



## Frequently Asked Questions Post-Graduate APRN Certificate Programs & CCNE Accreditation

### 1. When did CCNE begin accrediting post-graduate APRN certificate programs?

CCNE began reviewing post-graduate APRN certificate programs for accreditation in 2014.

### 2. Why did CCNE begin accrediting post-graduate APRN certificate programs?

The [\*Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification & Education\*](#) (*APRN Consensus Model*) (2008) states that, for regulatory purposes, all APRN education programs (including both degree and certificate programs) must be accredited by a nationally recognized nursing accrediting agency.

In response to the *APRN Consensus Model*, the CCNE Board of Commissioners agreed to develop a process for the accreditation of post-graduate APRN certificate programs. As of January 1, 2014, with the implementation of the *Standards for Accreditation of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Programs* (2013), CCNE began reviewing post-graduate APRN certificate programs for accreditation.

### 3. Does CCNE accredit other types of certificate programs?

CCNE only accredits post-graduate (post-master's or post-doctoral) APRN certificate programs, which includes clinical nurse specialist, nurse anesthetist, nurse-midwife, and nurse practitioner.

### 4. Can an institution seek accreditation of one or two tracks offered as part of the post-graduate APRN certificate program and exclude other tracks?

All tracks offered within the post-graduate APRN certificate program must be presented for accreditation, including nurse anesthesia and nurse-midwifery post-graduate certificate tracks, if offered. This is true even if the nurse anesthesia and nurse-midwifery post-graduate certificate tracks are accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs (COA) or the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education (ACME), respectively.

### 5. Does CCNE prohibit nursing programs from offering non-APRN certificate programs?

No. Many institutions offer certificate programs that do not prepare APRNs (e.g., nurse educator), and may continue to do so; however, these certificate programs are outside CCNE's scope of accreditation and are not eligible for CCNE accreditation.

**6. Our post-graduate APRN certificate program offers the same tracks as our CCNE-accredited master's and DNP programs, and students take the same courses. Is our post-graduate APRN certificate program therefore CCNE accredited?**

The CCNE Board of Commissioners reviews the post-graduate APRN certificate program separately for accreditation, just as it reviews each degree program separately for accreditation.

The post-graduate APRN certificate program at your institution is only accredited if it has hosted a comprehensive on-site evaluation by CCNE and received an action letter from CCNE confirming the award of accreditation. CCNE began accrediting post-graduate APRN certificate programs in 2014. Please contact the CCNE staff if you are unsure about or need to confirm the accreditation status of a post-graduate APRN certificate program.

**7. Our institution would like to seek accreditation of our post-graduate APRN certificate program. What is the process?**

Post-graduate APRN certificate programs are reviewed by CCNE in conjunction with the review of one or more degree programs. Programs scheduled to host an on-site evaluation of a degree program are queried by CCNE (approximately one year prior to the on-site evaluation) as to whether the institution has a post-graduate APRN certificate program that is not accredited by CCNE, and, if so, whether the institution would like to add the certificate program to the already-scheduled on-site evaluation.

A program may also notify CCNE, at any time, of its interest in adding the post-graduate APRN certificate program to an already scheduled on-site evaluation of a degree program. If your institution already has a CCNE-accredited degree program, please submit a letter of intent to CCNE indicating that the institution would like to seek accreditation of the post-graduate APRN certificate program, and that you would like to add the post-graduate APRN certificate program to the next scheduled on-site evaluation of the degree program(s). The letter of intent can be submitted electronically and must be signed by the chief nurse administrator. See Item 14 for information about fees.

**8. Are there separate standards of accreditation for post-graduate APRN certificate programs?**

No, all programs (degree and/or certificate) are required to address the CCNE [\*Standards for Accreditation of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing Programs\*](#) (2018).

**9. We have added the post-graduate APRN certificate program to the next scheduled on-site evaluation of our CCNE-accredited degree program. Do we need to address the post-graduate APRN certificate program in our self-study document?**

Yes. The CCNE Board of Commissioners will make a separate accreditation decision about the post-graduate APRN certificate program; therefore, the certificate program must be thoroughly addressed throughout the self-study document, just as you would address each degree program under review for accreditation.

When appropriate, you may include narrative that clarifies similarities between the degree program and the post-graduate APRN certificate program. For instance, perhaps students in the post-graduate APRN certificate program are taking the same role specific courses as students enrolled in the master's or DNP programs.

