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AMERICAN VETERINARY CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION

What is the Difference between a Certificate Course and Professional Certification Program?

According to ICE – the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, (formerly NOCA, the National Organization for Competency Assurance) accrediting standards:

A **certificate course is a non-degree granting program** that:

1. Provides a course of instruction with intended learning outcomes.
2. Evaluates participants' achievement of those same learning outcomes via an examination.
3. Awards a certificate ONLY to those who have taken that specific course and passed that specific examination.

The **purpose** of this kind of **certificate course** or program is **to educate participants**, and the **examination is used as a mirror to show students their progress toward learning those specific outcomes**.

A **professional certification program is a non-governmental program** that does two things:

1. Delivers an assessment based on industry knowledge, independent from training courses or course providers.
2. Grants a time-limited credential to anyone who meets the assessment standards.

As the standard explains, **it is the role of TRAINING and its relationship to credentialing that sets these two types of credentials apart**.

Professional certifications (i.e. Animal Chiropractic Certification Commission (ACCC) of the AVCA) are **independent of training courses**.

In the words of the standard, "Whereas the **primary focus of a certificate course/program is on education/** training ...the **primary focus of professional or personnel certification is on assessment**. Moreover, the assessment conducted by a certification program (ACCC/AVCA) is independent of a specific class, course or other education/training program and also independent of any provider of classes, course or programs."

With professional certification, the examination is used NOT as a mirror but as a screen – to separate those who meet the assessment standards from those who do not.

Use of Credentials:

The distinction between certificates and certifications is important when you consider the implications. According to accepted standards

Holders of **assessment-based certificates may NOT use letters or acronyms behind their names, nor may they use the word "certified" in describing their credentials**.

The use of letters, **acronyms and the word "certified" are reserved to holders of professional or personnel certifications** as defined in the standard.

Self-Test - Those who are unsure whether their credentials are compliant with these standards can ask the following questions of their certification body:

1. Is the examining/designation granting organization involved in the development or delivery of the certification training courses?
2. Does the examining/designation granting organization require its own training course as a prerequisite for credentialing, or imply that such a course is the only way to certification?

If the answer to these questions is "yes," then the organization should not bestow titles, initials or the word "certified" on its certificate holders, because such credentials are NOT certifications.