

# Defining and Reporting Subbaccalaureate Certificates in IPEDS





# DEFINING AND REPORTING SUBBACCALAUREATE CERTIFICATES IN IPEDS

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## INTRODUCTION

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Subbaccalaureate certificates, postsecondary awards conferred as the result of successful completion of a formal program of study below the baccalaureate level, have become more prominent in higher education over the last decade. Institutions of all sectors offer subbaccalaureate certificates, which can range in length from a few months to more than 2 years. Subbaccalaureate certificates provide individuals with a means for gaining specific skills and knowledge that can be readily transferred to the workforce.

Each year institutions report the number of awards conferred in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Completions component. The current IPEDS instructions state that institutions should report: “Formal awards conferred by the institution as the result of completion of an academic or occupational program of study. The instructional activity completed as part of the program of study must be credit-bearing, but can be measured in credit hours, contact hours, or some other unit of measurement.” Subbaccalaureate certificates are reported in three categories based on the program length, and measured in terms of an academic year, with a clock and credit hour equivalency. The three categories are defined as programs that are:

- Less than 1 academic year (referred to in this report as short-term):  
Less than 900 clock hours, less than 30 semester credit hours, or less than 45 quarter credit hours.
- At least 1 but less than 2 academic years (referred to in this report as moderate-term):  
At least 900 but less than 1,800 clock hours, at least 30 but less than 60 semester credit hours, or at least 45 but less than 90 quarter hours.
- At least 2 but less than 4 academic years (referred to in this report as long-term):  
1,800 or more clock hours, 60 or more semester credit hours, or 90 or more quarter hours.

Subbaccalaureate certificates, in total, comprise a large share of all postsecondary awards. In 2010-11, about 1,057,000 subbaccalaureate certificates awarded by institutions that participated in federal Title IV financial aid programs were reported to IPEDS.<sup>1</sup> This equates to almost a quarter of all postsecondary degrees and certificates awarded. Over the last decade, growth in the number of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded has been much higher than growth in associates or bachelor’s degrees. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded has increased by 91 percent compared to a 63 percent increase in associate’s degrees awarded and 38 percent increase in bachelor’s degrees awarded.

Given the sharp increase in subbaccalaureate certificates, there is a need to better understand the wide variety of subbaccalaureate certificates reported to IPEDS. As part of its mission to promote the quality, comparability, and utility of postsecondary data, the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) convened a working group to examine subbaccalaureate certificates, which focused on the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011, Completions component (preliminary data).

- How has subbaccalaureate certificate award reporting in IPEDS changed over the last few years?
- How comparable are the certificate awards reported in IPEDS?
- What types of subbaccalaureate certificates are not reported to IPEDS?
- Are there ways that IPEDS could be modified to improve the quality of data reported on subbaccalaureate certificates?

To address these questions, the Working Group analyzed IPEDS subbaccalaureate certificate data and identified nine institutions for a more in-depth review of institutional practices for subbaccalaureate certificate reporting. The selected institutions represented different institutional sectors, varying student population sizes, and number of certificates awarded in a year. Some of the institutions reported their own IPEDS data, while other institutions' IPEDS data were reported by system offices on the institutions' behalf. Representatives from the institutions, and where appropriate system offices, were interviewed to gather detailed information on the types of certificates reported to IPEDS and institutional processes for reporting data.<sup>2</sup>

This report summarizes the findings related to the questions posed by the Working Group, and offers some recommendations for defining and reporting certificates in IPEDS in the future. Note that the Working Group's discussions focused specifically on subbaccalaureate certificates and references to certificates within this report are to certificates at that level. However, some of the recommendations outlined could have implications for the reporting of postbaccalaureate and postmaster's certificates as well.

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<sup>2</sup>Appendix A provides more information on the Working Group's process. The Working Group also examined the definition of certificates used in other federal data collections. More information can be found in Appendix B.

