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REGENTS ADOPTS NEW UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE TO MEET RAPIDLY CHANGING ECONOMY

Baton Rouge, LA – The Louisiana Board of Regents approved a new upper-level Undergraduate Certificate (UC) today to specifically meet the needs of businesses looking for more flexible and stackable educational options in this changing economy. The approval of this innovative addition opens the door for campuses to immediately begin developing post and sub-baccalaureate offerings for students.

Coordinating with the universities, Louisiana Department of Economic Development and high-tech employers such as CenturyLink, DXC and IBM, Regents created the UC as a mechanism to address specific educational competencies that meet a defined industry demand, thus creating a more qualified workforce.

“Regents has been fast moving on this initiative and came up with a solution that is amazing,” said Louisiana Economic Development Fast Start Director Susie Schowen. “This is very exciting and came about in the right way with colleges and universities coming up with the solution. What we hear over and over again from industry is computer science majors, for example, are very much in demand, but they aren’t the only college graduate populations that could thrive and be successful in the workforce if they had additional tech skills.”

“We are constantly looking to hire qualified employees,” said IBM Baton Rouge Talent Manager Beth Aucoin “Right now, we are training those with potential on our own, but this undergraduate certificate will shorten that time period for us. Additionally, from a diversity standpoint, this will help us hire a diverse workforce in our Louisiana operations and we’re excited by that.”

The UC would be offered to current students and to returning adults who have already earned some college credit or a degree. Certificates will require at least 18 student credit hours focusing on a discipline or skill associated with high demand jobs or specializations. The UC can compliment a worker’s current educational background and be designed to meet an industry need.

“Adoption of this undergraduate credential is a game-changer for our partners in

economic development and industry and great for our students,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Kim Hunter Reed. “I hope the co-creation of this credential with higher education and business signals that we are listening and responding. Our intention is to focus on the competencies needed and the relevance of skills being developed for Louisiana’s life-long learners,” said Reed.

According to Regents’ staff, the cost to implement the first UCs in Louisiana should be minimal through campus changes to degree audits, course catalogs and advisor training. Regents could approve quality proposals approved by systems and submitted by campuses in approximately a month.

“This is a national trend and gives students a menu of options that make their skills as relevant as possible to the jobs out there,” said Board of Regents Chairman Marty J. Chabert. “This is a great opportunity for our students and shows our industry partners, we hear you and we are responding to your needs.”

Regents acknowledged that to date, alternatives for focused, short-term undergraduate university education for working adults has been missing from the program inventory sometimes resulting in a significant workforce gap and an inability to recruit new employers to the state.

Examples of successful undergraduate certificate programs, similar to the one adopted by Regents, can be found in states including Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas and Missouri.

Louisiana trails the nation in educational attainment with only 45.7% of adults aged 25-64 holding a certificate or postsecondary degree. Additionally, of that population, 1.1 million people, or nearly a quarter of the state’s population, have a high school diploma or less resulting in dramatic poverty and diminished quality of life. To address these challenges, the Board of Regents recently adopted a statewide attainment goal of 60% of working adults earning a credential of value beyond high school by 2030. Doubling the numbers of credentials earned, would increase workforce opportunities for more Louisiana citizens and improve overall state outcomes.

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