Preface

At the core of developing and offering a stackable credential are two essential questions: (1) What should students know and be able to do at the completion of the credential? (2) What industry standards or certifications align with the credential are valued by employers? These essential questions should be front and center among faculty in any academic program when thinking about developing and offering a stackable credential.

The guidelines provided in this document by the Division of Academic Affairs are intended to assist faculty and academic units in addressing these two essential questions, while at the same time addressing regional and national workforce needs. Our mission to advance students’ academic and career success in the context of our new undergraduate curriculum approved by the University Senate in summer 2016, a stackable credential will have added value for academic success.

The initial draft of the document was developed by the following members of an Adhoc committee appointed by the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affair:

- Dr. Calvin L. Brown, Associate Provost (Interim)
- Dr. Paul M. Brown, Faculty Assembly Chair
- Ms. Susan Gibson, University Registrar
- Dr. Lauren Lopez, Executive Director of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness
- Dr. Narendra H. Patel, Assistant Vice President for Planning, Assessment and Institutional Research/SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison

Following reviews and revisions in Academic Affairs, the Council of Deans discussed and approved the guidelines in November 2017. Each academic School and Department engaged in developing stackable credentials is expected to utilize these guidelines. Additional support for developing stackable credentials can be found in Mapping_Upward Stackable Credentials TOOLKIT at the following website: http://www.cord.org/stackable_credentials_toolkit_oct2017.pdf

Questions related to the guidelines maybe addressed to the Division of Academic Affairs, Attention: Associate Provost.

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Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
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Introduction: Igniting Possibilities: CAU New Undergraduate Curriculum

On July 14, 2016, Clark Atlanta University Senate approved a new curriculum for undergraduate education at the institution. The approval capped more than 18 months of work by faculty and administration to reform the undergraduate curriculum and align it with 21st century needs. Implementation of the new curriculum began in fall 2016 with the new freshmen class.

The new undergraduate curriculum at Clark Atlanta University (CAU) is grounded in igniting new possibilities for CAU students, and is built on the concept of I.D.E.A.S, which stands for:

- I = Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- D = Design and System Thinking
- E = Environmental Sustainability
- A = Arts and Humanities
- S = Science and Technology

At the core of the new curriculum is a focus on producing graduates who are independent learners and thinkers, and who seek to make a difference in their world through design and system thinking coupled with actions and ideas that matter in environmental sustainability, arts and humanities, and science and technology. I.D.E.A.S. is also geared toward creating economic inclusion and competitive pipeline opportunities in spaces where African Americans and other underserved population groups are currently underrepresented. The University has created a framework, Advancing Innovation, Motivation, and Success (AIMS), to assist faculty and staff focus on curriculum and related co-curricular activities in an intentional manner to achieve the goals of the new undergraduate curriculum. Key components of the new 122-credit hours curriculum and the elements to ensure successful realization of curricular and co-curricular goals and expectations are outlined in the AIMS Framework on page 5 of this document.

As part of the new curriculum, students are motivated by faculty and professional staff to a) learn critical skills; b) use those skills to think in ways that result in ideas that matter; 3) use the ideas as innovators to engage in creating products that will, upon graduation, enhance their meaningful participation in their chosen fields, including participation as citizens of a diverse and democratic society in a constantly changing global knowledge economy.
What is a Stackable Credential?

A **stackable credential** is defined as an industry-recognized credential that leads to a higher level certificate or associate degree in the same occupational area. The stackable credential may be offered by an institution of higher education or another organization, as long as the credential articulates to a higher level certificate or associate degree offered by state-recognized institutions of higher education (Wilson, 2016, more references on 4-year institutions from Dr. Mintz).

According to Wilson, stackable credentials recognize the mastery of skills that are a subset of the skills typically achieved through a longer program of study. The shorter program aligns with the longer program, so that education and training for the shorter program does not have to be repeated should the credential recipient continue on the longer program. Likewise, the U.S. Department of Labor defines a stackable credential as one that is “part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications and help them to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs” (Hopkins, 2017).

