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

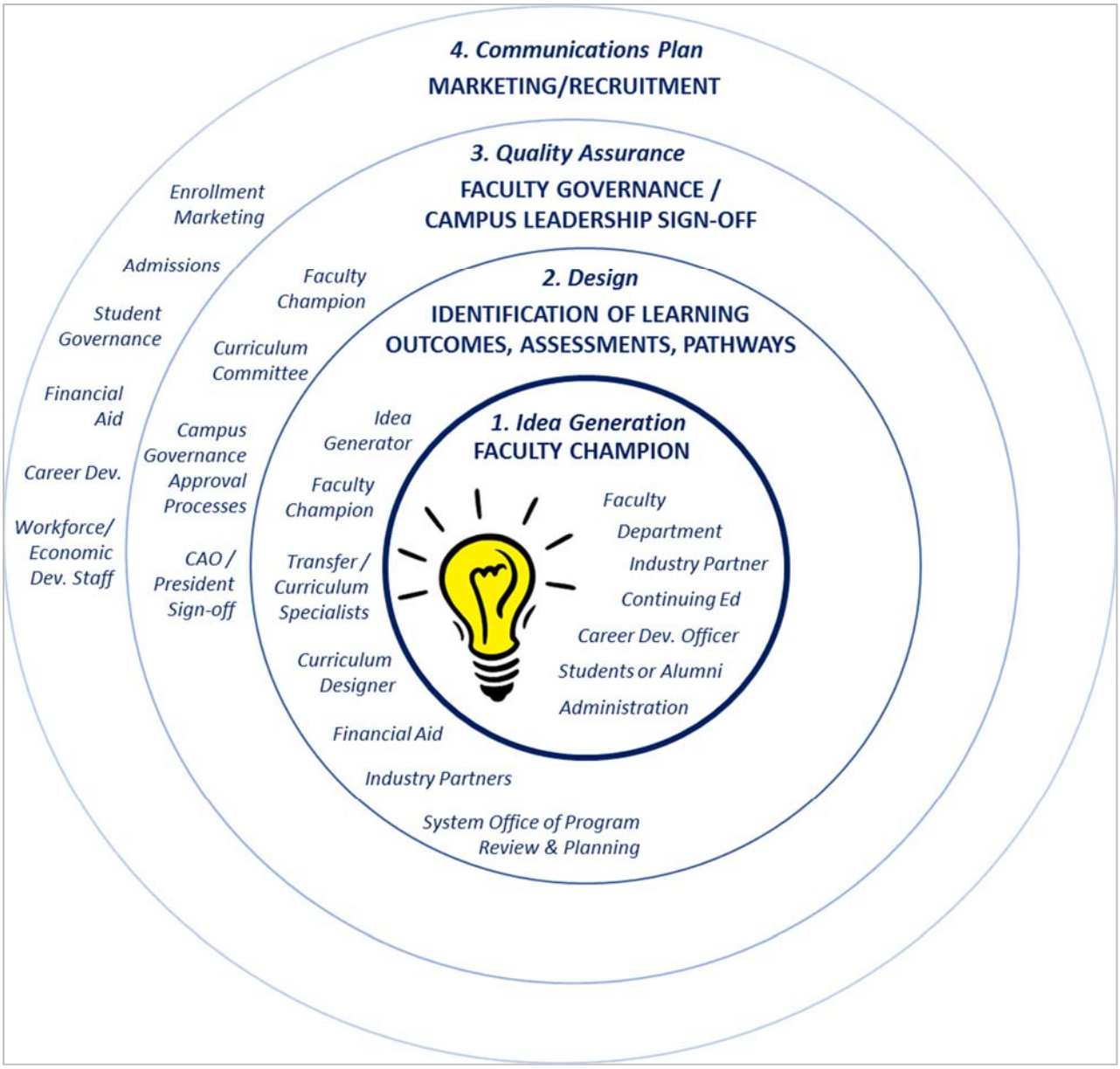
- Micro-credentials may represent the content of credit or noncredit study; they may take the form of digital badge or micro-award, and can be offered online, on-campus, or a hybrid of both.
- Each micro-credential awarded must be represented clearly and accurately, addressing associated costs, financial 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.