



Achieving Smart Growth in Microcredential Programs

Tactics to Build Successful Standalone and Stackable Credentials

Professional and Adult Education Advisory Services

Joining you today...



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Microcredentials on the Sector's Mind



Buzz Surfacing from Stakeholders in and Outside Higher Education

Bold Headlines on Microcredentials...

Forbes

Small But Mighty: Why Microcredentials Are Huge for The Future of Work

**WORLD
ECONOMIC
FORUM**

Four Ways Microcredentials and Skills-Based Hiring Can Help Displaced Workers Access Jobs of the Future



New Jersey Latest State to Stop Requiring College Degrees For Some Jobs

IHE Inside Higher Ed

Spelman's Online Program Rakes in Nearly \$2M a Year After Launch

...Supported By Encouraging Data

67%

Of American adults think that getting a microcredential would be worth the cost

81%

Of executives say that employees who hold microcredentials gain credibility

200%

Growth in the number of "alternative" credentials offered in the market between 2018 and 2020

Source: Maggioncalda, J., "4 ways microcredentials and skills-based hiring can help displaced workers access jobs of the future," World Economic Forum, May 2023; Perna, M., "Small But Mighty: Why Microcredentials Are Huge For The Future Of Work," Forbes, 2021; State of New Jersey, "Governor Murphy Signs Executive Order to Prioritize Work Experience and Skills Training Over Four-Year Degrees for Certain State Employment Opportunities," April 2023; Nietzel, M., "New Jersey Latest State to Stop Requiring College Degrees For Some Jobs," Forbes, April 2023; Strada Education Foundation, "Strada-Gallup Education Survey (2020-2021)," 2021; Greenberg, S., "Employers Are All In on Microcredentials, Survey Shows," Inside Higher Ed, February 2023; SHRM, Coffey, L., "A Woman's College's Profitable Foray into Online Learning" 2023; SHRM, "Making Alternative Credentials Work," 2022; EAB interviews and analysis.

A Rose by Any Other Name...



Our Three Characteristics of a Microcredential

A credential

Smaller in size

Narrower in focus

A microcredential is a **codification** of a package of learning **smaller** than the amount required for a traditional credential and designed around a **specific skill or competency** (rather than an entire body of knowledge).

How Did EAB Land on This Definition?

▶ **We focused on points of agreement.**

Interviews with Canadian, UK, and Australian leaders revealed that provincial/national frameworks did not substitute for strategy.

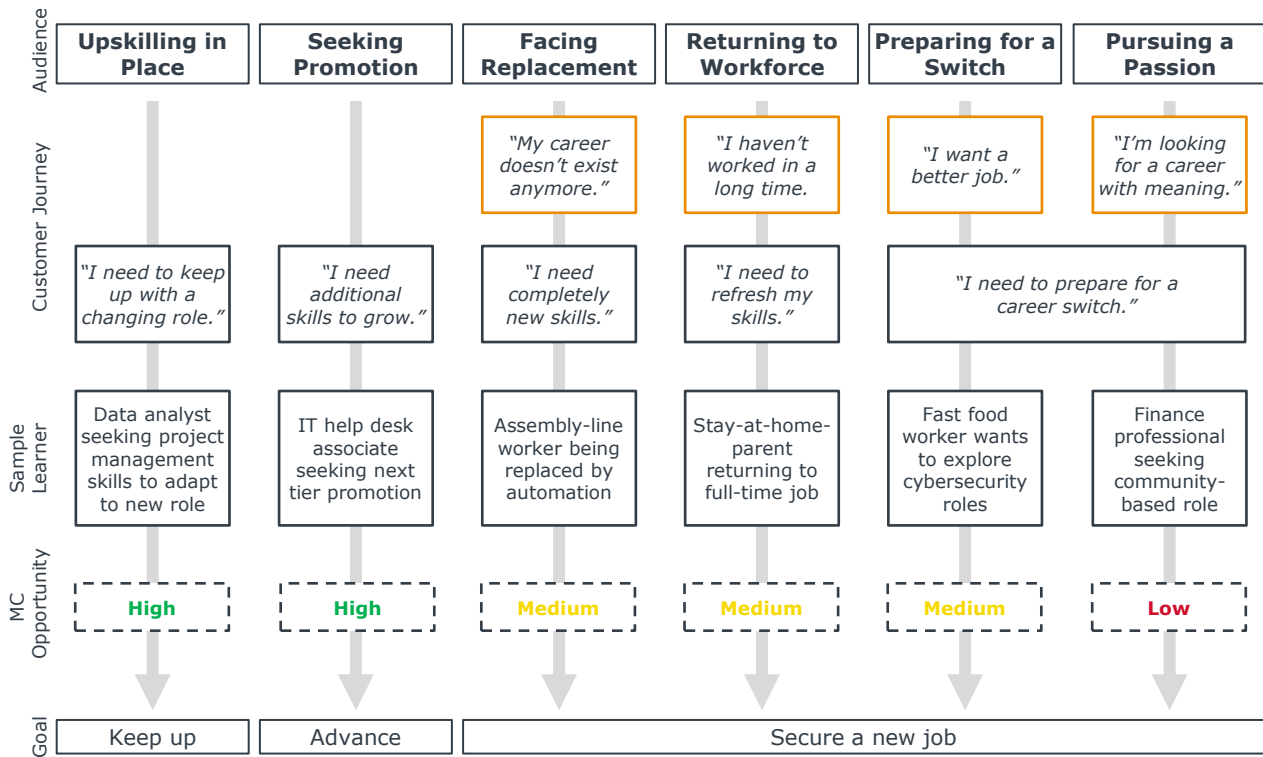
▶ **We selected the best-fit term for higher ed.**

The “micro” in micro-credential is relative to traditional higher education credentials.

