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SYSTEM

May 24, 2022

TO: Provost/Chancellors

FROM: Debora Halbert  
Vice President for Academic Strategy 

SUBJECT: Guidance on UH Microcredentials

This memo provides system-wide guidance on the creation and use of microcredentials that will allow for programmatic innovation while system and campus policies and processes are developed.

#### *UH Microcredential Work Group*

The University of Hawai'i System convened a working group on microcredentials to learn more about what they are, how they are being used throughout the system, and how best to govern the burgeoning number of opportunities associated with issuing them. The task force, which included representatives from Mānoa, Hilo, West O'ahu, the Community Colleges, and the Vice President for Academic Strategy (VPAS) system office, met from February to April 2022 and concluded their work by offering some recommendations for next steps that are incorporated in this memo.

#### *Background on Microcredentials*

“Microcredentials” are an evolving concept in postsecondary education and training. Microcredentials are a broad term to represent a growing list of non-degree credentials which represent about a quarter of the nation’s nearly 1 million credentials being awarded and a fast growing category ([Credential Engine, 2021](#)). Frequently, microcredentials represent the attainment of a specific skill or competency, or set of skills or competencies, that are less comprehensive than a degree. “Digital badges” may document the award of a microcredential.

There are numerous reasons why UH should embrace microcredentials and develop guidelines for UH’s awarding of microcredentials. Microcredentials also have potential benefits to learners, education and training providers, and employers. The President’s [“Reimagining and Repositioning the University of Hawai'i: Navigating Together to a Sustainable Future for UH and Hawai'i.”](#) presented to the Board of Regents in January 2022 (slide 8), identifies the opportunity to include microcredentials that are “stackable” toward a degree as a key strategy for UH to meet learner and workforce needs. A forthcoming OVPAS website will include more information about microcredentials.

### *Microcredentials at UH*

The Microcredential Work Group learned about multiple UH programs that are already awarding digital badges to learners, primarily for staff professional development, and of additional programs expressing interest in awarding digital badges. By consensus, the work group recognized the value and opportunity of microcredentials and recommended system-level policy and procedural guidance for microcredentials be developed and issued. This guidance, which will need to include policy and/or procedures at the system and/or campus levels, is necessary to ensure quality and consistency, for tracking and reporting, and to support continuous evaluation and improvement. The work group acknowledged the dual need for governance and supporting innovation.

### *UH Next Steps*

The Office of Vice President for Academic Strategy will lead development of a systemwide policy to govern microcredentials. The objectives are to develop policy that includes:

- A cogent UH definition of microcredentials;
- A taxonomy that identifies “levels” of microcredentials awarded by UH to serve as a common framework, providing coherence across the system. The taxonomy may address criteria such as: complexity of the skills/competencies; time spent learning the skill, breadth or range of application; validation by employers or other subject matter experts; whether the learning activities are credit-based, noncredit, co-/extra-curricular, and/or based on experience; and authority to create and approve microcredentials; and
- A policy that supports learning, innovation, and quality.

The policy will include identification of the roles of the system or units (i.e., Mānoa, Hilo, West O’ahu, University of Hawai’i Community Colleges) and plans for tracking outcomes. The target date for consultation on the policy is Spring 2023.

Until the systemwide taxonomy and policy are approved, a *limited implementation of microcredentials* is authorized by this memo. The Hilo Chancellor, Mānoa Provost, West O’ahu Chancellor, and the Vice President for Community Colleges will approve interim processes, including criteria, to award microcredentials. These “unit”-approved processes will need to align with the design principles recommended by the work group as follows:

1. During the limited implementation, microcredentials will be for *noncredit, workforce training only*, including professional development. Policy revisions underway for Regents Policy 5.201 and Executive Policy 5.201 specify that delegated approval of authority is only for programs that do not require significant resources address. While the policy only addresses credit programs currently, the same principle will apply for microcredentials. At this time any microcredential should not require significant resources. As we develop the for-credit potential of microcredentials, policy change will be completed as needed.
2. Some mechanism for determining quality assurance is necessary. Quality assurance evidence must include:
  - a. Evidence of business, industry, and/or employer support for the skills or competencies represented by the microcredential. Note: UH may be the employer that supports the skills or competencies developed through UH-provided professional development, and

- b. An assessment that provides evidence of competency or competencies recognized by the microcredential.
3. These microcredentials will be recognized with digital badges that provide documentation for the learner and allow for tracking and reporting by UH.

Beginning August 24, 2022, microcredentials awarded by UH as digital badges will be issued *primarily* via system-supported badging services:

- UH ITS-managed BADGR system, or
- UH Community Colleges' Credly implementation for UHCC noncredit courses and programs managed in the Destiny system.

During the 2022-23 year, units may approve use of current program or campus-based digital badging systems to continue awarding digital badges for a transition period, provided that the microcredential is approved through the unit's process and that IRAPO reporting requirements are met.

If a program intends to award microcredentials in Fall 2022, please let your unit contact know so that you can be apprised of developments over the summer.

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OVPAS will publish a website with information about microcredentials at UH including this memo, information about unit-level processes for awarding microcredentials, reference information about microcredentials, and status of the taxonomy and policy development.

If you have questions about this memo, please contact me at (808) 956-6897 or [halbert@hawaii.edu](mailto:halbert@hawaii.edu).

c: Vice Chancellors/Vice Provost for Academic Affairs