



Use of Certificate, Certified, Credentialed

A number of questions have been referred to IECA as ethics inquiries surrounding the use of such honorifics by those working as independent educational consultants. At times the question arises from someone confused by the proper terminology, and at other times, the contact takes the form of a complaint based on someone's email signature or website.

Most often, the lack of clarity springs from the correct term to be applied to those who complete the Certificate in College Counseling program from the UCLA Extension or the online Certificate in Independent Educational Consulting program at UC Irvine, among others.

All of the UC Extension programs are very clear that their graduates receive a "certificate" not "certification." A certificate indicates completion of a series of courses, while certification typically refers to passing a test established by a national body of experts, often a governmental or non-government agency.

In fact, in many fields certificates are earned by completing short courses or day-long training. While a longer program, here's the language from UCLA relative to their designation:

"The Certificate in College Counseling signifies completion of a specialized program of courses and training in college counseling. It designates professional development in this unique field. Many schools look upon our certificate programs as a strong positive factor in hiring and offering promotions. Note: This is not a "certification" in that it neither licenses nor certifies you to be a college counselor."

Similar language is used by UC Irvine, expressly stating that it awards "Certificates in Independent Educational Consulting" that should not be confused with "certification."

The chart below indicates a more complete explanation of the appropriate use of terms. Based on this information, the use of phrases like "Certified Educational Consultant" or "Certified College Admission Consultant" or "Certified Boarding School Consultant" are not appropriate designations. The "Certified" nomenclature in consulting is reserved for those who have earned the Certified Educational Planner credential from the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners and have passed a certification exam and board review.

Nomenclature for Independent Educational Consulting

The field of independent educational consulting is growing and thriving. One result of that growth is the need to be clear in the nomenclature used to identify practitioners. Specifically, there is a need to establish parameters for listing affiliations, certifications, and educational attainments in or on such displays as an email signature line, letterhead, business card, and website. This is important internally as the profession seeks consistency in the use of terms, and externally, as the public looks to distinguish one IEC from another. As a result, the following apply:

If you ...	Appropriate Designation(s)	Example
Are an independent educational consultant	Independent Educational Consultant	John Murphy, Independent Educational Consultant
Have a college or graduate degree	List in standard ways (BA, BS, MEd, MA, etc.)	Mary Jones, MA Todd Greensleeves, PhD
Have a nationally recognized license	List name of license, or abbreviation	Pat Zern, LPC Louis Smith, Master Addictions Counselor (MAC)
Are a member of a professional association [†]	List memberships, as per level (if applicable)*	Rachel Twang, NACAC Member Ann Wang, Professional Member, IECA; Member, LDA, NATSAP
Earned the credential "Certified Educational Planner" from the American Institute of Certified Educational Planners	List as CEP	Terry Smith, Certified Educational Planner
Received a certificate	List the full certificate, including issuing body	Jason Jones, Certificate in College Counseling, UCLA Jenny Snide, Independent Educational Consultant Certificate, UC-Irvine

[†]IECA members are encouraged to list their affiliation when attending conferences or being listed on websites, etc.

*Independent educational consultant affiliations should come first (e.g., IECA, NACAC), followed by other affiliations, since your identity as an independent educational consultant is your profession, and other affiliations indicate an area of specialty within the profession.