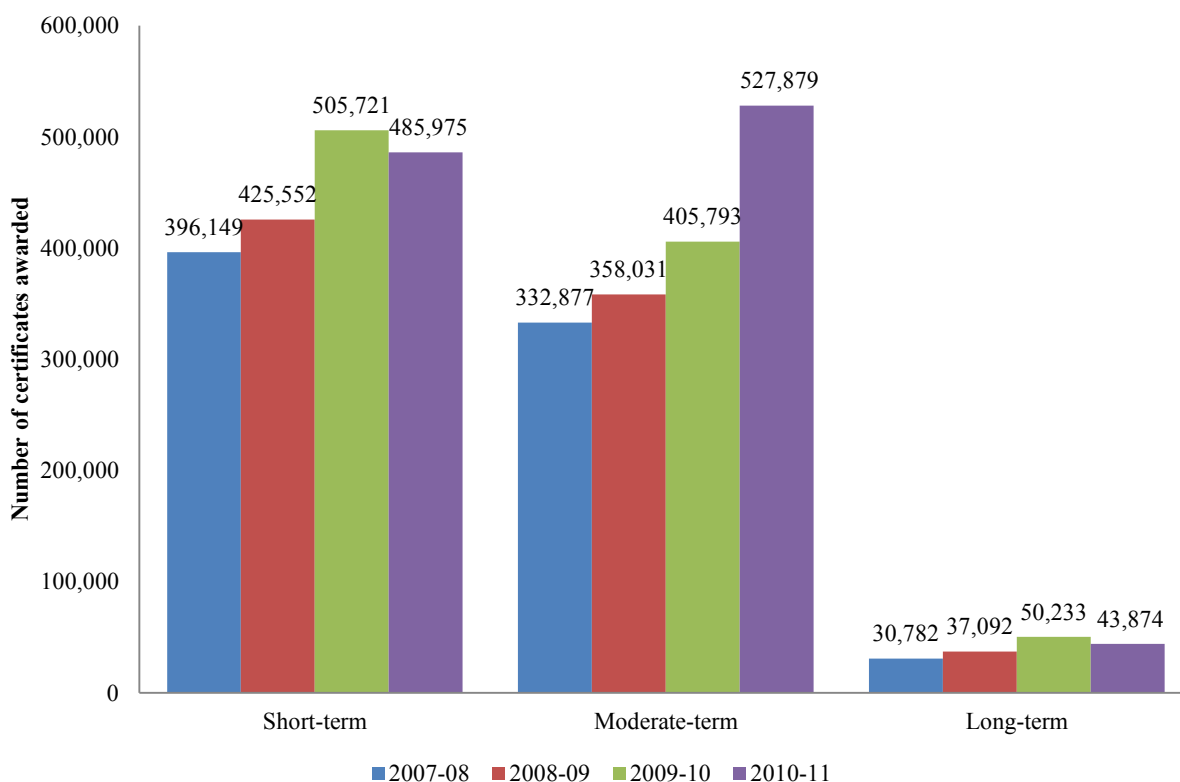


## TRENDS IN IPEDS SUBBACCALAUREATE CERTIFICATES

The Working Group agreed that, in order to make sound recommendations regarding the increase of certificate reporting to IPEDS, it was important to have a more in-depth understanding of the nature of that increase. To that end, the Working Group examined the most recent years of IPEDS Completions data to determine what types of subbaccalaureate certificates were awarded and which sectors contributed to the growth.

Between 2007-08 and 2010-11, there was a large increase in the number of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded. Interestingly, however, between 2009-10 and 2010-11, there was a decrease in the number of short-term and long-term certificates awarded and a sharp increase in the number of moderate-term certificates awarded. As shown in figure 1, the number of short-term certificates awarded decreased from 505,721 to 485,975—a 4 percent drop; while, there were about 122,000 more moderate-term certificates awarded—a 30 percent increase from 2009-10 to 2010-11.

**Figure 1. Number of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded at Title IV institutions, by certificate type: 2007-08 to 2010-11**



NOTE: Short-term certificates are “less than 1 academic year,” moderate-term certificates are “at least 1 but less than 2 academic years,” and long-term certificates are “at least 2 but less than 4 academic years.”

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011, Completions component (preliminary data).

From 2007-08 to 2010-11, the total number of subbaccalaureate certificates increased at all institutional sectors; however, there were differences in the growth of each certificate type among the sectors. Table 1 displays the number of certificates awarded by sector from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

The number of short-term certificates increased in each year at public 4-year, public 2-year and private nonprofit institutions between 2007-08 and 2010-11. At for-profit institutions and public less than 2-year institutions, short-term certificates increased from 2007-08 to 2009-10 and then declined from 2009-10 to 2010-11.

