



*Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges
1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097*

NON-DEGREE CREDENTIALS

Guidelines

For accreditation purposes, “non-degree credentials” include a variety of programs offering narrowly focused areas of study where learners demonstrate mastery of knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or competencies. A non-degree credential typically covers more than a traditional three-four credit hour course but less content than a full degree. Non-Degree Credentials vary in content, instructional level (associates, baccalaureate, masters, etc.), length, method of instructional delivery, credit awarded, and professional or occupational focus. They may be offered “for-credit” or “not-for-credit. The method of instructional delivery may be via distance education, in person, or through a combination. In all cases, the academic rigor of non-degree credentials matches the quality of other institutional credentials, regardless of whether academic credit is awarded for instruction provided by the institution, awarded for external credit (i.e., by transfer of credit from another institution), or awarded for credit through a collaborative academic arrangement.

Categories

There are two basic categories of non-degree credentials: those that carry academic credit and those that do not carry academic credit. These guidelines are relevant to non-degree credentials for which academic credit is given. Institutions offering credit-bearing non-degree credentials will need to determine the hour equivalency of the credit, how the credits will be recorded on the students’ academic transcript, if the credential can be applied toward another credential, and if the non-degree credential is transferable to other institutions.

Institutions ensure that their credit-bearing non-degree credentials comply with the *Principles of Accreditation*. This applies to all such credit-bearing educational programs and their services, wherever located or however delivered. Institutions should also be prepared to demonstrate clear institutional control over non-degree credentials for which academic credit is awarded.

Naming the Credential

SACSCOC institutions market their non-degree credentials under a variety of names, including:

- Micro-Credentials,
- Alternative Credentials,
- Workforce/ Professional Credentials,

- Certificates or Badges, and
- so forth.

SACSCOC recognizes different audiences may be drawn to specific non-degree credential names, so institutions may select the marketing name of the credential but must maintain written and published guidelines or policies to clarify the purpose and characteristics of the non-degree credential.

Clarity Through Institutional Policies or Guidelines

The institution should maintain written and published guidelines and/or policies that provide detailed explanations of the types of non-degree credentials it awards, or the types of non-degree credits the institution accepts. Special care is needed for institutions to transparently communicate whether or not each offered NDC carries academic credit, if it may be added to the transcript, if it may be stacked or counted as credit for other credentials, and whether the credential may be transferred.

Similarly, institutions accepting non-degree credentials from external institutions or other entities should maintain a policy and/or guidelines on its acceptance of non-degree credentials for credit. In granting credit for prior-learning or accepting transfer credit from a non-degree credential, the institution accepts the responsibility to conduct due diligence to ensure students and other stakeholders that the accepted credits carry the same level of compliance with standards as other credits awarded by the institution. As in all curriculum matters, guidelines for institutions to grant credit for prior learning would include procedures for appropriate faculty review, assessment of learning outcomes, and periodic curriculum review.

Applying the Principles of Accreditation to Non-Degree Credentials

The *Principles of Accreditation* apply to all educational programs of the institution for which academic credit is awarded. Institutions should refer to the *Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation* to consider information provided in Standard 10.8 (Evaluating and awarding external credit) implementing a non-degree credential. Similarly, reviewers should consider these statements when evaluating non-degree credentials.

Substantive Change

An institution offering non-degree credentials for credit ensures appropriate substantive change notification and/or prior approval (if needed) related to these educational programs. Refer to the SACSCOC “[Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#)” for additional guidance. Non-degree credentials that do not carry/ nor receive academic credit are not subject to SACSCOC substantive change requirements.

Document History
Approved, Ex. Council 3/12/24