

An Overview of Micro-credentials

What are micro-credentials?

Although definitions vary, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario defines micro-credentials as: “a representation of learning, awarded for completion of a short program that is focused on a discrete set of competencies (i.e., skills, knowledge, attributes), and is sometimes related to other credentials.”

By nature, micro-credentials are short and serve as proof of learning or capability aligning with standards and requirements, often based in industry. Micro-credentials can be achieved through short courses or through assessment of specific competencies.

Micro-credentials are:

- Skills and competencies-based
- Short in duration
- Assessable
- Modular and stackable
- Personalized
- Verifiable

How do micro-credentials benefit learners?

As micro-credentials are short, they are particularly attractive to working professionals who are looking to upgrade their skills or are interested in special topics. Micro-credentials are often developed in collaboration with and recognized by business and industry, meaning learners can be sure that they are acquiring relevant skills for the job market.

Micro-credentials are also generally stackable and ‘transcriptable.’ This means that micro-credentials could appear on a university transcript and could be ‘stacked’ to achieve a certificate. Some micro-credentials are tied to digital badges which live in a learner’s e-portfolio or e-wallet, hosted on platforms such as LinkedIn. Learners can then control who sees the badges.

What form do micro-credentials take?

Micro-credentials can be offered though face-to-face, online, or hybrid learning contexts.

Who offers micro-credentials?

A range of providers offer micro-credentials including:

- Universities
- Colleges
- Professional bodies
- Licensing organizations

How are micro-credentials designed and assessed?

Micro-credentials can be designed and assessed through different means depending on the offering provider. A few common delivery and assessment modalities include:

- Coursework and accompanying assessments
- Lectures/seminars
- Projects, assignments, portfolios, conferences

All in all, why micro-credentials?

Micro-credentials offer personalized, flexible, life-long, and specialized learning opportunities. They can provide recognition for pre-existing or newly learned soft and hard skills. Micro-credentials can help learners prior to entering or while on the job market and can address gaps in employees’ skills.

Where can I get more information on micro-credentials?

- [Contact North](#)
- [HECQO](#)
- [DEAKINco](#)
- [Making micro-credentials work](#)
- [eCampus Ontario](#)
- [Colleges & Institutes Canada](#)

What are some additional considerations?

Funding and governmental involvement in micro-credentials are rapidly changing in Ontario. [The Micro-credentials from Ontario post-secondary schools](#) offers some guidance on the expectations of a micro-credential that could receive Ministry funding and some forms of recognition. We anticipate that these guidelines will change and should be regularly revisited. Likewise, policy and administrative processes for micro-credentials at McMaster continue to evolve. Please consult with your Associate Dean and/or the MacPherson Institute for current practices for the design, implementation, and approval of micro-credentials at McMaster.

Contact mi@mcmaster.ca with questions around design of micro-credentials.