▶ **We pushed for greater specificity.**

While alternative credentials is inclusive of microcredentials, it is broader (e.g., alternative provider credentials).

Understanding the Microcredential Student



Barrier 1: Low Student Awareness



7



Students are optimistic...

- 75% believe “digital credentials are **a good way to supplement traditional education**”
- 86% who completed a microcredential said it **helped them achieve their career goals**



...but confused.

- **Only 47%** are familiar with digital credential programs
- 40% “**don’t know where to start**” in trying to learn new skills

Students’ Expected Outcomes Do Not Match What They Actually Accomplish

Top *Expected* Outcomes of Completing a Microcredential

1. Improved job performance (41%)
2. Improved job applications (28%)
3. Learn something new (27%)

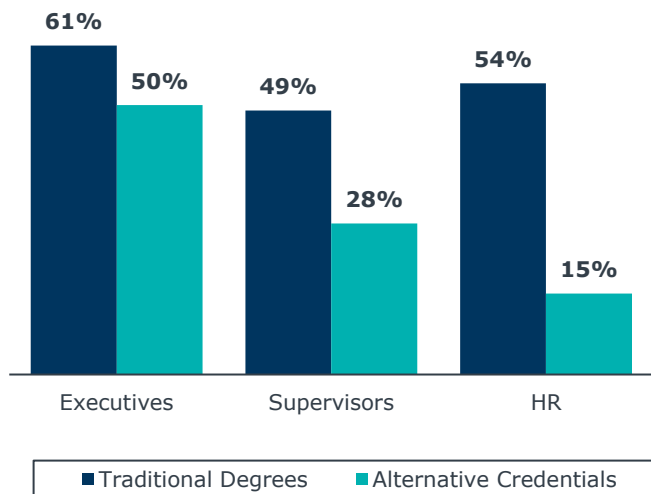
Top *Actual* Outcomes of Completing a Microcredential

1. Learn something new (94%)
2. Improve job performance (38%)
3. Improve English language skills (23%)

Barrier 2: Minimal Employer Uptake

Varied Opinions on Microcredentials Hinder Employer Recognition

Percentage of Leaders Who Place High Value on Different Credentials (by Level)



HR Software Also a Barrier

- Resume scanning software and web-based forms typically unable to identify alternative credentials
- Candidates materials often supplied as static PDFs, reducing ability to link to verified digital credentials
- Employer demand for more sophisticated approach is low

*"At some point, maybe 5 or 10 years, enough of the vendors, employers, and institutions will be producing and consuming digital credentials ... **it'll be a hockey stick adoption curve, but we're on the bottom of the stick right now.**"*

-Andrew Cunsolo, Jobvite

Barrier 3: Evergreen (and New) Internal Headwinds

Many Institutions Implicitly or Explicitly Resistant to Microcredentials



Common Innovation Roadblocks

Challenges facing any academic innovation are still present when trying to create microcredentials...

- Developing new academic policies and processes that align with the new offering
- Educating students about the new offering and how it compares to current programs
- Identifying and successfully reaching new markets
- Responding to faculty concerns and pushback

Barriers Unique to Microcredentials

...but microcredentials also bring their own additional, unique internal challenges.

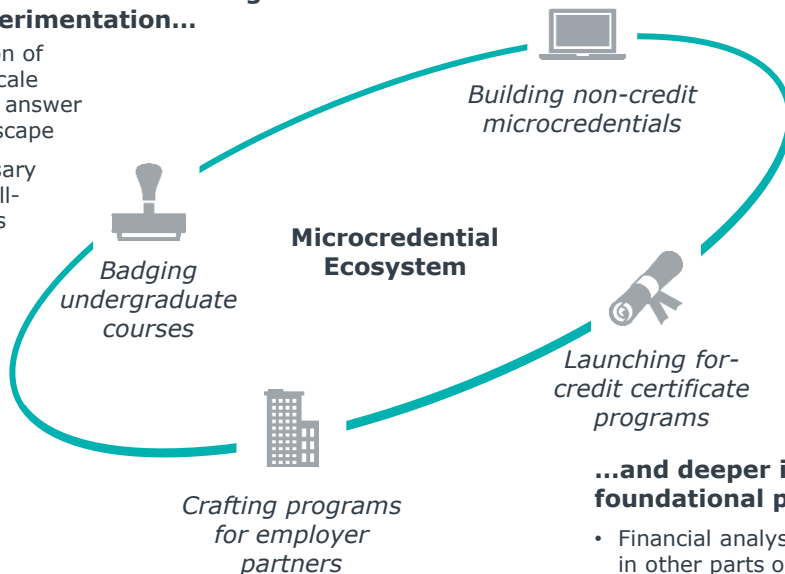
- Acquiring new tech platforms to support credential issuance, tracking, and/or ecommerce activities
- Finding student support solutions when microcredential offerings are ineligible for federal financial aid
- Competing successfully with credentials offered at low or no cost by alternative providers

Consider the Microcredential “Ecosystem”

Microcredentials Require Both Experimentation and Deeper Investment

Embracing microcredentials through small-scale experimentation...

- Higher-risk portion of portfolio; small-scale experiments best answer in uncertain landscape
- Guardrails necessary around even small-scale experiments



...and deeper investment in foundational practices.

