FAQ for Certificate Programs

Certificate Planning Tips—PLEASE READ BEFORE you start planning
As you are planning your certificate, please budget sufficient time to carry out all required steps. Much will depend on the number of SCHs you include in the certificate and whether it is part of/attached to an existing program and is financial aid eligible. Below are some questions for you to consider as part of your planning process:

1. How many credit hours and graduate or undergraduate?
The number of SCHs and level will affect 1) whether it requires preliminary and/or external approvals at the THECB and SACSCOC, 2) whether students who enroll are eligible for financial aid, 3) whether you will be required to track graduates of the certificate program for gainful employment, and 4) whether it has to be attached to an existing program.

2. Who is the target audience?
If you are planning to attract new applicants who are not already students at UHD, you will need to consider admissions requirements and what kind of preparation students would need to succeed in your courses. (E.g., if you have an undergrad certificate in translation studies with upper-division courses, would applicants need to have studied a foreign language? Do they have to already have a baccalaureate degree? Will you have an admissions committee to review the applications? Is it a rolling admissions process?) NOTE: any new admissions procedures will depend on discussion with the admissions office and must be consistent with any general university requirements.

3. Is there market demand?
All certificates will require justification based on market demand. This should take into account comparison with offerings at local institutions—larger certificates will have to be sent out for comment within a 50-mile radius and secure THECB approval.

4. Will it require new courses?
If new courses are needed, consider whether these courses might also serve an existing program; if not, whether you will have enough enrollments from the certificate to sustain the courses. If new faculty will be needed, you’ll likely need to demonstrate sufficient income in the pro forma to justify the request.

5. Will it be part of an existing program (or closely aligned)?
Larger certificates (grad 16+ hours and undergrad 21+ hours) must be attached to/serve an existing program at the university, according to THECB guidelines. Smaller certificates, if not aligned with an existing program, will not be DOE eligible unless students are already enrolled in an existing degree program. Within UHD, we will need to carefully review programs that are not attached to existing programs or use existing courses, particularly with respect to generating sufficient enrollments to support the required course offerings.

6. How long to completion?
The advantage of many certificates is a compressed/efficient timeline for completion—often in a year or less. Thus, as you think about your courses, consider whether you can staff/schedule the needed courses in a rotation and delivery method that is timely and attractive to applicants, especially if they are not already students at UHD.
7. **Are you willing to track graduates?**
   If your certificate is financial-aid eligible and can be done as a stand-alone certificate (e.g., students can enroll in the certificate only), then your department will need to track graduates in order to comply with DOE “gainful employment” requirements—this also entails specific website notices, etc. Please note: this tracking will NOT be done at the institutional level—IR and financial aid will provide some guidelines and direction, but each program will be requested to actually gather the data and report annually.

8. **Are you prepared to do additional assessment?**
   All certificates that can be earned and listed separately on a transcript will require their own assessment plans.

9. **Can you devote the time/effort to marketing the certificate?**
   As with all programs, advertising and visibility is critical for success—the university may or may not be able to provide funding/advertising support; it will depend on resource availability and other institutional priorities. Costs and effort may need to be addressed at the department level.

10. **Would your program be better suited to continuing education?**
    Depending on your target audience, you should consider whether for-credit existing UHD courses are the best fit. For example, if you are aiming to provide a skills set that is not captured easily in academic coursework or a timeline (e.g., weekends or within a few weeks) that doesn’t map to existing academic calendars, you might consider a continuing education program. Please note that with continuing education, the courses do not count toward degrees and are not considered credit-bearing; they also cannot be taught as part of a faculty member’s load. However, there are potential financial benefits for faculty and programs.

11. **How will this advance a program or enrollment?**
    Any certificate should be designed to enhance current offerings, meet student needs, and support university enrollment and retention targets. Please consider the market studies component very carefully and weigh also the time, effort, and human/financial resources required to establish and maintain the certificate.

12. **Have you considered the financial costs/benefits?**
    Students who apply for and take only courses toward a graduate certificate are technically not “degree-seeking” as per DOE funding guidelines. Thus, the students in this type of certificate can only be classified as graduate students for purposes of state funding if the THECB approves the certificate. Further, certificates of certain sizes and types may not become DOE eligible and thus students may not be able to get financial aid—see categories below.

    **NOTE:** Some graduate certificates may be eligible to charge “optional fees” up to $168 per SCH—these are in addition to graduate general tuition and graduate DDT. To be eligible, the courses cannot be “part of” an existing graduate degree plan—please contact Provost’s Office to determine eligibility for your specific plan and the amount that the market can support.
13. Do you have a good sense of the timeline for the paperwork?

Please review timelines below for certificate approvals—the process can take up to 1.5 years if approvals at the state and federal level are required.