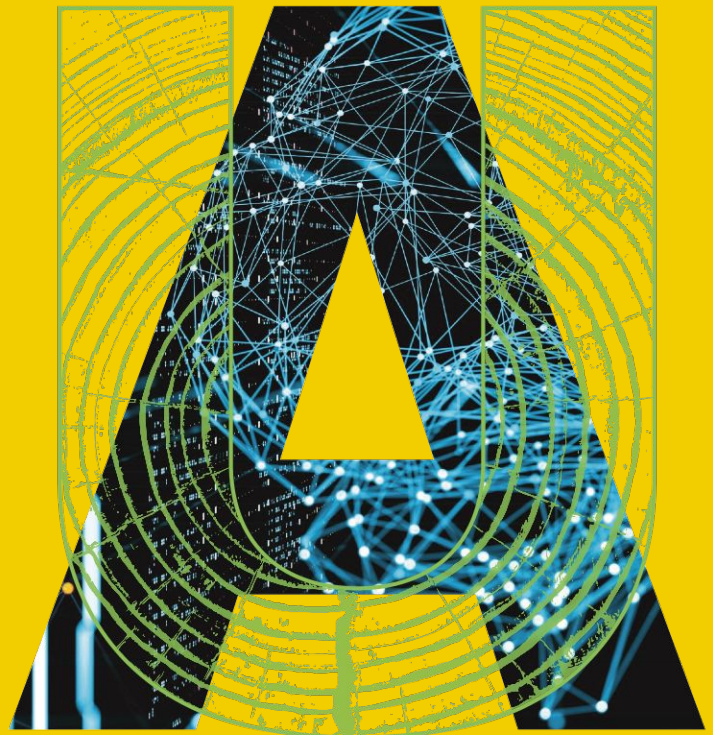
Report of the Embedded Certificates Working Group

Students' Council

August 23, 2022

Presentation by Janice Causgrove Dunn

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



Introduction

- Popular credential among faculties and departments but lack of consistent understanding of Embedded Certificates resulting in a diverse set of existing certificates
- Questions arising:
  - ***What is the purpose of Embedded Certificates; is it clear?***
  - ***How do they differ from other 1st and 2nd level specializations?***
  - ***What is the value proposition for students?***

Working Group: Purpose

- **January 2022** | Members of the Program Support Team (Undergraduate and Non-Credit) were invited to serve on a Working Group led by the Vice-Provost (Programs), to examine the current offerings of embedded certificates at UAlberta, identify concerns, risks, and opportunities as they related to embedded certificates, and develop a set of recommendations.

- **Working Group Members** | Janice Causgrove Dunn (Provost's Office), Gerda de Vries (Science), Lynn McGarvey (Education); Frances Plane (FGSR), Heather Richholt (University Governance), Norma Rodenburg (RO), Beverley Temple (Nursing), Leo Wong (Business), Jaime Chan (Working Group Support) and Carley Roth (Resource Member).

Environmental Scan | University of Alberta

- 6 Graduate and 32 (*30) Undergraduate Embedded Certificates (June 2021)
- Approximately 4% of students have completed embedded certificates in last 5 years
- Graduate Embedded Certificates:
    - Range in credit value from 9-15 credit units, tend to be highly prescriptive and target students in a particular program or faculty
    - Total # of graduates from 2017-2021 ranges from 0 to 25 (per certificate)

Environmental Scan | University of Alberta

Undergraduate Embedded Certificates

- Range in credit value from 12-30 credit units
- Variations in number of core/required courses, limited choice options, electives, inclusion of some form of experiential learning, target group
- Total # of graduates from 2017 to 2021 ranges from 0 to 374 (per certificate)
    - 31% with ⩽10 graduates; 22% with 11-25 graduates; 25% with 25-100 graduates; 16% with 101-200 graduates; 6% with 200+
    - Top 5: Certificate in International Learning, Certificate in Interdisciplinary Leadership Studies, Certificate in Sustainability, Certificate in Biomedical Research, Certificate in Community Engagement & Service Learning
    - All but 1 above are open to all students, include 12-15 credit units of course work plus an “experience” (e.g., capstone project, intercultural exp, stretch exp, research project)

Environmental Scan | Other Universities

- **University of Calgary** | 6 undergraduate embedded certificates; all 14 credit units (12-24), open to all students, relatively consistent structure.
- **University of Toronto** | Policy on for-credit certificates states they may be completed in conjunction with a bachelor's degree program (*n* = 46) or taken as a stand-alone post bachelor certificate (*n* = 11); range in value from 9-12 credit units, many have a capstone requirement
- **York University** | Certificates may be embedded in a degree program or completed as a stand alone program, 15-57 credit units.
- **Concordia University** (*Montreal, QC)* | 30 credit units (1 year), certificates not embedded but used as a shorter credential that can ladder into degrees.
- **Western University** | Can be taken as part of degree studies and separately, 18-21 credit units (most are 18)

Concerns, Risks & Considerations

- Lack of consistency & clarity of purpose of embedded certificates at UAlberta
- Lack of oversight
- Registration system is problematic
- Some awarded to students automatically when they complete their program (i.e., earn the certificate for completing their program; certificate does not differentiate students or provide added value beyond the degree program)
- Similar appearance of embedded certificate and degree parchments may cause confusion
- Lack of awareness & understanding of the value of embedded certificates among students
- Proliferation of low demand & low enrolment embedded certificates risks diluting the value of embedded certificates among students, graduate schools, employers, etc.

