UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Non-credit Micro-credential
DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

January 2024

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Purpose + Scope

The University of Alberta's Strategic Plan, *SHAPE*, calls to utilize the U of A's expertise in continuing education to support a wide range of credentials and pathways into the university for lifelong learners.

To mobilize *SHAPE*, a one-university approach is needed to support Faculties, Units, and proponents in the planning, design, and delivery of sustainable and scalable non-credit micro-credentials. The *Non-credit Micro-credential Guide* (MC Guide) is intended to provide guidance and required steps to move from ideation to implementation in a structured way.

Micro-credentials are different from the traditional credentials offered at most post-secondary institutions, including the U of A. They are short, competency-based learning experiences that can be credit or non-credit-bearing, and are assessed and recognized by a digital credential. Most notably, micro-credentials are often developed in collaboration with external partners including employers, professional associations, Indigenous and community organizations - to identify competencies and skills gaps *and* to inform on the design and delivery of programming. Therefore, the development and delivery of sustainable micro-credentials requires new approaches and processes that are addressed in the MC Guide.

While micro-credentials can be credit or non-credit-bearing, the scope of the MC Guide is focused on equipping Faculties and Units with clear steps, best practices, and supports/services available from the Continuing Education unit to develop **non-credit** micro-credentials in alignment with the [Non-credit Programming Framework](#) (Framework).

As the non-credit micro-credential landscape continues to grow and change within Canada and globally, the MC Guide is intended to be a living document that will evolve.

Action Group: Acknowledgments

The Micro-credential Action Group - supported work on the co-creation of the vision, definition, and principles which resulted in a one-university approach to defining, developing, implementing, and promoting non-credit micro-credentials at the U of A. The Micro-credential Action Group includes representation by U of A Faculties and Units. Their contributions, time, and commitment are greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

Co-leads - Jessica Butts Scott (Online Learning & Continuing Education) and Janice Causgrove Dunn (Office of the Provost)

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Vision + Definition

Vision

To enable competency development by upskilling and reskilling delivered through flexible and stackable non-credit micro-credentials designed for professionals and organizations.

Definition

A non-credit micro-credential is an assessed, small volume of learning that develops specific competencies, skills, and knowledge through a short course/s that may strategically stack into credit programs.

Non-credit micro-credentials enable higher education to be more accessible, inclusive, affordable, and flexible - therefore removing barriers for learners to achieve their learning goals.

Learner Lifecycle

Discovery of Learning Opportunities
Learners and organizations discover all non-credit micro-credential offerings in one website https://www.ualberta.ca/continuing-education.

Registration and Purchase
Learners and organizations register and pay through the U of A's approved online e-commerce website.

Learn, Apply Knowledge, and Assess
Learners link the application of theory to practice with competencies assessed and validated.

Earn and Stack
Learners earn digital awards that may stack into a credential or a credit program.

Share the Achievement
Learners can share and port digital awards.

Principles

Assessed and Validated
Micro-credentials include assessments validating learning outcomes and competencies represented by digital awards.

Short Programming
The term *micro* identifies programming to be short and focused, with specialized learning aligned to the development of specific competencies and/or skills.

Foster Partnerships and Connections
Where possible, micro-credentials are developed in collaboration with industry, government, employers, Indigenous communities, and other academic institutions.

Learner-centered Design
Micro-credentials are designed and delivered to meet the flexibility requirements of individuals and working professionals.
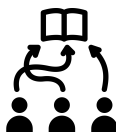
Equity and Inclusivity
Micro-credentials remove traditional barriers to accessing post-secondary learning and the design incorporates inclusive design principles.

Quality Assured
Micro-credentials are rooted in the best pedagogical practices and quality assurance measures and deliver an exceptional student experience.

Pathway Opportunities
Micro-credentials enable opportunities for learners to stack and ladder non-credit achievements into credit learning pathways.

Support Unit: Continuing Education

The Continuing Education (CE) unit is a service, support, and revenue-generating unit with deep expertise in the development and delivery of non-credit programming. The CE unit offers over 230+ non-credit courses and 40 credentials, driving close to 8,000 enrolments annually. The unit will leverage its experience, expertise, infrastructure, and support services (if needed) to collaborate with Faculties, Units, and proponents to develop and deliver sustainable non-credit micro-credential offerings.