All institutional sectors awarded more moderate-term certificates in 2010-11 than they did in 2007-08. The 4-year for-profit institutions awarded almost 150 percent more moderate-term certificates in 2010-11 than in 2007-08. The growth in moderate-term certificates between 2009-10 and 2010-11 at 4-year institutions is the result of a sharp increase primarily in the number of moderate-term certificates in the health professions and personal and culinary services being awarded.

Long-term certificates comprise a much smaller share of subbaccalaureate certificates than short-term and moderate-term certificates. The number of long-term certificates awarded from 2007-08 to 2010-11 increased although not as much as did short-term and moderate-term certificates. Among for-profit institutions and public less than 2-year and private nonprofit institutions, the number of long-term certificates dropped sharply from 2009-10 to 2010-11. There was a decrease in the number of long-term certificates awarded in almost all fields of study at these institutions.

**Table 1. Number of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded at Title IV institutions, by certificate type and sector: 2007-08 to 2010-11**

Sector	Short-term certificates				Moderate-term certificates				Long-term certificates				Total subbaccalaureate certificates			
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Public																
4-year	20,124	19,376	23,435	28,684	8,921	9,182	10,460	11,874	1,522	1,772	1,402	1,656	30,567	30,330	35,297	42,214
2-year	199,713	214,345	241,118	257,158	125,258	135,250	149,036	174,988	8,808	10,075	10,239	10,469	333,779	359,670	400,393	442,615
Less than 2-year	11,253	13,893	17,664	15,807	15,900	17,850	19,128	19,396	77	149	75	5	27,230	31,892	36,867	35,208
For-profit																
4-year	7,859	7,775	11,814	8,886	9,512	12,130	14,937	23,548	285	258	584	376	17,656	20,163	27,335	32,810
2-year	58,434	67,932	90,453	66,303	81,135	81,847	85,672	128,117	14,515	19,739	29,348	26,142	154,084	169,518	205,473	220,562
Less than 2-year	81,917	86,969	104,235	90,793	76,276	86,221	109,342	152,486	362	93	3,185	105	158,555	173,283	216,762	243,384
Private nonprofit	16,849	15,262	17,002	18,344	15,875	15,551	17,218	17,470	5,213	5,006	5,400	5,121	37,937	35,819	39,620	40,935

NOTE: Private nonprofit is the total reported by 4-year, 2-year, and less than 2-year institutions in this sector. Short-term certificates are “less than 1 academic year,” moderate-term certificates are “at least 1 but less than 2 academic years,” and long-term certificates are “at least 2 but less than 4 academic years.” Total number of institutions reporting at least one certificate increased from 4,248 to 4,938 during this time period.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011, Completions component (preliminary data).

In addition to examining the number of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded by institutional sector, the Working Group thought it important to investigate the proportion of certificates awarded by reporting method to IPEDS. Institutions may report to IPEDS by traditional academic year or by program. Program reporters are institutions that do not operate on a traditional academic year, instead students enroll in programs on a continuous basis throughout the year. Table 2 shows that about 45 percent of all certificates awarded in 2010-11 were reported by institutions that are program reporters, which accounted only for about 35 percent of institutions.

**Table 2. Percentage of subbaccalaureate certificates awarded, by institutional sector and reporting method: 2010-11**

Sector	Percentage of short-term certificates		Percentage moderate-term certificates		Percentage of long-term certificates		Percentage of total subbaccalaureate certificates	
	Program reporter	Academic reporter	Program reporter	Academic reporter	Program reporter	Academic reporter	Program reporter	Academic reporter
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>55</b>
Public								
4-year	0	6	0	2	0	4	0	4
2-year	3	50	3	30	6	18	3	39
Less than 2-year	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	0.3
Private for-profit								
4-year	1	1	0	4	0	1	0	3
2-year	12	2	15	9	53	7	15	6
Less than 2-year	18	1	27	2	0	0	22	1
Private nonprofit	2	2	1	2	2	9	1	3

NOTE: Private nonprofit is the total reported by 4-year, 2-year, and less than 2-year institutions in this sector. Short-term certificates are “less than 1 academic year,” moderate-term certificates are “at least 1 but less than 2 academic years,” and long-term certificates are “at least 2 but less than 4 academic years.”

