

Chapter 1

Growing Oklahoma's Workforce Readiness Through Micro-Credentials

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ABSTRACT

The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education is undergoing a rapid transformation which has been accelerated due to the onset of COVID-19. As the pandemic worsened throughout 2020, Oklahoma's unemployment rate skyrocketed to historic levels. Despite this unfortunate circumstance, numerous job openings are available, particularly among critical occupation areas, such as advanced manufacturing, information systems, technology, healthcare, and management. In order to meet this employment demand, the coordinating board of higher education in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE), sought additional ways to equip Oklahoma college students, particularly those students with some college and no degree, with the necessary professional capital to compete for these jobs. Concurrent with the national trends, OSRHE staff began researching opportunities to validate the ongoing achievements of students through implementation of micro-credentials and digital badging.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education is the state's legal structure for providing public education at the collegiate level. It is a coordinated system of colleges and universities located throughout the state. The state system is comprised of 25 colleges and universities – including two research universities,

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10 regional universities, one public liberal arts university and 12 community colleges – and 11 constituent agencies and two university centers. The state system is coordinated by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE), and each institution is governed by a board of regents.

The work of the OSRHE is defined by constitutional provision, state statute or State Regents' policy delineating coordinating responsibility for the State System of Higher Education, including the areas of institutional functions, programs of study, standards of education and finances. Dr. Glen D. Johnson is the chief executive officer for the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, reporting to a constitutional board whose nine members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate.

Johnson provides leadership on matters relating to standards for Oklahoma higher education, courses and programs of study, budget allocations for institutions, fees and tuition, and strategic planning. He is responsible for an annual higher education budget in excess of \$1.9 billion as well as the state endowment fund, with a market value over \$664.2 million. He is responsible for oversight of OneNet, which is Oklahoma's most advanced technology network designed to provide the infrastructure to support high-speed broadband services, as well as the Oklahoma College Assistance Program, which has guaranteed more than one million student loans exceeding \$2.5 billion in insured debt. Johnson directs 20 statewide scholarship programs including the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program and statewide GEAR UP efforts.

Professional staff serve at the pleasure of the Chancellor at the State Regents' offices located in Oklahoma City. Responsibilities for the agency and its staff include coordination of multiple advisory groups, some of which have been ongoing partners on the micro-credentialing initiative (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2014)

SETTING THE STAGE

Statewide Councils

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) has a longstanding history of facilitating coordination and collaboration among its state system institutions. It exists not only in the anticipated areas such as academic policy, but also in areas like academic program innovations, workforce/economic development, and online education. There are multiple other groups that advise the Chancellor, OSRHE staff, the Council of Presidents, and other state officials, including: Communicators Council, Council for Online Learning Excellence, Online Consortium of Oklahoma, Council of Business Officers, Council on Information Technology, Council on Instruction, Council on Student Affairs, Faculty Advisory Council, and Student Advisory Board.

Council on Instruction

The Council on Instruction (COI) considers academic and related issues affecting Oklahoma higher education, proposes academic and related policy and procedures, and serves as the principal statewide advisory council rendering advice and counsel to the Chancellor in the review of current and recommended academic and related policy and procedures. In performing these responsibilities, the COI renders service to the whole state system.

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