

# **Highlights and Notes: Report of the SUNY Micro-Credentialing Task Force**

## **SUNY MICRO-CREDENTIAL DEFINITION**

Despite efforts for consistency nationally, there remain many varying answers to the question, "What is a micro-credential?"

Through a collaborative process, endorsed by the SUNY Trustees, there is now a SUNY definition of micro-credentials, designed to distinguish SUNY's efforts and ensure that the rigor and quality of its micro-credentials are the same as with every type of credential SUNY offers.

### **SUNY Micro-Credentials:**

- verify, validate and attest that specific skills and/or competencies have been achieved;
- are endorsed by the issuing institution;
- having been developed through established faculty governance processes; and
- are designed to be meaningful and high quality.

### *Taxonomy of Terms:*

To provide the SUNY community with a common taxonomy around micro-credentials, a list of definitions for common micro-credentialing terms is provided as Appendix A of this report. This list may be expanded or revised over time and will be maintained online at:  
<http://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/microcredentials>.

## **MICRO-CREDENTIAL USES AND BENEFITS**

- Motivate students toward completion of a credential or degree program by highlighting progressive attainment of competencies.
- Support academic/industry partnerships through credentials that meet industry requirements and/or are designed to meet a specific need.
- Provide more specificity to potential employers about skills and competencies learned.
- Supplement an existing degree program with complementary skill sets.
- Ladder from noncredit to credit. Ladder from a stand-alone credential to a degree program.
- Provide short-term, immediate competency development opportunities valuable for ongoing professional development.

See the complete Task Force report for multiple examples of micro-credentials.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN DEVELOPING SUNY MICRO-CREDENTIALS (ABBREVIATED)**

1. Academic quality is paramount for micro-credentials, and faculty governance participation is required.
2. Micro-credentials are initiated locally, developed, and approved according to local campus policies and procedures, consistent with campus mission and strategic goals.
3. Micro-credentials designed to meet market needs should be informed by current data from appropriate markets and align with relevant industry/sector standards.

4. Micro-credentials can provide opportunities for industry/education connections and partnerships.
5. Micro-credentials are inherently more flexible and innovative.
6. Micro-credentials should be portable.
7. Micro-credentials should be stackable.

### **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS (ABBREVIATED)**

1. Development of micro-credentials should be consistent with Task Force Guiding Principles.
2. Develop a process/practices for articulating (stacking) credentials that includes faculty governance.
3. Partnerships between Continuing Education, Workforce Development, and Academic Affairs will assure optimum results.
4. Consider ACE Quality Dimensions for Connected Credentials: transparency, modularity, portability, relevance, validity, equity. Details on cost, financial aid, learning outcomes, assessments, and stackability for all micro-credentials (<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Quality-Dimensions-for-Connected-Credentials.aspx>).
5. Use of SUNY Definition of Micro-Credentials & common taxonomy.
6. Seek support and counsel from liaison in the System Program Review and Planning Office.
7. System Provost to launch a formal policy review process to address identified barriers/opportunities for micro-credentials.
8. SUNY to join advocacy efforts for financial aid for quality micro-credentials; explore System-wide approach to digital transcripts and portability.
9. Charge FACT2 with development of readiness assessment tools.
10. Define reporting structure in SIRUS so progress can be followed.

