Micro-Credentials and Learner Records

I.   Purpose

This Policy sets out the principles and procedures for quality assurance of the TBR institutions' micro-credentials that are included on the System's comprehensive learner record. The principles and procedures include, but are not limited to design, approval, delivery, monitoring, and review.

II.   Scope

DSCC employees and others representing DSCC will adhere to the policy.

III.   Policy

A. Awarding of Credit for Degree-Seeking Programs
  I.   Admission
       a.   For the purposes of institutional and governmental reporting obligations, a learner taking a micro-credential course does not meet the definition of any degree or certificate seeking student.
       b.   If a learner wishes to pursue a formal degree-seeking program, clear information should be provided about official admission application requirements that exist, including whether or not micro-credential credits may transfer to the degree program, and if so, which degree-program requirements they might fulfill.
  II.   Credit arrangements for micro-credentials may be established. Eligibility for formal credit will be assessed according to TBR Policy [TBR Policy 2.01.00.04 and any applicable College policies and procedures](#).
  III.   Schools may determine advanced standing equivalencies, if applicable, for non-credit and for-credit micro-credential programs.
  IV.   Upon successful completion of micro-credential program requirements, digital acknowledgement of achievement will be granted to students.
  V.   Programs are encouraged to develop ways for micro-credentials to be highly visible, with connections to professional networks and leveraged as much as possible.
  VI.   Micro-credentials will usually be an open "public" offering. However, in some circumstances, micro-credentials will have restricted entry, for example an industry partner offering, or specific entry requirements.
  VII.   There is no limit to the number of micro-credentials a student may earn.
  VIII.   Students enrolled in a micro-credential credit-bearing program must have a cumulative GPA of at least 2.0 for successful completion of the program.
B. Micro-credential Program Duration
  I.   For-credit micro-credential programs are generally 15 or fewer credit hours. Non-credit micro-credentials vary in length.
  II.   Micro-credential programs should balance time-to-completion considerations (either credit hours, units, etc.) with the time necessary for students to demonstrate competency and achievement of program outcomes.

III. Micro-credential programs should enable participants to achieve program outcomes in as timely a manner as possible.

C. Tuition and Aid

I. Micro-credential programs pursued as stand-alone programs do not qualify for federal financial aid. Micro-credential participants may apply for other forms of funding that may be available. However, some micro-credential programs may be completed while students are pursuing a degree. Those degree-seeking students may be eligible for federal financial aid.

II. Innovative pricing models are encouraged to make programs widely accessible given that federal financial aid is generally not available to participants. TBR institutions should seek guidance and approval from the TBR System Office prior to implementing new models.

III. Micro-credentials embedded into credit-bearing degree pathways are eligible for federal financial aid.

D. Micro-credential Program Design and Delivery

I. When designing and delivering for-credit offerings, the following principles must be adhered to:

a. for-credit learning must align with the strategic directions of the College and the relevant Faculty / Department / School / Office;

b. for-credit learning must be financially viable, with due consideration given to design and delivery costs and other factors as appropriate to the Faculty / Department / School / Office;

c. admission requirements to a for-credit learning or micro-credential program will be determined as part of the approval process specified in Part A of this policy;

d. any for-credit learning must be consistent with the requirements of TBR Policy 2.01.00.04

e. when and how credentials may be stacked together should be included in institutional policies and approved in accordance with TBR Policy 2.01.01.00 II B.

f. in cases of for-credit learning and micro-credential programs, learning outcomes aligned to SACS-COC's Policy on Quality and Integrity of Educational Credentials and SACS-COC Principle 8.2a must be developed; task(s) must be set to assure the attainment of the learning outcomes; and

g. credit must be based on the hours it will take for participants to successfully complete the micro-credential using the following standards:

i. The basis for the assignment of credit is defined federally as not less than one hour each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or

ii. At least an equivalent amount of work as required outlined above for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practicums, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

E. Model Framework for Micro-Credentials

I. Each institution must establish a model for faculty oversight regarding the review, approval, and verification of micro-credentials. Institutions should determine their specific needs and consider whether different information should be collected and

approval workflows established between credit-bearing or non-credit micro-credentials. An institutional model framework or proposal form should contain information regarding:

a. Program title
b. Program description
c. Issuing entity type (credit or non-credit)
d. Requirements
e. Criteria
f. Evidence (demonstrations or examples of criteria to be met)
g. Assessment protocol
h. Effective date
i. Expiration date (if applicable)
j. Learning outcomes
k. Alignment with external standards and competency frameworks
l. Description of the timing of how the micro-credential can be earned and when a learner can begin and finish the credential (traditional semester/quarter model or on-demand)
m. Clock or credit hours, if applicable

