

## University Curriculum Committee Meeting

Meeting #17, March 18, 2024

**Members (those present in bold; \* indicates a voting member):**

**Dave Paul, Chair\***

Dean Panttaja

**Francesca Sammarruca**

**Erin James\***

**Stacy Isenbarger\***

**Stacey Doumit\***

**Magdy Noguera\***

Kyle Howerton\*

**Steve Shook\***

**Erkan Buzbas\***

**Emad Kassem\***

**Jerry Long\***

**Hanwen Dong\***

**Lindsey Brown**

Emma Johnston\*

Nate Trachimowicz

**Gwen Gorzelsky**

**Guests present:** Torrey Lawrence, Ted Unzicker, Dean Kahler, and Ken Udas

- I. Chair Dave Paul called the meeting to order at 3:30.
- II. Announcements and Communications
- III. New Business
  - a. Discussion on certificates with Provost Torrey Lawrence

Torrey Lawrence had previously received a list of questions on certificates and the Vandal Gateway Program from the committee, so he started by addressing the first question on the target audience of certificates. He said that there are opportunities for existing students as well as outside non-students. He explained that certificates may target different groups based on the content and/or discipline. Another question from the committee was which of these groups generates additional revenue, and Torrey explained that it was again dependent upon the situation: part-time students pursuing additional certificates may increase revenue as they take additional courses, while students that are already full-time may not increase revenue to the same degree. Additional revenue could also be increased by adding highly targeted certificates, such as in specific engineering or computer science areas, that may encourage adults in careers to return and pursue additional certification. Dave Paul asked if this should be a consideration when reviewing certificates, and Torrey replied that it's always something to consider, especially because the State Board requires that information, but it's often hard to predict, particularly due to demand.

In moving to the next question on any possible differences between certificates built from existing courses vs certificates based on new courses, Torrey said that it would be specific to individual colleges and departments in considering their resources and needs.

Steve Shook pointed out that in some cases, the external demand is quite clear based on industry need. However, in other cases, such as liberal arts-based certificates, the certificates can't illustrate a particular demand. He clarified that this difference does not mean that the liberal arts-based certificates are less valuable, but it doesn't seem fair when making the comparison.

Additionally, Steve pointed out that there's other ways to educate people and benefit the university without making it credit driven, such as offering workshops. In response, Torrey explained that things were very different when many of the committee members were attending universities because there were fewer degree options available (associate's, B.A. or B.S., M.S. or M.A., and Ph.D.). Now, there's a greater variety in what types of degrees a student can pursue, and this same expansion is occurring with certificates as well. Torrey explained that another term for what Steve was talking about is "micro credentials", and this is something that hasn't been explored much by the University of Idaho, especially due to bureaucratic processes. He further added that many people want to walk away from an experience with some type of credential, hence why the non-credit bearing workshops and such haven't been pursued to the same degree as certificates.

In continuing the conversation, Torrey also said that this relates to another question that asked if the State Board values certificates, and he explained that they do, particularly when it's tied to future job opportunities. He also noted that as of now, minors aren't regulated to the same degree that undergraduate and graduate degrees are, and he believed they would become more regulated in the future, explaining that there are some differences between minors and certificates, including minors generally having more credits and needing to be attached to a bachelor's degree.

Stacy Isenbarger pointed out that some certificates feel like they're tied to specific degrees and others seem like they're more able to stand on their own, so she asked for more information on this topic. Dave pointed out that her question seemed to relate to the third question that asked about the potential for "double dipping" in the U of I financial model. Erin James added that they'd like more information on the financial model and how certificates are counted.

In addressing Stacy's question, Torrey said that there's many different types of options and "mixtures" for certificates, just as there are many different types of bachelor's degrees based on the needs within a particular field.

He also added that nearly all other Idaho universities have a general education certificate. Lindsey Brown said that doing this may help with transferability. However, to address this, the U of I Registrar's Office makes a "Core Complete" comment on a student's transcript before transferring rather than having a separate certificate for it, which may require a graduation application. Steve pointed out that according to the state, certificates should represent "a coherent body of knowledge", and he was confused as to how a general education certificate could contain that type of needed coherency. Torrey also pointed out that he agreed with Jerry's stated point previously in the meeting that offering this type of certificate would enable students that are unable to finish their degrees to leave with some type of credential. He added that certificates that are more embedded in a degree may have this same impact.

