

Complete Policy Title

Certificates & Diplomas Policy

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Responsible Executive

Vice-Provost, Faculty

Policy Specific Enquiries

[Vice-Provost, Faculty](#)

General Policy Enquiries

[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

1. The purpose of this Policy is to provide minimum academic criteria which must be met if programs are to be approved as McMaster University certificates and diplomas. The academic criteria proposed are intended to maintain the University's high academic standards and enable certificates and diplomas to continue their traditional functions of providing studies complementary to degree programs, professional preparation or upgrading, and/or bridging into degree programs.
2. The evaluation, approval and monitoring of certificate and diploma programs is the responsibility of the University's governing councils, Graduate Council and Undergraduate Council (as applicable). The relevant Council shall report to the Senate the establishment, closure, and/or substantial revisions of academic certificate and diploma programs.
3. Academic certificate and diploma programs are operated in accordance with normal academic regulations as outlined in the *Undergraduate Calendar* or *Graduate Calendar* (as applicable).

DEFINITIONS

4. **Credential** is a body of academic work or collection of course work that stands on its own and for which a parchment is issued. McMaster credentials include certificates, diplomas, and degrees.
5. **Academic Credit Course** is a course of an academic calibre consistent with those offered in undergraduate or graduate degree programs. The most common kind of academic credit course is that included in the curricula of undergraduate or graduate degree programs. These provide a benchmark against which other academic credit courses can be evaluated.

SECTION II: PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC CERTIFICATE AND DIPLOMA PROGRAMS

6. Academic certificate and diploma programs are operated in accordance with normal academic regulations as outlined in the *Undergraduate Calendar* or *Graduate Calendar* (as applicable).
7. Students registered in academic certificate and diploma programs are issued a student number, classes are scheduled within sessional dates, and part-time student fees are charged. Student records, including grades, are maintained by the Office of the Registrar.
8. Academic certificates and diplomas will be issued by the academic unit offering the program to the student upon completion of all academic requirements of a program.

ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE COURSES

9. Certificate and diploma programs include courses which are determined to be of an academic calibre consistent with courses offered in undergraduate or graduate degree programs (as appropriate).
10. While credit for courses in degree programs is normally given in blocks of three or six units, credit can be at the one, two, three or any other unit level.
11. To receive approval as an academic credit course, a course which is not part of a degree program must:
 - a) be at a level of intellectual rigour comparable to that found in undergraduate or graduate degree program courses in the same or similar field(s). Academic credit courses are vetted by the Faculty offering the course or that is most relevant to the content of the course;
 - b) evaluate student performance by the methods normally used in degree courses such as tests, essays, reports and other assignments; and
 - c) include a systematic student evaluation of the course using such methods as multiple-choice questionnaires, narrative responses and/or interviews.

Transfer between Credentials

12. Academic credits can be applied to another credential. Examples include, but are not limited to, transfer of credit from a certificate to a degree or from a degree to a diploma. Normally, credits can be applied to a maximum of two credentials.
13. Up to 100% of the academic credit courses completed toward undergraduate diploma and certificate programs may be used for credit toward another credential at the discretion of and in accordance with the normal academic rules specified by the academic unit offering the subsequent credential.
14. In some specific cases, courses taken for credit as part of a graduate diploma program may be considered for credit toward a subsequent Master's degree program.

Academic Approval Criteria

15. When approving a certificate or diploma program, Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council (as appropriate) must ensure that the program proposal appropriately fulfills all of the following criteria:
 - a) well-defined program objective(s);
 - b) well-defined program learning outcomes;
 - c) curriculum to meet the program learning outcomes; and
 - d) admission requirements (as applicable).

SECTION III: UNDERGRADUATE DIPLOMAS

16. An Undergraduate Diploma is a program of study involving a significant body of academic work coherently organized around clear learning objectives. Undergraduate Diplomas (including post-baccalaureate diplomas) may be focused primarily upon academic or professional development objectives, but all must include academic content equivalent to a **minimum of 24 units** of undergraduate-level course work.
17. Undergraduate Diplomas serve such functions as: study complementary to degree programs, professional preparation or upgrading, and bridging into undergraduate degree programs. The word Diploma must be included in the program name.