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2011, Completions and Institutional Characteristics components (preliminary data).

## **INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING OF CERTIFICATES**

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The Working Group interviewed representatives from nine IPEDS reporting entities to begin to understand ways that institutions report subbaccalaureate certificates to IPEDS. Institutional representatives were asked about general reporting practices, challenges with interpreting IPEDS definitions and instructions, and experiences with defining subbaccalaureate certificate awards and certificate programs.

### ***General IPEDS Reporting Practices***

Institutions complete the submission of their IPEDS data in different ways. In some cases, each institution reports its own data to IPEDS. In other cases, institutions report to a central office that, in turn, completes their IPEDS reporting requirements. One system office that reports all certificate awards to IPEDS for its colleges reported that there are differences in certificate reporting among its colleges. The system office approves all certificate programs that are 12 or more credits, and institutions must report those awards to the system office. However, certificates earned with less than 12 credits are approved at the institution or regional level and are not required to be reported to the system office. According to a system representative, some institutions report certificates less than 12 credits and some do not report these certificates to the system office. If the institution has not reported the certificates awarded to the system office, then those certificate awards would not be reported to IPEDS.

### ***Reporting Short-Term Certificates***

Institutions award certificates for programs with credit and contact hour requirements that vary widely, particularly for certificates reported in the “less than 1 year” category. Among the institutions reviewed, certificates reported in the IPEDS category of “less than 1 year” could be earned with as few as 3 semester credits; however, most certificate programs were 12 to 29 credits. One public 2-year institution reported that about 1,800 of their 2,594 less than 1-year certificates were programs completed by earning 6 credits. Two institutions reviewed operate on a clock-hour basis and certificates could be earned from programs completed in 45 clock hours to 750 clock hours.

Through discussions with institutional representatives, the Working Group learned that there were differences among institutions in reporting certificates earned with less than 12 credits. Some institutions reported all certificates, while others used 12 credits as the cut-off point to determine whether a certificate should be reported to IPEDS. Although the IPEDS instructions ask institutions to report all certificates earned as the result of the completion of a credit-bearing program of study, not all institutions do so. The reasons some institutions do not report all certificates are unclear, but may be related to: a perceived credit minimum for reporting certificates, a belief that only certificates awarded for the completion of Title IV eligible programs should be reported, or a belief that only state-reviewed programs are considered “formal.” For example, one public less than 2-year institution did not report its home health aide certificates earned with 5 to 9 credits to IPEDS. Conversely a public 2-year institution reported all certificates awarded including those earned with as little as 1 semester credit.

### ***Stackable or Embedded Certificates***

At all but two of the institutions reviewed, certificates could be earned while a student was working on another certificate or enrolled in a degree program at the institution. In some instances, a certificate was designed to be completed and then subsequently those credits were applied toward another certificate or a degree. For example, at one public 2-year institution a student enrolled in Fire Science could earn up to four different certificates that could then be combined into one technical certificate (31-45 credits). That technical certificate is also embedded within an associate's degree of 61 credits. Each of the certificates earned would be reported in IPEDS, meaning up to five certificates and one associate's degree could be reported to IPEDS for one student in this Fire Science program. The "embedded" approach could also be less formal. A few institutions noted that students may be working on an associate's or bachelor's degree and complete courses that would then make them eligible to earn a specialized certificate. One representative used the example of students working on an accounting degree may take one or two courses in finance that would earn them a certificate in banking or finance. At the 2-year public institutions and the private nonprofit 4-year institution reviewed, certificates were also called "stackable," where students may earn a series of certificates in consecutive order and completing one certificate makes them eligible to enroll in a different certificate program.

### ***Determination of a Formal Program of Study***

IPEDS defines certificates as a formal award, and most of the certificate programs at the institutions interviewed had undergone a formal review process. At all but one of the institutions, certificate programs were formally approved by a system or institutional office that would include a curriculum review, and because most certificates are vocationally focused, reviews include determination of whether the program aligned with business or industry needs. The four community colleges reviewed for this report all had system-level reviews for programs of study; however, the minimum number of credits that required the programs to be reviewed at the system level ranged from 12 to 30. There is the possibility that some institutions and systems consider only those certificates awarded as the result of completion of programs that had undergone system-level reviews necessary for IPEDS reporting.

