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**Senate Policy on Diplomas and Certificates**

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**Vice-Provost (Faculty)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides criteria and procedures for the evaluation, approval and monitoring by Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council of undergraduate and graduate certificate and undergraduate diploma programs. It provides a framework which will enable better quality control and unambiguous communication to students and prospective students regarding the nature of each credential and the academic value of certificates and diplomas.

The intention is to provide minimum academic criteria which must be met if programs are to be approved as McMaster certificates and diplomas. With the minima clearly set, program designers will be free to build creatively around them to provide programs appropriate to their constituencies. The academic criteria proposed are intended to maintain the high academic standards of McMaster and enable certificates and diplomas to continue their traditional functions of providing studies complementary to degree programs, professional preparation or upgrading, and bridging into degree programs.

These criteria and procedures are also designed to make it straightforward for McMaster to mount new, innovative certificate and diploma programs. The number of criteria has been kept to a minimum and the procedures have been streamlined in order to allow program developers to move quickly with initiatives while subjecting them to clear, rigorous academic scrutiny. These criteria and procedures are intended to engender speed, flexibility, quality and clarity.

McMaster's diploma and academic certificate programs are operated in accordance with normal academic regulations as outlined in the *Undergraduate Calendar* or *Graduate Calendar* (as applicable). For example, students are issued a student number, student records (including grades) are kept by the Office of the Registrar, classes are scheduled within sessional dates, and part-time student fees are charged. Further, university approved 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.

## 2. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### 2.1 Credential

A 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.

### 2.2 Academic Credit Course

A course of an academic calibre consistent with those offered in undergraduate or graduate degree programs at McMaster. 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. (See Section 3)

### 2.3 McMaster Diplomas

#### 2.3.1 Undergraduate Diploma

A McMaster Undergraduate Diploma is a program of study involving a significant body of academic work coherently organized around clear learning objectives. Undergraduate Diplomas (which include 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. Undergraduate

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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. (See Section 4)

### 2.3.2 Graduate Diploma

McMaster Graduate Diplomas are based on Graduate Degree Level Expectations (see Appendix 1 of the *Quality Assurance Framework*) and will prepare students for employment requiring sound judgment, personal responsibility and individual initiative, in complex and unpredictable professional environments. 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 Reviews](#). There are three types of Graduate Diplomas. (See Section 5)

#### 2.3.2.1 Master's Level Diploma (Type 1)

Master's Level Type 1 Graduate Diploma 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, and some may also require students to demonstrate these skills in applied activities.

#### 2.3.2.2 Master's and Doctoral Level Diploma (Type 2)

Master's Level Type 2 Graduate Diplomas 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, and some may require students to demonstrate these skills in applied activities.

#### 2.3.2.3 Master's and Doctoral Level Diploma (Type 3)

These 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, and some may require students to demonstrate these skills in applied activities.

## 2.4 McMaster Academic Certificates

### 2.4.1 Undergraduate Certificate

A McMaster Undergraduate Certificate is a program of study coherently organized around clear learning objectives and having academic content equivalent to a minimum of half a year of full-time undergraduate study at McMaster (15 units). There are two types of McMaster Undergraduate Academic Certificates.

#### 2.4.1.1 McMaster Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificate

Stand-Alone Undergraduate Certificates (which include Post-Baccalaureate Certificates) may be focused primarily upon academic or professional development

objectives, but all must meet the minimum criterion of academic content. Stand-Alone Certificates serve such functions as bridging into undergraduate degree programs, professional preparation or upgrading, and study complementary to degree studies. (See Section 6)

#### 2.4.1.2 McMaster Concurrent Undergraduate Certificate

A Concurrent Undergraduate Certificate shall be focused primarily upon academic development objectives and must meet the minimum criterion of academic content. This type of Certificate sets out a plan of study complementary to degree studies and will provide added value to degree studies. (See Section 7)

#### 2.4.2 Graduate Certificate

A McMaster 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. (See Section 8)

### 2.5 Non-Academic Programs

These 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. There are two types of non-academic programs.

#### 2.5.1 Certificate of Completion

Certificates of Completion may be provided for non-academic programs that include a minimum of 30 contact hours and evaluation of the student’s learning. Certificates of Completion may include academic content if the course or courses have been approved for credit toward another credential. (See Section 9)

#### 2.5.2 Certificate of Attendance

Certificates of Attendance may be provided for programs that have no academic content and for which there is no evaluation of learning. (See Section 10)

### 2.6 Non-McMaster Certificates

McMaster collaborates with other organisations or 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.

## 3. ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE COURSES

Diploma and certificate programs include courses which are determined by Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council, as appropriate, to be of an academic calibre consistent with courses offered in undergraduate or graduate degree programs. 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. This provides a flexibility appropriate for programs which often have professional development as well as academic goals.

To receive approval as an academic credit course, a course which is not part of a degree program must:

- (i) Be at a level of intellectual rigour comparable to that found in undergraduate or graduate degree program courses in the same or similar fields. Academic credit courses are vetted by the Faculty offering the course or that is most relevant to the content of the course.
- (ii) Evaluate student performance by the methods normally used in degree courses such as tests, essays, reports and other assignments.
- (iii) Include a systematic student evaluation of the course using such methods as multiple-choice questionnaires, narrative responses and/or interviews.

### 3.1 Transfer between Credentials

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.

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.

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.

### 3.2 Academic Approval Criteria

When approving a program as a McMaster Diploma or Certificate, Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council (as appropriate) must ensure that the program proposal appropriately fulfills all of the following criteria. It has:

- (i) a well-defined program objective(s);
- (ii) well-defined program learning outcomes;
- (iii) curriculum to meet the program learning outcomes; and
- (iv) admission requirements (as applicable).

