Policy on Definition and Criteria for Graduate Level Certificates at UIS

WHEREAS, in 2002, the University of Illinois Springfield’s Graduate Council developed policy recommendations for the recognition and offering of graduate certificates, but no formal written policy was established; and

WHEREAS, changes in the curricular structure have occurred since the 2002 graduate certificate policy recommendations were made, such that some graduate degree curricula are now based on 3-credit-hour courses and some remain based on 4-credit-hour courses; and

WHEREAS, the Graduate Council has already established written graduate certificate program review guidelines and a graduate certificate program proposal form; and

WHEREAS, written policy guidance is needed to ensure that graduate certificate programs continue to represent meaningful and coherent short programs of graduate-level study; and

THEREFORE, the Graduate Council proposes the following Policy on Definition and Criteria for Graduate Level Certificates at UIS:

- Graduate certificate programs are designed for persons who have completed a baccalaureate degree.
- Graduate certificate programs may be proposed by any academic department.
- Graduate certificate programs must represent an organized program of graduate study and culminate in a certificate recognizing graduate-level specialization within the discipline.
- It is expected that graduate certificates in four-credit-hour based curricula will have a minimum of 12 semester credit hours of courses above the baccalaureate level and graduate certificates in three-credit-hour based curricula will have a minimum of 9 semester credit hours of courses above the baccalaureate level. Justification will be needed when graduate certificate proposals comprising fewer than the expected minimum hours of graduate-level courses are submitted for approval.
• Graduate certificate programs may not exceed one-half the minimum number of credit hours required for a relevant academic Master’s degree as defined by the academic program proposing the certificate.
• The curriculum leading to the award of a graduate certificate must represent an academically sound and professionally meaningful program, based on a coherent and relevant sequence of graduate courses.
• All graduate certificate programs must be approved by the requisite governance bodies.
• Graduate certificate programs comprising 18 or more semester credit hours of graduate courses will be formally assigned a Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code.
• Graduate certificates comprising less than 18 semester credit hours of graduate courses will be considered campus-level certificates.
• Eligible graduate credit hours completed for approved graduate certificate programs may, at the discretion of an academic department, be applied toward the credit hours required for a Master’s degree. Administration of graduate certificate programs will be conducted by the appropriate academic department in collaboration and coordination with the Offices of Admissions and Records & Registration.
• Graduate certificate programs will be reviewed in accordance with established graduate certificate review guidelines and in accordance with the regular academic program review schedule.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Illinois at Springfield Campus Senate approve the Policy on Definition and Criteria for Graduate Level Certificates at UIS.
Rationale:

Since April 8, 2002, Graduate Certificate Proposals have been drafted and reviewed under the guidance outlined in a memo, “Policy Recommendations for Graduate Certificates,” authored by Rachelle Anderson, Malcolm Levin and Annette Van Dyke. No formal Graduate Certificate policy was generated out of this recommendation. Therefore, Graduate Council (GC) is proposing the attached policy resolution to correct this oversight.

GC believes that the previous recommendations for graduate certificate proposal and review are sound, and they are included in the proposed policy. The only component that needed thorough discussion in Council was the minimum credit hours required for campus-level certificates. GC concluded that the policy should define a minimum credit hour requirement, but allow for exceptions when consistent with curricular integrity of the academic intent of the certificate. The exceptions anticipated will be in academic programs with curricula built on 3-credit-hour courses.

GC is very cognizant of the challenges individual departments face in maintaining curricula when changing from 4-credit-hour courses to 3-credit-hour courses, as has been seen most recently in the departments of the College of Business and Management. When originally approved through governance, graduate certificates met the 12-credit-hour minimum with three, 4-credit-hour courses. Now those same certificates may contain three, 3-credit hour courses for a total of nine credit hours.

GC discussed at length whether the academic integrity was significantly altered by the change in credit hours. GC believes that rather than automatically granting exception to the 12-credit hour minimum, the academic department should demonstrate that the modified graduate certificate program meets the following:

- coherence of curriculum necessary to teach certificate material at the graduate level,
- competencies for the curriculum to be taught through the coursework, and
- logical sequencing/clustering of courses by which students can complete the certificate curriculum in a timely manner.

All graduate certificates affected by credit hour changes will be revisited at time of program review.