### ***Nonindependent Programs of Study***

At one 4-year institution, it was not clear that all certificates were awarded based on an independent program of study, but rather were awarded after completing a set of courses in a particular field of study. For example, of the more than 60 certificate programs at one public 4-year institution, most certificates could be awarded to any bachelor's degree-seeking student who completed four or five courses in a specific area (e.g., marketing research or culinary arts). Further, comparison of IPEDS data and institutional websites reveals that at least one public 4-year institution awards certificates for what is essentially a concentration within a major. For example, a history major who has taken a given number of courses in Korean history would be awarded a certificate in Korean history. In both examples above, a student could not have applied to the institution for the specific purpose of getting the certificate. Instead, these

certificates are awarded as the result of a sequence of classes taken as part of fulfilling bachelor's degree requirements.

### ***Title IV Eligible Programs***

Another key distinction between certificates reported in IPEDS is whether the certificate program was eligible for Title IV financial aid. At seven of the nine institutions reviewed, most certificate programs were Title IV eligible. However, among the 4-year institutions interviewed, none of the certificate programs were eligible for Title IV aid. Among the institutions reviewed, most report certificate awards in IPEDS regardless of whether the program was eligible for Title IV federal financial aid or not. Moreover, representatives at all the institutions interviewed were able to readily identify certificate programs that were Title IV eligible. According to a representative of a public 2-year institution, the institution recently began to code certificates by Title IV eligibility. The institution did this because many of the programs were 1 semester credit certificates and were not eligible for Title IV aid.

### ***Subbaccalaureate Certificates Not Reported to IPEDS***

Seven of the institutions offered certificates for completing noncredit courses, adult education, English as a Second Language, basic education, or career development courses. At a few of the institutions, noncredit certificates also prepared students for certification exams; but, according to institution officials, these certificates were not reported to IPEDS. At two of the institutions, data for noncredit certificates were collected in separate databases than those used for collecting credit-based certificates. Many of the noncredit certificate programs were developed to meet the workforce needs of the surrounding region, provide specialized skills for specific employers, or offer general career-related skills, such as leadership training or learning Spanish for business. Several representatives stated that they did not document the number of certificates awarded through these programs. Representatives of a public 4-year and private nonprofit 4-year institution stated that their institution is exploring offering industry certification programs, but that any certificate awarded for these programs would not be reported to IPEDS because it would not include any of the institution's credit-bearing courses.

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## WORKING GROUP FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

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The analysis of IPEDS data and interviews regarding institutional practices for reporting subbaccalaureate certificates to IPEDS yielded several findings.

- Although institutions have internal consistency about what certificates are reported (or not) to IPEDS, that consistency does not necessarily exist across institutions. Furthermore, institutional representatives reported that, by and large, the definitions presented in IPEDS are clear; however, differences in reporting practices suggest that some details that directly affect certificate reporting could be better explained in the IPEDS instructions or definitions.
- The general increase in the number of subbaccalaureate certificate awards reported is accompanied by some anomalies in the trends, particularly in the more recent years. This may indicate a need for clarity in the IPEDS Completions component definitions and instructions.
- Institutions, particularly 4-year institutions, may be reporting certificates that are not necessarily subbaccalaureate certificates or that may not be earned as the result of an independent, formal program of study.
- There is increased interest in knowing which certificates are awarded for Title IV eligible programs and which are not. This was suggested both by the Working Group and institutions.
- Institutions are awarding a number of noncredit certificates that, under current definitions, are not being reported to IPEDS.

Based on the findings, the Working Group has three suggestions for ensuring that the above areas are adequately addressed in future IPEDS data collections.

### ***Working Group Suggestion #1: Clarify IPEDS Instructions and Definitions***

First, the Working Group suggests clarifying the existing IPEDS definitions and Completions component instructions to ensure that institutions are reporting appropriate certificate completions. Specifically, the following should be addressed and clarified in the current instructions:

- That there is no credit minimum for reporting awards;
- Whether to include awards conferred as the result of completion of non-Title IV programs;
- Whether to report certificates awarded to students as part of other degree programs; and
- The meaning of “independent program of study.”

These changes should be implemented as soon as possible.

