

Care in Terminology

It is essential to take care when writing badge metadata to avoid any confusion. Public descriptions of noncredit-bearing badges should avoid or qualify the use of phrases below, as indicated, to prevent confusion on the part of learners, the public, and regulators.

Terms to Avoid in Badging

- **Student:** Badges may be offered to members of the public who are not currently enrolled students, and participation in badging does not constitute student status at UT Austin. To avoid confusion with those individuals who have been admitted into the institution and are seeking a degree, use an alternative term, for example, “learner,” to describe those individuals who are seeking badges. This is especially important in marketing and advertising materials.
- **Credit:** Credits at UT Austin represent an hour of instruction over a 15-week period in a semester system. Credit hours are applied toward the total number of hours needed for completing the requirements of a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award. The term credit should not be associated with badging as it may be misleading or result in inaccurate expectations.

Terms to Use Cautiously

The following terms have recognized meanings at UT Austin and should not be used in any context in which they might be misunderstood.

- **Core:** Use of the word “core” in university catalogs is reserved for reference to institutional core curriculum, which is regulated by and reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. As such, it should be avoided by badge issuers or used only in ways that won't be mistaken for the core curriculum.
- **Concentration:** An approved and defined group of courses within a major published in the university catalog that allows a student to focus in a particular area of that major. As an understood component of UT academic offerings, badge issuers are urged to avoid use of the term or use it only in ways that won't be mistaken for concentrations that are officially recognized by the University.
- **Specialization:** Refers to a course or sequence of courses that is defined and offered by an academic unit (department, program, school, or college) but does not appear on the transcript as a separate credential. Badge issuers are asked to avoid use of the term or use it only in ways that won't be mistaken for a University-recognized specialization.

Terms to Qualify in Usage

These terms are used commonly in academic settings. To avoid confusion, they should be used with qualifying language that makes it clear that they are not for credit (e.g., “professional certificate” or “continuing education certificate”).

- **Certificate:** Broad term describing a credit or noncredit credential that is less than a degree. Using “certificate” as a stand-alone term is problematic because it may be conflated with a credit-bearing credential. As a result, most noncredit certificates are framed with qualifiers such as “professional certificate” or “continuing education certificate.” If use of the term cannot be avoided, badge issuers are urged to provide qualifying language that clarifies the noncredit nature of the credential.

- **Course or Coursework:** Generally understood to denote a specific portion of a credit-bearing degree program. Similar to “certificates,” badge issuers should consider using qualifying language to clarify that courses associated with badges are not for credit.
- **Program:** Catch-all word used to generically describe a category defined by a common grouping such as academic or educational program, funding source, non-academic program, or characteristic that is institutionally approved and managed with oversight. Despite the term’s generic usage, it is specifically defined in law and regulation and should be avoided by badge issuers unless qualified as a noncredit-bearing program.