The CE unit has identified goals and initiatives to support the delivery of non-credit programming across the academy:

Goal 1: Co-create and collaborate with Faculties and Units to provide resources and administrative support where needed.

Goal 2: Develop high-quality non-credit micro-credentials in areas of strength that are linked to outcomes. Non-credit programming development is guided by industry collaboration (where possible) and aligned to the [Non-credit Programming Framework](#).

Goal 3: Implement the infrastructure (registration system, learning management system, digital credential platform) to scale growth and revenue generation. The CE unit will support the onboarding of Faculties and Units to the U of A's approved non-credit infrastructure.

Goal 4: Establish a central web presence to promote all continuing education programming across the U of A, that integrates with the main website.

For questions about the MC Guide, or Continuing Education services and supports:

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ualberta.ca/continuing-education

Programming Framework

A *Non-credit Programming Framework* (Framework) identifies the four programming categories aligned to micro-credentials. All non-credit micro-credential programming must align with the Framework.

Micro-credential Programming Categories			
Micro-course	**Course**	**Certificate**	**Diploma**
A micro-learning experience that is self-directed, enabling access to learning anytime, anywhere. A micro-course focuses on a specific topic, identified skills gap, and/or a defined competency or a sub-component of a competency.	A course that is focused on developing specific knowledge, skills, and competencies. Typically, courses are intended to stack into certificates, although a course may be taken as a standalone offering.	A non-credit credential earned for the completion of specific courses, leading to the achievement of a certificate. A certificate is a credential intended to be immediately valuable to learners and employers.	A non-credit credential earned for the completion of specific courses, leading to the achievement of a diploma. A diploma is a credential intended to be developed only when required (due to length) that is immediately valuable to learners and employers.

Development Steps

Once it is determined, through consultation with the Programs Team in the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) that a non-credit micro-credential is the ideal programming structure, the steps detailed below should be followed. The steps balance the importance of quality assurance and governance oversight, with the autonomy needed for rapid development.

Step 1: Initiation

Faculties and Units with potential micro-credential initiatives are encouraged to contact Continuing Education (CE) to explore opportunities. CE will schedule an initial discussion with the proponent to gain a better understanding of the initiative and to determine the next steps. Prior to this initial discussion, CE recommends that the proponent complete the [Micro-Credential Concept Form](#).

Step 2: Preliminary Assessment

CE will meet with the proponent to conduct an opportunity assessment. Working collaboratively, CE and the proponent will scope out the opportunity, identify the key learner segments, describe the specific program, and assess the overall potential of the initiative. From this meeting, a collaborative recommendation is made about the next steps which could include; moving forward with the opportunity, gathering more information, or a recommendation to not proceed that is rooted in data and information.

Step 3: Feasibility and Approval

Working collaboratively, CE and the proponent will develop a detailed program description, assess the potential program market, and engage with key stakeholders within the Institution and with external bodies as required. From this, a feasibility assessment is prepared with recommendations for future steps and if required, a program submission is prepared for Academic Governance review and approval.

If the proponent requires support services from CE, a financial analysis and cost-sharing structure are established. Working collaboratively, CE and the proponent will develop a detailed program development, delivery, and administration plan, including defining the services offered and costs associated with these services. A range of factors are considered including tuition levels, enrolment, delivery costs, etc. A Service Agreement between CE and the Faculty will be created and approved before proceeding further.

Step 4: Micro-credential Planning

During the planning phase, the proponent and the CE unit determine the resource requirements for the proposed program development. In collaboration, they identify the purpose and high-level scope of the program. A project charter will be established that outlines roles, responsibilities, timelines, financial investments, revenue-sharing structures, and deliverables (persona development, modality recommendations, etc.). The project charter is agreed to and signed off by the involved stakeholders.

Step 5: Design and Production

Design and Production of the new program is initiated. Based on the developmental plan a range of resources (internal and external) are identified and secured to support the asset design and production.

Step 6: Launch & Optimization

Depending on the services agreement developed in the Feasibility and Approval stage, CE will work collaboratively with the proponent to launch and administer the new program.

