

Guidelines for Graduate Badges

Modified from the undergraduate guidelines (Academic Affairs Committee)

DEFINITION: Alternative pathways¹ are 1) less than a degree, such as credit bearing certificates and badges; 2) tools to evaluate a student's ability to demonstrate competency in discrete areas, and 3) combined together, can fulfill the requirements of certificate programs that meet workforce demands and match the mission and culture of Wichita State University.² As a standalone option, they are not degrees.

- *Badges: Typically .5 credit hours and demonstrate competency in discrete areas. Amounts more than .5 will need to be justified in the proposal and increase in increments of .25 (e.g. .75, 1.25). The minimum requirement for instruction for a .5 credit hour badge, would be 7.5 hours of direct instruction and 15 hours of out-of-classroom work per the Federal definition and assignment of credit hours.*

POTENTIAL STUDENTS include:

- Students seeking skills or knowledge in a focused area for which we have no degree.
- Students seeking more flexibility in obtaining just-in-time credentialing, such as licensed professionals, who would use badges as proof of updated skills and knowledge.

COURSE WORK: Badges can be awarded for approved academic work completed in workshops, short courses, or for parts of a regular course, such as modules or units, in which there may be a need or it may be useful to award credit for less than a full credit hour. Upon successful completion, badge credits would be awarded as “badged” or BG credit.³

MANAGEMENT: An alternative pathway may be housed in a single department or institute, or may be interdepartmental, or even inter-college. In all cases, the alternative pathway is proposed and managed by faculty having an interest in awarding badges or providing stackable pathways through the established curriculum. Normally one faculty member serves as the alternative pathways coordinator for the department awarding credit this way. The Office of Workforce, Professional, and Community Education (WPCE) will assist departments in determining the market for such programs. Students will be directed to the Office of WPCE for assistance in enrolling in a particular program.

¹ Alternative pathways are targeted at specific audiences, often persons seeking specialized information for a job. Upon completion of the alternative pathway, the badge serves as a bolster to employability as a job applicant or improves chances of advancement within a current job.

² Certification, not a certificate, is a process that assures that students meet certain standards within their program of study. These standards are usually specified by an external board. For example, teacher certification standards are set by the Kansas State Board of Education and are implemented, in part, through the content of various courses. Students who take the appropriate courses and meet other required standards become certified to teach in the State of Kansas.

³ The Graduate School has limits as to 1) how many non-graded courses may be used on a plan of study 2) how many courses may be transferred to a degree program from a non-degree status and 3) how long courses are valid before expiring or needing course validation for the plan of study (see Graduate Catalog). These norms will be important for programs who want to use badges as a marketing tool to recruit for degree programs. WPCE will incorporate these concerns in a FAQ section on their website.

ELIGIBILITY: Graduate students seeking to enroll in alternative pathways must be admitted to Wichita State University's Graduate School, meeting the requirements of Non-degree, Category A.⁴

DEGREE OVERLAP: If approved as such, students may use alternative pathway course work toward an eventual degree or certificate.

APPROVAL PROCESS: Proposals for new graduate alternative pathways should be processed by way of the curriculum routing form starting in the department and if appropriate routed to the Academic Affairs Committee before final approval by the Provost and Senior Vice President. The proposal shall contain:

- The title of the proposed alternative pathway
- Objectives
- Demonstration of need
- A detailed description and rationale for the pathways through an already established curriculum
- A plan for offering a sequence of courses that allows completion of the requirements
- Exceptional circumstances that favor the development of the proposed alternative pathway
- Organization of the program, including identification of...
 1. Faculty associated with the alternative pathway, normally those who expect to teach courses in the alternative pathway curriculum. Badges have been identified as subject matter that will be delivered voluntarily outside of the typical course-load expectations. Deviations from this should be with faculty consent.
 2. A coordinator responsible for management of the alternative pathway, for advising students, etc.⁵
- Statements of support from chairs and deans whose programs and faculty are involved in the proposed alternative pathway. Colleges and departments may have procedures for faculty approval that must be respected as well. Statements from representatives of any program, department, or college on which the proposed alternative pathway will have an impact.
- An assessment plan for the alternative pathway must be included. The plan should include how the quality of the pathway will be monitored. The plan should also include narrative on how continuation and duration of the pathway will be determined.
- Prior to submitting a proposal for an alternative pathway, it is the responsibility of the originating unit to consult with the Offices of Academic Affairs and Financial Aid to determine whether the proposal triggers Gainful Employment Rules as determined by the U.S. Department of Education (i.e., whether the pathway would be eligible for Federal Financial Aid consideration). If the program is a Gainful Employment program, Federal regulations require a university to disclose, inter alia, the following

⁴ For tracking and/or data purposes, a new code will be developed for this category (i.e. guests/badges).

⁵ All faculty and coordinators should have the appropriate graduate faculty status.

information about the program on the university's website and in materials promoting the alternative pathway:

- Tuition and fees;
 - Costs of books, supplies, room and board;
 - On-time completion rate for students completing the requirements;
 - Job placement rates; and
 - The median loan debt incurred by students who completed the program.
- Curriculum routing sheet with the appropriate departmental, college, graduate school, and university signatures.

CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL:

Principles for assessing the academic quality of proposals:

- A demonstrated need must exist.
- Course work should offer clear educational objectives at the graduate level.
- Deans, chairs, and other administrators will address resource issues in their statement of support.

RECOGNITION: Students completing a graduate alternative pathway will receive an appropriately worded designation, such as an electronic badge signifying that it was issued by WSU and what was required to complete the badge. Notation will be made on the student's transcript when a badge or certificate has been awarded.

PROMOTION: Approved graduate alternative pathways will be listed in the *Graduate Catalog* (print and web versions), and Schedule of Courses. Departments may choose to promote their options for alternative pathways through other venues. The WPCE website will also include information relevant to graduate badges and their possible use with degrees. No promotional materials should be created that do not clearly identify potential limits on graduate coursework where applicable.

DURATION AND REVIEW: Graduate alternative pathways will exist as long as the department, college, or graduate school assessment data support a need for the option.

QUALITY:

- The courses offered for graduate credit must be taught by faculty with expertise in the area of the offering and graduate faculty status.
- Graduate alternative pathways are initially approved through a process defined and monitored by the Graduate School and are periodically reviewed during the home program's review process.

Endorsed by the Graduate Council on 11/19/2015.

Guidelines reviewed and approved by the Graduate School Dean on 11/25/2015.