- Financial analysis more central than in other parts of portfolio
- Academic policy adjustments necessary to deliver on promise
- Support services and investment in quality required, not optional

Today's Focus



Achieving Smart Growth in Microcredential Programs

I

Prioritize Financial Analysis in Program Development and Assessment

Tactic 1:

Nurture Promising Microcredential Ideas

Tactic 2:

Build a Better Microcredential Proposal Form

Tactic 3:

Conduct Independent Assessment of Microcredential Viability

Tactic 4:

Develop and Implement a Microcredential Sunsetting Policy

II

Make Stackability a Reality

Tactic 5:

Build Clear Pathways to Larger Credentials

Tactic 6:

Strengthen Credit for Prior Learning Policies to Support Stacking

Tactic 7:

Create Alternative Admissions Standards and Processes for Microcredential Programs

III

Align Microcredential Offerings to Student and Employer Expectations

Tactic 8:

Optimize Microcredentials for High-Quality, Industry-Aligned Content

Tactic 9:

Invest in Robust Student Services to Support Persistence

Tactic 10:

Scale Using B2B Partnerships



Prioritize Financial Analysis in Program Development and Assessment

SECTION

- Tactic 1: Nurture Promising Microcredential Ideas
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- Tactic 3: Conduct Independent Assessment of Microcredential Viability
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Independent PCO Assessment Crucial To Success

Incorporating Additional Analysis Safeguards Against Financial Risk

Key Elements of PCO Assessment



Market Demand

- Ensures that new offerings are aligned to in-demand skills
- Guards against launching programs only because they excite faculty



The **University of Adelaide** built a new product assessment tool that assigns a score to potential programs based on potential market demand



Competitor Analysis

- Evaluates market to determine where opportunity for innovation exists
- Guards against launch in an oversaturated market



Western University evaluates offerings from peer institutions and alternative providers to find opportunities for new programs that align with their institutional niche



Cost & Revenue

- Projects margin to determine if the offering will be financially viable
- Guards against launching programs without understanding costs



The University of Texas at San Antonio™

UTSA designed their funding formula to account for overlooked costs. They project how costs will change so they know how much revenue to expect over time

Size Up The Competition

Competitor Analysis Important for Determining Sustainable Market Share

How To Conduct A Competitor Analysis

1

Gauge Competitors and Market Share:

- Research regional providers already providing similar programs; visit PCO websites to check who offers microcredentials
- Consider alternative providers and international competitors
- Check StatsCan, IPEDS, etc. for degree and certificate completions data

2

Assess Competitors' Market Position:

- Examine time to completion, flexibility, and affordability/ROI for each competitor
- Evaluate the content taught to determine if there are gaps against what's in demand that your institution could fill

3

Decide to Compete or Pivot:

- Determine whether market demand is high enough to warrant another microcredential in this competitive landscape
- Decide if you can offer a stronger ROI by being faster, more flexible, or cheaper

Case Study



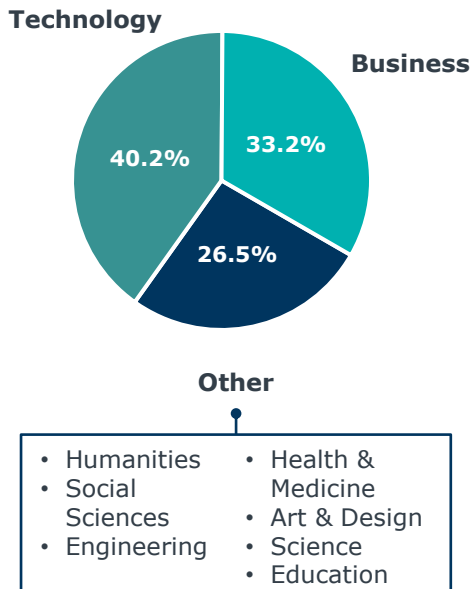
- **Launched a competitor analysis** process in 2023
- Program proposer and Continuing Studies program innovation specialist consider **similar internal alternatives and external competitors**
- Specialist documents **key information on competitors**, including duration, price, maturity, and any reputational information
- Western uses info to determine whether it **can achieve a sustainable market share** for a given program
- When Western decides against launching a program, leaders consider **partnerships for learning pathways** with competitors

Opportunities in Both Big and Niche Markets

Creative Partnerships Can Support Success for Niche Programs

Nearly 75% of Alt. Credentials Are in Technology or Business

Microcredential Distribution by Subject



Many Ways to Find Your Niche

Consider Region, Special Populations, Unique Topics



Pinpoint Regional Needs

Lethbridge College offers an indigenous policing microcredential in partnership with local police services



Connect With "Celebrity" Instructors

Alverno College offers an environmental education program taught by a "celebrity ecologist" in their region



Target Underserved Groups

Ashland University offers microcredentials to formerly incarcerated people in Ohio through grants funded by the state government.



Align with Professional Requirements

U of Maine offers a \$25 indigenous history microcredential that aligns with continuing ed and pre-service teacher training.

Starting with Market Demand

Work with EAB's **Market Insights** Service to Generate High-Potential Ideas

In demand occupations were then grouped into categories to identify in-demand verticals where the requesting institution may consider focusing their nondegree programming.

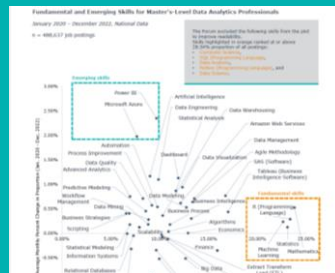
High Demand Occupations (Labor Market Source)	Vertical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislators (3.11) Operations Research Analysts (3.08) General and Operations Managers (3.05) Managers, All Other (3.76) Human Resources Specialists (3.74) Transportation, Storage, and Distribution Managers (3.70) Human Resources Managers (3.70) Project Management Specialists (3.62) Business Operations Specialists, All Other (3.59) Compensation, Benefits, and Job Analysis Specialists (3.55) Purchasing Managers (3.44) 	Business Operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Relations Managers (3.82) Marketing Managers (3.80) Fundraisers (3.80) Advertising and Promotions Managers (3.47) 	Communications and Marketing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-Instructional Teachers (4.21) Teachers (4.00) Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors (3.90) Postsecondary Teachers (3.82) Educational Administrators, Postsecondary (3.72) Secondary (K-12) Teachers, Special Education and Career/Technical Education (3.67) 	

What Verticals Offer Greatest Opportunity?