Academic Program Requirements

18. All Undergraduate Diplomas must include academic credit courses equivalent to **at least 24 units** of undergraduate study at McMaster. In addition to their academic content, Undergraduate Diploma programs may include courses and other forms of learning which are not suitable for academic credit.
19. The maximum overlap with degree courses is 70% of the requirement for the diploma. Up to 100% of the academic credit courses completed toward undergraduate diploma and certificate programs may be used for credit toward another credential at the discretion of and in accordance with the normal academic rules specified by the academic unit offering the subsequent credential.

Admission Requirements

20. There are two sets of admission requirements:

General Requirements

- a) students who wish to enter an Undergraduate Diploma program must have at least one of:
 - (i) an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or equivalent;
 - (ii) be a mature student as defined in the *Undergraduate Calendar*; or
 - (iii) be deemed an exceptional case by the admissions committee for the Undergraduate Diploma.
- b) these requirements ensure that students have the basic capabilities necessary to deal with the academic credit courses in Undergraduate Diploma programs and take into account the bridging function that some diplomas perform; and

Additional Requirements

- c) any particular diploma program may have other admission requirements which are appropriate to its learning objectives. These requirements may include prerequisite courses or degrees specific to the particular diploma.

SECTION IV: GRADUATE DIPLOMAS

21. A Graduate Diploma is based on Graduate Degree Level Expectations and will prepare students for employment requiring sound judgment, personal responsibility and individual initiative, in complex and unpredictable professional environments.
22. Graduate Diplomas must include academic content **equivalent to a minimum of four graduate courses** at McMaster. Graduate Diplomas are defined in this Policy. However, the review and approval process falls under the [Policy on Academic Program Development and Review](#).
23. There are three types of Graduate Diplomas:
 - a) Master's Level Diploma (Type 1) programs require students to develop a conceptual understanding of fundamental aspects of the discipline. Some programs require students to demonstrate Master's-level analytical, interpretative, methodological and expository skills through course-specific applications, while some may also require students to demonstrate these skills in applied activities;
 - b) Master's and Doctoral Level Diploma (Type 2) programs are offered in conjunction with a Master's or doctoral degree and represent an additional, usually interdisciplinary, qualification. Programs require students to develop a conceptual understanding of fundamental aspects of the discipline(s) and appropriate levels of analytical, interpretative, methodological and expository skills through course-specific applications, while some may require students to demonstrate these skills in applied activities; and
 - c) Master's and Doctoral Level Diploma (Type 3) programs are stand-alone, direct-entry Graduate Diploma programs require students to develop a conceptual understanding of fundamental aspects of the discipline. Programs require students to demonstrate the appropriate level of analytical, interpretative, methodological and expository skills through course-specific applications, while some may require students to demonstrate these skills in applied activities.

Academic Course Requirements

24. All McMaster Graduate Diplomas must include academic credit courses equivalent to at least four courses at the graduate level at McMaster.

Admission Requirements

25. There are two sets of admission requirements:

General Requirements

- a) students who wish to enter a Graduate Diploma program must meet the admission requirements of a Master's level program. These requirements ensure that students have the basic capabilities necessary to deal with the academic credit courses in Graduate Diploma programs; and

Additional Requirements

- b) any particular Graduate Diploma program may have other admission requirements which are appropriate to its learning objectives. These requirements may include prerequisite courses or degrees specific to the particular diploma.

SECTION V: UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATES

26. An Undergraduate Certificate is a program of study coherently organized around clear learning objectives and having academic content equivalent to **15 or 9 units** of undergraduate study at McMaster.
27. There are three types of Undergraduate Academic Certificates:
 - a) Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificate (15 units);
 - b) Stand-Alone Certificate of Professional Learning (9 units); and
 - c) Concurrent Undergraduate Certificate (15 units).

STAND-ALONE UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE

28. Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificate (including Post-Baccalaureate Certificates) may be focused primarily upon academic or professional development objectives, but all must meet the minimum criterion of academic content (**15 units**). Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificates serve such functions as bridging into undergraduate degree programs, professional preparation or upgrading, and study complementary to degree studies.