Stackable credentials include: credit-bearing, noncredit, and work readiness certificates; badges; professional/industry certifications; apprenticeships; and licenses—all of which in different ways testify to people’s skills, knowledge, and abilities.
Types of Credentials

“Credentials” is an umbrella term that includes, among other things:

Certification
A credential awarded by a certification body (not a school or government agency) based on an individual demonstrating, through an examination process that he or she has acquired the designated knowledge, skills and abilities to perform a specific occupation or skill. The examination can be written, oral or performance based. Certification is a time-limited credential that is renewed through a recertification process.

License
A credential is awarded by a government-licensing agency based on pre-determined criteria, and permits the holder to practice in a specified field. The criteria may include some combination of degree attainment, certifications, certificates, assessment, apprenticeship programs, or work experience. Licenses are time limited and must be renewed periodically.

Certificate
A credential awarded by a training provider or an educational institution based on completion of all requirements for a program of study, including coursework and tests or other performance evaluations. Certificates, as an academic award are not time limited and do not need to be renewed.

These definitions are based on the U.S. Census Bureau publication; Stephanie Ewert and Robert Kominski, Measuring Alternative Educational Credentials: 2012 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census).

Stackable Credentials at Clark Atlanta University

CAU’s stackable credentials are a unique addition to the university’s new undergraduate degree programs and are designed to strengthen labor market value. The University is actively partnering with outside organizations to offer highly valued industry and professional certifications. The University utilizes a “horizontal” stacking method, which allows students to earn a baccalaureate degree in their chosen field of study and a stackable credential in another field of study without additional cost or increasing the duration of their study per credit hours earned at the university.

At CAU, stackable credentials consist of a sequence of 9-12 credit hours of courses offered within the 122-credit hour requirements for a baccalaureate degree program. Students in any degree program may earn a stackable credential in a discipline that enhances their major field of study. A Psychology major in the School of Arts and Sciences, for example, may elect to take courses to earn a stackable credential in Project Management in the School of Business Administration. A Management major in the School of Business Administration, for example, may elect to take courses to earn a stackable credential in Data Analytics from the School of Arts and Sciences.

Clark Atlanta University honors “catalog rights” for all students. This means that returning students maintain the degree plan on record at the time of their admission to the University. However, while stackable credentials are currently operational under the fall 2016 catalog, any continuing
undergraduate student under any of the prior years’ catalog may opt for the new undergraduate curriculum in order to enroll in a stackable credential. A change to the new undergraduate curriculum with stackable credential requires that the student receive advising support, which includes evaluation of his/her current degree plans and transcripts from the university’s Center for Academic and Student Success (CASS) and approval of the department chair of the new degree plan. Changing from an existing degree plan to the new degree plan with stackable credential requires the completion of a consent form by the student, approved by CASS following advising and transcript evaluation, and approval of the chair of the department of the new degree plan. Documentation of the approvals at both the CASS and department chair level must be submitted to the University Registrar.

Source: Clark Atlanta University-Division of Academic Affairs/8.5.16 revised 11.3.17 clb
Considerations for Designing and Offering Stackable Credentials at CAU

Today, the demand for institutions to more closely align curriculum with the skills needed in high demand industries has become even more imperative. Academic units are urged to engage employers upfront in the development of stackable credentials that are responsive to workforce needs (Center for Occupational Research and Development (CORD)/Social Policy Research Associates (SPRA), 2017). Thus, designing a stackable credential requires that academic units keep in mind the following two questions: (1) what should students know and be able to do upon completion of the credential and (2) what industry certifications, if any, are aligned to each credential and valued by employers? At the end of the day, a stackable credential is intended to maximize a student’s skill acquisition, employability, and seamless transition to careers.