1. Analyze employer demand within your service region to surface which roles offer students the greatest opportunity, with high and/or growing demand
2. Categorize related roles within verticals to focus efforts

What Skills Hold Greatest Value in Chosen Vertical?

1. Analyze skills requested in relevant job postings over time to determine which experience consistently high demand (fundamental skills) and which experience highest growth in demand (emerging skills)
2. Group related skills to identify possible microcredential content areas





Make Stackability a Reality

SECTION

II

- Tactic 5: Build Clear Pathways to Larger Credentials
- Tactic 6: Strengthen Credit for Prior Learning Policies to Support Stacking
- Tactic 7: Create Alternative Admissions Standards and Processes for Microcredential Programs



Two Approaches to Stackability

Bundle or Create Pathways to Ensure Credential Connectedness



Bundled Credentials

Stackability

Credential Pathways

Students take several distinct microcredential offerings; if they complete the full set, it "adds up" to a full, larger credential. Final assessment may be required.

Students take a microcredential that comprises some part of a larger credential and counts toward that credential, but the full credential cannot be completed just by completing a set of microcredentials.

Stackable Credential Pipelines in Ohio



16%

Increase in earnings, on average, for those who earned a single credential

37%

Increase in earnings, on average, for those who stacked multiple credentials

\$9,000

Approximate annual earnings increase for those who stacked

Carnegie Mellon's Successful Bundled Credentials

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Stacks Four Certificates

- Methods and Tools for Product Innovation
- New Product Management
- Product Design Innovation
- Technology for Product Management



Capstone Course
Professional Practice
of Product Innovation



MIIPS Degree
Master of Integrated
Innovation for Products
and Services

CMU's Stackable Master's Program



- In **January 2022**, CMU unbundled their residential MIIPS degree; formed equivalent online degree of four certificates with two courses each
- Program emerged from CMU's **interdisciplinary** Integrated Innovation Institute; successful pilot has led to expansion of the model to other units
- **Certificates can be completed in any order** to ensure high student flexibility and capstone course only required for students pursuing credit
- **Students are largely more domestic, more diverse, and have not cannibalized on-campus offerings**, including the MIIPS degree
- **70 students to date**; originally 49 entered as certificate only, but **7 converted to the full degree program** by the end of their first credential

Help Students Understand Stackable Pathways

MSU-Denver's Pathways Graphic Visualizes Stackability for Students



METROPOLITAN
STATE UNIVERSITY
OF DENVER

Metropolitan State University of Denver's Introduction to Space Flight Operations



Key Components of Pathway Visualization

1

Direct connection to employment outcomes (e.g., salary or job title)

2

Examples of the final for-credit degree or other off-ramps from the institution

3

Clear articulation of the pathways and all variable components (e.g., credit/credential type)



Align Microcredential Offerings to Student and Employer Expectations

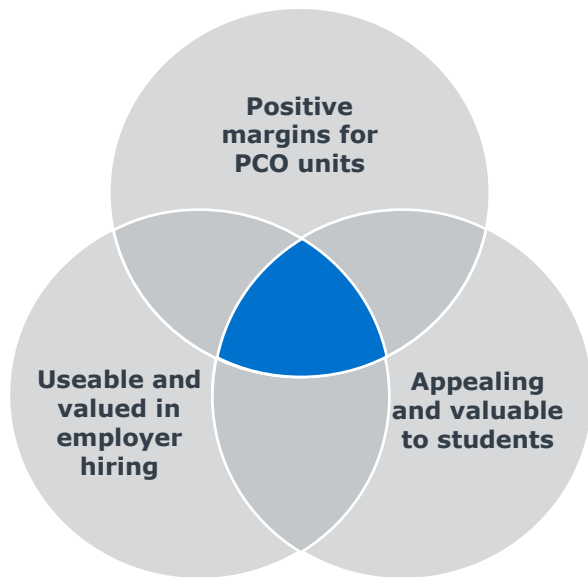
SECTION

- Tactic 8: Optimize Microcredentials for High-Quality, Industry-Aligned Content
- Tactic 9: Invest in Robust Student Services to Support Persistence
- Tactic 10: Scale Using B2B Partnerships

III

Meet Me in the Middle

Aligning Student, Employer, and PCO Needs Essential in Nascent Space



Successful Microcredentials Must Deliver Value to Three Core Constituencies



For students, microcredential programs must offer a high-quality learning experience with low barriers to entry, competitive price point, convenient modality, and a compelling case for microcredential value in the job market.



For employers, microcredentials must have successfully taught students critical skills, and HR and hiring managers must understand what that knowledge is and how to evaluate microcredential completion in make hiring decisions.



For institutions, microcredentials must meet financial goals: at least breaking even, and ideally achieving positive margins directly through tuition payment and/or indirectly through lead generation.

Microcredentials Are Different...

