

What's Faster Than an MBA and Sometimes Just as Good? A Post-Baccalaureate Credential: Is a Credential Right for You?

By Donald Asher

You're smart and you work hard, so you'll keep advancing, right? In today's competitive job market, educational credentials matter—a lot. A brain-dead moron with one more diploma than you can beat you out of that great next job or promotion. So how do you keep up without starting over?

A credential is an oft-overlooked option about halfway between the bachelor's and master's degrees. They prove commitment to professional development, without taking two years or more out of your life for full-time study. They can also make your art history degree relevant to your new corporate life, or prove that you're still mentally agile late in your career, or even take the place of a bachelor's degree in many cases.

There are several different kinds of diploma called a “credential” in the education marketplace, including vendor credentials such as software certification or blue-collar credentials for training programs such as welding or hazardous materials handling. But what we are talking about here is a university-based professional program of study focusing on a functional area, such as human resources or marketing.

Credential programs are designed for mid-career professionals, busy people who have other obligations besides school. They almost always are structured around part-time and evening study, often in downtown or financial-district satellite classrooms, or through quality, accredited online programs, or even a blend of the two.

The faculty are often practicing professionals themselves, with advanced degrees and up-to-the-minute knowledge of issues in the material they teach. Some programs may be affiliated with the most elite university in your area, sometimes a university that would never admit you as a day student! Your colleagues in class will usually be other careerists, working full time themselves. What you won't see is a lot of is know-nothing, traditional-age college students who can't contribute to class discussions because of their lack of experience.

Courses may vary from intensives and workshops lasting a few days up to regular college courses lasting a full quarter or semester. After taking a predetermined sequence of somewhere between four and ten courses, you'll have your credential!

How do you find these programs? Start by asking your boss or human resources officer which programs they know about that would help you advance your knowledge and professionalism. Check university extension programming affiliated with nearby brick-and-mortar institutions. Or check any of the major online education portals and look specifically for the credential options.

Although the curriculum in some of these programs can be quite rigorous, many have no prerequisites beyond the guts to sign up and show up. So if you are a smart careerist without a bachelor's degree, this might be a more attractive educational option than taking freshman comp with a bunch of 18 year olds and worrying about how many PE credits you'll need to finish that diploma.

Here is just a sampling of some of the programs a quick search revealed:

- Accounting
- Aging & Mental Health
- Alcohol & Drug Abuse Studies
- Business Administration
- College Admissions and Career Planning
- Computer Information Systems
- Construction Management
- Direct Marketing
- Earthquake Engineering
- Evidence-based Executive Coaching
- Facilities Management
- Family Development
- Finance
- Garden Design
- Human Resource Management
- HVAC Engineering & Design
- Interior Design & Interior Architecture
- Landscape Architecture
- Management
- Marketing
- Personal Financial Planning
- Project Management
- Studio Arts
- Teaching English as a Second Language
- Technical Communications
- Training & Human Resource Development
- UNIX/Linux System Administration
- Water Management and Ecosystem Restoration

There are myriad others to choose from, and some programs get downright esoteric, such as a certificate in Dialogue, Deliberation, and Public Engagement.

Some things to think about as you consider these options:

Are you someone who finishes what she starts? *Completing* these programs is going to get the attention of employers, but just taking a few classes may not make a difference in your career options.

How long will it take you to complete the program? Some of these programs promoted as a quick fix actually take years to complete by taking classes one at a time.

Are you comfortable with the focus and specialization these programs offer, or do you want exposure to more varied academic topics?

Finally, you might want to compare a credential to your other educational options, such as an evening or weekend MBA or an online bachelor's or master's degree choice. Some credential programs have so many requirements that you could complete a degree in the same amount of time.

For the mid-career, employed professional, though, a credential can be a breakthrough accomplishment leading to new promotions and job opportunities.

BIO: Donald Asher is a public speaker and writer specializing in careers and higher education. He is the author of eleven books, including *Cracking the Hidden Job Market*, *How to Get Any Job*, *The Overnight Resume*, *Asher's Bible of Executive Resumes*, and *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why*. His web page is www.donaldasher.com. © 2010 Asher Associates.