Working Group: Recommendations

1. **Define the Purpose of Embedded Undergraduate Certificates**

   The following draft statement of purpose is recommended for consideration:

   Embedded certificates are intended to provide the opportunity to engage with topics that have an interdisciplinary focus, transcending single program requirements, and may cross faculties and/or disciplines. Topics are of strategic interest at UAlberta and/or respond to broad societal issues or needs. In this way, embedded certificates enable a breadth of engagement not normally otherwise available within more focused majors and minors, and serve to recognize student achievement in areas of academic focus that are not otherwise reflected on a student's degree parchment or transcript.

Working Group: Recommendations

2. Establish Principles to Guide Development of Undergrad Embedded Certificates

Accessibility: Accessible to students from multiple units or faculties and locations, and include consideration of course scheduling and delivery mode.

Strategic Alignment: Promote UAlberta's strategic initiatives, enhance graduate attributes, and/or respond to the concerns of society.

Interdisciplinary Focus: Provide the opportunity to engage with topics that have an interdisciplinary focus, transcending single program requirements.

Student Demand: Demonstrated interest by students (and the community).

Thoughtful Program Design: Consideration of overlap with other program requirements and other embedded certificates, mode of delivery; appropriate balance of junior and senior courses, meaningful experiential component.

Indigenization of the Curriculum: weaving of *Indigenous worldviews, histories, and perspectives… recognizing the validity of Indigenous knowledge systems, remediating the knowledge gap on Indigenous historical and lived experiences and strengthening academic rigour across disciplines*. (UAlberta Indigenous Strategic Plan)

Sustainability: Consideration of administrative load, consistent delivery of courses.

Working Group: Recommendations

3. Narrow the Range of Credit Value

Review of existing UAlberta certificates revealed that certificates with higher demand (as indicated by higher graduation numbers) are among those with lower units of credit weight. In part, fewer requirements may make these certificates accessible to more students than those with higher credit weight requirements.

It is recommended that undergraduate embedded certificates should be *12 -*15 units of course weight (maximum of *3 at 100-level and a minimum of *3 at the 300 or 400-level). Certificates requiring *12 units of course weight should include a meaningful experiential component and/or a capstone course or project within or in addition to the course requirements.

Working Group: Recommendations

4. Early, Streamlined Registration

The current non-committal process poses challenges to the institution, as we lack insight into which students are pursuing which certificates and we cannot plan effectively or efficiently as a result. A heavy administrative burden exists to identify these students and ensure requirements have been met at graduation, especially within the larger faculties.

Students should apply for or declare their intention to complete a certificate either prior to completing the first certificate course or as early as possible, and ideally registration would then be reflected in Campus Solutions. This would allow data to be gathered on how many students are working to complete each certificate.

Working Group: Recommendations

5. **Reconsider Design of Parchment & Announcement at Convocation**

   It is recommended that the awarding of an official UAlberta parchment and announcement at convocation for be reconsidered. Rather, students should receive a notation of completion of the credential on their official transcript and a UAlberta digital certificate and/or badge that details the competencies/skills gained.

6. **Communication and Marketing**

   Information about undergraduate embedded certificates should be easily accessible in one location on one central institutional level website, and include clear statements of the purpose, knowledge and skills gained, value proposition, and requirements.

Working Group: Recommendations

7. **Grandfather Existing Embedded Certificates**

   Existing undergraduate embedded certificates that do not adhere to the recommended revised framework and guidelines should be grandfathered. However, it is recommended that proponents of existing certificates with few graduates/low demand consider revisions to increase demand, or termination.

8. **Ongoing Review**

   A yearly report of current embedded certificates and corresponding number of graduates should be compiled by the Provost's Office each year, and Embedded Certificates should be included in scheduled curriculum reviews by the offering unit(s).

Conclusion

The Working Group identified a number of **concerns, risks, and considerations** within the embedded certificate development process, and created a number of **recommendations**.

The recommendations are intended to **guide the development of undergraduate embedded certificates** that are **mission-related** and perceived by students and others (e.g., employers, graduate admissions personnel, graduate supervisors) as **adding unique value to students' academic experiences**.

Leading with Purpose.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA