Essential traits you need to look for in an online graduate certificate program
Push your career forward with online graduate certificate programs

1. #1: Academic excellence
2. #2: Instructors who are experts in their fields
3. #3: Program and class option
4. #4: Flexible classroom options
5. #5: Supportive faculty and staff
6. #6: Conducive learning environment
7. Find the best program for you

Push your career forward with online graduate certificate programs

The employment landscape has changed drastically in recent decades, morphing from a workforce that stayed relatively immobile to one that routinely moves between jobs and organizations. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, you’re likely to change jobs three times between the ages of 35 and 44.

Whether you’re interested in moving up in your current organization, changing companies or transitioning to a completely different industry, online graduate certificate programs can help. They offer a great way to further your career, change professions and make your resume stand out to hiring managers.

But there are so many programs available, it can be difficult to find the one that’s right for you. To narrow down your list, the program you choose should meet these six criteria.
Academic excellence

If your ultimate goal is to find a job with another company or in a different field, burnishing your resume with qualifications that will impress hiring managers is essential. Graduate certificates make your resume stand out to potential employers—especially when issued by institutions with strong academic reputations.

A 2017 Equal Opportunity Project study found that moving up to the top 1% of income distribution typically requires an education from one of the nation’s elite universities. In other words, the highest earners in the country usually have a degree from the top colleges.

That one detail can lift your resume out of the crowd, especially when applying for high-paying positions. Applicants with degrees or certificates from elite schools have a significant edge over their competitors.

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Instructors who are experts in their fields

Graduate certificates are more than just a way to increase your salary or land a job; they are your ticket to working in exciting new fields and expanding your professional skill set. These certificates are more valuable when they are more than just a piece of paper or line on a resume. They should impart lessons and information that can be directly used in your day-to-day job, helping you solve problems, tackle projects and drive career growth.

Learning from instructors who are the best in their field and have real-world experience will provide a more valuable professional education, regardless of the specific program or curriculum.

Look for instructors who are highly respected in their fields and have years of hands-on experience working in your particular industry.

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#3

Program and class options

Enrolling in an online graduate certificate program opens up a wealth of educational possibilities—provided the institution offers a broad scope of courses. Courses should cover a wide range of subjects and fields, allowing students of various knowledge levels to find the right starting point.

Introductory courses help build foundational knowledge for individuals who are unfamiliar with the subject matter, while advanced courses allow experienced professionals to jump right into more complex topics.

There should be plenty of avenues to build upon accumulated knowledge and expand one's understanding of a given topic. The right online graduate certificate program will continually offer new opportunities to grow and learn and serve as a launching point for sustained professional development.
Flexible classroom options

Continuing your professional development can be challenging, especially when you have other responsibilities, such as a full-time job or a family to support. Rigid programs, whether they have on-campus requirements, inflexible project timelines or real-time attendance expectations, are a poor fit for students who need their ongoing education to fit around their own schedule.

Online graduate certificate programs should offer students the flexibility to take classes on their own time and make progress when they can. Lectures, presentations and other classes can be recorded and made available online for later viewing, letting students with full-time jobs access them during their down time.

All this flexibility helps you chart your own path and continue to develop your professional career while balancing real-life needs.
Supportive faculty and staff

Remote students don’t have the same regular in-person interactions with their instructors and peers that on-campus students enjoy. They don’t have the opportunity to take advantage of a professor’s office hours to ask for feedback on their work or help with an upcoming project.

Without the right support structure in place, remote online students can feel isolated. It’s important that online programs take whatever measures they can to cultivate a more inclusive learning environment for students who can’t be on campus.

Instructors and teaching teams should always be willing to answer a question or help solve a problem to make the learning experience as positive as possible. Administration needs to be responsive and timely, so that the enrollment process is smooth and new students are guided past any growing pains they might experience while taking their first online class.
Conducive learning environment

Remote students should never feel like their coursework is treated as an afterthought or somehow inferior to the curriculums created for full-time undergraduate or graduate students. The best online courses foster a conducive learning environment by recreating the college experience for students who are hundreds or thousands of miles away from campus.

Online courses should always meet the high expectations one would have for any college-level course, both in terms of the complexity of the material and the learning environment. Look for programs that include live-streamed lectures, in-class participation tools and peer-to-peer collaboration opportunities.

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Find the best program for you

When choosing an online graduate certificate program, don’t feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of options available. Take your time to vet each one and check that it meets all of your needs, and you will find the right program.

The best online programs combine academic excellence, expert instructors, extensive curriculums, flexible options and a real college experience – all accessible from the comfort of your home. Anyone can find the right fit, even if you have to schedule your classes around a full-time job and a family to support.

Good luck on your continuing education journey. In your search for the perfect program, consider Stanford Online’s robust portfolio of online graduate certificates. Get started on the next phase of your career with an online graduate certificate program today.

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