In returning to Erin and Dave's question on the financial model, Torrey said that the model was intended to be weighted based on the average number of years needed to complete a program or the "size" of the credential. Torrey said the model had initially been unweighted, and after additional review, the weighting had been added. In the weighted point system, after looking generally at the time it would take to complete a particular degree, it had been decided that certificates would be worth one point,

undergraduate degrees receive four points, master's degrees receive two, doctorate degrees receive six, and law degrees receive three. He said this would likely raise the question of whether a certificate with a lower credit amount, such as nine credits, would still receive the same amount, and he replied that it would not.

Steve said that some departments and faculty members were now creating certificates in an effort to gain more points in the financial model and therefore receive more funding, even if many of the students enrolled in the certificates aren't generating additional revenue for the university because they're existing students. This brought up the last question on the question sheet on whether there should be a document that guides the process of approving a certificate.

Torrey said he hoped faculty members weren't creating certificates only for this purpose because it is such a tiny portion of the financial model. He said that he could understand certificates with existing courses that wouldn't cost the university or student anything extra, especially if it helped with future job prospects. Steve explained that his concern was more that the UCC would receive many certificate proposals without strong rationales in future years because of this perception.

Erin expressed her enthusiasm for the possibility of more interdisciplinary certificates, like the Sustainability certificate, in the future and how those may work in the budget model. Torrey said that in the example of the Sustainability certificate, the conferral credit would go to the Provost's Office since it's run through that office. However, in the future, it may depend more on credit hours than a particular department, which is already counted in the budget model, though it is a small piece in the model.

Stacy expressed concern that, though something like this may seem like a small portion of the financial model, the perception is that it is significant because of the competitive nature of higher education. She also pointed out that minors aren't counted in the budget model, and certificates only require 12 credits (though they can include more credits), so in comparison with a bachelor's degree that requires 120 credits, it seems like giving it a full point could be problematic.

Dave asked if someone should be assigned to look at how closely related a certificate is to a degree program or emphasis area. Torrey pointed out that's also a question with minors and emphasis areas, and he said that it's certainly something they could look into, though he'd want to make sure that certificates still had flexibility. He said they could also look into the budget model again with that consideration.

Stacey Doumit pointed out that people are desperate to try to get every penny from the model that they can, so by attaching a certificate to an undergraduate degree, that will automatically guarantee an extra point per conferral.

Dave proposed coming up with language that indicates that a certificate should be a certain number of credits different from another degree program. Jerry Long pointed out that the state doesn't have that policy put in place, and he would be concerned about adding a new policy to fix something that exists due to a different, university-specific factor (the U of I financial budget model). This may also create disadvantages that don't need to be in place. Erin agreed, saying that in her discipline (English), it could very well make sense for a certificate to be created from the prerequisites of the bachelor's degree, such as a professional writing certificate. She suggested that certificates that are "bus stops" to degrees (earned inherently through a larger program) can be approved for the catalog but aren't counted in the budget model.

Dave routed the conversation back to a question that had been skipped over regarding whether certificates should have a justified demand for approval. Torrey agreed, but he also added that the research on certificates is more limited than other types of degrees, so there may not be as much data to use. He also agreed with Jerry's point that if the budget model is creating problems, it should be reviewed. He suggested that the new Career Services director could also provide some insights into this. Torrey also noted that the colleges and departments are the ones taking on the risk when proposing a certificate, so there should be a level of trust in them, even if there's a certain level of experimentation with it.

There was a brief discussion on using industry demand for certificates, and multiple committee members concluded that the demand for certificates could come from other sources other than industry.

Torrey said that even if a certificate needs to be changed later or doesn't do as well as projected, there could still be something to be learned from it. Magdy Noguera commented that sometimes factors change later (such as the demand decreasing after only offering it for a couple years), and certificates could be dropped at that point, and Torrey agreed.

Lindsey said that the Registrar's Office could change questions and add requests for additional information on the CIM forms as needed. There was a brief discussion on if and how the form would be changed, particularly if information about demand would be added as a requirement, and many of the committee members agreed that it would be the responsibility of the unit to ensure that the certificate had an audience that they could serve.

Dave asked for Torrey's thoughts on the State Board's change from certificates require 12 credits to 7 credits for undergraduate certificates and whether the U of I should adopt that practice as well. Torrey said that he would like to make that policy change at the U of I because many of the other institutes in Idaho are making this change and leaving the policy at 12 needlessly could shut the door on good certificates that may be less than that. He also noted that it can be hard to adjust the mentality with credit worth in terms of certificates.

