Microcredentialing Task Force Midyear Report
December 2023

Membership

    Chair(s): Nick Swartz, School of Professional and Continuing Education

    Members:

- Michele Estes, College of Education
- Lori Gano-Overway, College of Health and Behavioral Studies
- Gilpatrick Hornsby, Center for Faculty Innovation
- Sarah MacDonald, School of Professional and Continuing Education
- Meg Mulrooney, Faculty Affairs and Curriculum
- Leigh Nelson, College of Arts and Letters
- Scott Paulson, University Studies
- Sam Prins, College of Science and Mathematics
- Rhonda Syler, College of Business

Charge:

Goal 3, Objective 2 of the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan identifies continuing to develop JMU's online capacity, presence and expertise as a priority for our division. Higher education institutions, including many R2 universities, are responding quickly to the changing post-COVID economy and workplace expectations. One significant movement is towards micro-credentials as a "new currency of learning," where employers and students expect "demonstrated skills and competencies completed through more stackable pathways of higher education" (UPCEA & Modern Campus, 2021).

This task force will:

• Establish clear goals and vision for JMU's approach to micro-credentials that responds to industry and employer needs while maintaining JMU's institutional identity and brand.

• Make recommendations for both specific topic areas to explore and procedures and guidelines for development, including funding, curricular approval, issuing digital badges, and other institutional policies.

Summary of Current Semester Activity:

- The group reconvened in September and identified two subgroups (Market Analysis & Systems/Processes) that will meet more frequently to hone in on what the market wants in terms of microcredentialing and what systems and processes need to be further understood or established within JMU to offer more microcredentials.
- The group met again in November to hear updates from the two subgroups on their work.

- o The Market Analysis subgroup has begun developing a survey that will go out to the academic colleges within JMU to identify each of their top 20 employers.
- o The Systems/Processes group produced recommendations based on their group's research. A summary of these recommendations include:
  - JMU should start by offering non-credit microcredentials with a target audience of external constituents.
  - A structured vetting process and financial model need to be developed.
  - Faculty/staffing processes should be carefully considered.

Future Work Planned:
- Develop and send survey to JMU's top employers as part of the market analysis.
- Gauge JMU faculty interest, experience, and workload by connecting with JMU deans and Academic Unit Heads.
- Group will reconvene in mid-February for next meeting.

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Appendix 1
Meeting Minutes from 9.26.23 Meeting

Microcredentialing Task Force
9/26/23 Meeting Minutes

1. Introductions

- Introductions were provided. The group shared their name, title, department, and reason for being on the taskforce/how microcredentials relate to their work

2. Review Our Charge

Corresponds to Goal 3, Objective 2 of the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan

- Establish clear goals and vision for JMU's approach to micro-credentials that responds to industry and employer needs while maintaining JMU's institutional identity and brand
    a. This acknowledges that JMU **is and will be** in this space.
- Make recommendations for both specific topic areas to explore and procedures and guidelines for development, including funding, curricular approval, issuing digital badges, and other institutional policies

3. Proposed Next Steps

- **Group 1: Market Analysis:**
  -Develop survey for top 20 employers of JMU grads and regional employers
  -Analyze survey results
  -Analyze report from Education Dynamics.

- **Group 2: What can JMU Deliver?**
  -Develop survey for faculty:
  > -Awareness
  > -Interest
  > -Capacity

  -Identify areas of competitive advantage that we could take to a national market, like civic engagement or ethical reasoning.

- **Group 3: Systems & Processes**
  -Examine other institutions.
    o Financial and budget model
    o Approval process
    o Curriculum review
    o Registrations
    o Marketing
    o Assessment

How do we feel about this?

