Graduate Certificate Program Policy

Overview
The Graduate School recognizes that academic units or organized groups of faculty can offer structured programs of study leading to graduate certificates. The general purpose of a graduate certificate program is to enhance the academic training of individuals through a set of specialized courses on a topic. The set of courses may be interdisciplinary or they may be closely related courses within a discipline.

Graduate Certificate Requirements (General):
A graduate certificate must require a minimum of 12 hours of graduate level course work. The courses must be clearly appropriate to the topic of the certificate program and be from among an approved list of courses pertinent to the certificate topic. If courses below the 500 level are included in a graduate certificate program, the total number of hours of the program will need to be greater than 12, since at least 12 hours of the certificate need to be at the graduate level.

No transfer credit may be counted toward a graduate certificate program.

No more than three hours may come from practicum, internship, research, or individual study courses. Normally, a certificate program is primarily advanced lecture or seminar courses.

A minimum GPA of 3.0 is required for courses counted toward the certificate. The Graduate School’s rules regarding repeating courses apply. The time limit for completing a certificate program is four years. Individual certificate programs may establish more rigorous GPA or time limit requirements and they may establish non-course requirements.

Approval and Review Processes:
Throughout the approval process all applicable IHL and SACSCOC requirements must be met. The approval process will progress as follows:

1. Submission of a memo to the Graduate School, Provost, and IREP/SACS Liaison to determine whether the program would be subject to review by IHL and SACS or covered by a letter
2. Submission of memo to Financial Aid if the students enrolled in the certificate program are expected to have access to any financial aid
3. Approval by faculty of all academic units teaching courses that contribute to the proposed certificate program
4. Approval by the relevant Curriculum Committee(s), departments, and Dean(s)
5. Review by Graduate School
6. Review by Financial Aid if students in the certificate program are expected to have access to any financial aid
7. Approval by the Graduate Council
8. Approval by the Council of Academic Administrators
9. Approval by the Chancellor
10. Submission to IHL (Letter of Notification or Review)
11. Submission to SACSCOC, if applicable.

When developing and/or reviewing new graduate certificate programs, faculty, curriculum committees, deans, and the Graduate Council should all consider whether there are sufficient resources to support the program and a timely offering of courses, whether there is a potential student pool for the program, and whether there is an adequate administrative structure for the program.

**Administration:**
Graduate certificate programs are required to submit a biennial assessment plan.

The program coordinator and/or responsible academic unit assumes responsibility for ensuring compliance with all federal policies, including any mandated reporting and disclosure regulations. Certificate programs identified as gainful employment (GE) certificates may have more reporting and disclosure requirements than graduate certificate programs that are not identified as gainful employment (GE) certificates.

Certificate programs that allow access to federal financial aid will need to follow the notification requirements for gainful employment (GE) certificates. No federal financial aid will be allowed unless the program has been specifically added to the institution’s Federal Title IV “Program Participation Agreement” with the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). All non-degree programs must be individually listed, per regulation.

Certificate programs cannot be offered in a field in which such offerings would/could imply a career opportunity which cannot be attained with the certificate. For example, if career opportunities in the discipline require a master’s degree, the certificate cannot be offered unless admission to the certificate program already requires the qualifying master’s degree.

The Graduate School is responsible for processing applications and the general maintenance of student academic files. However, student records related to certificate programs are maintained by the coordinator (or coordinating committee) of the program. The coordinator may be a department chair, dean, or faculty member appointed by a more senior administrator to serve as coordinator. The coordinator or designated faculty committee will make decisions about admission into the certificate program, provide oversight regarding the courses comprising the program, receive and audit applications for certificate completion, correspond with the Graduate School about certificate completions, and execute the necessary administrative duties and reporting requirements for the certificate program. Evidence of completion of a certificate program will also be verified by the Graduate School.

Completion of a graduate certificate program will be indicated on a student’s transcript and any documentation of this credential must originate from the Office of the Registrar.
Admissions Requirements:
The applicant must:

(1) hold an earned baccalaureate or graduate degree from an accredited institution and
(2) intend to participate in courses leading to a graduate certificate.

An applicant who is not currently pursuing a graduate degree at UM should apply to the certificate program via the on-line graduate application. Such an applicant should meet the requirements for admission as a Non-Degree II student. The coordinator of the certificate program will make an admission recommendation to the Graduate School.

An applicant who is pursuing a graduate degree at UM must apply for admission directly to the coordinator of the certificate program. In this case, the application for a graduate certificate must be submitted and approved prior to beginning the courses for the certificate. This policy in no way restricts students who were pursuing a graduate minor, but left the institution/degree program (prior to completing the graduate degree), from completing a credential in the form of a graduate certificate when one is available within the same subject area. The coordinator or coordinating committee of the certificate program will establish and interpret admissions criteria. Admission to a certificate program must be with the knowledge and approval of the advisor and academic department in which the student is admitted in degree seeking status.

Students should be made aware that courses being taken for the certificate program will not be counted in their enrollment level (e.g., full-time, half-time) for federal aid purposes unless (1) the certificate program has been authorized for federal aid or (2) the certificate courses are specifically required for the degree program. Therefore, it may be necessary to enroll in greater than 9 hours to be considered full-time. Similarly, tuition for courses applicable to the certificate will not be eligible for federal financial assistance if there is no gainful employment (GE) designation in place. So, students should plan to pay for these courses through alternate means if necessary. (Programs may offer graduate minors to current students in the same field as the graduate certificate, and courses for graduate minors are eligible for federal financial aid).

Financial Aid:
The following guidelines govern the financial aid options available to students pursuing graduate certificates:

- Financial aid will process private loans for students enrolled in graduate certificate programs that do and do not fall under the gainful employment (GE) classification.
- Institutional aid, with the approval of the Provost’s Office, may be offered to support individuals pursuing graduate certificates. Such aid will almost always reflect actual tuition dollars paid by the unit/units offering the graduate certificate. Enrollment in a graduate certificate does not qualify an individual to hold a graduate assistantship and, thus, the tuition scholarships associated with assistantships do not apply. Similarly, graduate certificate students are not eligible for Graduate School recruitment scholarships.
- Graduate certificate programs will not be eligible for federal financial aid unless arrangements are made through the Office of Financial Aid. An individual program will
need to meet Federal Title IV aid requirements related to gainful employment (GE) programs. If so, Federal Direct Loans and Grad PLUS Loans would be available to students. Requests for aid eligibility should be referred to the Financial Aid Director, who is responsible for submitting an application for consideration to the federal processor. Although DOE approval is not specifically required, notification must be on record prior to any aid being offered, so advance notice of intent to apply should be given to the Office of Financial Aid. Once this action is completed, the program coordinator assumes responsibility for ensuring compliance with all federal policies, including any mandated reporting and disclosure regulations.

**Rationale for Policy Change**
Allowing academic programs and collaborative units to offer graduate certificates enables the University of Mississippi to expand the number of individuals within the state, region, and world served by the expertise of its faculty and provides additional educational opportunities to adult learners. Such credentials provide a mechanism for adult learners with a bachelor’s degree to continue their education within a structured learning environment, and provide flexibility for learners who do not require a graduate degree to benefit from additional educational opportunities at the graduate level. The proposed changes would enable the University of Mississippi to more closely align our graduate educational offerings with those of peers. Several SEC peers offer graduate certificates in diverse disciplines (e.g., Mississippi State University, Auburn University, University of Georgia, Texas A&M University).