### ***Working Group Suggestion #2: Explore Modifying Current Certificate Categories***

Second, the Working Group suggests convening a Technical Review Panel to explore the feasibility and desirability of modifying the certificate definitions and categories. The Working Group's analysis reveals variability in certificates reported within the subbaccalaureate certificate categories (e.g., that some institutions report all certificates, while others only report those above a certain credit threshold). Some of the variability could be eliminated through modification to current IPEDS certificate categories. Additionally, more detail and contextual information would be desirable given the prominent and growing role of subbaccalaureate certificates in higher education.

The Working Group discussed several potential methods for defining and classifying certificates for IPEDS reporting. The Working Group agreed that future discussions should take into account Title IV eligibility, prerequisite postsecondary awards, and level of prerequisite award (if any) as possible parameters for certificate category definition. Discussions about reclassifying IPEDS certificates should also include the possibility of an indicator of program length.

### ***Working Group Suggestion #3: Collecting Noncredit Certificate Data***

Third, the Working Group also suggests exploring the possibility of collecting data on noncredit certificates. Many institutions award certificates for noncredit programs (some of which are identical to credit-bearing programs at other institutions). Collecting those in IPEDS would help ensure complete data on certificates awarded by institutions. Among the institutions reviewed that also awarded noncredit certificates, it is not clear that data on noncredit certificates are systematically collected by the institutions. For institutions that do collect data on noncredit certificates, the data are often collected in a database separate from credit-bearing certificates, which may not be readily accessible to staff that are reporting IPEDS data. From institutional interviews, representatives seemed to be clear on excluding noncredit certificates from IPEDS reporting.

The Working Group recognizes the need to be sensitive to institutional burden. Any changes made to the IPEDS Completions component should consider potential impacts on institutional reporting burden and use IPEDS data for analyzing trends in certificate awards. The institutional interviews conducted for this Working Group did not gather information on the potential burden of reporting noncredit certificate data. The technical review process should consider this issue.

## APPENDIX A

To address the research questions, the Working Group analyzed subbaccalaureate certificate data reported in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) between 2007-08 and 2010-11 to identify institutions for a more in-depth review of certificate programs and IPEDS data reporting processes. Using data on certificates awarded, student enrollment, and institutional sector, the Working Group identified nine institutions to interview. The nine institutions represented a mix of public, private nonprofit, and for-profit institutions, 2-year institutions (the institutions that report the highest number of subbaccalaureate certificates) and 4-year institutions that have awarded such certificates, as well as state system offices. Table A-1 shows the institutions that agreed to participate in the study.

**Table A-1. Subbaccalaureate certificates awarded, 12-month undergraduate enrollment, and number of programs at participating institutions, in 2009-10 and 2010-11**

Institution name	State	Number of certificates awarded in 2010-11				12-month student enrollment	Number of subbaccalaureate nondegree programs
		Total	Less than 1 year	1 to < 2 years	2 to < 4 years		
<b>Public, 2-year</b>							
Gwinnett Technical College	GA	2,477	2,049	355	73	11,010	114
Central Carolina Community College	NC	931	610	321	0	7,208	46
Ivy Tech Community College	IN	4,013	1,170	2,843	0	174,746	70
Santa Rosa Junior College	CA	3,256	3,012	230	14	37,533	166
<b>Public, less than 2-year</b>							
Emily Griffith Technical College	CO	1,062	853	209	0	4,738	108
<b>For-profit, less than 2-year</b>							
Ocean Corporation	TX	403	403	0	0	739	2
Crescent City Bartending School	LA	1,725	1,725	0	0	2,812	4
<b>Public, 4-year</b>							
Ferris State University	MI	185	185	0	0	15,343	60
<b>Private nonprofit, 4-year</b>							
Ashland University	OH	150	122	28	0	3,688	12

SOURCE: Institutional interviews and U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Fall 2011, Completions and 12-Month Enrollment components (preliminary data).