F. Recording micro-credentials in student record
a. Certifications and micro-credentials should be recorded on the STDGVC screen in Banner
b. Micro-credentials will be titled "*name* Credential" in the student information system

E. Micro-credential Program Assessment and Effectiveness
I. Micro-credential programs and courses should be reviewed annually by the creating school to ensure continued viability. This cyclical review will ensure that programs remain effective at meeting students' educational needs. Updates to the curriculum, courses and teaching strategies should be implemented regularly in the pursuit of continuous improvement.
II. All courses should be reviewed prior to release to students to ensure effective design and delivery strategies are in place to support engaging learning experiences and student achievement of learning objectives.
III. Instructors who teach online micro-credential courses should first complete professional development to ensure they are prepared to teach students in the online learning environment.

IV.   Compliance

Persons found to have violated the terms set forth in the policy will be subject to corrective action and potential disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

V.   Definitions

Assertion: the digital credential or claim the earner receives and serves as the record of their achievement. The assertion contains all general information of the badge and what makes it a

unique instance of the badge, the identity of the badge recipient, and optionally a link to evidence, a narrative, and an expiration date.

Assessment: a process that ensures appropriate rigor and expertise to evaluate a learning activity to determine to what extent learning may have occurred.

Badges (Digital): online representations that recognize skills, achievements, membership affiliation, and participation. Badges are the visual representation issued to students upon successful completion of a micro-credential or demonstrated accomplishment or skill.

Certificate: certificates are academic programs based on a free-standing body of knowledge, often interdisciplinary in nature. They typically have a minimum number of credits, and are smaller than major programs of study. Certificates can be comprised of micro-credentials that culminate in the awarding of a certificate. Institutions should follow guidance found in TBR Policy 2.01.01.00 II.B.4a. on academic actions required for certificate programs.

Credit Hour: A credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency. SACS-COC policy and COE Objectives 2-A-6 and 2-A-7 follow the federal definition of the credit hour.

Alternative Credentials: non-degree credentials offered by TBR institutions may include a myriad of credit alternatives including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), micro-credentials (badges), credit- or non-credit bearing certificate programs and various other opportunities. Typically issued in a digital format.

Digital credentials: digital insignia that can be stored and shared virtually to show accomplishment of learning, skills, and knowledge.

Learning outcomes: the expression of the set of knowledge and skills, and the application of the knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning through measurable assessments and standards.

Micro-credential: a certification of an individual's discrete learning and achievements. Micro-credentials are often aligned to industry or other professional needs and, in some instances, may be used to provide credit towards formal qualifications. Micro-credentials are certified through assignment of a digital credential and associated metadata. A micro-credential offered by a TBR institution should be asserted by a recognized campus authority.

Micro-credential Programs: largely stand-alone programs created to provide professional development opportunities to equip enrollees with specific knowledge, skills, and proficiencies. The credentials may be either credit-bearing or non-credit bearing. Micro-credentials allow institutions to recognize a learners' skills and accomplishments in ways that are verifiable. Micro-credentials are less than a technical certificate (less than 15 credit hours or 300 clock hours). Schools and programs may consider implementation of additional admissions standards for credentials that are transferable toward a certificate or degree program.

For-credit learning: college-level courses, often stackable toward a certificate and/or degree program. Courses must follow the credit or clock hour policy for earned hours.

Not-for-credit learning: courses or other learning experiences that do not result in a learner earning academic credit, which do not typically appear on an academic transcript, and may be recognized through other means. Learning may be offered in a variety of formats ranging from stand-alone courses to a series of courses or modules, focused on a specialized set of competencies. Non-credit micro-credential programs are not directly transferrable toward a certificate or degree program.

Third Party micro-credential provider: an arrangement made with another party in the provision of higher education, including placements and joint award of qualifications. All third parties who design and deliver a micro-credential on behalf of a TBR institution must adhere to this policy.

Verifiable: confirmation that a credential is authentic, accurate, and legitimate and has been awarded by an institution to a specific learner. Verifiable credentials can protect against credential fraud and increase trust in the credential being awarded. Any credential listed on a TBR Learner Record must be verified.

VI.   Revision History

Policy Approved by the DSCC Administrative Council on September 28, 2023.