

Recommendation to Establish Policies and Procedures for Microcredentials at UWM

I. Description

A microcredential is a small program of study that provides specified competencies that contribute to the needs of communities, industries and students. Those that bear credit are smaller than degrees, majors, minors, certificates, concentrations, and other such credentials, often in the range of 6-12 credits. These are termed “clusters.” When students fulfill the requirements for a microcredential cluster it will be noted on their transcript and they will receive an electronic badge.

II. Definitions¹

Badge: an electronic document that indicates competencies and various learning achievements; electronic badges should include meta-data on the evidence of learning and link back to sponsoring institution and evaluation criteria.

Certificate: a credential issued by an institution in recognition of the completion of a curriculum that usually represents a smaller domain of knowledge than established degrees. Credit bearing certificates must be approved through UWM curricular governance processes. Certificates typically contain fewer credits than a degree program.

Certification: mastery of or competency in specific knowledge, skills or processes that can be measured against a set of accepted standards, usually established by a recognized entity such as Wisconsin’s Department of Public Instruction in the case of licensure requirements or an industry organization such as Microsoft.

Cluster: a focused development of a competency across multiple courses, ranging from 6 to 12 credits in length (e.g., a 6-credit cluster would be made up of two 3-credit courses; a 12-credit cluster could be made up of four 3-credit courses). A microcredential can be comprised of one or more clusters.

Competency: Learnable, measurable and/or observable knowledge and skill-sets gained.

Degree: title given by an institution (usually a college or university) that has been granted the authority by a state, a recognized Native American tribe, or the federal government to confer such credentials. A degree represents satisfactory accomplishments within an accepted body of knowledge.

Microcredential: Credentials that are generally smaller than a minor, certificate or degree and narrower in focus. For example, a microcredential could be three courses in length (9 credits). Microcredentials are designed to help students meet academic and

career goals and to help them stand-out in a competitive job market. They are intentionally explicit about skills and competencies mastered. For the purposes of this policy, the term “microcredential” refers exclusively to credit-bearing forms.

Stackable Credential: part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications and help that individual move along a career pathway and further education. For example, a 30-credit master’s degree could be comprised of three 9-credit microcredentials plus a capstone course.

III. Governance Approval Process

Credit-bearing microcredential clusters are considered “submajors” for the purposes of Academic Approval Matrix, and must be approved according to the process specified for “Establish sub-major or certificate program.” Interdisciplinary clusters can combine courses from multiple departments or programs, but one sponsoring unit must be designated as the administrative and governance home.

Microcredential clusters can be discontinued according the process specified in the Academic Approval Matrix for “drop sub-major or certificate program.”

In order to make the process of proposing and reviewing new microcredentials as simple as possible for programs and governance bodies, Academic Affairs (for undergraduates) and the Graduate School (for graduate students) will develop standardized procedures for proposing new microcredential clusters or revising clusters, such as online forms to expedite the process and facilitate preliminary review. Programs and departments are strongly urged to consult campus experts on microcredentials before beginning the proposal process.

IV. Proposed Criteria and Procedures for Microcredential Clusters

A. Credit Requirements

A microcredential cluster consists of 6 - 12 credits earned in two or more different courses.

A microcredential cluster must be earned either at the undergraduate or graduate level. An undergraduate cluster may include credit earned at the graduate level, but a graduate cluster must only include courses that can be taken at the graduate level. Note that graduate credit earned by undergraduates can only transfer into subsequent graduate degrees under limited circumstances. Credit for clusters also may be earned through the prior learning assessment (PLA) process according to the Prior Learning Assessment Policy.

No more than 3 credits of independent study shall be included in any microcredential.

B. Admission to Microcredential Clusters

Undergraduate and graduate students pursuing degrees or certificates at UWM will earn badges for completed microcredential clusters without an application process. All students are encouraged to consult their advisors in advance of beginning to work toward a cluster.

Students who intend to pursue a microcredential cluster but are not already UWM students must apply to UWM as non-degree students (undergraduates and graduates) and be admitted in order to enroll. Minimum university and program-level admissions requirements apply.

C. Transfer of Credit

At the graduate level, all credit included in credit-bearing microcredentials must be earned at UWM. Credit cannot be transferred into a microcredential from another university. At the undergraduate level, one course is permitted to transfer in if an equivalency is determined by the sponsoring unit. All other rules on the transfer of credit apply.

