

Approved (by AAAC & AA) guidelines document for UCB Academic Certificates for Undergraduates/
(updated March 2017)

This document identifies UCB Academic Affairs policy with respect to formal certificate programs for undergraduates. Formal academic certificates are defined as meeting certain minimum academic requirements and are maintained in our system of record, published in the university catalog, eligible to be recorded on students' academic transcripts, and employ the University of Colorado BOULDER imprimatur. This document has two sections: a check list of undergraduate academic certificate policy items and a subsequent section providing additional context and detail. This policy document conforms to a similar protocol in place for graduate certificates, which is maintained and administered by the Graduate School's Executive Advisory Committee.

All formal academic certificates need an accurate description and current set of curricular requirements to be included in the university catalog. The complete list of approved academic certificates is maintained by the Office of the Registrar and Institutional Research.

Check List for Academic Certificates:

(1) Course work: Each formal undergraduate certificate must require a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 24 semester hours of academic credit as specified by the originating faculty oversight unit. Certificates may include requirements in addition to formal course work, and, in those cases, the usual customary guidelines for time and effort for approximately equivalent course work should apply if the additional credits are credit-bearing.

(2) Certificate names: There should be only a single, precisely employed name for each certificate. The name must be approved by the AAAC. The word 'certificate' should not appear in the name as that designation appears automatically on students' transcripts. No certificate information will be built in the system of record or posted on student transcripts for certificates that are not approved by AAAC.

(3) Student Eligibility: The usual status for undergraduate students who are earning certificates is to be degree seeking. Degree-seeking students pursuing a certificate will have both degree and certificate plans active in the student information system. Because of financial aid implications, certificates will not post to student records until completion of the degree requirements. Students who complete certificate requirements, but do not complete their degrees, may only have them posted if changed to a non-degree status by Continuing Education. Some certificates may only be available to students in a degree-seeking status.

If a supervising unit chooses to accept undergraduate non-degree students into their certificate programs, those students must be admitted and administered through Continuing Education in order to have the certificates post to their record.

(4) Approvals: The academic originating units must obtain approvals from the relevant academic Dean's office (or more than one if requirements span multiple Dean's offices, as is common) and the Office of Academic Affairs.

(5) Justifications: The originating unit has responsibility to provide the context for each new certificate to include evidence or projections of student demand; relationship to other majors, minors or certificates; academic value to students; identification of resources required to include faculty expertise, space, budget, etc.; and considerations of significant overlap or duplication with existing programs across the campus (e.g. minors).

(6) Review: The originating unit should identify a (usually faculty) structure to oversee the certificate program to include an initial review immediately after three years in operation to assess the effectiveness and value of the program. If continued, then review every fifth year should be specified.

(7) Operations: A specific office, usually within the originating academic unit, needs to be identified in the proposal document to be responsible for: (a) creating and maintaining an accurate description on appropriate CU web sites to include the CU catalog, (b) admitting students to the certificate program, (c) verifying completion of requirements, (d) submitting and retaining lists of students who have completed those requirements to the Registrar's office, and (e) undertaking other related administrative tasks. Past certificate history indicates that maintaining continuity of responsibilities when personnel changes occur needs more care.

Background, Context, Recommendations

Certificates can serve various purposes and may have multiple academic strategies, all of which are directed toward student benefit and credentialing. In all cases, the certificate should offer something not available, as a whole, under other standard academic options such as a minor. In general, certificates generally carry less academic prestige than minors so the expectations for academic certificates should typically be less than the requirements for academic minors and almost always less than for academic majors. A major can be thought of as being a substantial study program within a particular discipline while a minor constitutes a much more modest study within a discipline. A certificate generally should signify either (a) a concentrated study in a narrow sub-discipline not offered by standard academic options or (b) a spanning, interdisciplinary focus of study, also not offered by standard academic options. In general, certificates with requirements mostly enclosed within a major that also offers a minor should not be offered because of too much similarity. The certificate should have a substantially different focus and purpose from a minor, most frequently by specifying requirements that encompass multiple departments. A student should not be able to earn a certificate that constitutes a proper subset of major requirements in the same way a student cannot earn a minor within the same department as their major.

The use of terms 'tuition' and 'courses', in the context of certificates, should be restricted to mean UCB-controlled and approved tuition and UCB-controlled and formally approved academic courses.

Language used to advertise certificate programs, e.g. in the catalog, should use terminology that clearly distinguishes certificates which qualify for posting on the academic degree transcript from those that do not. Postings that use the word 'certificate', but are not formally approved as transcript-worthy academic certificates, should clearly inform students of that status in their websites, in the catalogs, etc. Student eligibility for a certificate program may be restricted to certain groups of students (e.g., certain majors).