

Chapter 14

A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a Microcredentialing Program

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how institutions of higher education (IHEs) can create a multi-faceted microcredentialing/digital badging program that includes industry specific skills, transferrable skill development (career readiness skills), and reskilling/upskilling for regional community workforce partners. Drawing from the direct experience of Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), a regional, state comprehensive university, this chapter provides a blueprint for cultivating relationships with diverse constituencies, such as industry partners, faculty, staff, and students, to create a successful, comprehensive digital badging initiative.

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A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a Microcredentialing Program

Microcredentials are a powerful and innovative vehicle institutions of higher education (IHEs) can utilize to provide students with specific skills identified by employers (Mulligan, 2022). Essentially, microcredentials reflect competencies required or desired by industry (Naidoo & Kinzel, 2022). Microcredentials are not intended to replace the traditional bachelor's degree; instead, they complement the degree by providing students with additional in-demand competencies, and by recognizing skills that are invisible in a standard transcript. In contrast to the broad scope of a bachelor's degree program, microcredentials focus on demonstrating mastery of a particular skill or area of knowledge. Thus, digital badges are a way to make visible a learner's successful completion of educational activities that lead to specific competencies and skills (Hickey, 2012). This chapter presents a toolkit to help IHEs create microcredentialing initiatives that meet the workforce development needs of regional and national employers.

Microcredentials are new in higher education, so there are few established best practices or models for creating robust digital badging initiatives (Hijden, 2019). This chapter proposes some best practices, based on the authors' ongoing experience implementing a multifaceted digital badging initiative at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU). Use the chapter as a guide to help your institution work through the critical implementation stages of launching a microcredential program strategically, and to avoid costly administrative missteps.

BACKGROUND

At FGCU and for the purpose of this chapter, a microcredential is defined as a credential issued to a student by an IHE for demonstrating competencies in a focused subject. It can be an addition, alternative, complement to or component of another program (Naidoo & Kinzel, 2022). A digital badge is the verifiable credential that allows students to show the skills they have demonstrated, while earning a microcredential that is shared with an external audience via platforms such as LinkedIn (Fein, 2021). For simplicity, we will use the terms interchangeably in this chapter. In essence, microcredentials and digital badges offer students the opportunity to gain focused, in-demand skills that complement their degree programs. Badges efficiently share and demonstrate student mastery with an external audience through digital badging technology which provides an intentional use of meta-data (listing learning outcomes, skills and competencies, linked to student work) (Proctor, 2021).

Effective microcredentialing programs can take a variety of forms, as the authors discovered through our experience at FGCU—a regional state comprehensive university of 16,000 students in Southwest Florida. Our analysis of the skills gaps in the region and of the barriers to effective communication of student skill achievements led us to develop three distinct forms of microcredentials (Figure 1):

- Badges associated with courses that have significant content developed in collaboration with industry partners. Students earn industry-specific badges through an assessment process over and above the requirements for the course.
- Badges that make transferrable career readiness skills visible. To earn these badges, students create a portfolio of artifacts to show how they developed specific transferable skills through a variety of course work and co/extracurricular activities.
- Badges that serve as alternative workplace credentials for anyone looking to expand their skills. Through stand-alone courses that do not bear academic credit, students, alumni, and working

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