

**University Policy 3.01.08****Academic Degree and Certificate Requirements****Policy Approval Date: May 8, 2015****Policy Effective Date: July 1, 2015****Procedure Approval Date: May 8, 2013****Procedure Effective Date: January 1, 2016****POLICY STATEMENT**

Academic degree and certificate requirements serve as the university standard for degree and certificate program development and learners' degree and certificate program completion. Schools develop all degree and certificate programs and specializations to align with the requirements described in this policy.

Degree and certificate program requirements must be explicitly described, defined, and published in the *University Catalog* for the quarters during which those requirements are to take effect. In order to be awarded the degree or certificate for the program in which they are enrolled, Capella University learners must satisfactorily fulfill all program requirements, as described in the catalog in effect at the time of their enrollment in that program.

All degree and certificate requirements must also comply with all other university policies.

**Approval of Degree and Certificate Requirements**

The Capella University Board of Directors reviews and approves the requirements for each academic degree and certificate level upon recommendation of the chief academic officer, the University Curriculum Committee, and the Product Development Governance Committee.

Degree and certificate program requirements are developed to ensure alignment with: 1) the academic standards of the field of study for that degree or certificate level; 2) advancements emergent in the academic discipline; 3) prevailing professional standards; and where applicable, 4) professional accreditation standards and states' regulatory standards. These considerations will guide the development and revision of degree and certificate program requirements and will furnish the rationale for those proposed requirements that vary from the standards typical to other Capella University degree and certificate programs at an equivalent degree or certificate level.

Degree and certificate program requirements will be determined for the following categories:

- Credit totals for the degree or certificate level
- Grade point average (GPA) standards for the degree or certificate level
- Formal engagement in the scholarly community, such as online course discussions, learning cohorts, practica, and residencies
- Comprehensive assessments of learning such as portfolios, integrative projects, and comprehensive examinations
- Demonstrations and extensions of knowledge such as capstone projects, internships, and doctoral dissertations

Upon the recommendation of the chief academic officer, the University Curriculum Committee, and the Product Development Governance Committee, the Capella University Board of Directors has established academic requirements for each degree level. Degree and certificate program requirements are described, defined, and published in the *University Catalog* for the quarters during which those requirements are to take effect.

### **Degree Program Requirements**

- *PhD degree requirements:* Degrees at the doctoral level require
  - No fewer than 90 total graduate quarter credits.
  - No fewer than 66 graduate quarter credits excluding comprehensive examination, dissertation, and residency credits.
  - A formal engagement in the scholarly community, such as a residency, learning cohort, or equivalent experience.
  - A comprehensive examination.
  - An original research component, such as a dissertation.
  - A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- *Professional doctoral degree requirements:* Professional degrees at the doctoral level require
  - No fewer than 52 earned Capella graduate quarter credits, excluding transfer.
  - An original research component, such as a dissertation, research paper, professional product, or professional portfolio.
  - A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- *Specialist degree requirements:* Degrees at the specialist degree level, such as the Education Specialist degree, require
  - No fewer than 48 total graduate quarter credits.
  - A formal engagement in the scholarly community.
  - A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- *Master's degree requirements:* Degrees at the master's level require
  - No fewer than 45 quarter credits.
  - A final master's project.
  - A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 3.0.
  - A minimum evaluation of "Proficient" on all competencies in FlexPath degree programs.
- *Bachelor's degree requirements:* Degrees at the bachelor's level require
  - No fewer than 180 total quarter credits, including general education requirements and a capstone course.
    - General education requirements fulfill the standards for the bachelor's degree and include study in a minimum of four categories: communication, humanities, natural science and mathematics, and social science.
  - A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 2.0.
  - A minimum evaluation of "Basic" on all competencies in FlexPath degree programs.

## **Certificate Program Requirements**

- *Post-master's certificate requirements:* Post-master's certificates typically require
  - o No fewer than 16 quarter credits.
  - o A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- *Graduate certificate requirements:* Certificates at the post-baccalaureate level typically require
  - o No fewer than 16 quarter credits of graduate study.
  - o A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 3.0.
- *Undergraduate certificate requirements:* Undergraduate certificates require
  - o No fewer than 24 quarter credits.
  - o A minimum conferral cumulative GPA of 2.0.

## **Degree and Certificate Program Requirement Exceptions and Substitutions**

Capella University learners are expected to complete all degree and certificate program requirements. However, in some circumstances, a learner may request to waive a requirement or substitute an alternate Capella course in place of a required course. If approved, the exception or substitution of a requirement does not affect the total number of credits required for a learner's degree program. Requirement exceptions and substitutions are only valid for the degree or certificate program, specialization, and catalog for which they are approved.

## **RATIONALE**

Capella University is committed to developing and offering degree and certificate programs that consistently meet academic standards defined by the academic discipline. Capella demonstrates this commitment by defining and creating degree and certificate programs that are consistent with the university's published learning outcomes, ensuring transparency in guiding learners in the achievement of those learning outcomes. The role of the Capella University Board of Directors is to establish institutional authority for, and ensure the stability of, degree and certificate program requirements. The role of the chief academic officer, University Curriculum Committee, and Product Development Governance Committee is to establish academic authority by applying the expertise of academic disciplines to ensure academic rigor, depth, and appropriateness of content.

