HOW TO BUILD AN UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

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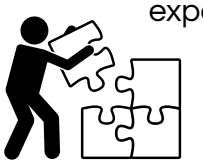
This pilot planning guide is informed by the development of a cohort-based undergraduate certificate program at Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), in partnership with the Center for Restorative Justice at the University of San Diego (USD), and the National Center on Restorative Justice (NCORJ).

This resource is designed to help you implement a credit-bearing restorative justice program. While originally developed for community colleges, this model is highly adaptable to a range of higher education contexts. Because restorative work is deeply contextual, this guide will help you navigate your institution's formal approval channels while building a learning environment that authentically mirrors restorative justice values. Ultimately, a successful program requires a deep commitment to collaborating with the restorative justice communities that exist beyond your institution's walls. The following steps may unfold simultaneously or recursively rather than in a strict chronological order.

1 LAY INSTITUTIONAL GROUNDWORK

Build a team, secure resources, and foster campus-wide understanding of restorative justice.

Who are the key stakeholders across campus that need to be at the table, and what expertise do they bring? Together, how can you build knowledge and buy-in?



Quick tip: Look beyond job titles. Identify faculty, staff, and administrators already rooted in restorative justice or related fields.

2 GROUND THE PROGRAM IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL WISDOM

Seek expertise and guidance from both local and national restorative justice communities.

How is restorative justice practiced in your community? Can you identity 3-5 local practitioners working in varied settings who could bring valuable perspective and serve on your certificate advisory board?

Quick tip: Devote time to build relationships prior to program launch if relationships aren't already well established.

3 FUND STUDENT ACCESS AND EQUITY

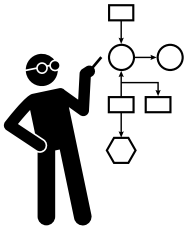
Define your target audience, set inclusion goals, and identify funding opportunities to ensure student access and equity.

Who is the primary audience for this certificate, and what are your specific equity goals for enrollment?

Quick tip: Consult Financial Aid to ensure your funding strategy doesn't inadvertently affect a student's existing aid package.

4 DEVELOP PROGRAM AND COURSE STRUCTURES

Navigate the formal approval channels of your institution while ensuring the classroom experience remains authentically restorative.



What department will host this certificate, and what is your timeline for navigating internal approvals? How will your certificate offer a restorative learning experience?

Quick tip: Be aware of catalog deadlines for program approval, and clearly outline program needs in approval documents.

5 BUILD CURRICULUM & TEACHING TEAM

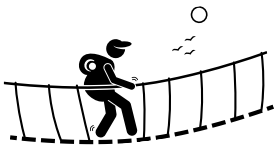
Create the courses and the pedagogical heart of the program.

How will you ensure diverse, real-world perspectives are embedded in the certificate curriculum?

Quick tip: While creating the syllabus, consider whether the readings, instructors, and content reflect your students and city.

6 BRIDGE CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY

Connect classroom learning with learning at community sites, ensuring students gain hands-on experience while providing genuine value to local partners.



What are your community partners' needs or priorities, and how can your certificate support those needs while advancing student learning goals?

Quick tip: Involve your college's legal and career teams early to handle paperwork like background checks and site agreements.

7 SPREAD THE WORD

Raise awareness and connect with students, partners, and the broader community.

What is the core message and "spirit" of your certificate? How will you share it through accessible materials and outreach (meetings, presentations, website, flyers, social media)?

Quick tip: Instead of a standard "Open House," host a "Demonstration Day" and open it to the community.

8 ESTABLISH THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Design a selection process for the certificate that is both accessible and intentional.

What criteria (if any) are necessary to support student success in the certificate? What commitments do you need to communicate to applicants?

Quick tip: If your application window is seasonal, establish a way to collect interest from students year-round.

9 CREATE AND MANAGE FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIP PROCESSES

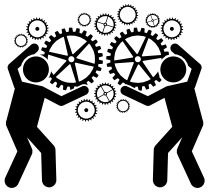
Support student access through financial aid and scholarships while promoting engagement with program values.

Will scholarships be offered? What selection criteria will you use, and how does this align with your access and equity priorities? Which campus stakeholders (Accounting, Financial Aid, Grants, Tuition) need to be involved from the start?

Quick tip: If grant funding is unavailable, explore alternatives like employer sponsorships, Federal Work-Study, or Pell Grants.

10 MAINTAIN, EVALUATE, AND EVOLVE THE PROGRAM

Sustain and improve the certificate over time by gathering feedback, reflecting on outcomes, and adapting to evolving student, community, and field needs.



How often will the certificate be formally reviewed, and what data will be included in each review (curriculum, enrollment, outcomes, community impact)? How will you support alumni in remaining connected to each other and the program?

Quick tip: Build transparency, clear commitments, and shared benefits into these processes from the start.

STAY CONNECTED

We plan to launch a full planning guide in the coming months. To stay connected, share valuable feedback, and receive this free resource, please add your information to our contact list. We'll send you the complete guide to support your work in launching a restorative justice certificate at your institution.

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