- *What are barriers to the university in microcredentialing?*

- *What does the workload look like right now?*
- *Shift 2 after 1 & 3?*
- *Need a 2.1 about discussing with AUHs and faculty capacity*
- *SWOT Analysis before the faculty survey*
- *R2 Focus?*

Other Questions for this group to address?
- *Certificate vs. Badge vs. Microcredentials? Definitions needed.*
- *Will microcredentials be administered through SPCE or departments?*

4. Finalize Plan & Begin Our Work

2 groups for the next month or so focusing on:
- **Market Analysis**
  - Sam
  - Nora
  - Rhonda
  - Lori
  - Teddy
  - Leigh
- **Systems & Processes**
  - Meg
  - Michele
  - Gilpatrick
  - Sarah
  - Kurt
  - Scott

Group 1- Reporting Out
- What does market want?
  - What would bring value to our grads when interviewing as well as when currently employed i.e. employability and career growth?
  - Do we focus on both i.e. is it current students for employability, or is it non-students for career growth, or both? Career growth may be for non-credit.
  - How do you want credentialing to occur?
  - What packages/skills would they be interested in if not "MATH 220, BUS 328"…
- It was suggested to involve the Career Center, Libby Westley.
  - Curious if employers are using badging/microcredentials in the hiring process?
  - If yes, what is it that's attractive about them?
- Develop survey for top 20 employers of JMU grads and local employers

- Need names from them. Perhaps ask questions through Handshake? Work with Career Center.
- Loop in Federal Dukes
- Analyze Education Dynamics market analysis

Group 2- Reporting Out

Outside of the original list, group also added the following items to the systems and processes needing to be further understood and/or established:

- Definition- how is JMU defining microcredentials & what does JMU want to accomplish in this space?
- Audience- New students vs. Current students
- Virginia Institutions- Radford, William & Mary
- Faculty Capacity
- Staff Capacity

Group also distributed various items to continue to look into and research:

- Sarah- Financial models; Assessment
- Gilpatrick- Radford
- Michele- Assessment
- Scott- Other Models
- Meg- W&M; Paula
- Kurt- Catalog Searches

Other thoughts captured from their time together included:

- Aceware, Passport & UCGS, Stackable?, Scale (Micro)
- Approval process and curriculum review can start out as non-credit to be nimble and continue to explore beyond that?

Entire group reconvened to discuss initial plan. Further things to discuss and develop include:

- *Repackaging credit courses that they are already taking*
- *Could microcredentials be disciplinary specific*
- *Transferrable skills that overlap across disciplines such as team based communication*
- *In terms of a financial model, how would this generate revenue?*
- *Would the focus be career growth for working individuals or tailored to current students? Or will it be things two things at once? Can one fund the other?*
- *Do we have the infrastructure? & Do we have the capacity to offer new curriculum to a new audience that could generate revenue?*
- *Perhaps leaning into REDI's work based learning timeline would allow us to slow things down work simultaneously along their efforts.*

Action Steps:

- Nick will talk to Provost about extending our timeline.
- Task force will reconvene in late November with subgroups convening in the meantime to continue research and discussion.

Appendix 2
Meeting Minutes from 11.29.23 Meeting

Microcredentialing Task Force
Meeting Minutes
11/29/2023

Those in attendance: Nick Swartz, Melanie Carver, Nora Sutton, Sarah MacDonald, Teddy Levin, Leigh Nelson, Kurt Johnson, Gilpatrick Hornsby, Sam Prins, Scott Paulson, Michele Estes, Meg Mulrooney, Lori Gano-Overway

Nick began meeting with reminding the task force of the provost's charge for this group:
- Establish clear goals and vision for JMU's approach to micro-credentials that responds to industry and employer needs while maintaining JMU's institutional identify and brand
- Make recommendations for both specific topic areas to explore and procedures and guidelines for development, including funding, curricular approval, issuing digital badges, and other institutional policies

