



Certificate Programs

By Elizabeth M. Economou

When Seattle resident Steve Griggs signed up for a certificate program in arts management through the University of Washington in 2002, he had recently left an IT job in the clinical-research industry and wanted to transition into work with an arts organization. Completing the certificate program, he hoped, would help him make that change. ■ “The certificate program was a bridge between my business

and creative paths,” says Griggs, who is also a professional jazz musician. Griggs, 51, later pursued a second certificate at the UW, this time in narrative nonfiction. “[The certificate program] combined my passion for research, art and storytelling,” says Griggs, who now works as a freelance writer, composing concert reviews for *The Seattle Times* and contributing to *Earshot Jazz*—a monthly newsmagazine featuring profiles, previews and reviews of jazz artists in the Northwest.

Certificate programs designed for working professionals are flourishing on college campuses coast to coast, and provide specialized training, focused instruction and practical application in fields as diverse as screenwriting and stream restoration. Courses, which are taught by university faculty or industry professionals, are usually offered evenings, weekends or online (or a combina-

tion thereof), and programs average three academic quarters. UW certificate programs, for example, must include at least 90 hours of instruction. Most importantly, certificate programs offer busy adults the opportunity to update their skills, network, develop a personal interest, boost their careers or change fields entirely.

THE PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE landscape looks nothing like it did more than 40 years ago, when James R. Johnston and Lewis G. Kearns established the first certification program in the country to improve the way financial services were provided. Their six-course Certified Financial Planner credential has inspired nearly a dozen certifications in the financial services industry, says Johnston.

“Our program was quite a shock to traditional higher education,” recalls Johnston. There was no interest from

universities back then, so Johnston and Kearns established the College for Financial Planning in Denver (now a subsidiary of the Apollo Group, which also operates the University of Phoenix) to host their certification program. Today, there are few colleges and universities that do not have certificate programs or courses in the field.

In fact, continuing professional education is now possible in subjects as diverse as museum studies; 3D animation for digital media; recycling and solid-waste management; cloud computing; teaching English as a second language; and lactation consulting. For example, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) Extension touts more than 125 certificate programs, and University of Washington Professional & Continuing Education (formerly UW Extension) also offers more than 125 certificates.

UC San Diego Extension, which features around 100 certificate programs, has seen its enrollment grow by 59 percent in the past four years, says Henry J. DeVries, assistant dean of UC San Diego Extension and co-author of *Closing America's Job Gap*, a compilation of narratives about successful graduates of certificate programs.

“Many individuals and organizational leaders believe that an undergraduate or advanced degree, coupled with on-the-job experience, will provide the knowledge and skills sufficient for a professional career spanning several decades,” says DeVries. “But in today’s world, that is not always true. One of the reasons certificates have become so critical is the acceleration of scientific and technological progress, coupled with a globalizing economy.”

Demand for certificate programs is being driven by the desire to improve earning potential, says Cathy Sandeen, dean of UCLA Extension, noting that the typical certificate student has already earned one or more degrees. “More highly paid employees have lost jobs in this



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downturn than previously. These individuals are seeking a quick way to retool for re-employment," she says.

Certificate programs are of shorter duration and are less expensive than master's degree programs; they tend to be geared toward practical application rather than academic knowledge; and they are scheduled at times convenient for working professionals. For any or all of these reasons, they can be a good choice for those transitioning into a new role or career.

Another trend is baby boomers—who are retired or nearing retirement—turn-

"Almost all certificates [at UCLA] ... relate to surrounding local industries. Relevance is a principal goal."

ing to certificate programs as a way to follow a lifelong dream or passion. "Many are pursuing health care, education, nonprofit or arts-related certificates," Sandeen notes.

Additionally, recent graduates are making themselves more marketable by augmenting their bachelor's degrees with the practical knowledge and networking skills gained in a certificate program. For example, an art history major might complete a certificate in interior design, or a music major could supplement his or her degree with a certificate in film scoring.

Bradley Snaza, a graduate of Central Washington University in Ellensburg, realized the value of adding a certificate program to his list of credentials. Snaza, 26—who is the assistant restaurant manager and sommelier for the upscale Sunco-dia Resort in Cle Elum, Washington—says sheer curiosity initially led him to pursue a wine trade professional certificate while earning a degree in tourism administra-

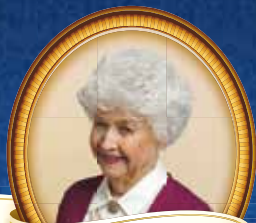
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tion. His interest in wine blossomed, and he spent another year earning a second bachelor's degree in global wine studies.

Unlike most programs that address viticulture and the study of wine (enology), the wine trade professional certificate offered by CWU's Office of Continuing Education is one of the few accredited university programs in the United States to focus on the international business of wine, says curriculum coordinator and wine director Amy Mumma. "We created the [wine trade professional certificate] program because there were no other programs that met this need," she says.