...But Those Differences May Not Mean What You Think

Misstep 1: Because microcredentials are shorter in length, institutions **allot less time for program development.**

In fact, microcredentials:

- Require collaboration across departments
- Require instructional development even when repackaging content
- Typically require 6-18 months to develop and launch



Tactic 8:
Optimize for High-Quality, Market-Aligned Content

Misstep 2: Because microcredentials are less than a degree, institutions **think students expect a lesser experience.**

In fact, students:

- Want robust learning experiences regardless of credential type
- May look to microcredential as on-ramp to traditional program
- Need support services, especially adult students



Tactic 9:
Invest in Robust Student Services to Support Persistence

Misstep 3: Institutions creating skill-aligned programs **take employer buy-in as a given.**

In fact, employers:

- Lack understanding of microcredentials
- Need evidence of alignment and outcomes to convince them of value
- Need nuanced messaging for different audiences (e.g., executives vs. HR)



Tactic 10:
Scale Using B2B Partnerships



Hold Microcredentials to a High Standard

Four Quality Checks to Ensure Industry and Format Optimization

1

Ensure Curricular Alignment with Employer and Industry Needs



Twelve of **Simon Fraser University's** 23 non-credit certificates are endorsed by or aligned to a relevant professional association/accrediting organization. These endorsements can improve learners' employability.

2

Create Career-Oriented Learning Opportunities



Southern Alberta Institute of Technology concludes four microcredential programs (including Product Management and User Experience Design) with industry-sourced capstone project. At least three startups have launched as a result.

3

Deploy (or Require) Rigorous Assessments



Florida Gulf Coast University collaborates with employers to develop assessment criteria. Employer partner Arthrex attends and helps evaluate final oral presentations in *Fundamentals of Medical Device Industry* microcredential. Successful completion guarantees an interview.

4

Optimize Delivery for Modality and Format



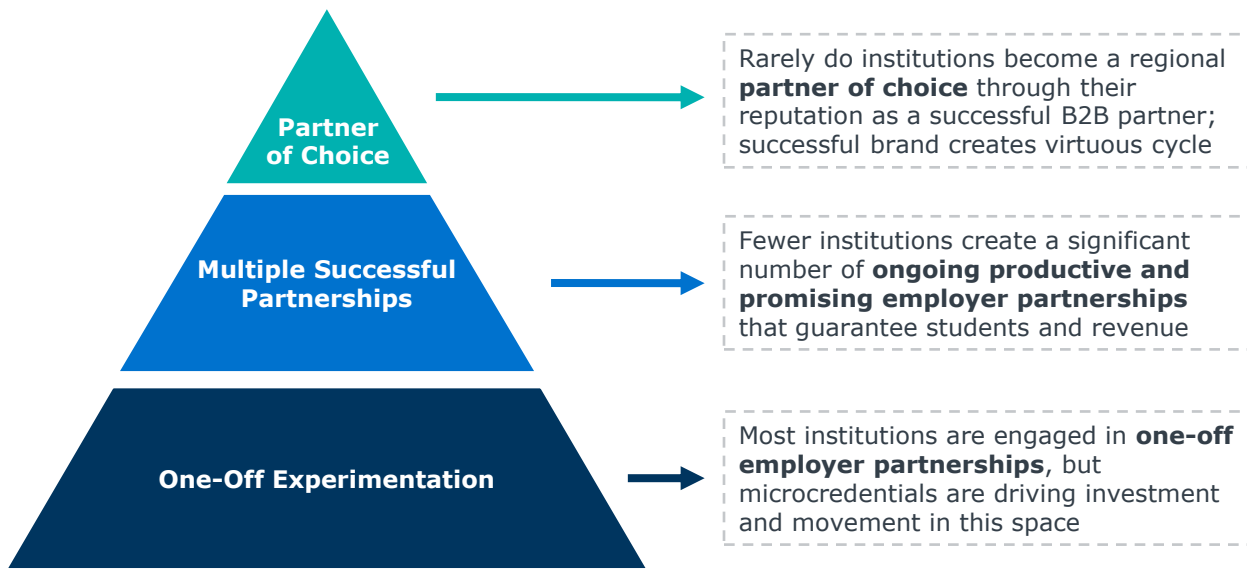
Carnegie Mellon University collaborated with iDesign to convert residential master's curriculum into virtual-optimized delivery across four certificates. Assignments are team-based, work begins with team contract. CMU welcomed their first cohort in Spring '22.

PCO Units at Different Points in B2B¹ Maturity



Microcredentials Creating More Opportunities for Units to Partner and Scale

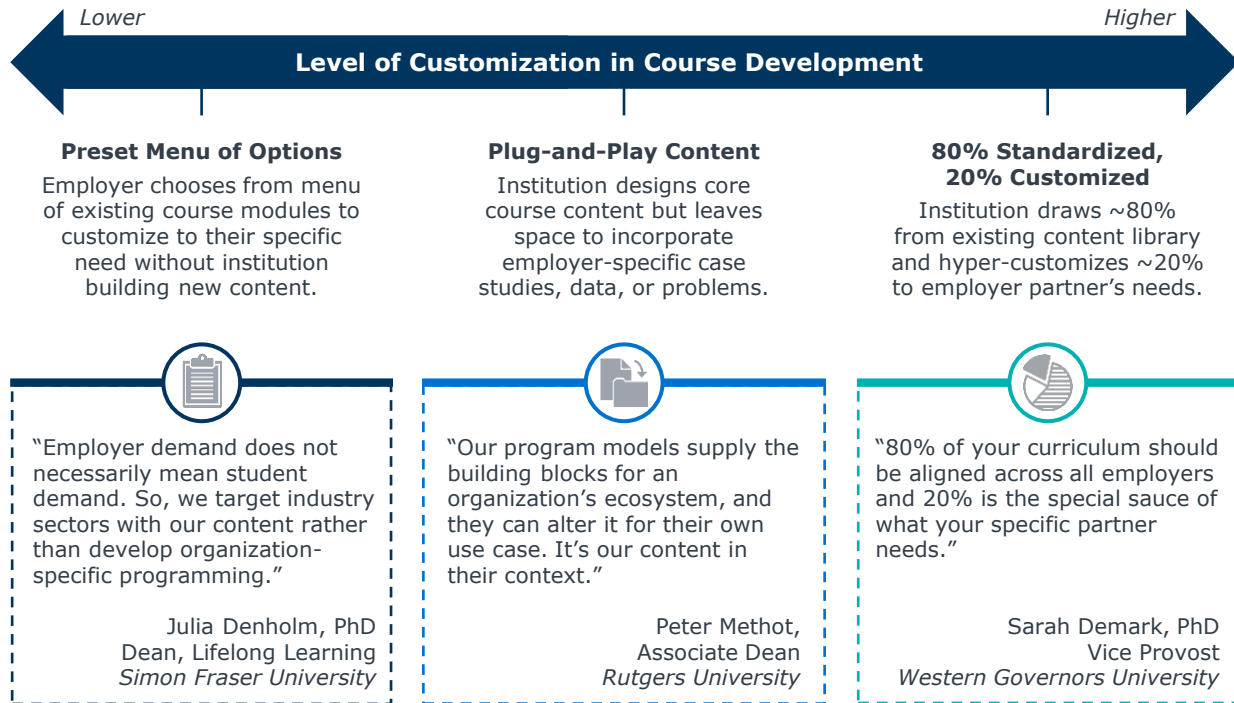
Three Levels of Maturity in B2B Partnerships