Updates from each group
- Market Analysis (Sam, Nora, Rhonda, Lori, Teddy, Leigh)
  - **Survey**-
    - Waiting on data from the Career Center; this data will ideally provide the top 20 employers from each of the academic colleges. Group has gently nudged the Career Center for this information but in terms of timeline (given the busyness of December) the *survey would be ready to go out after the task force's approval by mid-late January with data finalized by end of February.*
    - Another piece the group will need to consider is who these surveys will go to.
  - **Teams Content**-
    - Articles (reports, news, etc) related to microcredentials, employer demands, and where this is headed
    - Notes on conversations from Nora at September career fair – getting a read on what employers are seeking, are they familiar with microcredentials, does this set candidates a part
    - Notes on conversations from Rhonda with her executive advisory board
    - Lori took an initial pass at compiling survey questions
- Systems & Processes (Meg, Michele, Gilpatrick, Sarah, Kurt, Scott)
  - *Research led to drafting the following recommendations:*
    - "JMU should start by offering non-credit microcredentials. We may consider how those non-credit microcredentials might translate into credit, or how to offer microcredentials linked to/integrated with credit courses, in the future.

    - Our initial target audience for this will be external audiences, not current JMU degree-seeking students. Once we've learned some lessons and developed processes, we may consider how to expand beyond that.

    - JMU should have some kind of vetting process for these offerings, but we need to develop a process that is potentially outside of (but aligned with?) existing

C&I procedures. Meg and Gilpatrick will take this to VPFAC for discussion in January.

- Registration and transcription will depend on how the approval process for microcredentials is developed. Could be within SA/Curriculog, could be within ACEware, could be some combination.

- JMU still needs to develop financial models that are appropriate for these programs; there may be multiple financial models needed (depending on audience). Someone from finance should be involved in those discussions (and soon).

- We also need to carefully consider staffing issues (both faculty and administrative).

- We need to consider intellectual property issues."

- o Initial feedback on this recommendation:
  - Faculty & Faculty Resources (Gilpatrick)
    - How do we reconcile our faculty working with external constituents outside of their program? (Michele)
    - Explore circumstances in which faculty would enthusiastically participate in this? Such as personal, professional, department value that would incentivize faculty to prioritize it? (Sam)
      - o Nick provided the successful example of the Supply Chain Analytics & SPCE/COB partnership example.
    - Workload is also concern: we need clear expectation on what this would look like for them.
    - Does this need to rest on the back of our current faculty? People in the field could be teaching this. (Meg)
      - o JMU faculty first if allowed to do so, if not then go external (Nick)
  - Assessment & Quality Control (Lori)
    - This needs to be a high priority.
    - Collaboration with CARS

Updates from Conference Participation
- APLU
  - o Focus was primarily on AI
- UPCEA/AACRAO
  - o Consistent themes throughout: The institution needs to grab a hold of this - policy will be needed; partnering with employer's is critical; many platforms to do this effectively already exist. Given these themes, it makes sense to start slowly then spread out from there
- VEDA

- o Focus was primarily on workforce: Microcredentials themselves were not specifically discussed the "updated 3-legged stool: university/industry/government partnerships to meet workforce needs" was definitely discussed

Next Steps

- Questions to ask?
  - o Do we still want to reach out to faculty regarding their interest, experience, etc? Is this still a logical next step for spring 2024?
    - ▪ Deans & AUHs should be addressed first. -Gilpatrick
      - -Sam & Nick can revisit with the Deans
  - o Can this expectation for faculty be considered in-load given if it is not credit bearing? (Gilpatrick)
    - ▪ If not in load, then loaded to summer for development? -Sam
  - o Can we continue to think about systems, budget models, and creative ways to offer this for current students/recruitment for continuing education at JMU? – Meg
  - o 2 years from now: How many microcredentials are we thinking we could offer? Do we focus our offerings on what JMU is known for, what we are good at, and then push those forward?
    - ▪ This question will be better answered after we have more input from faculty and the data.
- Next Meeting – Mid to late February; Nick will be in touch via email; Melanie will send out a doodle poll after the break to identify a time for our next in person meeting.