

CHAPTER 15.

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL
OF WAC MICRO-CREDENTIALS:
DRIVING PROGRAM
GROWTH ON NEW PATHS

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Abstract. This chapter focuses on the emerging trend of micro-credentialing in higher education, which draws on corporate training models and responds to employer demand. While micro-credentials (badges) have raised concerns that a skills-training approach could devalue traditional college education, we propose suggest that micro-credentials can be tools for innovative faculty development, student learning, and WAC program growth.

Micro-credentials in higher education are often a response to the business community's desire for detailed and easily accessible credentials that verify skill competencies specific to certain hiring needs. They draw on corporate training models and are usually offered in shorter timeframes and are more flexible than traditional degree or certificate programs. As defined by the SUNY Micro-Credentialing Task Force, "micro-credentials verify, validate, and attest that specific skills and/or competencies have been achieved" (2018, p. 2). The term "micro-credential" is often used interchangeably with "badges," and when awarded, they are commonly web-based and "clickable," allowing them to be displayed online on LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media platforms.

Universities, including Purdue, University of Michigan, SUNY, University of Utah, and University of Minnesota, offer micro-credentials as a means of both meeting business and industry needs and preparing students with marketable skills. However, micro-credentials have raised concerns that what has traditionally been largely a skills-training approach could devalue traditional college education. For example, while SUNY's Micro-Credentialing Task Force ultimately recommends the support and development of micro-credentials across the university, they are clear to qualify that in such programs, "academic quality is paramount

for micro-credentials, and faculty governance participation is required” (SUNY, 2018). With similar concern, Glotfelter et al. categorize micro-credentials in what Randy Bass labels the “disintegrative paradigm” for learning, one that “emphasizes dimensions of education that can be commodified: targeted online learning, granular or modular, driven by algorithms that deliver micro-data on student understanding, often with a diminished role for faculty” (Bass, qtd. in Glotfelter, et al., 2022, p. 10). Such a paradigm, in Bass’s description, fails to support deep learning, moving views of learning “away from the complex and messy to simpler, more linear measures of success” (Glotfelter et al., 2022, p. 5).

We agree fully on the need to foster deep learning experiences; however, we argue that micro-credentialing can be an effective delivery method for enriching and change-making faculty development. Our experiences leading a WAC program at a large Hispanic-serving university suggest that WAC programs are poised to productively influence not only the future of digital micro-credentials within the academy but also the future of WAC impact on campuses. More specifically, we contend that since micro-credentials in the academy are still new enough that the definition is malleable, our role as WAC specialists puts us in the position to define how micro-credentials might work in our specific context. In other words, as the experts at our institution in training faculty across disciplines to teach with writing, we are uniquely positioned to design micro-credentialing experiences that benefit our faculty and goals for our institutions’ writing cultures. Doing so allows us to not only capitalize on the interest across campuses in micro-credential programs but also promote WAC principles and writing pedagogy best practices. Relatedly, our experiences suggest that micro-credentials can be used for promoting equity and access for students across campus.

To support our claims, we describe a strategic partnership with our Office of Micro-Credentials (OMC) to launch faculty and student-facing WAC micro-credentials. As we have discussed previously (Fang et al., 2023), in an effort to sustain our WAC program in a context of budget short-fall and political contention, we work to “link to highly connected institutional structures” with the goal of increasing “program stability by not being perceived as marginal or temporary, but integral to the institution” (Cox et al., 2018, p. 80). As Cox et al. (2018) have so clearly argued, WAC programs do well to “focus on points of high interactivity and leverage to shift the university culture” (p. 37). WAC administrators, they point out, can connect their program “to the structure of the institution through collaborations with highly connected units” which in our context is the OMC (2018, p. 67). A strategic partnership with the OMC not only helps to keep our WAC program visible and relevant but also aligns with university priorities. Our most recent Quality Enhancement Plan, *Critical Skills for the 21st Century*, promotes micro-credentialing and prompted the

development of the university's Office of Micro-Credentials, led by our vice president of academic affairs. Partnering with our OMC brings visibility and increased funding to support faculty participation. However, the above-mentioned benefits would be insufficient if the program did not align with our WAC program's values and provide opportunity to engage faculty in meaningful and lasting work that creates increased opportunity and equity for their students. In what follows, we provide an overview of our micro-credential courses and share participants' self-assessment results, which support our view that micro-credentials, when designed with clear and context-specific WAC goals in mind, can lead to meaningful pedagogical change.