Academic Course Requirements

29. All Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificates must include academic credit courses equivalent to at least **15 units** (half a year) of undergraduate study at McMaster. In addition to their academic content, Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificate programs may include courses and other forms of learning which are not suitable for academic credit.
30. Up to 100% of the academic credit courses completed toward undergraduate diploma and certificate programs may be used for credit toward another credential at the discretion of and in accordance with the normal academic rules specified by the academic unit offering the subsequent credential.

Admission Requirements

31. There are two sets of admission requirements:

General Requirements

- a) students who wish to enter a Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificate program must have at least one of:
 - (i) an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or equivalent;
 - (ii) be a mature student as defined in the *Undergraduate Calendar* of McMaster University; or
 - (iii) be deemed an exceptional case by the admissions committee for the certificate.
- b) these requirements ensure that students have the basic capabilities necessary to deal with the academic credit courses in Undergraduate Certificate programs and take into account the bridging function that some certificates perform; and

Additional Requirements

- c) any particular Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificate program may have other admission requirements which are appropriate to its learning objectives. These requirements may include prerequisite courses or degrees specific to the particular certificate.

STAND-ALONE CERTIFICATE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- 32. Stand-Alone Certificate of Professional Learning enables learners to complete an academic program of study (9 units) with a professional focus. It will include academic development objectives targeting the learner's growth in a professional area and will meet the minimum criterion of academic content. Stand-Alone Certificates of Professional Learning serve the function of bridging into undergraduate degree programs and professional enhancement.

Academic Course Requirements

- 33. All Stand-Alone Certificates of Professional Learning must include academic credit courses equivalent to 9 units of undergraduate study at McMaster. Up to 100% of the academic credit courses completed toward undergraduate diploma and certificate programs may be used for credit toward another credential at the discretion of and in accordance with the normal academic rules specified by academic unit offering the subsequent credential.

Admission Requirements

- 34. There are two sets of admission requirements:

General Requirements

- a) students who wish to enter a Stand-Alone Certificate of Professional Learning program must have at least one of:
 - (i) an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or equivalent;
 - (ii) be a mature student as defined in the *Undergraduate Calendar* of McMaster University; or
 - (iii) be deemed an exceptional case by the admissions committee for the certificate.
- b) these requirements ensure that students have the basic capabilities necessary to deal with the academic credit courses in Undergraduate Certificate programs and take into account the bridging function that some certificates perform; and

Additional Requirements

- c) any particular Undergraduate Stand-Alone Certificate of Professional Learning program may have other admission requirements which are appropriate to its learning objectives. These requirements may include prerequisite courses or degrees specific to the particular certificate.

CONCURRENT UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE

35. A Concurrent Undergraduate Certificate shall be focused primarily upon academic development objectives and must meet the minimum criterion of academic content (**15 units**). This type of Certificate sets out a plan of study complementary to degree studies and will provide added value to degree studies.

Academic Course Requirements

36. All Concurrent Undergraduate Certificates must include academic credit courses equivalent to at least 15 units (half a year) of undergraduate study at McMaster.
37. In addition to their academic content, concurrent certificate programs may include courses and other forms of learning which are not suitable for academic credit. Up to 100% of the requirement for the concurrent certificate may overlap with degree courses.

Admission Requirements

38. Students who wish to enter a Concurrent Undergraduate Certificate program must be enrolled in an undergraduate degree program at McMaster.
39. Any particular Concurrent Undergraduate Certificate program may have other admission requirements, such as prerequisite courses, which are appropriate to its learning objectives.

SECTION VI: GRADUATE CERTIFICATES

40. A Graduate Certificate is a program of study coherently organized around clear learning objectives and having academic content equivalent to a minimum of three graduate courses at McMaster.

Academic Course Requirements

41. All Graduate Certificates must include academic credit courses equivalent to at least three courses at the graduate level at McMaster. Up to 100% of the certificate course requirements may overlap with graduate degree courses. (Courses may or may not be unique to the certificate.)