Additional criteria for program proposals are set out in Section 11.

## 4. McMASTER UNDERGRADUATE DIPLOMA

### 4.1 Academic Program Requirements

All McMaster 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. 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 academic unit offering the subsequent credential.

### 4.2 Admission Requirements

There are two sets of admission requirements:

- a. **General Undergraduate Diploma Admission Requirements.** Students who wish to enter a McMaster 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* of McMaster University; (iii) be deemed an exceptional case by the admissions committee for the Undergraduate Diploma. 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.

- b. **Diploma Specific Admission Requirements.** 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.

## 5. McMASTER GRADUATE DIPLOMA

The minimum requirements for Graduate Diplomas are set out below. For submission and approval requirements, please see the [Policy on Academic Program Reviews](#).

### 5.1 Academic Course Requirements

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

### 5.2 Admission Requirements

There are two sets of admission requirements:

- a. **General Graduate Diploma Admission Requirements.** Students who wish to enter a McMaster 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.
- b. **Diploma Specific Admission Requirements.** 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.

## 6. McMASTER STAND-ALONE UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE

### 6.1 Academic Course Requirements

All McMaster 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 Certificate programs may include courses and other forms of learning which are not suitable for academic credit. 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.

### 6.2 Admission Requirements

There are two sets of admission requirements:

- a. **General Undergraduate Stand-Alone Certificate Admission Requirements.** Students who wish to enter a McMaster Undergraduate Stand-Alone 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; (iii) be deemed an exceptional case by the admissions committee for the certificate. 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.

- b. **Certificate Specific Admission Requirements.** Any particular Undergraduate Stand-Alone 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.

## 7. McMASTER CONCURRENT UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE

### 7.1 Academic Course Requirements

All McMaster Concurrent 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, 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.

### 7.2 Admission Requirements

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

## 8. McMASTER GRADUATE CERTIFICATE

### 8.1 Academic Course Requirements

All McMaster 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.)

### 8.2 Admission Requirements

There are two sets of admission requirements:

- a. **General Graduate Certificate Admission Requirements.** Students who wish to enter a McMaster 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.
- b. **Certificate Specific Admission Requirements.** Any particular Graduate Certificate program may have other admission requirements which are appropriate to its learning objectives. These requirements may include prerequisites courses or degrees specific to the particular certificate.

## 9. CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

A Certificate of Completion issued by McMaster University acknowledges that an individual has completed a course or program at McMaster that does not have the status of an academic program. A Certificate of Completion can be issued when a course or program includes a minimum of 30 contact hours and there is evaluation of the student's learning. The student 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.



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.

#### 9.1 Admission Requirements

Normally, there are no specific admission requirements.

#### 9.2 Credit Toward Another Credential

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 degree, diploma or certificate.

A series of Certificates of Attendance cannot make up the components of a Certificate of Completion.

#### 9.3 Approval Criteria

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.

However, if new fees are being charged to students, the Faculty proposing the Certificate of Completion program must follow the process for approval of academic certificates and diplomas, as set out in Section 11 below.

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.

#### 9.4 Guidelines and Limitations

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.

The course description should include the credit or non-credit status of the course, that there will be student evaluation, how the student shall be graded (i.e., pass/fail or a letter grade), and that a "Certificate of Completion" will be awarded for successful completion.

### 10. CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE

A Certificate of Attendance issued by McMaster University acknowledges that an individual has participated in a set of activities at McMaster that does not have the status of an academic program. 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, and 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.

#### 10.1 Admission Requirements

Normally, there are no specific admission requirements.

#### 10.2 Credit Toward Degree or Other Program Studies

There is no credit granted toward additional credentials.

#### 10.3 Approval Criteria

Although administrative and academic units at McMaster do not need permission from Undergraduate Council to issue Certificates of Attendance, they are required, at minimum, to report new Certificates of Attendance and revisions to existing Certificate of Attendance programs to Undergraduate Council on an annual basis.

However, if new fees are being charged to students, the Faculty proposing Certificate of Attendance program must follow the process for approval of academic certificates and diplomas, as set out in Section 11 below.

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.

#### 10.4 Guidelines and Limitations

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."

### **11. PROCEDURES FOR THE APPROVAL OF CERTIFICATE AND DIPLOMA PROGRAMS AND ACADEMIC CREDIT COURSES**

The Faculty or Centre for Continuing Education will present proposal for undergraduate diplomas, undergraduate academic certificates and undergraduate-level academic credit courses to the Undergraduate Council Certificates and Diplomas Committee. Such proposals do not need to be approved by the Undergraduate Council Curriculum Committee. Once approved, the Certificates and Diplomas Committee will then make a recommendation to Undergraduate Council. In the case of graduate certificates and graduate-level academic courses, the Faculty will present proposals to Graduate Council. Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council in turn will make its recommendations to Senate. 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.

Graduate Diplomas are approved through the process outlined in the [Policy on Academic Program Reviews](#).

The approval and reporting processes for Certificates of Completion and Certificates of Attendance are outlined in Sections 9 and 10 above.

### 11.1 Statement of Academic Merit

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.

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:

- (i) a paragraph-long course description along with a statement of the number of units of academic credit provided by the course.
- (ii) a statement of how the course contributes to the learning objectives of the program(s) of which it will be a part.

### 11.2 Financial Viability and Resource Implications

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.

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.

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 by the Executive Director Finance and Administration (Academic) and Vice-Provost (Faculty) or Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies 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](#).

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>*

<Signatures>

<Date>

<Names>  
<Title>  
<Faculty/Dept>

