Certificates are a valuable new currency in the information economy. Through a postbaccalaureate or postmaster's certificate, adults acquire market-demanded competencies in a short time. Many certificate makers are currently employed adults looking for focused, flexible, interdisciplinary, and highly relevant education opportunities. Certificate programs may be introductions to adult students considering entering degree programs, the foundation for further training, or a follow-up to previous training. The most popular certificate programs are those related to health care and information technology. Adult learners with specific goals and multiple responsibilities are fueling demand for distance delivery. While colleges and universities have almost doubled the number of distance subbaccalaureate certificate programs, almost 50 percent of graduate certificate programs have no distance offerings. For-profit virtual institutions are rushing to fill this gap. Some certificates are tied to industry and professional standards, but there is no comprehensive quality assurance system for certificate programs similar to that for college degrees. Since relevancy of course content is a critical issue in short-term programs, institutions offering certificates should have in place a process to revise or retire programs no longer in alignment with workplace needs and a fast-track approval process. (Contains 23 annotated resources.) (YLB)
Career Certificates:
High Quality and Cutting Edge?
Trends and Issues Alert No. 16

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Career Certificates: High Quality and Cutting Edge?

Resources

The University of Virginia's Computing Survival Skills program addresses the ongoing technology training needs of staff with a series of workshops that result in a certificate in computer troubleshooting skills.

Brown, E. L. Vocational Certificates and College Degrees. ERIC Digest No. 212. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1999. (ED 434 248)
<eric.ge.org/digests.asp>
Compares the economic benefits of career certificates and college degrees, their employment outcomes, and their role in the lifelong learning patterns of career-focused individuals.

The number of students enrolled in degree and certificate programs at Western Governors University, a virtual university, is significantly lower than projected. The low enrollments may be the result of the amount of time it took to plan and implement programs.

Driscoll, M. "Professional Development: Certification Programs." Training Scene 26, no. 3 (March 1996): 5-8. (EJ 597 262)
Discusses the benefits of certificate programs; lists 12 questions to ask, pertaining to programs' sponsors, content, recognition, and refresher requirements.

Gordon, G. "Fancy Certificates May Not Be All They're Cracked up To Be." Business Times (South Africa), May 31, 1998. <www.btimes.co.za/98/0531/tech/tech13.htm>
Some private sector providers of certification in computer skills may be unscrupulous operators who issue certificates without ever testing learners. The information technology industry is attempting to establish standards that will enhance the value of certificates.

Presents a rationale for business educators considering offering industry-oriented certification courses. Focuses on the options, requirements, and the benefits for educational institutions, students, and business and industry.

Advisory committees and surveys of students and employers were used to revise the human resources and personnel management certificate programs at the University of Calgary. Revisions were done in the context of resource constraints, postsecondary competition, and declining enrollment.

Examines factors behind the growth in certificate programs and the differences between university and nonuniversity providers. Outlines the opportunities and threats for institutions and for learners.


Analysis of recent occupational data suggests that postsecondary educational credentials have varied effects on early labor force outcomes. Some credentials have greater value in the work force than associate's degrees, and their effects often differ for men and women.


Investigates the burgeoning market for postbaccalaureate credentials; discusses certification for employability and the issues surrounding quality assurance and accreditation.


The possibility of completing degree and certificate programs solely through distance education offers the potential for the most dramatic changes in access and opportunity. The number of distance education degree and certificate programs offered at higher education institutions has nearly doubled.


Developments in postbaccalaureate certificate programs are outstripping the capacity of existing quality assurance mechanisms. In addition, the efficiency and vocational directness of such programs may induce the expectation that all postsecondary education should be offered this way.


This comprehensive directory of certificate programs throughout the country provides data on how to get certified in a career, how long it will take, how much it costs, and what to expect on the job.


Describes how businesses are collaborating with education providers to develop standards and curricula for employer-recognized certificates. Explains forces driving the demand for these credentials.


Certificate seekers were more likely than associate degree seekers to attain a postsecondary credential (55% versus 43%, respectively); within 3 years of initial enrollment, 50% had earned a certificate, and 4% had earned an associate's degree.


Contains the tabulated results of the certificate survey conducted initially through the Council of Graduate Schools deans' discussion list in 1998. The data depict the policies and procedures being used in the administration of graduate certificate programs at many institutions.


Discusses policy issues related to certificate programs and concludes with a set of model guidelines for the administration of certificate programs.


Shared governance of graduate certificate programs by graduate schools and continuing education schools would take advantage of different strengths: graduate schools offer quality assurance, and continuing education has a market orientation and understanding of work force development needs.


Presents results of a survey of universities offering graduate certificate programs and analysis of programs at Indiana University, New York Institute of Technology, Arizona State University, the University of Colorado-Boulder, and the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies.


Describes the Information Technology Career Ladder program at Clayton College and State University (Georgia), the first competency-based, three-tiered (certificate, associate, bachelor's degrees) IT program at a U.S. university.


Electronically delivered degree and certificate programs must meet three criteria: quality assurance, faculty security, and financial support that facilitates institutional competitiveness. The demand for higher education will shift substantially toward the global marketplace.


Recommends expanding undergraduate and graduate certificate programs to meet the needs of the adult student market. Notes that such development should not diminish but strengthen ongoing and new degree programs.


Responses from 27 of 51 participants in an executive certification program indicated that most were motivated by enhanced job and promotion opportunities, especially those aged 20-39. Over 50% received financial assistance or paid off from employers for study.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education or does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Trends and Issues Alerts may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://tecinfo.coe.org/fulltext.asp>.