

State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

Guidance on Accurate Representation of Approved Degree and Certificate Programs

Renewed, August 8, 2022

1. All academic degree and certificate programs of Virginia public institutions must be approved by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) (§ 23.1-203, Code of Virginia). The only official state roster of approved academic degree and certificate programs is the SCHEV Degree/Certificate Inventory, online at <https://www.schev.edu/students/applying-for-college/degree-certificate-search>. All descriptions and representations in any “public-facing” context should be consistent with SCHEV’s inventory.
2. Given that SCHEV-approved degree programs and certificates are the only approved programs according to § 23.1-203, it is important that public-facing materials not appear to elevate “sub areas,” such as concentrations, emphases, focuses, options, specializations, tracks, or majors, to the status of a standalone degree program. “Programs” and sub areas that are not degree or certificate programs should not be characterized or represented as if they are standalone degree or certificate programs. All sub areas should be represented clearly as falling under a specific, accurately described, approved degree or certificate program. It should be clear to students and third party regulators (e.g., USED, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Veterans Affairs, SACSCOC) what the degree or certificate program is that graduates will receive.
3. The following bullets are points of advisement to **prevent** the misrepresentation of “programs” (e.g., sub areas, or even simply courses that have been grouped together and referred to as a program or program of study) in institutional catalogs, websites, or advertisement materials:
 - The officially approved degree program—award/designation level and program name—should always be listed first and accompanied by a description of the focus of the degree program. The same should occur for certificate programs.
 - Where sub areas of a degree program are being presented, it should be clearly stated that such sub areas fall under the approved degree program and that the student will receive the officially approved degree (award) upon graduation.
 - Links to the institution’s website should not take students to web pages that appear to present a sub area as an approved standalone degree program. Websites should be structured in their format and layout so that students are generally directed to a “landing page” that indicates what the officially approved degree program is, and what its sub areas are (if any), as opposed to pages that appear to treat sub areas as standalone degree programs.
 - Curriculum requirements for the approved degree program should be listed first. Sub area requirements should be listed and clearly related to the overall degree program requirements. Significant differences (e.g., in total required credit hours) among sub areas within the same degree program should be clearly articulated and accessible to prospective students or anyone else seeking information about the institution’s degree programs.

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- The same principles should apply, as relevant, to certificate programs. Details (e.g., purpose and focus, and total number of required credit hours) of the officially approved certificate should be presented first.
4. Degree and certificate programs offered at off-campus sites or entirely online should be presented in the same way (award/designation level and name) as the same degree and certificate programs at the main campus. Any *curricular* distinctions related to location or modality should be clearly described and should not significantly alter the primary content, focus or scope of the original SCHEV-approved program.
 5. Institutions should, to the extent possible, have policies and procedures that require involvement of the registrar, institutional research office, and provost's office in decisions on the public presentation of degree and certificate program information in the catalog, and all other communications (e.g., pamphlets, brochures). One purpose of such policies and procedures is to prevent "slippage," whereby administrative units enact changes that result in inaccurate representation of degree and certificate programs or in changes that would require approval according to the SCHEV Program Approvals and Changes policy.
 6. Institutional reports, to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) or other third parties, of enrollment and completion data related to degree and certificate programs should not be at variance with what is reported to SCHEV, i.e., the roster of degree and certificate programs for which completions are reported should be the same.