the graduate degree program in which the student is enrolled.

Any department or program wishing to offer and award graduate certificates must submit their proposed programs for approval. Only a certificate awarded by an authorized, approved graduate certificate program may be advertised or be noted on a student's transcript.

Graduate certificate programs fall under the administrative jurisdiction of the school deans, as follows, with the Dean of the Graduate School serving as the overall principal point of contact in the Provost's Office. The Dean of the Graduate School will approve and oversee (1) all graduate certificate programs offered individually or collaboratively by the Graduate School's graduate-degree programs and (2) all graduate certificate programs that are open broadly to post-baccalaureate students enrolled at Vanderbilt (i.e., programs not limited to those in a single professional school). The Dean of each professional school will approve and oversee any graduate certificate program open only to students already enrolled in a professional degree program in that school and will keep the Dean of the Graduate School informed of all such certificate programs. In all cases, programs wishing to establish graduate certificate programs must adhere to guidelines established by the aforementioned deans.

### **Certificate Programs Overseen by the Graduate School**

With the approval of the appropriate faculty, department chair(s) or program director(s) and the local college/school dean(s), a program may propose that the Graduate School offer a *Graduate School Certificate Program* focused on a specific academic theme.

- Certificate Requirements
  - Only students already enrolled in a Vanderbilt University post-baccalaureate-degree program are eligible.
  - Each certificate must require at least 12 credit/semester hours of interrelated graduate-level coursework supporting a specified theme. Substituting an undergraduate course for a graduate course (each instance) requires the approval of the Graduate School.
  - The courses must form an intellectually cohesive whole. Independent study courses or the like may be used to include required essays or project papers.
  - In some cases, specific named courses (e.g., Physics 341) are required either for the post-baccalaureate degree program in which the student is enrolled or for a concentration or area within that program. When that is the case, no more than 6 credit/semester hours of those specific named courses may be used to fulfill the requirements for a graduate-certificate program. But all of the certificate-related hours may be counted toward the degree-program total.
  - Students wishing to enroll in a certificate program must complete an Intent to Enroll form, which must be signed by the student, the director of the certificate program, and the director of Graduate Studies for the degree program in which the student is enrolled. A signed copy of the form should be submitted to the Graduate School ([richard.hoover@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:richard.hoover@vanderbilt.edu)) and to the University Registrar's Office (URO) ([university.registrar@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:university.registrar@vanderbilt.edu)).

- Approval Process
  - After receiving approval at the local college/school level, proposals may be submitted to the Graduate School, 411 Kirkland Hall, at any time during the year. Proposals for certificates overseen by the Graduate School should follow and document the standard program approval process within the relevant college/school.
  - Proposals should not exceed five pages; should identify the Vanderbilt program(s) that will offer the proposed certificate program; and should include, in addition: A description of the certificate program's theme and the rationale for it; examples of similar certificate programs, if any, offered by other institutions; the intended eligibility requirements (which Vanderbilt students would be eligible to earn the proposed certificate); the requirements for earning the certificate; the name of the faculty member who will oversee the certificate program; an assessment plan, including student learning outcomes and proposed assessment measures; and signed copies of the required approvals.
  - Approvals must be secured from the department chair(s) or program director(s) and dean(s) of any units offering courses likely to be used to fulfill the certificate requirements. The Graduate School, with the Graduate Faculty Council, will review each certificate proposal for merit, provide feedback as necessary, and then approve deserving proposals.
  - After a certificate program is approved, the Graduate School will notify the URO and the respective dean and program director. The URO will finalize the process and set up the program in the registration system.
  - Completion of approved certificate programs will be noted officially on students' transcripts. Certificates will not be awarded retroactively.
  - Programs will issue certificates at the time of completion of the certificate program requirements. Certificates must be sent to the Graduate School for final signature prior to awarding them to the students. The certificate will serve as documentation that the student has completed all the requirements for the certificate. The Graduate School office will in turn notify the URO, which will note on the student's transcript that the certificate program has been completed.
  - Upon completion of the student's degree program and prior to graduation, the URO will remove the transcript note and post the completed certificate program as part of the final transcript.

### **Graduate Certificate Programs Outside of the Graduate School**

The Dean of each professional school will approve and oversee any graduate certificate program open only to students already enrolled in a professional degree program in that school and will keep the Dean of the Graduate School informed of all such certificate programs.

- Certificate Requirements
  - Each school is responsible for determining the requirements for their own certificate programs. Requirements should closely align with the Graduate School certificate program requirements listed above. If requirements are different based on issues such as credentialing and licensure, please include an explanation when notifying the Graduate School of the approved certificate.
  - Students wishing to enroll in a certificate program must complete an Intent to Enroll form, which must be signed by the student and the director of the certificate program. A signed copy of the form should be submitted to the University Registrar's Office (URO) - [university.registrar@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:university.registrar@vanderbilt.edu).

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- Approval Process
  - Certificates overseen outside of the Graduate School should follow and document the standard program approval process within the relevant college/school.
  - After a program is approved, notification should be sent to the Graduate School. The notification should contain a description of the certificate program's theme and the rationale for it; the intended eligibility (which Vanderbilt students would be eligible to earn the proposed certificate); the requirements for earning the certificate; the name of the faculty member who will oversee the certificate program; an assessment plan including student learning outcomes and proposed assessment measures; and signed copies of the required approvals.
  - After receiving the notification, the Graduate School will forward the information to the URO, which will finalize the process and set up the program in the registration system.
  - Completion of approved certificate programs will be noted officially on students' transcripts. Certificates will not be awarded retroactively.
  - Programs will issue certificates at the time of completion of the certificate program requirements. Copies of the signed certificates must be sent to the URO, to serve as documentation that the student has completed all the requirements for the certificate. The URO in turn will note on the student's transcript that the certificate program has been completed.
  - Upon completion of the student's degree program and prior to graduation, the URO will remove the transcript note and post the completed certificate program as part of the final transcript.

### **Catalog Requirements for All Certificate Programs**

All approved certificates should be listed in the relevant school catalogs and on websites with the certificate requirements.

### **Assessment Requirements for All Certificate Programs**

All certificate programs are required to assess student learning outcomes within their program.

- All certificate programs are required to submit an assessment plan as part of the approval process. For a copy of the assessment plan template, please email [via@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:via@vanderbilt.edu)
- An annual assessment report is required if the number of certificates awarded is 5 or more. If the number is less than five, the assessment data should be added to the next year's report. Assessment reports must be submitted at least every three years even if there have been fewer than five students who have completed the requirements for the program.
- Annual assessment reports should contain a list of the outcomes measured, assessment results, and a list of any planned improvements to the certificate program.
- Student outcomes and assessment measures can be the same in certificate and degree programs but outcomes and assessment measures must be relevant to certificate-level students. It is also important to distinguish between the two levels.
- Annual assessment reports should be submitted to [via@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:via@vanderbilt.edu) by August 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.