

Guidelines/Procedures for Certificate Programs Offered for Academic Credit

Certificates may be awarded with or without academic credit subject to appropriate internal and external approvals.

Certificates for Academic Credit

Certificates are a formal designation on a student's transcript certifying satisfactory completion of a postsecondary education program. Proposals for new certificates must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate college or school committees, the Graduate or Undergraduate University Curriculum committee (depending on the certificate level), the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Provost. After University approval has been obtained, the certificate proposal is submitted to ACHE and SACSCOC (when applicable), for approval.

Certificates for which 25% or more of the credit hours are new content are subject review as outlines in the Substantive Change Policy of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The University of South Alabama Policy and Procedure for Monitoring and Reporting Substantive Changes can be found at <https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/academicaffairs/resources/revisedsubchangepolicy72021final.pdf>

Once approved by ACHE, an Academic Program Request Form should be completed by the College and submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs for review. The Academic Program Request Form can be found at https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/eforms/academicaffairs/academic_program_request_form.pdf

Once all approvals are in place, the certificate program will be created in Banner by the Registrar.

Financial Aid Eligibility

Academic certificate programs eligible for federal financial aid are subject to the United States Department of Education (DOE) Gainful Employment regulations. To be eligible for financial aid:

- Certificates must be designed to prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation using the Standard Occupational Classification.
- Undergraduate certificate programs must consist of 36 credit hours (minimum one year in length).
- Graduate certificate programs must consist of at least 18 credit hours (minimum one year in length).

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DOE must approve certificate programs for which students are eligible for federal aid 90 days in advance of advertising the program or enrolling students. The notification to DOE must explain the institution's determination that the new program will meet employment market needs and describe how the program was reviewed or approved by, or developed in conjunction with external groups and its accrediting agency.

Administrative Responsibilities

1. Departments offering certificate programs must develop a system to formally accept students into the certificate program at the beginning of the program and ensure they are appropriately designated in Banner.
2. The department must (1) demonstrate reliable and valid procedures to monitor and track students, with particular attention to learning outcomes assessment, completion rates and job placement (or persistence to graduate school) and (2) agree to provide this data on an annual basis. Gainful Employment (GE) regulations offer the following guidance for distinguishing certificate and degree program enrollment:
 - For situations where the program offers a degree and certificate program in the same area, students enrolled in the degree program only should not be included in either the disclosures or reporting for the separate certificate program.
 - If students are enrolled in a certificate program, even if the enrollment is concurrent with enrollment in the degree program, those students must be included in the certificate GE Program's reporting and disclosures.
 - If a significant number of the students enrolled in the degree program are awarded only the certificate and not the degree, the students enrolled in the degree program must be included in the disclosures and reporting for a certificate GE Program. If the institution does not offer a separate certificate program, it must, for gainful employment purposes, treat the degree program as a gainful employment certificate program for which the institution must comply with the gainful employment regulatory requirements.