

Developing Certificate Programs to Increase Departmental Student Enrollment

Faced with the rising costs of higher education, the public's skepticism regarding the value of a four-year college degree, and an ever-increasing number of options from which students may choose, many institutions of higher education must think of alternative methods for attracting students to their campus. Certificates and stackable certificates are an excellent means for doing this.

Certificate programs are becoming one of the growing trends in universities and colleges. These programs offer a means for individuals to get up to speed in newly-evolving industries and are particularly attractive for individuals re-entering the workforce and need to get current with what is happening in a given field. The World Economic Forum estimates that by 2025, 50% of employees will need re-skilling and micro-credentials, certificates and stackable certificates are an affordable learning option.

In the U.S., more than one million certificates are awarded each, surpassing the number of masters' degrees conferred. There are a number of reasons that certificate programs are attractive particularly to adult learners. Certificates generally take a year or less to complete, they cost considerably less than a master's degree or higher, they offer training in practical hands-on skills and not just theoretical knowledge and generally there are multiple start dates. In addition, there is a greater degree of flexibility in certificate programs than in degree-granting programs. Courses are often offered online or in a hybrid environment or even at night or on weekends.

The College of Nursing and Health Sciences at the University of Louisiana offers two graduate certificate programs – the Graduate Certificate in Cardiovascular Nursing and the Graduate Certificate in Population Health. These programs are geared toward health care professionals who want to advance their practice and improve health outcomes for all people.

UL Lafayette offers one of only three Graduate Certificate Programs in Cardiovascular Nursing in the country. Launched in the spring of 2022, four cohorts have graduated to date. The program is designed for nurse practitioners who want advanced training in cardiovascular health and disease management. The six-month program is 12 credit hours of online learning and in-person clinical experiences.

The Department of Health Sciences is home to the state's first Graduate Certificate in Population Health. The graduate certificate program is open to professionals with a bachelor's degree who recognize disparities in the health system and want to make health care and treatment more equitable. This certificate is designed for healthcare professionals in direct patient care, as well as those who work in healthcare administration, informatics, health information management, and risk managers. The six-month program includes 12 graduate credit hours of online learning.

This presentation will address more fully the decisions to offer certificate programs, the advantages and disadvantages for doing so, and will take participants through the step-by-step process of implementing these types of programs.