1) Business-to-business partnerships

Risk Mitigation Idea 1: Minimize Custom Content

Custom Content Limits Reusability Across Partnerships, Increasing Cost



Risk Mitigation Idea 2: Secure Employer Commitment

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Melbourne's Employer Partners Agree On Enrollment, Costs Upfront



Institutional Risk



Investment in program development **can be a gamble** without guaranteed revenue or enrollment

Employer Risk



Upfront investment to **fund program development challenging** even if employer expects value from employees completing the program

University of Melbourne Recoups Costs Through Contracted Minimum Enrollments

$$\text{Employer cost per student per year} = \frac{\text{(Total development \& delivery cost)} \div \text{(Committed no. of students)}}{\text{Length of contract (years)}}$$

- 1 Calculate **comprehensive program cost**
- 2 Develop contract with employer that guarantees **fixed number of students they will send** over contract time period
- 3 **Determine employer cost per student** to ensure enrollment will cover entire development costs (i.e., fewer students or higher development cost raises price per student to employer)

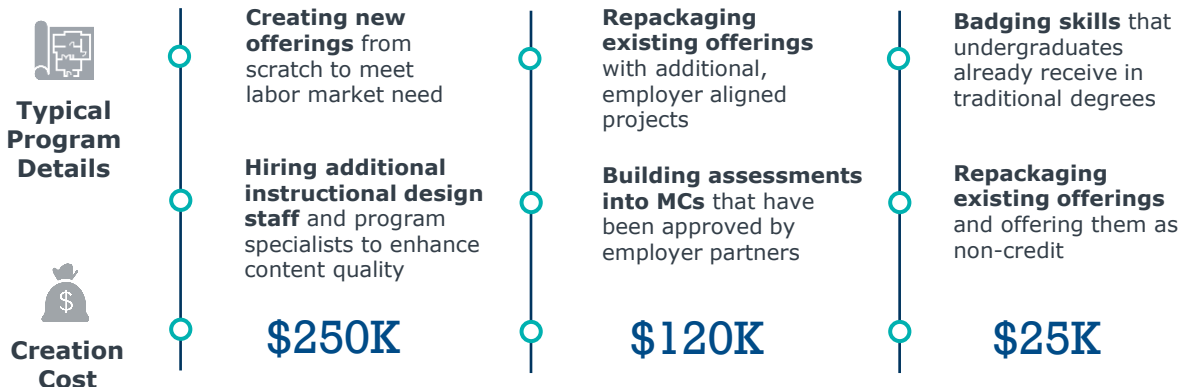


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No Such Thing as a Low-Cost Microcredential

Even “Low-Lift” Microcredentials Are More Expensive Than Anticipated



Costs Overlooked in the “Zero-Cost Model”

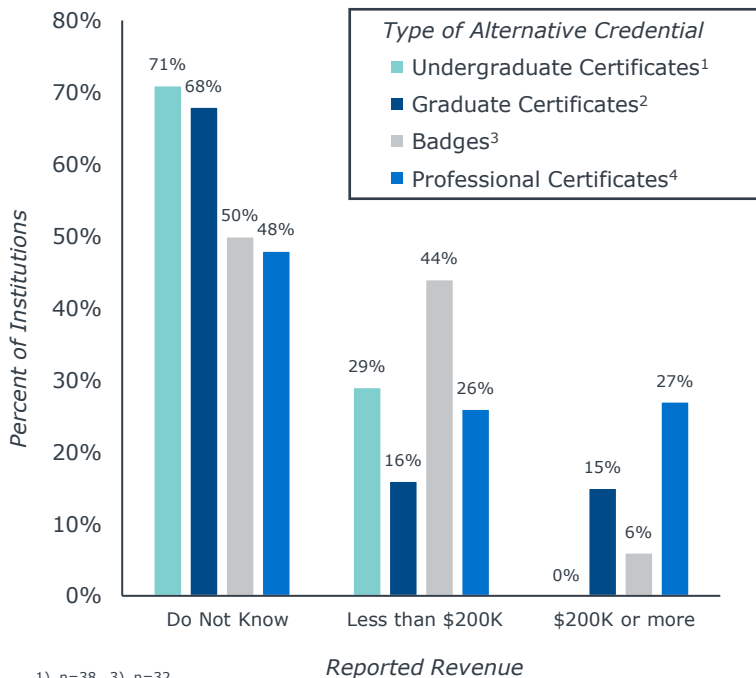
- ✘ Faculty course development cost
- ✘ LMS/SIS infrastructure
- ✘ Marketing cost from staff or third party
- ✘ Post-completion badge issuing
- ✘ Staff proposal processing time
- ✘ Non-credit registration platform
- ✘ Staff time for processing application
- ✘ Market research before launch

