

CERTIFIED FOR SUCCESS

Programs provide path to career achievement

For working professionals who want to advance in their career but don't want to spend the time and money needed to complete a degree, university certificate programs may be a good fit. Many Chicago area schools offer certificate programs in a variety of fields from business to communications to health care.

While the wide range of available programs attracts a diverse mix of students, most courses are targeted to adults seeking additional credentials in their current industry.

"Most of our programs are designed to be training and enhancement for someone already working in the profession," says Steve Laymon, associate dean for graduate and professional programs at the University of Chicago's Graham School of General Studies. "Students are looking for additional skill sets to make them more valuable in the workplace."

For example, the clinical trials management certificate program attracts, and is appropriate for, workers who have health care or pharmaceutical experience, such as registered nurses or research study coordinators. Conversely, the editing certificate program doesn't

require any specialized skills other than a thorough knowledge of the written English language.

"We get a few career changers for this one," says Laymon. "It doesn't really make sense to get a degree in editing. You can take good writing, clear thinking abilities and translate those existing characteristics into a craft."

Prospective students should check the description of the certificate program they are interested in to see if it has any educational or work experience prerequisites.

Convenient courses

Because programs are geared toward working professionals, most classes are held in the evenings and on weekends. Some programs comprise a series of classes and can take a working professional student up to two years to complete while others can be completed more quickly.

"The shortest we have are as little as a six-day time commitment, like our family and divorce mediation certificate," says Carol Lee Roberts, director of DePaul University's Center for Financial Services. "The financial planner certification takes about 15 months. But we can

anyone's time constraint if you get something done." Courses that require a series of schools schedule their

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basic requirement courses in the fall with more advanced or elective courses in the winter and spring. But many schools can accommodate adult students who wish to begin coursework at different points in the academic year.

A few schools offer online programs. The University of Illinois at Chicago's certificate in nonprofit management is entirely online, which brings participants from across the country together to learn from each other in an interactive "e-classroom."

Many paths to credentials

How does a certificate program differ from a degree program? "Certificate pro-

grams are designed to teach tools that you can put to work the very next day," says Laymon.

Jeff Rosen, dean of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at Loyola University, adds, "They offer a concentrated learning experience in a specific area, which helps individuals upgrade their skill set and provides opportunities for career advancement."

When considering certificate and degree programs, students don't necessarily have to choose one path. Taking a certificate course can be a low-commit-

menting coordinator.

The majority of university certificate courses are taught by professionals in the field. "For all of our programs, the biggest draw is the faculty we use," says Roberts. "The courses in financial planning are taught by certified financial planners who work as financial planners during the day. No one is sitting up in ivory towers. They have the knowledge base along with practical application experience."

Schools are constantly adjusting their program offerings to keep on pace with what skills and knowledge working professionals are seeking. For example, new at DePaul this fall is the business continuity certificate program. This course trains busi-

ness professionals for emergency situations in the workplace like power failures, natural disasters and computer system failures. Class is held in the evening twice a week for 15 sessions at the school's Loop campus and costs \$1,795.

Another relatively new professional education program is Loyola University's paralegal certification. This prepares students for work as paralegals in law firms, corporations and other agencies. The certificate comprises 12 two-credit-hour courses and can be completed in eight months. The program costs \$480 per credit hour for the 2006-2007 academic year. ■