D. Articulations between Microcredentials and other Programs

Microcredential clusters can be combined in an unlimited way with degree or certificate programs, and with majors and minors. For example, a 30-credit master's degree might include three different 9-credit clusters.

Microcredential clusters can double-count credit with other clusters without limit, as long as each cluster differs from another. It is desirable that distinct microcredentials be clearly distinct in content (generally should differ by at least 50%)

A course that is already being double counted between a certificate and a master's degree, a bachelor's and a master's degree, or between two certificates, can also be counted toward a microcredential cluster.

Unlike courses counted toward completed degrees, courses counted toward completed microcredential clusters remain eligible to be counted toward a later certificate or degree. All other restrictions on transfer of credit between degrees or between certificates and degrees apply.

E. Minimum Grade and GPA Requirements

Because microcredential clusters are demonstrations of competency in a specific area, undergraduates must earn a C or higher (not C-) in all courses that count toward the cluster; graduate students must earn a B or higher (not B-) in all courses that count toward the cluster.

Students who cannot graduate with their degree because their overall GPA is below the undergraduate minimum of 2.0 or the graduate minimum of 3.0 can earn badges for

completed microcredential clusters, provided they earned the minimum grade or higher in all courses counted toward the cluster.

F. Program Responsibilities

Sponsoring units of microcredential clusters should create advising procedures to ensure that students pursuing clusters do so in the most efficient way possible. Programs must ensure that courses are offered with enough regularity that students can complete them within the time limits.

Syllabi for courses included in microcredential clusters should include standard language to help students understand. For example:

“This course can be taken toward completion of the “X” cluster (add link). To learn more about the “X” cluster, contact me or your advisor. For more information see the Microcredential website (add link). Also see [add link to the Microcredential webpage] for information on how to 1) apply to add a completed cluster to your transcript and 2) receive a badge that recognizes your attainment of the competencies associated with this cluster.”

G. Time Limits

Students combining a microcredential cluster with a certificate or degree program must complete all clusters within the time limit specified for the certificate or degree.

Non-degree students at the undergraduate and graduate level must complete each microcredential cluster within three years of taking the first course included in the cluster.

Courses taken as part of an earned UWM degree or certificate can be applied to a subsequent microcredential cluster taken either by a non-degree student or by a student in a subsequent certificate or degree as long as all courses counted toward the cluster were taken within a period of five years.

Students who have graduated may retroactively request the awarding of a microcredential cluster within five years of having taken the first course to be counted toward the cluster.

H. Awarding of Microcredentials

When students complete the credit requirements for a microcredential cluster, they must apply to have the badge awarded and the designation added to their transcript through procedures designed and publicized by the undergraduate and graduate registrars.

V. Proposal of New Microcredentials

New microcredential clusters must be approved by faculty governance as described in Section III, above. To streamline and standardize the process, Academic Affairs shall make a form available for programs to complete and submit to begin the approval process (this may be delegated to other units under Academic Affairs, such as the Graduate School). The form shall ask for the following information at a minimum:

1. Microcredential name
2. Brief description of the microcredential cluster, including the competency it confers
3. Timeline for implementation (first semester of availability)
4. Time to completion
5. Undergraduate or Graduate
6. Identification of eligibility: 1) current UWM students in degree or certificate programs; 2) non-degree or special students enrolling at UWM solely for a credit-bearing microcredential
7. Additional admissions or eligibility requirements for:
 - a. UWM students already enrolled in another degree or certificate (such as minimum UWM GPA)
 - b. Non-degree or special students enrolling in credit-bearing microcredentials (such as prior educational attainment, prior GPA)
8. List of required courses and eligible elective courses to complete the microcredential cluster
9. Statement of educational or career opportunities that the microcredential will support.
10. Identification of Career Readiness skills that the cluster will provide, as defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers
 - a. Career and Self-Development
 - b. Communication
 - c. Critical Thinking
 - d. Equity and Inclusion
 - e. Leadership
 - f. Professionalism
 - g. Teamwork
 - h. Technology
11. Statement of whether the microcredential satisfies any accreditation or professional licensure requirements.
12. Name, position, and email of the person responsible for answering questions from prospective students about the microcredential, for admitting students to it, and for advising those admitted.
13. Names and emails of current staff or faculty responsible for website updates and overseeing the governance approval process.

¹ Definitions adapted with gratitude from SUNY: <https://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/microcredentials/definitions/> and <https://az659834.vo.msecnd.net/eventsairsthcusprod/production-sunycopd-public/194d076e93b04c7ab929b8cd00ac4d6f>