Importantly, data relative to the graduate nursing programs must be provided separately. For instance, if your

institution offers master's-level APRN tracks and a post-graduate APRN certificate program, the institution must report student completion rate data, certification pass rate data, and employment rate data *separately* for the master's degree program and the post-graduate APRN certificate program. Such data are not to be combined because separate determinations need to be made by CCNE evaluation teams and decision-makers about whether the degree program complies with the accreditation standards and key elements, and whether the post-graduate APRN certificate program complies with the accreditation standards and key elements.

## **10. For what term of accreditation are post-graduate APRN certificate programs eligible?**

The term of accreditation for a post-graduate APRN certificate program is dependent on the term of accreditation for which the degree programs under review are eligible. If the degree program is being reviewed for initial accreditation, the maximum term of accreditation for both the degree program and the post-graduate APRN certificate program is 5 years. If there is a degree program being reviewed for continuing accreditation, the maximum term of accreditation for both the degree program and the post-graduate APRN certificate program is 10 years. If there are two degree programs under review and one is seeking initial accreditation and the other is seeking continuing accreditation, the post-graduate APRN certificate program is eligible for the maximum term of the program seeking continuing accreditation (10 years). This policy affords program officials maximum flexibility for scheduling future on-site evaluations.

As is always true, there is no guarantee that accreditation or the maximum term of accreditation will be awarded for any program seeking accreditation.

## **11. Our next scheduled on-site evaluation of a degree program is not for several years. What is the potential impact on students who complete a post-graduate APRN certificate program that is not CCNE accredited? Will our students still be able to sit for certification exams?**

In keeping with the [APRN Consensus Model](#), certification bodies have indicated that graduation from (completion of) an accredited APRN education program is an important factor when determining a graduate's eligibility to sit for a certification examination.

CCNE communicates and works closely with the certification bodies on issues related to APRN credentialing. CCNE informs certification bodies and other stakeholders about the Board's final accreditation actions following each decision-making meeting. The certification bodies are aware that CCNE began reviewing post-graduate APRN certificate programs for accreditation in 2014, and that CCNE reviews certificate programs for accreditation at the same time one or more degree programs are under review.

Together, CCNE and the certification bodies recognize that the accreditation of post-graduate APRN certificate programs is a transition in the nursing education community. It is important to understand that risks exist for any program that is not accredited. For example, an institution that passes up the opportunity to present its post-graduate APRN certificate program for CCNE accreditation may be putting students or completers at risk. This is why CCNE recommends that an institution present its post-graduate APRN certificate program for accreditation in a timely fashion and in accordance with CCNE policies (see Item 7).

## **12. We don't currently have any students enrolled in our post-graduate APRN certificate program. Do students need to be enrolled in the post-graduate APRN certificate program for it to be eligible for accreditation?**

In order to be eligible to host an on-site evaluation, the post-graduate APRN certificate program must have had at least one student enrolled, in at least one track, within the past two years or have had at least one completer, in at least one track, within the past two years.

### **13. Our institution does not currently offer a post-graduate APRN certificate program, but we are considering offering one in the future. What are the reporting requirements?**

Per the CCNE substantive change policy, an accredited program is required to notify CCNE of any new nursing program, track, or certificate, or of any other significant change. The timeframe for notifying CCNE is no earlier than 90 days before the change but no later than 90 days after the change.

With respect to implementation of a new post-graduate APRN certificate program, the notification must address how the new program affects, or is expected to affect, the baccalaureate, master's, and/or DNP programs already accredited by CCNE and those programs' ability to continue to comply with the CCNE accreditation standards.

In its notification, the institution should specifically demonstrate that the faculty and other resources dedicated to the accredited programs continue to be sufficient in light of the implementation of the post-graduate APRN certificate program. The notification also should provide an overview of the certificate program, including information about its approval, timeline, point(s) of entry (i.e., post-master's, post-doctoral), curriculum, and resources. Additional information regarding this process, including a substantive change notification template, is available on the [CCNE website](#). All substantive change notifications are submitted to CCNE via email to [ccnesubchange@ccneaccreditation.org](mailto:ccnesubchange@ccneaccreditation.org).

### **14. What are the CCNE fees related to accreditation of a post-graduate APRN certificate program?**

If the institution already has a CCNE-accredited program, the one-time [fee](#) to add the post-graduate APRN certificate program to the on-site evaluation is \$2,000. The institution submits the new program fee to CCNE with the letter of intent to request an accreditation review of the new program.

If the institution has no program that is accredited by CCNE, its post-graduate APRN certificate program must apply as an initial applicant with a degree program, and new applicant fees apply. New applicant fees depend on the number of degree programs seeking CCNE accreditation.

Annual fees are based solely on the number of degree programs accredited by CCNE. Therefore, if a post-graduate APRN certificate program is awarded accreditation by CCNE, there will be no increase in that fee as a result of the accreditation of the certificate program.

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