Development Stages Summary

FACULTY/UNIT OPPORTUNITY	→	**INITIATION**	▪ Information Gathering ▪ Explore Opportunity
		PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT	▪ Opportunity Assessment ▪ Collaborative Decision on Next Steps
		FEASIBILITY + APPROVAL	▪ Feasibility Plan + Approval ▪ CE Service Agreement ▪ Governance Submission
		MICRO-CREDENTIAL PLANNING	▪ Project Charter ▪ Resource Requirements
		DESIGN + PRODUCTION	▪ Development Plan Established ▪ Product Build
		LAUNCH + OPTIMIZATION	▪ Program Activation ▪ Administrative Supports in Place

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

Term	Description
Active/Inactive	Status of a micro-credential's ability to be awarded in the University of Alberta's Inventory
Assessment	Evidence of learning, submitted by the learner that is evaluated against the established criteria before a micro-credential can be awarded - assessments are intentionally aligned to course learning outcomes
Award	The act of granting or issuing a micro-credential to a learner once they have completed all requirements of the micro-credential.
Badge	A digital graphic icon that contains metadata linked to a description of the micro-credential, the requirements for successful completion, and the artifacts the learner provided
Consumer	A person who views a learner's awarded micro-credential. Consumers may include employers, potential employers, the learner's professional network, or members of social media networks.
Destiny One	The U of A's enterprise-approved Continuing Education operational system that provides seamless registration, fee collection, learner records, and populates the public-facing Continuing Education web portal. Destiny One is a cloud-based SaaS product powered by Modern Campus.
Digital Image	A visual symbol of accomplishment. Each micro-credential has its own unique digital image associated with it.
Course	A micro-credential learning experience (best practice - 12-24 hours) that is focused on specific competencies and can be delivered online, or in-person - courses can stack to enable the learner to earn a certificate
Certificate	A type of non-credit micro-credential offering that meets the U of A's defined institutional quality assurance process and is awarded for a collection of stackable badges representing the achievement of skills and competencies
Learner Activity	A task associated with a micro-credential that results in learning outcomes.
EMSI by Lightcast	A labor market analytics firm that uses data to drive economic prosperity. EMSI provides a database of over 32,000 available skills that are included within a micro-credential.

Hours	The general investment in the number of hours or effort to complete the micro-credential
Icon	The clip art image that is found on a digital badge that aligns with a micro-credential subject area, skill, or competency.
Inventory	The complete list of past and current micro-credentials offered at the University of Alberta.
Issuer	The office, department, or faculty of ownership for a micro-credential that assigns individuals to award the micro-credentials.
Laddering	A structural micro-credential that is applied toward earning a credit offering - ie: non-credit certificate laddering for credit into a graduate certificate.
Learner	An individual who signs up for and completes a micro-credential based on its established criteria.
Learning Outcome	That which a learner is expected to know, understand, or be able to do after successful completion of a micro-credential.
Levels	A term used to describe the degree of sophistication of the material covered, the expected learning outcome, and the degree of mastery of the micro-credential earned. At the simplest level, the skill or competency is attained at a proficiency where it can be completed under supervision, while at the highest level, those who earn the micro-credential would be able to generate new understanding or teach the skill to others.
Micro-Course	A micro-credential learning experience that is short (best practice - 4-8 hours), typically delivered on-demand and has appropriate assessment criteria.
Metadata	The computer code that identifies critical information about the learner, the micro-credential itself, and the organization offering it.
Micro-credential	A U of A micro-credential is an assessed, small volume of learning that develops specific competencies, skills, and knowledge through a short course/s that may stack into credentials.
Modern Campus	Modern Campus is the company that owns Destiny One.
Open Badge	A specialized type of digital badge that contains verifiable information that is universally accepted by employers across the globe. The Open Badge Standard provides recommendations for consistent elements embedded in each digital badge that is awarded for a micro-credential.
Skills	Competencies that add market value to a micro-credential.

Stack or Stacking	A collection of earned micro-credentials that combines skills or competencies within an area of focus or learning pathway. When all of the micro-credentials within the collection are achieved, the resulting outcome is generally referred to as a stack or bundle - ie: micro-courses and courses stacking toward a certificate.
Tag	A keyword or term assigned to a piece of information that may include the topic, type, Issuer, distinction, or other important data associated with a micro-credential.