

Microcredentials Frequently Asked Questions

General Information

What is a microcredential?

A microcredential is a short-term certification that emphasizes specific skills or knowledge areas. It can help prospective students fill knowledge gaps or enhance their career skills.

What are the different types of microcredentials?

Career-focused microcredentials include badges, industry certifications, and certificates.

What are the differences between a badge, a certificate, and a certification?

A badge is a short-term credential that shows achievement of specific skills or competencies earned through certified learning experiences, workshops, or programs. A certificate indicates the completion of a structured curriculum that involves more coursework than a badge but less than a degree program. A certification proves mastery of knowledge, skills, and competencies established by a recognized organization, such as a licensing body or industry group.

Can microcredentials count toward a college degree?

Yes, credit-bearing microcredentials can be either standalone or stacked to earn enough credits for an associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree. Non-credit-bearing microcredentials may be integrated into degree programs or evaluated as prior learning if the student chooses to pursue a degree.

What does "stackable credential" mean?

Stackable credentials are a series of credit-bearing awards that can be earned incrementally and contribute to the completion of a degree.

Can microcredentials be designed for graduate education?

Yes, microcredentials can be at the graduate level as long as the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with the microcredential necessitate graduate coursework.

What are the potential benefits of obtaining a microcredential?

Earning a microcredential can open doors to new career opportunities and advancement. A 2023 study by Collegis Education and the Online and Professional Education Association found that 95% of employers are familiar with microcredentials. Additionally, 89% of students believe it will help them stand out to employers and secure jobs.

General Information for Institutions

Do I need approval to offer a microcredential?

Certificate-based, credit-bearing microcredentials require administrative approval prior to implementation. All other microcredentials only require notification.

What are the possible benefits of offering a microcredential?

Microcredentials can increase the chances that prospective students will enroll and stay in their education, especially if they see a clear path to relevant job skills and knowledge, along with the flexibility to include them in a degree program.

How does a student enroll in a microcredential program?

Students can apply using the existing application process. To enroll, they must meet the institution's admission requirements.

Can a microcredential be an embedded certificate?

Because microcredentials are designed to align with high-demand careers and are potentially stackable credentials accessible to students outside of a specific degree program, the certificate should be standalone and go through the USG administrative approval process.

Can a student obtain financial aid for microcredentials?

If a microcredential is offered as a certificate program and meets federal gainful employment criteria, students might qualify for financial aid by enrolling in the required credit hours each semester. Badges awarded for credit usually involve fewer than nine credit hours and typically do not qualify for Pell funding unless they are part of an existing degree program.

If a student has prior learning or military experience, can that be counted towards a microcredential?

Institutions should recognize the importance of prior learning experiences and follow established procedures. Students can request a review of their relevant prior experience to possibly earn credit for courses. The American Council on Education is a useful resource for assessing prior learning gained through military service.

Will the microcredential appear on a student's academic transcript?

If a student completes a credit-bearing certificate recognized as an authorized academic program, it should be recorded on their transcript. For badges and certifications, the institution should establish systems to track completion and award the corresponding credentials.

How can we market and promote microcredentials?

Like any marketing plan, it is crucial to first understand the potential student group for the microcredential. Since microcredentials focus on specific workforce skills, collaborating with employers and industries that need these in-demand skills is also beneficial. When promoting these credentials, emphasize the practical, skill-based aspect, show how it can lead to career growth and better job prospects, and highlight how it fits into a busy schedule.

Information on Microcredential Development

How are microcredentials developed?

The development of career-focused microcredentials involves assessing workforce demand, engaging with industry partners, and evaluating potential students. It highlights aligning specific workforce skills with content and establishing achievement levels for assessment. This process follows a framework that includes needs assessment, design and development, implementation, and evaluation.

Can we develop a microcredential using existing courses?

It depends. If the courses are aligned with and mapped to specific competencies required for the workforce area, then yes. Otherwise, begin by listing the needed competencies for the workforce area and then determine whether new, existing, or redesigned courses are necessary to offer the credential.

How can we identify the competencies required for microcredential development?

Market research supports starting the competency development process by aligning key employment areas, industry trends, and learner needs. Additionally, creating an advisory board of industry professionals, employers, and alumni will be

a valuable resource for identifying competencies and their corresponding achievement levels.

Should I design the microcredentials to be part of an academic program or through continuing and professional education?

Microcredentials can be created for either type of course offering. If you have a potential student population of returning adults who wish to upskill or complete a degree program, offer the first course as continuing and professional education, and then apply prior learning procedures to count it toward a for-credit course within the credential.

How can I determine which microcredentials are appropriate for my discipline?

The best way to identify potential microcredential offerings is to use tools like MEDLI and the Unified High Demand Career list to see which jobs align with your discipline.