



To: Senate Executive Committee
From: Provost Morgan & Dean Thomsen
RE: Procedures for establishing non-credit microcredentials
Date: 1/23/2025

Action. Requesting Faculty Senate review and endorsement of newly developed campus-wide procedures for establishing **non-credit** microcredentials. The proposed guidelines have been developed in consultation with UWL's non-academic divisions.

Overview. Graduate and Extended Learning (GEL) will oversee all non-credit microcredentials (NCMC). Each NCMC will be reviewed by a UWL Subject Matter Expert (SME) to ensure its quality and rigor, and each NCMC developed will be reported to the Senate Executive Committee as an informational item.

Background. UWL established definitions and procedures for establishing credit-based **microcredentials** in 2023. Credit-based microcredentials are in the range of 4-8 credits, and designed to help students meet academic and career goals. They are intentionally explicit about skills and competencies. UWL credit-based microcredentials are based on completion of a specific set of classes and transcribed as part of a student's transcript. They are available only to individuals enrolled as UWL students.

At the time the credit-based microcredential procedures were adopted, we indicated that we also wished to pursue options for non-credit microcredentials. Because non-credit options have traditionally been outside the traditional governance review, we are requesting that Faculty Senate review and endorse the procedure for developing non-credit microcredentials (NCMC) rather than endorsing individual NCMC as they are developed.

We anticipate two distinct audiences for UWL NCMC:

- Current students will be able to document skills they have obtained through co-curricular activities such as leadership roles, service organizations, and participation in high-impact practices such as a sales competition or undergraduate research.
- Non-UWL students (including UWL employees) engage in professional development and continuing education activities offered by UWL.

The development of NCMC therefore aligns with our strategic priorities in the areas of transformational education, investing in our people, and community engagement. The Universities of Wisconsin strategic plan also emphasizes the need to increase our offerings in the areas of workforce development and non-credit programming.

UWL non-credit microcredential (NCMC) guidelines

The goal of a non-credit microcredential is to signal to employers a skill or competency gained at UWL, outside of credit-bearing instruction. Every non-credit microcredential should therefore enhance career readiness for recipients.

All UWL non-credit microcredentials (NCMCs) will be administered within Graduate & Extended Learning (GEL), which is responsible for ensuring the quality and rigor of UWL NCMCs. Each NCMC must have a sponsoring unit within UWL. If a community partner wishes to pursue a NCMC, either GEL or another unit on campus will serve as the sponsoring unit. Community partners should start their inquiries with GEL, who can either support the development of the NCMC, or assist in finding an appropriate campus partner to serve as the sponsoring unit.

The sponsoring unit may choose to provide a single NCMC or create a group of NCMCs that can be stacked to become a larger credential. GEL is responsible for obtaining and maintaining badging software, which will track learner progress, and issue a digital badge to document the completion of the NCMC. Digital badges provide permanent, easily accessible documentation regarding the work completed to earn a microcredential. Badges can be linked anywhere a URL can be inserted, for example within a digital resume, a *LinkedIn* profile, or as part of an email signature line.

As GEL is financially self-supporting, GEL will establish contracts as needed regarding the financial arrangements. This will include the labor associated with NCMC proposal review (both within in GEL and for the SME), setting up a new NCMC within the badging software, documenting learner completion of NCMC, and issuing the digital badges. GEL will also be responsible for FERPA and document retention consideration for digital badges issued for NCMCs.

Process

Step 1: Units wishing to propose a NCMC should first meet with the GEL Dean or designate to discuss the options. NCMC should be proposed by a unit rather than an individual; however, each NCMC needs a contact person. GEL can be the proposing unit. The supervisor of the proposing unit should be informed as well as the Vice Chancellor or Chancellor of the corresponding division. Proposers should be aware that the review process may require several iterations to ensure a quality offering.

Step 2: A 1-2-page proposal should be provided to GEL via a standard NCMC form. The form will have standard elements, but proposers must include the following:

- A general description and proposed name for the NCMC
 - Names should be short, clear, and appropriate for the non-academic contexts in which they will be used.
- The proposed components of the NCMC. A NCMC can be composed of entirely non-credit-bearing activities, or of one or more credit courses in combination with non-credit activities. A student will gain credit for any credit courses completed as part of a NCMC, but not for the overall NCMC, and the NCMC will not be transcripted.

- Estimated number of hours associated with completing the NCMC (minimum of 30 hours).
- Estimated number of participants in the NCMC per year, and a description of the audience for the offering (i.e., community members, current undergraduates, individuals at a particular employer, etc.)
- Evidence for how the NCMC will enhance career readiness, which could include:
 - Comparable microcredentials at other institutions or organizations
 - Evidence of support from UWL regional community partners
 - Evidence of support from workforce organizations
 - One or more Eagle Advantage competencies associated with the microcredential
- Recommendations for potential UWL faculty or staff with appropriate expertise to serve as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) for the development of the NCMC (see Step 3). When possible, the SME should not be the proposer for the NCMC, in order to enrich the quality of the feedback.
- The criteria and plan for assessing learner completion of the NCMC on an ongoing basis.

Step 3:

GEL will provide feedback to the proposer and, once GEL indicates the proposal is ready for additional consideration, will work with the proposer to identify a SME who will provide feedback on the proposal. GEL will determine the extent to which the feedback must be incorporated before review for final approval.

- Individuals serving as SMEs may be reimbursed for their time depending on the level of commitment and requirement.
- GEL will provide guidance and professional development, as needed, for individuals working as SMEs for NCMC.
- The Dean of GEL will ask SEC and the Deans' Council for feedback on the non-credit microcredential and the SME. This process of requesting feedback will also be the mechanism for informing Faculty Senate and the Deans/Provost about NCMC development. If the NCMC's home unit is in a division outside of Academic Affairs, the appropriate Chancellor or Vice Chancellor will be consulted.

Step 4:

An NCMC Advisory Committee will review the final proposal and provide feedback and endorsement. The final approval rests with the GEL Dean. Revisions to the NCMC can be approved by the Dean of GEL.

- The composition of the NCMC Advisory Committee will be the SME, the GEL Dean, VC of the unit proposing the NCMC, Director of Extended Learning and the GEL Professional Education Specialist.

Step 5:

GEL will review how many learners are awarded each NCMC, on an annual basis. If GEL has a concern regarding low usage, the NCMC Advisory Committee will evaluate whether a lack of utilization indicates a need for discontinuation. The issuing unit, and community partner if applicable, will be informed of the committee's recommendation for discontinuation and have the opportunity to discuss continuation with modifications if supported by the NCMC Advisory Committee. Issuing units can request the discontinuation of one of their NCMC at any time for

consideration by the Advisory Committee, which will either discontinue the NCMC or find a new sponsoring unit.