### **PARAMETERS**

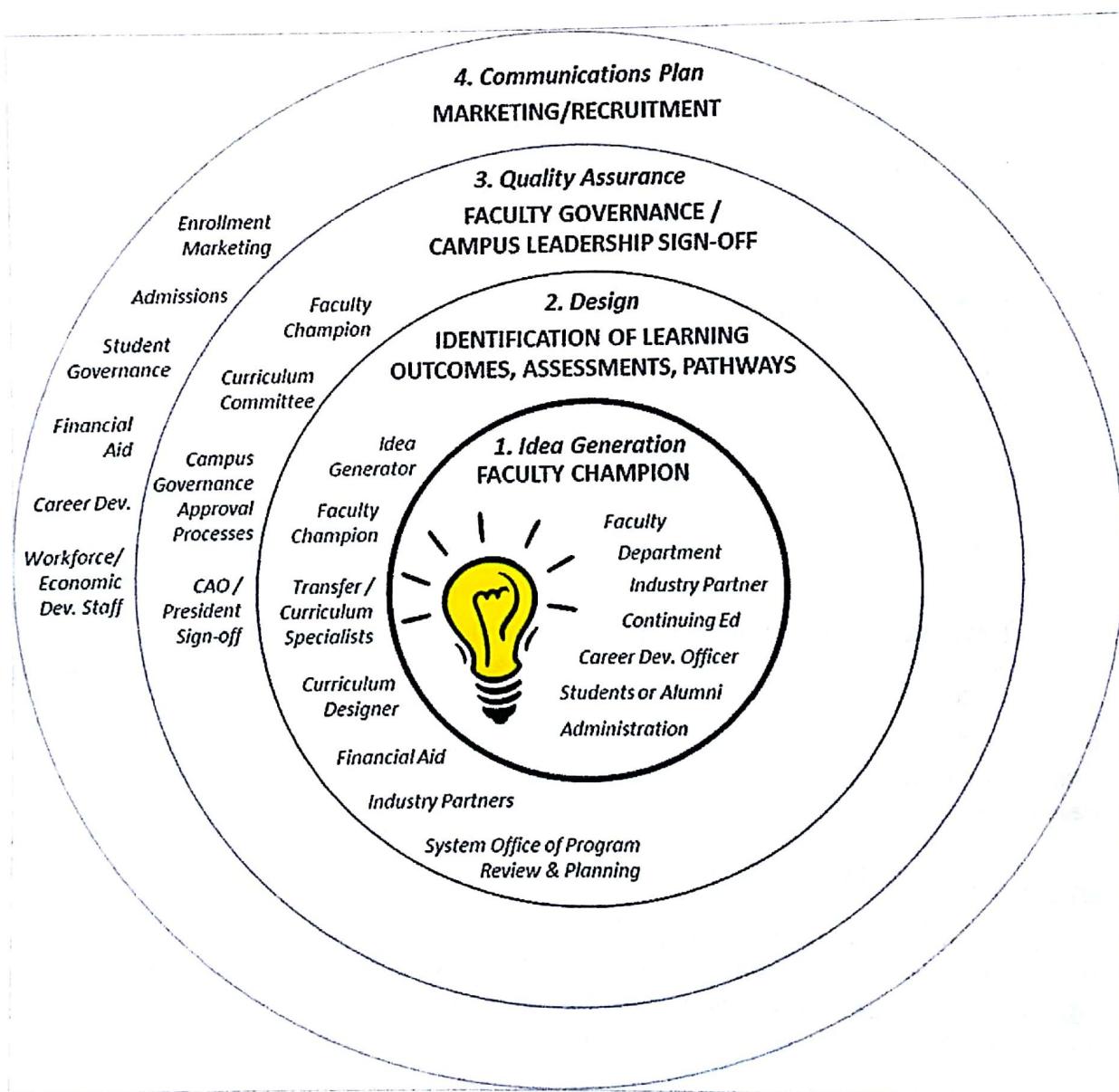
- Micro-credentials may represent the content of credit or noncredit study; they may take the form of digital badge or micro-award, and can be offered online, on-campus, or a hybrid of both.
- Each micro-credential awarded must be represented clearly and accurately, addressing associated costs, financial aid, transferability, and stackability toward a formal award(s).
- Review and approval of noncredit micro-credentials is largely local, must go through appropriate faculty governance procedures for approval, as well as course evaluation and prior learning assessment protocols, and be entirely consistent with SUNY policies and state and federal regulations.
- In most cases, review and approval of for-credit micro-credentials can be treated in the same way as development of a minor, which would not typically require off-campus approvals.
- A planned micro-credential should not have exactly the same title as a registered degree, certificate program, or P-12 educator certificate title.
- Consistent with NYS regulation, if a cluster of courses proposed for a micro-credential is 24 credits or more, campuses should explore with their Program Review liaison SUNY approval and NYSED registration of a free-standing certificate.
- Your System Program Reviewer (<http://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/acaproplan/app/find-your-campus-reviewer/>) can be a valuable resource in the design phase of a micro-credential.