## **DEFINITIONS**

### Course Substitution

A course substitution is the replacement of a required course with an alternate Capella course that fulfills the requirement. Substitution courses must be similar in course content, expected outcomes, and competencies.

### Credit Distribution

Credit distribution is the number of credits required within specific distribution areas, such as "20 credits of specialization courses" or "no more than 18 elective credits."

### Degree Level

A degree level is a classification of postsecondary academic achievement by a prescribed depth of understanding relative to course work and learning experiences. Capella's academic degree levels are bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctoral.

### Degree Program

A degree program is a specific set of course work and learning experiences in a field of study that, upon successful completion, results in the conferral of a degree or credential.

### Lower-Division Courses

Lower-division courses are undergraduate courses at the 1000 and 2000 levels.

### Minimum GPA

Minimum GPA refers to the lowest academic grade point average allowed for a completed course or course of study to fulfill degree program requirements.

### Requirement Exception

The removal of a requirement from a learner's degree program requires an exception. The learner is not awarded credits for the removed requirement and is not required to take a specific course in its place. A requirement exception does not affect the required number of credits in a degree program.

### Requirements

Requirements are the features, content, courses, and achievements that comprise an academic degree program that must be completed in order to earn that degree.

### Upper-Division Courses

Upper-division courses are undergraduate courses at the 3000 and 4000 levels.

## **PROCEDURES**

- I. Establishment of Program Requirements
  - A. Foundational requirements are established by the Capella University Board of Directors.
  - B. Development, vetting, approval, and publication processes for degree and certificate program and specialization requirements are guided by the minimum standards established by the chief academic officer, University Curriculum Committee, and Product Development Governance Committee.

- II. New Degree and Certificate Programs and Program Changes
  - A. New degree programs, certificate programs, and program changes will adhere to the requirements approved by the Capella University Board of Directors.
  - B. New degree programs and program changes will follow the guidelines described in university policy *3.02.01 Program and Course Development*.
  - C. Validation
    - During the process of approving new or revised degree or certificate programs, such programs will be reviewed to ensure that their requirements uphold the corresponding degree or certificate program requirements established by the Capella University Board of Directors, chief academic officer, University Curriculum Committee, and Product Development Governance Committee.
  
- III. *University Catalog* Degree and Certificate Program Requirement Information
  - A. Program requirements are described in detail in Capella's *University Catalog*.
  - B. Descriptions must include all requirements applicable to the specific degree or certificate program.
  - C. A learner's program requirements are subject to those of the catalog in effect at the time of the learner's matriculation, or at the time of the learner's most recent change of program or specialization.
  
- IV. Allocation of Credit Hours
  - A. Capella considers the following when determining the allocation of quarter credits to courses:
    - 1. The federal definition of a credit hour as stated in the Title 34 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 600.2 (34 CFR 600.2)
    - 2. Higher Learning Commission policies
    - 3. Demonstration of course competencies
    - 4. Best practices and standards within higher education
    - 5. Learner workload estimates
    - 6. Other factors as appropriate to the course type, field of study, and degree level
  - B. In Capella's learning model, learners and faculty apply foundational and specialized knowledge to their work and are committed to continually building their knowledge and skills. Learners synthesize scholarship and practical application on a continuum from practitioner to scholar, depending on their degree level:
    - 1. Bachelor's-level reflective practitioners gain knowledge and analytical skills and reflect on the relation between theory and practice.
    - 2. Master's- and graduate certificate-level practitioner-scholars develop systems and strategies for solving problems, intentionally and actively applying theory to practice.
    - 3. Doctoral scholar-practitioners acquire additional research skills, apply appropriate theory and research strategies, and share knowledge through scholarly publications and presentations to professional communities. These learners are distinguished as scholar-practitioners based on their engagement in research that leads to better ways of applying current knowledge.
  - C. The university's chief academic officer ensures compliance with quarter credit allocation procedures and processes.

D. Capella University's School Curriculum Committee, school leadership, faculty, and the course development process ensure that course workload is consistent with the allocation of quarter credits to courses based on Capella University academic and business processes.

**POLICY OWNERS**

Academic Owner: Curriculum and Instructional Support Services

Operations Owner: Learner Services and Operations

**RELATED DOCUMENTS**

University policy 3.02.01 Program and Course Development

University policy 3.02.06 Academic Quality and Effectiveness

**REVISION HISTORY**

Original Policy Approval Date: February 29, 2008

Revision Dates: 6-1-09; 6-26-13; 8-21-13

Administrative edits as result of ongoing review: 10-1-08; 1-16-09; 4-9-09; 11-17-09; 2-19-10; 4-17-12; 2-26-16; 8-11-16; 12-14-16