Admission Requirements

42. There are two sets of admission requirements:

General Requirements

- a) students who wish to enter a Graduate Certificate program must meet the admission requirements of a Master's level program. These requirements ensure that students have the basic capabilities necessary to deal with the academic credit courses in Graduate Certificate programs; and

Additional Requirements

- b) any particular Graduate Certificate program may have other admission requirements which are appropriate to its learning objectives. These requirements may include prerequisite courses or degrees specific to the particular certificate.

SECTION VII: OTHER CERTIFICATES

43. There are two types of non-academic programs:
 - a) Certificates of Completion: and
 - b) Certificates of Attendance.
44. These non-academic programs are distinct and differentiated from Certificates and Diplomas. The term "Certificate" shall only be used by McMaster courses and programs within the guidelines of this Policy.

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

45. A Certificate of Completion acknowledges that an individual has completed a course or program at McMaster that does not have the status of an academic program.
46. A Certificate of Completion can be issued when a non-academic course or program includes a minimum of **30 contact hours** and **evaluation** of the learner's learning. Certificates of Completion may include academic content if the course or courses have been approved for credit toward another credential.
47. The learner must demonstrate competency in the material as determined by evaluation methods which may include an exam, paper, project, presentation, etc. This will normally be recorded as a pass or fail, and records will be kept by the unit offering the program.
48. This category will be suitable for various types of life-long learning courses and programs. The Certificate of Completion is not an academic certificate and as such shall not be categorized as undergraduate or graduate level.

Admission Requirements

49. Normally, there are no specific admission requirements.

Credit Toward Another Credential

50. Normally, there is no credit granted towards degree program studies, unless the course or courses making up the Certificate of Completion have been approved for credit as part of a degree, diploma or certificate.
51. A series of Certificates of Attendance (see below) cannot make up the components of a Certificate of Completion.

Approval Criteria

52. Although administrative and academic units at McMaster do not need permission from Undergraduate Council to issue Certificates of Completion, they are required, at minimum, to report new Certificates of Completion and revisions to existing Certificate of Completion programs to Undergraduate Council on an annual basis.
53. However, if new **fees** are being charged to learners, the Faculty proposing the Certificate of Completion program must follow the process for approval of academic certificates and diplomas.

54. It is expected that Certificates of Completion will be granted only when the activities are of benefit and/or interest to the community and are consistent with the objectives of McMaster University.

Guidelines and Limitations

55. Clarity and the protection of the McMaster certificate brand are paramount. Thus, any courses or programs that issue a Certificate of Completion shall not use the term Certificate in their title, unless it is part of the term "Certificate of Completion." Exceptions may occur when a program is provided as contract training to a company (i.e. not a public program) and the program name is determined jointly with the client.
56. The course description should include the credit or non-credit status of the course, that there will be learner evaluation, how the learner shall be graded (i.e., pass/fail or a letter grade), and that a "Certificate of Completion" will be awarded for successful completion.

CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE

57. A Certificate of Attendance acknowledges that an individual has participated in a set of activities at McMaster that does not have the status of an academic program as there is no academic content and no evaluation of learning.
58. Such activities are designed to meet the interests and objectives of participants who may want to acquire general knowledge or training for general interest purposes, but who neither require nor seek any form of professional or academic recognition. As such a Certificate of Attendance shall not be categorized as undergraduate or graduate level. This category will be suitable for various types of life-long learning courses and programs.

Admission Requirements

59. Normally, there are no specific admission requirements.

Credit Toward Degree or Other Program Studies

60. There is no credit granted toward additional credentials.

Approval Criteria

61. Although administrative and academic units at McMaster do not require approval from Undergraduate Council to issue Certificates of Attendance, they are required, at minimum, to report to Undergraduate Council on an annual basis new Certificates of Attendance programs and revisions to existing Certificate of Attendance programs.
62. However, if new fees are being charged to learners, administrative and/or academic units proposing the Certificate of Attendance program must follow the process for approval of academic certificates and diplomas.
63. It is expected that Certificates of Attendance will be granted only when the activities are of benefit and/or interest to the community and are consistent with the objectives of McMaster University.