## GETTING STARTED

Ideas for micro-credentials can come from any number of sources. SUNY campuses have begun to develop micro-credentials in response to an idea from an individual faculty member, a department working together as a team, even a special President's Task Force charged with discussing micro-credentials with campus business and industry partners. It could be students or alumni who have identified a need, the enrollment or admissions office that is getting frequent requests about credentials in a certain area, or the career development officers who have made a new industry contact.

No matter what the source of the idea, the importance and value of collaborative design, quality assurance, and a thoughtful communications plan apply—this is true whether the intent is non-credit, non-credit to credit, or a for-credit credential.

Below is one possible campus engagement strategy for micro-credential design, campus review, and implementation:



## **CONNECTION TO CHANCELLOR JOHNSON'S PRIORITY FOR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION**

Chancellor Johnson identified Individualized Education as one of four priority focus areas in her January 2018 State of the University System address (along with Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, and Partnerships). Our challenge, she said, is to “optimize a SUNY education, while encouraging each individual student to chart her or his own path—and not to be constrained by the stereotypes of the past.” Chancellor Johnson emphasized that “rapidly advancing technologies and the need for new skills mean that each of our students will have to continue learning throughout their lives.” Micro-credentials, as defined in the Report of the Micro-Credentialing Task Force are one of several strategies that SUNY can utilize to offer this type of engaging learning experience.

Interim Provost Wang highlighted this connection in her presentation of the final Task Force report and Resolution to the SUNY Trustees’ Academic Affairs Committee on January 22, 2018. The webcast of the meeting, which included a presentation on Stony Brook’s digital badge offerings by Professor and Dean Ken Lindblom, is available here: <https://livestream.com/hvccstreaming/BOTJan2018>.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The SUNY Trustees’ resolution charged the System Provost with convening four implementation working groups, scheduled to complete their efforts by June 2019:

1. Policy/Financial Aid: Provost’s Office staff will conduct a formal policy review process to include representation from faculty and student governance and an open-comment period for any proposed policy revision in the areas identified in the Task Force report as well as those pertaining to financial aid;
2. Readiness and Assessment: The System Provost will charge the Faculty Advisory Council on Teaching and Technology (“FACT2”), which includes faculty and student governance representation, with developing readiness assessment tools and information resources to support faculty development of micro-credentials;
3. Data Reporting: To ensure accountability, transparency and portability of micro-credentials, associated data reporting at the campus and system levels are necessary. The University Provost will engage campus chief academic officers, institutional research officers, and other stakeholders to develop reporting structures for SIRIS (“SUNY Institutional Research Information System”);
4. Transcripts, Transferability, and Portability: The University Provost will engage campus registrars and other staff to explore a system-wide approach to digital transcripts that include micro-credentials; and, be it further

In addition, the University Provost will provide training and information resources to support campuses in engaging business and industry partners in discussions around micro-credential development.

## **QUESTIONS**

The full Report of the Micro-Credentialing Task Force, the January 2018 SUNY Trustee Resolution, as well as the adopted Definitions and Taxonomy of Terms are all available at: <http://system.suny.edu/academic-affairs/microcredentials>. Questions about the Task Force report or next steps can be sent to Cynthia Proctor, Director of Communications and Academic Policy Development, at: [cynthia.proctor@suny.edu](mailto:cynthia.proctor@suny.edu).



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## M E M O R A N D U M

January 23, 2018

**TO:** Members of the Board of Trustees  
**FROM:** Kristina M. Johnson, Chancellor  
**SUBJECT:** SUNY Micro-Credentialing Implementation

### Action Requested

The proposed resolution commends the SUNY-wide Micro-Credentialing Task Force ("Task Force") for its report and directs the University Provost to work collaboratively with campuses to develop strategies over the next year to support implementation of the Task Force's recommendations and to keep the Board apprised of progress.