Steve asked how a seven-credit certificate could embrace the definition of a "coherent body of knowledge", giving the example of taking two science courses (a four-credit course and a three-credit course) to reach the seven-credit minimum, even though that would not be a sufficient knowledge base. Torrey then pointed out that there could be coursework with those parameters that would meet the hypothetical guidelines and by not adopting the policy change, the committee doesn't even have the chance to review or consider it. Steve said that he was more concerned about adding extra workload to the committee, the Registrar's Office, and the Provost's Office by creating an influx of lower credit certificates that may not have high enrollment numbers. Jerry also said that the committee would have a hard time telling a certificate proposal author "no" based on a lack of coherent knowledge because of the diversity of disciplines represented by the committee, so it may be hard to tell what constitutes the needed body of knowledge in an unfamiliar field.

Stacey Doumit asked how the State Board would perceive the University of Idaho if they decided to remain at the 12-credit minimum for certificates and if the U of I would be discriminated against financially. Torrey said they wouldn't penalize the university, but it could put the university at a disadvantage.

Erin used the example of an eight-credit certificate that was removed from a previous agenda, and her analysis of the structure was that it was very different from many of the other certificates available at the university, which again brought up the question of if other standards should be put in place if the seven credit minimum was adopted. There was a brief discussion on rationale, and Torrey suggested that he could find examples and research to send the committee to provide additional concrete examples while deciding.

Francesca Sammarruca noted that the number of credits doesn't necessarily indicate that a certain body of knowledge has been obtained and that additional criteria may be more helpful than looking solely at credits.

Magdy said she could understand a nine-credit certificate as being coherent, but she had a harder time accepting seven credits as being sufficient.

Erin pointed out that the conversation would be significantly different if the budget model didn't include certificates, and Torrey said that it should be changed in that case because it's not only reasonable but also more student-centric to do so.

Steve said that he could understand a certificate being offered in a field such as welding that was lower than twelve credits, and Torrey agreed, adding that he'd had a request for a drafting certificate that could be valuable as a lower credit certificate option. Francesca said that in those cases, it may be less a coherent body of knowledge, but rather a skill set that a student would walk away with.

There was a brief discussion on rephrasing the rationale to articulate that the use of 12 credits is still standard for a certificate, but a lower credit minimum could be used with sufficient evidence of its benefit. Lindsey noted that if the minimum for certificates was dropped to seven, regardless of articulation, departments could waive certificate requirements down to seven individually.

Gwen shared that early research shows that when deciding on a college, students are already looking to see what additional certificates they could earn in deciding where to attend. She added that the information was provided to her by the director of Career Services, and she may be able to provide the committee with more information on request.

In switching to the Vandal Gateway Program (VGP) discussion, Torrey said that the dates outlined in the question seemed correct according to his recollection. By next year, the program would have completed three full years, which gives the opportunity for a more robust amount of research, particularly research that's not impacted as strongly by the COVID-19 pandemic as the first year's cohort was. He explained that though the program was approved to continue through Spring 2025, it should be approved to become a more permanent program now (Spring 2024) because of how far in advance admission standards need to be approved for each academic year. He suggested that an emergency action be submitted to grant the program one more year before reviewing it, especially since the program seems to only be growing and becoming more successful as time goes on. This would give UCC ample time to review the proposal to make VGP a permanent program in late Fall 2024 or early Spring 2025 with the maximum amount of research possible. There was a discussion to ensure all committee members understood the suggested timeframe and decide on the best solution, and the committee agreed to Torrey's timeframe. Dave requested that additional institutional data be presented when the program is reviewed again, and Torrey said that with the additional time from when VGP was first presented three years ago to now, they had gathered additional data that they could present to the committee. Torrey

also suggested that if there is specific data that UCC would like to receive, they communicate that with the VGP program director before they come to present.

Jerry also asked for additional data on the admission criteria change that had been previously reviewed, particularly with graduation rates. Torrey asked for what graduation rates he was requesting because the new admission standards likely wouldn't see graduation rates for undergraduates yet because they hadn't been in place for four years yet. Jerry explained that the data the UCC had received only related to GPA and retention with the admission standards, and it didn't address data for the standardized testing criteria or graduation rates. Torrey agreed and explained that the university was given short notice by the State Board too.

He also explained that they didn't want to lose students who could do well by returning to the pre-COVID admission standards who may be accepted into other Idaho institutions. Steve said that going back to those standards could set U of I as a more premier university, which could be good for marketing purposes.

IV. Chair Dave Paul closed the meeting at 5:08.

Sydney Beal  
UCC Secretary