

Non-degree credentials are increasingly common across the higher education landscape: recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that in 2018, over 25% of Americans held one or more non-degree credentials.¹ Non-degree credentials typically signify that the recipient has mastered a knowledge base and set of skills aligned with one or more specific career paths.

While some non-degree credentials require pre-requisite knowledge and degree attainment, others can be completed as early as pre-college; many high schools are now offering opportunities for their students to earn career-oriented alternative credentials.

For WP students, earning a career-oriented alternative credential as part of their academic program can help with early internship and job placement which, in turn, can help them pay for their education while taking classes. These credentials also provide an advantage finding appropriate, gainful employment upon graduation. Therefore, one of the goals set for the Alternate Credentials Pillar of the WP Strategic Plan is to have students in every major earn an appropriate alternate credential in the first 60 credits of their academic program.

The majority of non-degree credentials fall into one of the following 6 categories:²

Type	Definition
For-Credit Certificate	Credential awarded by an educational institution for completion of a credit-bearing educational program. Usually less than one year in length. May be completed prior to earning the bachelor degree; some are offered to post-baccalaureate students only.
Non-Credit Certificate	Credential awarded by an institution (educational or workplace) for completion of a non-credit educational program. This includes bootcamps, military and employer training programs with clearly articulated learning outcomes.
Industry Certification	Credential awarded by an industry body or governmental agency for demonstration of skills, typically via examination, based on industry or occupational standards.

Occupational or Professional Licensure	Credential awarded by a state or federal governmental agency for demonstration of skills in a specific occupation. Sometimes awarded for completion of an educational program. Often requires work experience in an occupation.
Apprenticeship	Credential awarded after completion of structured educational and workplace program based on industry and occupational standards.
Badges & Other Micro Credentials	Credential awarded for completion of a short program of study or for demonstration of a targeted set of skills. These are newly emerging.

Most of the alternate credentials our students earn will fall in the first category: For Credit Certificates.

A for-credit certificate is a formal credential recognized by the NJ Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and the US Department of Education (USDE). Students can matriculate directly into a certificate program without being matriculated in a degree program, which means these can be offered to an external audience as well as enrolled students. Certificates may be offered at the undergraduate or graduate level.

A for-credit certificate typically consists of two to five 3-credit courses with well-aligned student learning outcomes that provide for a defined knowledge base and set of skills preparing students for one or more specific career paths. Certificates may require more credits based on accrediting, certification and licensing requirements.

Ideally, a for-credit certificate offered at the undergraduate level will consist of courses that can also be counted within a student’s major, minor or satisfy a UCC requirement. Structuring certificates and academic programs in this way allows students to complete certificates and still complete their degree within 120 credits. The credits earned in a graduate certificate should, when possible, be applicable to completion of a full graduate degree program.

Because of the focus on a narrow body of knowledge and skill set, certificates should have limited, if any electives. Every course included in a certificate should address essential learning outcomes necessary for earning the certificate.

For certificates marketed to an external audience (i.e. not currently matriculated students), the offering of courses should allow completion within one year. Based on our experience offering online programs to adult learners, online asynchronous offerings in shorter 7-week sessions are

preferred. However, this may not be preferred for our traditional 1st and 2nd year undergraduate students. So, consider the audience carefully when determining how to deliver the certificate.

The focus of this document is to provide the process and outline for proposing a for-credit certificate. Departments do also have the option of offering non-credit certificates and certifications. However, if our matriculated, degree seeking students need to pay extra for non-credit certificates and certifications, these charges very likely will not be covered by financial aid. One option is to embed these types of credentials into required courses offered within a major. Processes for proposing non-credit certificates and certifications will be provided in a separate document.

1 Cronen, S., McQuiggan, M., Isenberg, E., & Grandy, S. (2018). *Adult training and education: Results from the National Household Education Surveys program of 2016*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

2 Van Noy, M., McKay, H., & Michael, S. (2019). *Non-Degree Credential Quality: A Conceptual framework to Guide Measurement*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center.