

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

What's the Difference?

According to the NOCA ([now ICE](#)) accrediting standards,

a “**certificate program**” 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** program is to educate participants, and the examination is used as a mirror to show students their progress toward the 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, are independent of training courses. In the words of the standard, “Whereas the primary focus of a ... certificate program is on ... education/training, ... the primary focus of professional or personnel certification is on assessment. Moreover, the assessment conducted by a certification program 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 NOCA's view of the implications: **In section 8, Standard 1100 stipulates that 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 Standard 1100 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/prep courses?

2. Does the examining/designation granting organization require its own prep 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 according to NOCA Standard 1100, such credentials are not certifications.

What about CRTS?

CRTS is a **professional certification**, not just a certificate program. (Graduates legitimately use CRTS initials after their name) . CRTS exam and testing are owned and operated independently from industry training programs. Using psychometrics, the exam is based on data gathered from the multiple disciplines involved in senior relocation services. The CRTS exam evaluates an INDUSTRY standard and is NOT limited to one organization or one person’s view .

Training for CRTS is an option, not a necessity, although candidates must meet certain eligibility requirements (as with any certification). Multiple training programs may be valid for CRTS exam prep.

About NOCA (now ICE)

Established in 1977, NOCA is the international leader in setting quality standards for credentialing organizations and through its division, the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), has provided over 30 years of accrediting services to the credentialing industry. NOCA’s membership is composed of credentialing organizations, testing companies and individual professional development consultants. Through its annual conference, webinars and publications, NOCA serves as the source for information on the latest trends and issues of concern to practitioners and organizations focused on certification, licensure and human resources development.

CRTS is in the process of NCCA (NOCA/ICE) accreditation.