According to Mumma, Washington's wine industry employs 19,000 people and has a \$3 billion economic impact on the state. Most wine-related jobs, she notes, are not found in the vineyard, but rather in marketing, branding, distribution, retail, public relations and import/export. The wine trade professional certificate program boasts a 90 percent rate of placement of its graduates, including jobs with regional businesses such as Swiftwater Cellars and neighboring Suncadia Resort.

Similarly, myriad programs at UCLA are designed to help meet the needs of growing businesses. "Almost all certificates, such as digital media, technology, entertainment and financial services, relate to surrounding local industries," says Sandeen. "Relevance is a principal goal." Some of the most popular certificates at UCLA Extension include global sustainability and nonprofit management.

Sometimes the popularity of certificate programs can reflect local intellectual curiosity. Since the 1996 inception of the University of Washington's certificate in museum studies, some 450 students have completed the program, which is one of the many popular offerings at the university. This comes as no surprise to Britta Simon, assistant director of academic programs for UW Professional & Continuing Education, who explains that the program garners so much interest due to its relevancy and to the combined experience of its instructors, all of whom are museum professionals.



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"People realize how important museums are in their communities," says Simon. "We've been wait-listing students for the past five years."

The six-course program is geared toward entry- and mid-level professionals who are interested in volunteering for or working at a museum, and also attracts art and history buffs. In the final practicum, students apply core concepts as interns in local museums, such as the Seattle Art Museum, EMP and the Henry Art Gallery. "Museums carry authority in local communities," says Simon. "Museum professionals and volunteers join a movement where history and culture are integrated into the here and now, where history becomes present."

Certificate programs can be a good way to explore evolving interests, as Leslie Widner found. When the graduate of San Diego State University couldn't find work as a teacher, she found alternate ways to better her community. In her position as a front-office supervisor at a large hotel chain, she noticed the company had no recycling protocol.

"I saw such an enormous amount of waste," says Widner. Recognizing a need, she decided to do something about it. Not only did she set up a recycling program for her employer, but she enrolled in the sustainable business certificate program at UCSD Extension.

While learning about weighty topics such as environmental economics and green marketing, Widner applied for an internship at the U.S. Green Building Council in San Diego, which led to a sales consultant job with Pasadena-based Waste Less Living, a provider of composting services to schools and businesses. There she was able to marry her love of teaching and her desire to protect the environment.

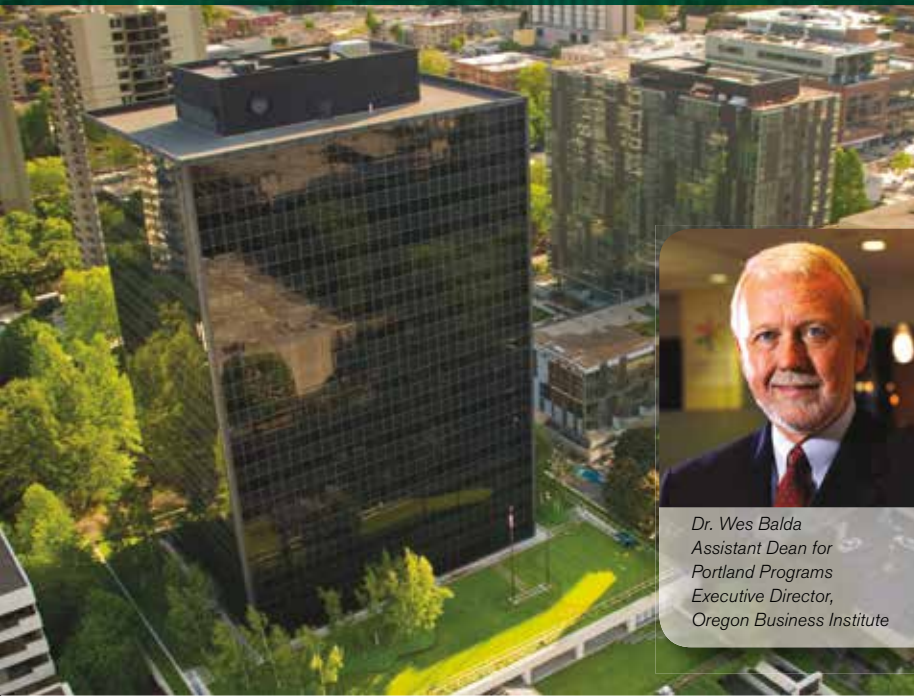
"It's awesome to see the change in how kids think after we spend time together," she says.


As Widner, Snaza, Griggs and many others have experienced, certificate programs can offer a way to explore personal interests or bridge the gap to greater career satisfaction. 🏡

Elizabeth M. Economou writes from Seattle.

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