The following key considerations are critical when designing a stackable credential:

**Internal/External Demands**

Throughout the process of designing, implementing, and sustaining your stackable credential program, employer participation and leadership will be necessary to help determine both the internal and external demand for the program. Internal demand requires a consideration of enrollment projections, credit hours to be generated, and how the credential will contribute to the success of other programs. External demand speaks to employer demand based on local, state, and national data and trends. Specifically, the value of the credential you are developing for employers and how well you know the credential is of value. Also, it is important to engage employers in the process; and, review regional and national data (e.g., data from the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics and Atlanta Chamber of Commerce). Engaging with business and industry helps in identifying current and future workforce needs and further enhances career pathways and opportunities for students. CORD/SPRA (2017), notes that such engagement also helps the academic unit identify and embed up-to-date preparation for industry certifications within the curriculum. It further facilitates job skills validation by employers to ensure alignment of curriculum, instruction, and work-based learning that prepares students for associated career opportunities; and, helps faculty develop career maps, ladders, and other visual aids that identify entry and exit points for the credential and offers course delivery options that are flexible and responsive to the needs of diverse learners.

In addition to the engagement with business and industry, academic units are also encouraged to utilize the steps outlined in the University Curriculum Approval Process document to further the case for the credential. Additional considerations to be addressed include the following: 1) what is the estimated stackable credential cost and potential revenue to be generated? These issues apply even in instances when the credential is being developed specifically for an external audience different from CAU students.
Developing a Stackable Credential Career Pathway

The following example can be used in the development of a stackable credential career pathway:

### Career Pathway

**Pathway (Example: Nursing)**

**Have Questions or Need Assistance?**
Provide contact information and office locations for advisors or counselors who can assist potential students.

**Credit for Prior Learning**
How can students obtain credit for prior learning, and who should they contact for more information?

**Earn College Credit in High School**
How can students obtain college credit while still in high school, and who should they contact for more information?

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College / University Name

College / University Website

This map has been adapted with permission from Gateway Technical College under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Designing the Curriculum

The CAU stackable credential consists of 9-12 credit hours. In designing the program it is important to keep the curriculum flexible to ensure that the needs of a wide range of students are met. Because there is no standard template for creating stackable credentials, consider the following questions when designing the curriculum:

1) What is the expected completion time for the stackable credential and the number of credit hours required? (e.g., 12 credits, one-year, a semester, etc).
2) What specific technical skills does the credential lead to?
3) Has the curriculum been developed on academic and technical skills, as well as industry standards?
4) Have technical skills been frontloaded in the first semester of the duration of the program?
5) Does the curriculum include work-based learning opportunities that allow students to gain practical skills and connections to industry?
6) Does the curriculum articulate across degree programs in the region or baccalaureate transfer?
7) Can existing courses be utilized/modified to design the credential to meet local and regional workforce needs, or must new courses be developed?
8) Is the curriculum directly tied to employment opportunities for high-wage and/or high-demand careers?
9) Does the curriculum provide multiple entry and exit points?
10) Have stackable credentials been validated by employers and revised (as needed) to align with current local conditions?
11) Has the curriculum been aligned to industry-recognized certifications?
12) Has a career pathway map been developed depicting academic credentials aligned to career opportunities?
13) Are articulation agreements in place to award credits earned through early college and dual-credit courses as well as those leading to baccalaureate degrees?
14) Is an articulation policy or procedure in place between noncredit and credit coursework that provides students the opportunity and guidance to avoid duplicative coursework and accelerate their accumulation of credentials?
15) Does the credential provide opportunities for credit prior to learning?

Delivery Options

A stackable credential program should provide course delivery options that offer flexibility for working students. Academic units should indicate whether the delivery option is on ground (traditional face-to-face), online, or hybrid (combination of on ground and online), as well as the length of each course (e.g., morning course (8:00-11:00), afternoon course (1:00-4:00), evening course (5:00-9:00) for 7 weeks, etc.). In addition, the program should consider: (1) the scheduling and sequencing of courses, and (2) how this be carried out to enhance program completion?
Articulation and Transfer Agreements

The articulation and transfer agreements for stackable credentials should follow the same policies and procedures for noncredit/credit matriculation at CAU. The Office of Enrollment Services will provide guidance and work with appropriate academic units and the University Registrar to facilitate credit hour transfer.

Collaboration Among Program Disciplines

The process for development of stackable credential at CAU should consider, where appropriate, interdisciplinary collaborations in the development of a certificate. For example, two academic units (in collaboration with nonacademic units, where appropriate) may work together to develop a stackable credential that draws from the strengths of the various units.