AN OVERVIEW: FACULTY-FACING AND STUDENT-FACING MICRO-CREDENTIALING COURSES

Our WAC faculty micro-credential, "Teaching with Writing in the Disciplines," is a six-week summer intensive course designed to help faculty across disciplines learn best practices for teaching with writing so that they can effectively incorporate writing into their courses, create writing assignments, and respond to student writing. Faculty are selected for the course via an application process. At the time of this writing, we have offered the micro-credential four times, starting in Summer 2022, and we consistently have high faculty interest in the micro-credential. On average, we receive 70 applications and accept 20–25 faculty per cohort. Since we intentionally limit the number of faculty in each cohort as one way of responding critiques of micro-credential courses that assume the faculty role is diminished. By keeping each cohort at 20–25 faculty, we ensure that our faculty-facing micro-credential is designed around close interaction between the WAC team and faculty participants. We divide the larger cohort of 25 faculty into smaller cohorts of four or five, with a dedicated WAC team member assigned to each small group to foster connections, collaboration, and ongoing communication. Each WAC team member provides individualized feedback to the members of their small group throughout the course. To help with acceptance decisions, we developed five criteria to guide our selection process.

When faculty apply to the micro-credential course, they identify the specific course in which they would like to integrate the student micro-credential, explain their motivations/intentions for applying, and describe their current pedagogical practices associated with writing. Thus, we evaluate faculty submissions according to the following: 1) The fit of the proposed course with the micro-credential content; 2) The applicant's understanding of and/or depth of interest in writing; 3) The potential impact of the student micro-credential at the program/department level; 4) The likelihood of faculty continuing to offer

the student micro-credential in subsequent semesters; and 5) The potential to strengthen connections between WAC and various programs/departments on campus. In developing these criteria, we kept in mind Barbara E. Walvoord's (1996) distinction between micro-level actions (those that focus on individual faculty and students) and macro-level actions (those that focus on larger systems and programs). Thus, we take a multi-pronged approach, considering not only the potential impact of the student micro-credential within each individual course, but also the potential for the faculty and student micro-credentials to promote WAC growth and impact across campus.

The faculty course is a virtual, hybrid course that consists of online discussions and weekly Zoom meetings. The weekly meetings complement the online portion of the course by offering faculty the opportunity to dive deeper into concepts discussed in the asynchronous discussions. For this reason, Zoom meetings often begin with a WAC-led presentation that further explores that week's topics and then concludes with small group activities and/or group discussions. Throughout the course, there are seven assessments: two online discussions and five writing assignments. To maintain consistency with the other micro-credentials offered through the OMC, faculty must earn a minimum grade of 80 percent on all assessments to be qualified to implement the student micro-credential in an upcoming course.

Five learning outcomes guide the content of the faculty micro-credential course. By the end of the course, faculty should be able to: 1) describe best practices of teaching with writing; 2) recognize that students come to the course with a wide range of resources; 3) describe and apply various approaches to responding to and assessing student writing; 4) apply best practices for teaching with writing in their respective discipline; and 5) reflect on the application of teaching with writing in accordance with their specific disciplinary conventions. To meet these outcomes, we cover various topics throughout the course, including how to design writing in the disciplines (WID) assignments, the importance of embracing a process-based approach to teaching writing, strategies for responding to student writing, suggestions for incorporating AI literacy into the teaching of writing, and leveraging the benefits of multilingualism. For instance, in Week 1 of the course, we discuss Write to Learn (WTL) and WID assignments and the ways in which both can be integrated into disciplinary classrooms. Week 2 focuses on effective design of writing assignments, including transparent assignment design and strategies for scaffolding smaller assignments. In Week 3, we discuss effective feedback and assessment practices, including rubric design, strategies for using AI for feedback, and how to incorporate peer and self-feedback. Finally, Week 4 focuses on best practices for working with multilingual students, such as adopting a culturally responsive approach to assignment design

and focusing feedback on idea development and clarity rather than prioritizing only Standard Academic English.

Throughout the entirety of the course, faculty create or revise a writing assignment according to WAC principles on effective assignment design. Faculty revise their assignments multiple times in response to WAC team feedback, create an assessment tool to accompany the assignment, and develop teaching artifacts designed with multilingual students in mind. During the final two weeks of the course, faculty write a Teaching with Writing Philosophy Statement in which they reflect on their experiences in the course and formalize their takeaways about teaching with writing within their specific discipline.