A Peek Behind the Revenue Curtain



Few Institutions Post Big Returns—and Most Don't Even Know ROI

Reported Revenue Data from April 2020 UPCEA Member Survey



1) n=38 3) n=32
2) n=41 4) n=53

Distributed Ownership Clouds Revenue Picture

- Roughly **50% or more** of all institutions do not know the revenue of their alternative credentials

Professional Certificates Are the Most Lucrative...But Not By Much

- Few institutions report an **annual revenue of \$200K** or more, highest amounts concentrated among even fewer players

More innovative microcredential likely even murkier market

- Certificates are the most commonly offered form of microcredential; as schools experiment with new formats, neither clarity on outcomes nor actual revenue achieved likely to increase

U of Adelaide's Market Assessment Tool Prioritizes Viable Programs



The screenshot shows a web-based assessment tool interface. At the top, there are three tabs: 'Desirability' (red), 'Feasibility' (blue), and 'Viability' (blue). The main content area is titled 'How appealing is the product to the target market?' and features a horizontal 5-point scale. The scale is color-coded: 1 (red), 2 (orange), 3 (yellow), 4 (light green), and 5 (dark green). A blue dot is positioned on the scale between 4 and 5, indicating a score of 4. Below the scale, there are two text boxes: 'Do you have evidence to support this?' with a 'Yes' button, and a larger text area for providing sources and evidence. A 'Score' box on the right shows the value '4'.

Programs receive an overall rating that is used to measure viability

- <20=not viable
- 20-30=for consideration, needs additional information
- >30=viable

Web-based tool helps proposer and PCO unit determine financial viability



Form includes assessment of modality, market size, competitors, and possible external funding



Built-in calculations provide initial analysis of proposer-submitted data as part of form completion



Proposer fills out form and PCO unit provides feedback and helps faculty iterate on submission

UTSA Models Out Program Costs



Formula and Model Increase Faculty Comfort with Revenue Share



Program Costs and Revenue Share for Mediator Program¹

	Year 1		Year 4	
	10 (min)	30 (max)	15 (min)	30 (max)
<i>Enrollment</i>				
Gross Revenue ²	\$20,000	\$60,000	\$30,000	\$60,000
Instructor Costs ³	\$4,500	\$4,500	\$4,500	\$4,500
Supplies	\$500	\$1,500	\$500	\$1,500
Coordinator Time	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
Curriculum Cost	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$0	\$0
Marketing	\$6,000	\$18,000	\$4,500	\$9,000
Net Revenue	\$4,000	\$31,000	\$20,000	\$43,000
University Tax (14%)	\$2,800	\$8,400	\$4,200	\$8,400
Profit/Loss	\$1,200	\$22,600	\$15,800	\$34,600

No curriculum cost because content has been developed

Marketing drops from 30% to 15%

PaCE Takeaway	\$1,200	\$22,600	\$11,060	\$24,220
Partner Takeaway	\$0	\$0	\$4,740	\$6,920

PaCE takes 100% in years 1-3 and 70% starting in year 4

- 1) Model based on PaCE-owned IP funding model.
- 2) Gross revenue based on course fee of \$2,000.
- 3) Includes \$1,500 travel cost and assumes \$75/hr wage for 40-hour in-person course.



Experimentation Riskier Without Sunset Policy



Most Institutions Don't Have Any Sunsetting Policy In Place

64%

Of PCO leaders disagree that their institution has a clear policy for sunsetting programs

80%

Believe that when sunsetting decisions are made they are haphazard and not grounded in market alignment



Benefits of A Default Sunset Policy

- ▶ Limits PCO unit financial loss from less successful program launches
- ▶ Protects academic units from zombie offerings
- ▶ Addresses concerns of faculty worried that microcredentials are a fad
- ▶ Flips burden of proof for program review; must prove that program is worth continuing instead of worth closing

“We are able to experiment in the microcredential space because of our temporary approval process. We tell faculty we can't know how a microcredential will perform unless we try. A program will be sunset after 18 months if it fails.”

*Andrew Bennett, PhD, Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Co-Chair
Kansas State University*

Don't Stop Believing Reviewing

Microcredentials Need Continuous Review To Prevent Resource Drain



Continuously Monitor Key Metrics & Intervene Aggressively

- Identify metrics that indicate program needs emergency review
- Evaluate enrollment levels to determine if they indicate need for revitalization or program pause
- Determine if the reason for low enrollment is content or marketing



Conduct Formal Reviews More Frequently

- Conduct program reviews every 18 months to two years. Focus of review should be market performance
- Assess financial health, total number of web inquiries, and enrollment projections
- Compare pre-launch projections to early data points to inform sunseting decision



Saint Louis University monitors microcredential performance constantly. They launched a blockchain and cryptocurrency offering and paused it after 18 months due to enrollment challenges and shifts in fintech landscape.



The University of Melbourne built a two-part review process with financial review every 18 months (to support sunseting decisions) and academic and student experience reviews on a separate cadence.

Stackability Is Definitional, But Often Overlooked



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Stacking Not Designed From the Start Often Never Comes to Fruition

Microcredential Definitions Highlight Stackability...

“ *Credential Engine*

Microcredentials have stand-alone value and may also **contribute to other micro- or macro-credentials.**”

“ *Australian Government*

Microcredentials funded under the pilot **need to [contain] credit pathways to formal qualifications and credit recognition arrangements.**”

“ *SUNY System Office*

Each microcredential has **immediate value and, wherever possible, stacks together** ...to meet the requirements of a certificate, initial or advanced degree.”