The Working Group developed a set of questions for the institutional interviews that gathered information on the following topics:

- Types of certificate programs offered, extent to which those programs are Title IV eligible, and whether the institution reports non-Title IV eligible programs in IPEDS;
- Extent to which certificate programs are terminal, transferrable, or “stackable”/embedded;
- Interpretation of IPEDS definitions and instructions related to subbaccalaureate certificates, certificates that have been reported to IPEDS, and what certificates should not be reported to IPEDS;
- Decisions made at an institutional level on how certificate programs are defined, and which CIP codes are selected for certificate programs that are related to multiple CIP codes;
- How certificates that are either intermediate qualifications (e.g., for course completion or bundles of courses) or state-sponsored programs are reported;
- How data on subbaccalaureate certificates reported to Completions are aligned with the Graduation Rate component of IPEDS; and
- Experiences with IPEDS training and keyholder information related to reporting Completions data, and the adequacy of current IPEDS definitions.

During the interviews the Working Group also gathered information on other industry-sponsored certificates or noncredit certificates awarded at the institution, and whether the institution collects and reports data on those certificates to other organizations or agencies.

The Working Group also examined other federal collections of certificate data and compared the definitions and data elements to those used in IPEDS. Specifically, the Working Group reviewed the National Center for Education Statistics sample surveys and other federal data collections (i.e., Census and Workforce Investment Act), and data collected by other research organizations studying certificate completion (i.e., Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce and Complete College America).

## APPENDIX B

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The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is the only collection of institution-level data on certificates awarded; however, other federal agencies gather data on an individual's completion of certificate or certification programs. For example, there are three federal agencies that collect data for specific populations: (1) the Department of Labor for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Common Performance Measures, (2) Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) educational/training classification system, and (3) the Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) Perkins IV State Accountability Reports. IPEDS and BLS' data collections define certificates as awards from postsecondary institutions, while the WIA and OVAE's data collections include both certificates awarded by postsecondary institutions and certifications from other entities, such as professional organizations. Given the occupational focus of WIA, its definition of a certificate is more occupational focused. WIA defines a certificate as one awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation. These technical or occupational skills are based on standards developed or endorsed by employers.

With the exception of OVAE, each agency provides specific guidance on what types of certificates should be included and which ones should be excluded (see exhibit B-1 for a detailed description). Among the nine institutions interviewed, only two institutions had the same office or person preparing IPEDS and WIA data reports. The officials from those institutions did not report any challenges in distinguishing between the reporting definitions of a certificate for each data collection. More often they encountered issues ensuring that they were using the correct cohort of students for the WIA data reports.

**Exhibit B-1. Comparison of certificate definitions in federal data collections**

Agency/Data collection	What is included in definition of certificate?	What to exclude?
<p><b>NCES</b> IPEDS Completions component</p>	<p>Formal awards conferred as the result of completion of an academic or occupational/vocational program of study. The instructional activity completed as part of the program of study must be credit-bearing, but can be measured in credit hours, contact hours, or some other unit of measurement.</p> <p>Awards conferred by the postsecondary institution.</p>	<p>Awards earned, but not yet conferred.</p> <p>Awards conferred by branches of your institution located in foreign countries.</p> <p>Honorary degrees.</p> <p>Awards conferred by an entity other than the postsecondary institution (such as the state, or an industry certificate).</p> <p>Informal awards such as certificates of merit, completion, attendance, or transfer.</p> <p>Awards earned as the result of an avocational, basic skills, residency, or other program not recognized by IPEDS as academic or occupational/vocational.</p>
<p><b>Department of Labor</b> WIA Performance Measures</p>	<p>Certificates awarded by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A state educational (including vocational/technical education) agency.</li> <li>Postsecondary institutions eligible to participate in federal student financial aid programs.</li> <li>A professional, industry, or employer organization (e.g., National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence certification) or a product manufacturer or developer (e.g., Microsoft Certified Database Administrator).</li> <li>A registered apprenticeship program.</li> <li>A public regulatory agency (e.g., Federal Aviation Administration aviation mechanic certification, state certified asbestos inspector).</li> <li>A program that has been approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs.</li> <li>Job Corps centers that issue certificates.</li> <li>Tribal colleges.</li> </ul>	<p>Certificates awarded by workforce investment boards and work readiness certificates.</p>
<p><b>Bureau of Labor Statistics</b> Educational/Training Classification System</p>	<p>Classifies certificates as “postsecondary nondegree awards” and states that a “certificate is the result of the completion of formal postsecondary schooling awarded by the educational institution.”</p>	<p>Certification issued by a professional organization or certifying body.</p>

## **APPENDIX C**

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