Adjustment of “Educational Program” Definition and Process for non-degree program notification or approval

Overview
WSCUC is adjusting its definition of educational programs, and therefore its Substantive Change procedures for the review of new non-degree programs, beginning July 1, 2016. This procedural adjustment is being made to ensure that WSCUC conforms with the expectations of the U.S. Department of Education, which defines “educational program” to include both degree and non-degree programs.

Definition of Educational Program
Effective July 1, 2016, WSCUC will define an “educational program” as: *a program of courses carrying academic credit leading to a credential* (degree, diploma, certificate, etc.). Each institution will continue to determine its procedures for the awarding of academic credit and which courses or programs carry academic credit. Non-degree programs that do not award academic credit are not included in this definition or in any notification or approval process.

Going forward
Non-degree programs that were in existence prior to July 1, 2016 will be grandfathered into the institution’s scope of accreditation.

WSCUC member institutions will need to submit new non-degree programs for which academic credit is granted for either notification or review. The key factor in determining whether a new non-degree program will require notification or a review is whether it represents a *significant departure* from an institution’s current offerings.

*Significant Departure*: A program that is not closely related to previously approved offerings or the use of a modality that is not previously approved.

Institutions will notify WSCUC of new non-degree programs that do not represent a significant departure from existing offerings. Staff will verify that the new non-degree program does not represent a significant departure.

For those programs that represent a significant departure from existing offerings, a review will be required through the Substantive Change Process.

Letters of Verification for Governmental Bodies
Occasionally, institutions request that WSCUC provide a letter verifying that a program is included in its scope of accreditation. For existing programs, the institution will be required to attest that the program was in existence before July 1, 2016. As is the case now, new programs will be verified once they have been submitted to WSCUC for notification or review (see below).
Next steps for institutions

Institutions will be directed to include their non-degree program offerings in the 2017 Annual Report. A spreadsheet will be sent to ALOs within the next few months to supplyWSCUC with information regarding existing non-degree programs to ease the next Annual Report process.

Initiation of non-degree programs that are not a significant departure from existing offerings

Institutions will notify WSCUC of implementation through the program implementation form. WCSUC staff will verify that the information is accurate and that the programs in question do not represent a significant departure from existing offerings. No further action will be required of the institution if intended programming is determined not to be a significant departure from current offerings.

Examples:
- Independent teacher certificate program offered by an institution with appropriate graduate education programs.
- Certificate in business utilizing existing curriculum from an institution’s existing business degree programs.

Initiation of non-degree programs that are a significant departure from existing offerings

If a new non-degree program represents a significant departure from an institution’s current offerings, the program or the modality will likely require a review. Most reviews for these programs will be eligible for WSCUC’s expedited review process.

This process will require: 1) submission of a proposal describing the program (resources, faculty, budget, assessment, etc.), and 2) a staff review of the submitted information.

In some circumstances, a new non-degree program may be subject to a more robust review by a panel of peer reviewers. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Some examples of programs that may require this more robust review include:
- a certificate offered online by an institution with no distance education experience or general approval.
- a program that is radically outside of existing programs (such as a single purpose institution offering new programs well outside of its current experience and expertise).

Impact on locations

The change in the definition of educational program may have an impact on an institution’s requirement to report locations to WSCUC. A location at which 50% or more of a program (now including both degree and non-degree programs) is offered must be reported to WSCUC and, in most cases, will require review. As with programs, any location that is open and not already reported to WSCUC before July 1, 2016 will be grandfathered and will be reported in the next Annual Report cycle. Any new location will be subject to the review requirements that currently exist and that are outlined in the Substantive Change Manual.
Frequently Asked Questions

Why the change in process and procedure?
WSCUC is making this adjustment in procedure to conform with expectations of the U.S. Department of Education.

Do non-credit offerings such as weekend seminars or offerings for continuing education hours need to be reported or approved?
No, only non-degree programs that award academic credit by your institution will need to be submitted for notification or approval.

What do I need to do right now?
Only new academic credit granting non-degree programs will need to be submitted for notification or approval to WSCUC after July 1, 2016. Those already in existence at your institution will be grandfathered into your institution’s scope of accreditation. Non-degree programs carrying academic credit will need to be reported in the 2017 Annual Report. WSCUC will, in the next few months, provide you with a method to report existing programs in order to ease the Annual Report process.

Another agency is asking for verification of our certificate program’s inclusion in our accreditation. Can WSCUC verify this?
Institutions in need of verification from WSCUC for a governmental body regarding the inclusion of a program will be required to attest to WSCUC that the program was in existence prior to July 1, 2016 in order for a letter to be issued verifying that it is encompassed in its accreditation. Non-degree programs implemented after July 1, 2016 will be subject to notification and/or review.

Our extension program offers certificates that will allow students to transfer credit to other institutions. Do we need to report or seek approval for these?
Only if the programs are offered for academic credit by your institution. Credit that is awarded to students on an appeal after completion or granted by other institutions upon transfer does not apply in this situation.

Are professional certifications that my institution offers included in this? Such as software, business practices, Six Sigma certification etc.?
Only if they are offered for academic credit by your institution.

Questions?
Please contact John Hausaman, Director of Substantive Change and Committee Relations (jhausaman@wascsenior.org)