Checklist for Developing and Offering a Stackable Credential at Clark Atlanta University

In the development of a stackable credential at CAU, a program, department or unit, must adhere to the following criteria:

- Identify the school, program, and department name.
- Clearly specify the type of stackable credential.
- Provide a description of what the program or stackable credential is intended to achieve.
- Utilizing the University six-step assessment process, clearly specify program learning outcome(s), i.e. the knowledge and skills’ students will be able to demonstrate at the completion of a stackable credential, and the competency(ies) that will be used to measure students’ attainment of the credential (e.g., performance based assignment aligned to standards, industry exams, licensure exams, etc.).
- For external certification and/or licensure, specify the prerequisite course requirements.
- Identify career opportunities for the stackable credential.
- Identify the credentials that students will earn at the completion of the stackable credential course.
- Provide the curriculum for the stackable credential (e.g., course number, course title, and credit hour, etc.), as well as the course description and course syllabus.
- Indicate delivery options and completion time for the stackable credential.
- Align the stackable credential with industry, local, state, professional, regional, and/or national standards.
- Indicate that the faculty is qualified and credentialed to teach the course(s) in the stackable credential.
- Requirements for a student enrolled in a stackable credential is a grade of “B” or higher in each course for the successful completion of the stackable credential.
- The proposed stackable credential must be submitted for approval using the University Curriculum Review Process.
- A stackable credential at CAU is comprised of 9-12 credit hours.
- Identify the number of credit hours required for a stackable credential, if done externally based upon the requirements of the agency, organization, or partnering institutions.
Data and Evaluation
Data management is essential to the success of each stackable credential program. They show evidence of program effectiveness and help demonstrate support for jobs and careers. We ask that each program consider collecting annual data in the following categories:
- Enrollment trends
- Placement rates
- Completion time

CAU Six-Step Assessment and Improvement Process
All stackable credentials offered at CAU are required to follow the university’s institutional effectiveness process utilizing the Six-Step Annual Assessment and Improvement Process (SSAAIP) established by the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (OPAR) in fall 2017. In accordance with the SSAAIP, each developed stackable credential must adhere to the following guidelines, which occur in two phases:

Phase I – refers to the Unit Assessment Plan (Assessment Planning occurs at the beginning of the assessment cycle in fall)
- STEP 1 – Define Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)
- STEP 2 – Identify Assessment Methods and Tools
- STEP 3 – Establish Criteria for Success

Phase II – refers to the Unit Assessment Report (Assessment occurs at the end of the assessment cycle spring)
- STEP 4 – Collect and Analyze the Data
- STEP 5 – Plan and Execute Improvement Actions
- STEP 6 – Report and document findings in the University’s Electronic Assessment System IMPROVE (formerly known as TracDat)

Program Review
For each stackable credential developed and implemented the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (OPAR) will conduct a 3-year program review.

Notation on Diploma
A student who has successfully met the requirements for the stackable credential as part of the new undergraduate curriculum will have the credential notated on the students’ degree at the time of graduation. Students completing only a stackable credential at CAU will receive a certificate upon completion of a specific credential. The Office of the University Registrar will be responsible for ensuring these notations and credential award in collaboration with appropriate campus units in line with University Policy for award of diplomas.
Conclusion

For several decades, community and technical colleges have been meeting the local workforce needs through short-term certificates and diplomas. More recently, however, many colleges have redesigned their technical programs to align more closely with the skills needed in high-demand industries. These program redesign efforts, coupled with growing recognition of the value of aligning curriculum with industry certifications have led to a noticeable uptick in the number of colleges seeking to offer stackable credentials.

The approval of CAU new undergraduate curriculum in 2016 positioned the University to offer stackable credentials that will ignite new possibilities for our students’ academic and career success. We believe that educational pathways built on stackable credentials offer today’s students a flexible option for earning industry credentials on the road to degree completion. Multiple exit points aligned to employment opportunities help students maximize limited time and financial resources. It is our goal that CAU becomes a model comprehensive four-year private institution in the nation in the delivery of innovative learning that moves today’s students from education to employment in a 21st century fast-paced and changing global knowledge economy.
References