... But Too Often, The Opportunity for Stacking Is Missed.



Institutions lose out on the opportunity to use microcredentials for effective lead generation.

Microcredential programs can generate leads for traditional programs, but absent stacking, students won't follow that path.



Employers may not believe in the validity and quality of an unaligned microcredential.

Without alignment with traditional credentials, employers may ignore or ineffectively weigh microcredentials in the hiring process.



Students are limited in their ability to capitalize on the benefits of lifelong learning.

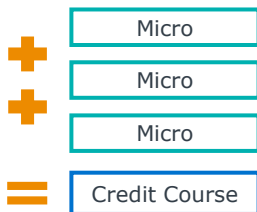
Standalone microcredentials leave students wondering what's next and how the learning relates to other pursuits.

Why Not Both?

New Mexico State University's Dual Approach to Stackability



Bundled Credentials

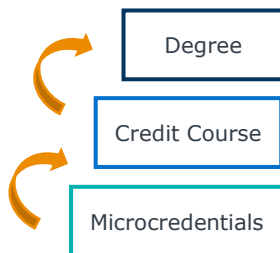


First, Bundle Microcredentials into Credit Course

Focal population: Open to all learners

- NMSU offers three engineering microcredentials
- Each microcredential is equivalent to 1 credit (defined as 42.5 hours of learning)
- Students who complete all three microcredentials have earned the credit for the full 3-credit course ENGR 400.

Credential Pathways



Then, Incorporate Course into Degree Pathway

Focal population: Learners in need of full traditional credential

- Credit for ENGR 400, whether earned via 3 microcredentials or through taking the traditional course, counts toward full engineering degree.
- Because equivalency of learning is established before design of the microcredentials, no credit for prior learning process is needed for students to progress through the stack.

Bring Stackability to Life for Students



Combat Confusion with Multiple Touchpoints to Educate on Stackability



Define Your Lingo

- **Keep stealth shoppers in mind.** Website and marketing materials must clearly define “stackability” for students opting not to speak to advisors as they choose a program.
- **Present the value proposition.** Make clear how students benefit from stacking credentials instead of pursuing more traditional educational paths.
- **Create infographics** to further illustrate available pathways.



Tell Student Stories

- **Demonstrate how stackability works in practice** by profiling students who have progressed through your stacked offerings.
- Explain **why profiled students chose to stack** instead of enrolling directly in a full traditional degree.
- **Highlight career outcomes** achieved based on students earning each individual credential throughout the stack.



Embed Across Student Lifecycle

- **Emphasize stackability** on website, social media, and marketing emails to attract prospective students.
- Have faculty teaching in stacked programs **talk to their classes** about how to progress through the stack.
- Create **process for advisors to proactively contact students eligible for stacking** to explain benefits and assist with process.

No Matter the Approach, CPL Essential to Stacking

Why CPL?

- Adults who earned credits through PLA had a **22% higher degree completion rate** than adults without PLA credits.
- Positive impact of CPL on degree completion **holds across racial/ethnic groups and SES**.
- PLA process is almost always necessary to enable **non-credit to credit pathways**, a core promise of microcredential offerings.
- CPL a linchpin enabling full realization of a **lifelong learning model** to serve adult learners.

Two Fundamental Principles That Make CPL Possible



Assessment ensures that students can demonstrate the key learning outcomes of the course. Without assessment, justification for granting credit is questionable.



Equivalency aligns learning outcomes from non-credit experiences to credit courses. Without alignment, granting of credit becomes impossible regardless of demonstrated learning.

“Credit for prior learning...can result in more adult students and more equitable outcomes. Not, however, as it is commonly practiced.”

--Michelle Navarre Cleary, PhD

Assessment Necessary to Verify Learning Outcomes

Two Options for Incorporating Assessments into Microcredentials

Built Into Program



- **All learners take (*and must pass*) required assessments** during the microcredential that are directly aligned to the competencies.
- In for-credit offerings, **earning the aligned microcredential is not directly associated with a student's grade in a course** due to the competency-based nature of microcredentials
- Focus on SLOs¹ and assessment ensures the **work can be transferred to the traditional curriculum** if interest in microcredentials fades.
- Assessments help students **better articulate what they have learned** to employers.

Verified Learning Outcome

Optional to Earn Credit



- **All mini-MBA programs are non-credit coursework, but students can choose to earn credit through assessment** (a final exam and applied project) after completion
- **Students earn three credits** upon successful assessment completion
- **These credits can be applied to multiple master's degrees**, including the MBA, as they cover core learning competencies
- **After adding a badge** to completion of the assessment, student choice to complete assessment and earn credit shifted from 10% to 90%

1) Student Learning Outcomes

Non-credit to Credit Pathways Require Equivalence

Delaying Plans for Stackability Leads Too Often to Broken Pathways

Microcredential 1: *Managing and Communicating Data*

1. Project Management
2. Advanced Excel
4. Public Speaking


Microcredential 2: *Intermediate Data Visualization*

2. Advanced Excel
5. Graphic Design
6. Tableau



Larger Credential: *Comp Sci 345, Data Communication*

Learning Outcomes:

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. Project Management | 4. Public Speaking |
| 2. Advanced Excel | 5. Graphic Design |
|  Data Communication | 6. Tableau |



Course Outcomes Must Be Equivalent

Like other CPL options (e.g., AP or CLEP tests), stacked microcredentials must meet all required learning outcomes of the larger degree. Otherwise, the student is missing requisite content and will not receive credit. Plan during the design phase to avoid this mistake.