### Resolution

I recommend that the Board of Trustees adopt the following resolution:

Whereas today's employers are increasingly looking for candidates to not only earn a degree, but also possess detailed and easily accessible credentials that verify skill competencies specific to their hiring needs; and

Whereas students are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from other job candidates in an increasingly competitive marketplace, and alumni are looking to gain new skills to advance in their careers and/or complete ongoing professional development; and

Whereas colleges and universities are seeking to motivate students toward completion and explore myriad post-secondary learning opportunities through stackable and portable micro-credentials; and

Whereas in response to these and other factors, institutions of higher education are increasingly embracing the multi-faceted micro-credential—which may take the form of digital badges, MOOCs, or other micro-awards—to both meet business and industry expectations and motivate and prepare well-rounded students with highly marketable skills; and

Whereas to ensure SUNY's leadership role, a university-wide Micro-Credentialing Task Force was created, with representation from across campus communities, including the

To Learn  
To Search  
To Serve

the Power of SUNY

University Faculty Senate, Faculty Council of Community Colleges, and Student Assembly; and

Whereas the Task Force was charged with the review of current literature and national dialogue on micro-credentials, the examination of work across SUNY to develop and/or implement micro-credentials, and the review of relevant SUNY policies to identify possible barriers and/or the need for new policy to support student access and success through micro-credentialing; and

Whereas the Task Force identified the potential of micro-credentials to enable campuses to more quickly respond to student need and industry demand, establish new academic/industry partnerships; motivate students to persist toward academic and career goals, and bridge noncredit and credit-bearing coursework and experiences; and

Whereas the Task Force recommended a SUNY definition of micro-credentials that is distinct in its recognition of faculty purview over curriculum and standards, and its focus on meaningful, rigorous credentials that serve students' best interests; now, therefore, be it

Resolved that the SUNY Trustees commend the Task Force for its work, resulting in a comprehensive report outlining core principles and parameters applicable to any SUNY campus that offers micro-credentials; and be it further

Resolved that the decision of whether or not to pursue micro-credentials rests with campuses, and that those campuses who do opt to develop micro-credentials will attend to the definitions, guiding principles, and recommendations of the *Report of the Micro-Credentialing Task Force*; and, be it further

Resolved that the University Provost is charged with establishing working groups to support campus implementation of micro-credentials to address the following key areas:

1. Policy/Financial Aid: Provost's Office staff will conduct a formal policy review process to include representation from faculty and student governance and an open-comment period for any proposed policy revision in the areas identified in the Task Force report as well as those pertaining to financial aid;
2. Readiness and Assessment: The System Provost will charge the Faculty Advisory Council on Teaching and Technology ("FACT2"), which includes faculty and student governance representation, with developing

- readiness assessment tools and information resources to support faculty development of micro-credentials;
3. **Data Reporting:** To ensure accountability, transparency and portability of micro-credentials, associated data reporting at the campus and system levels are necessary. The University Provost will engage campus chief academic officers, institutional research officers, and other stakeholders to develop reporting structures for SIRIS ("SUNY Institutional Research Information System");
  4. **Transcripts, Transferability, and Portability:** The University Provost will engage campus registrars and other staff to explore a system-wide approach to digital transcripts that include micro-credentials; and, be it further

Resolved that the University Provost will provide training and information resources to support campuses in engaging business and industry partners in discussions around micro-credential development; and, be it further

Resolved that the University Provost will periodically update the Board of Trustees on the progress of the implementation working groups, expected to complete work by June 2019, and on progress of the initiative overall and its impact on student success and completion.

### **Background**

The proposed implementation plan is based on the recommendations of the SUNY Micro-Credentialing Task Force. Task Force membership included presidents, provosts, representatives from the University Faculty Senate, Faculty Council of Community Colleges and the SUNY Student Assembly, registrars, business officers, institutional researchers, and continuing education officers.

Over the course of 18 months, the Task Force identified the potential of micro-credentials (which may take the form of digital badges, MOOCs, or other micro-awards) to enable campuses to more quickly respond to student need and industry demand, establish new academic/industry partnerships, motivate students to persist toward academic and career goals, and bridge noncredit and credit-bearing coursework and experiences. An excerpt of the Task Force report including the SUNY definition for micro-credentials, guiding principles for development and recommendations, is attached.

The proposed micro-credentialing implementation plan is consistent with SUNY's ongoing commitment to providing New Yorkers with the credentials they need to continue their education, find a job and/or advance in their careers.

Attachment