Guidelines and Limitations

64. Clarity and the protection of the McMaster certificate brand are paramount. Thus, any courses or programs that issue a Certificate of Attendance shall not use the term Certificate in their title, unless it is part of the term "Certificate of Attendance."

NON-MCMASTER CERTIFICATES

65. McMaster collaborates with other organisations and institutions to offer programming toward a credential that is issued by that other entity. Such externally issued credentials are outside the scope of this Policy.

SECTION VIII: PROCEDURES FOR APPROVAL

66. The Faculty or Centre for Continuing Education will present the proposal for undergraduate diplomas, undergraduate academic certificates and undergraduate-level academic credit courses to the Undergraduate Council Certificates and Diplomas Committee. Once approved, the Certificates and Diplomas Committee will then make a recommendation to Undergraduate Council.
67. In the case of graduate certificates and graduate-level academic courses, the Faculty will present proposals to Graduate Council.
68. The relevant Council shall report to the Senate the establishment, closure, and/or substantial revisions of academic certificate and diploma programs.
69. The academic unit is responsible for providing a complete proposal. In addition to the program proposal, the complete submission must include a statement of academic merit from the office of the Dean, as described below.
70. Graduate Diplomas are approved through the process outlined in the [Policy on Academic Program Development and Review](#).
71. The approval and reporting processes for Certificates of Completion and Certificates of Attendance are outlined in [Section VII](#) above.

Statement of Academic Merit

72. The statement of academic merit is normally an attestation from a Faculty, at McMaster University, confirming that the Faculty has vetted the proposed program and found that it meets the criteria for the designation proposed. That statement will also include a general description of how the academic merit of the proposal was evaluated, including such things as which academic departments were involved and the procedures used.
73. Proposals for new academic credit courses, which are intended to be part of a certificate or diploma program, and which are not to be part of any degree program, will include the following:
 - a) a paragraph-long course description along with a statement of the number of units of academic credit provided by the course; and
 - b) a statement of how the course contributes to the learning objectives of the program(s) of which it will be a part.

Financial Viability and Resource Implications

74. The financial viability of a certificate and diploma program is evaluated through other mechanisms within the University. All programs should follow these approval processes and ensure they are complying with financial policies, which may include returning a portion of revenue to the University.
75. Diploma and academic certificate programs, as well as non-academic certificates for which fees are charged, must submit fee proposals to the University Student Fees Committee for approval. Normally, this approval

should be sought prior to submission of the academic proposal to Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council. Please note that fees are approved by the Board of Governors for the subsequent academic year, so approvals should be sought in sufficient time to launch programs as planned.

76. Following approval by Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council (as applicable), the completed *Financial Viability and Resource Implications template* for new certificate and diploma programs must be reviewed, prior to submission of the business case to the University Planning Committee, as per the [Academic Revenue Activity Policy for Revenue Generating Certificate and Diploma Programs Administered through a Faculty](#) by the:
 - a) Executive Director Finance and Administration (Academic); and
 - b) Vice-Provost (Faculty) or Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies.
77. It is expected that **additional fees will not** be charged for Undergraduate Concurrent Certificates and Graduate Certificates, and that such programs will not generate additional revenue for the University, and therefore do not normally require approval from the University Planning Committee.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE PARCHMENTS



The Chancellor and Senate of

McMaster University

award

Firstname Lastname

the graduate diploma in

Advanced Neonatal Nursing

Dated this 20th day of November, 2015 at Hamilton, Ontario.

President and Vice-Chancellor

University Registrar

Dean of Graduate Studies



Certificate of Completion

is hereby presented to

Firstname Lastname

to recognize the successful completion of the

Project Management Program

delivered by <Faculty/Dept>

<enter optional information re: hours>

<Signature>

<Date>

<Name>
<Title>
<Faculty/Dept>

Name of Credential

is hereby presented to

Firstname Lastname

to recognize the successful completion of the

Program Title

delivered by the <CCE or Partner> in partnership with <CCE or Partner> and <CCE or Partner>

Signature _____ Date _____

  

Name of Credential

is hereby presented to

Firstname Lastname

to recognize the successful completion of the

Program Title

delivered by the Centre for Continuing Education

Signature _____ Date _____