For example, during the Summer 2022 course, Dr. Mike Hampton from the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management designed an assignment that asks students to analyze a business website according to marketing aspects and write a marketing analysis report. During the course, we helped Dr. Hampton apply the tenets of Mary-Ann Winkelmes' (2023) transparent assignment design to his assignment, develop a corresponding rubric, and create a student-facing self-editing exercise. Dr. Hampton's work offers one example of the type of writing assignments and artifacts faculty create in the "Teaching with Writing in the Disciplines" course.

Upon successful completion of this course, faculty are certified to incorporate the student-facing micro-credential "Writing in the Disciplines" into one of their upcoming courses. In the student micro-credential, we seek to promote equity and access for faculty and students across campus. For faculty, this approach means respecting their disciplinary expertise so that they are empowered to take what they have learned in the faculty micro-credential and effectively teach writing within their disciplines. One way we value disciplinary expertise is by inviting faculty to personalize the module assessments for their own courses and decide when/how they will integrate them. The student micro-credential includes designated areas for faculty to insert the discipline-specific pedagogical materials they created during the faculty WAC micro-credential course. Also, since faculty can create *or revise* a WID assignment, much of the work assigned to students in the micro-credential is work that they would do anyway in the course; however, as a result of the WAC micro-credential, faculty create stronger versions of the assignments, and students gain additional incentive to succeed in the assignment with the opportunity to earn a writing micro-credential that could be valued by potential employers.

Our partnership with OMC has been a positive collaboration build on mutual respect and has enabled us to offer an extended faculty training program that reflects our institutional WAC priorities and values while furthering the OMC's goal of hosting a wide array of badge programs. However, as with

any partnership, challenges arise. In this case, we had to negotiate assumptions regarding micro-credential standardization. Specifically, while honoring faculty disciplinary expertise was essential for our WAC team, our idea to allow personalization of the student micro-credential was initially questioned by the OMC. Traditionally, once a micro-credential had been developed and approved by the OMC, it would be taught the same way each time, regardless of the specific faculty teaching the micro-credential. This standardization ensures that all students earning a particular micro-credential will have a consistent experience. However, since our student micro-credential aims to teach writing *in the disciplines*, we knew that the student micro-credential needed to have discipline-specific aspects, and we therefore advocated for the importance of instructor choice within the student micro-credential. After working with the OMC to understand the requirements for each new micro-credential, we ultimately developed a student micro-credential that satisfied the OMC requirements while also providing opportunities for instructor personalization.

For instance, one of the student micro-credential modules focuses on genre awareness. An accepted premise of WAC theory is that genres are discipline-specific, and gaining familiarity with discipline-specific genres is inextricable from learning disciplinary writing. As Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle (2022) argue: “naming and providing ways for students to practice with the conventions of these genres ... is a critical part of providing disciplinary access. That’s because written genres ... reflect the ways in which people join or belong to fields and perpetuates the ideas circulating within those fields” (p. 45). From this perspective, who better to select the genres for student analysis than the faculty—the disciplinary experts—teaching the WID micro-credential? Therefore, in the genre awareness module, we provide faculty with readings on genre that include “Genre/Form” (Gross et al., 2022) from the open-access book, *Howdy or hello? Technical and Professional Communication* and “Navigating Genres” by Kerry Dirk (2010) from the open-access book, *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*. We also provide an editable genre analysis chart, and each instructor uses their disciplinary expertise to select the specific genre for their students to analyze (See Appendix for the editable genre chart).

Relatedly, just as genres are discipline-specific, so too are the characteristics of effective writing. Put simply, “disciplinary communities of practice ... determine what ‘counts’ and what doesn’t” (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2022, pp. 46–47). Thus, as we designed the self-editing module of the student micro-credential, we knew we also needed to embed instructor choice. Effective editing and revision in a scientific lab report, for example, will look different than it does in an anthropology narrative. Therefore, in this module, we provide resources on the importance of editing and revision, and then we work with faculty to

develop a self-editing activity that is specific to writing in their discipline and with their students.

We also aim to use the faculty micro-credential to promote equity for our specific student population. As previously mentioned, our institution is a large Hispanic-serving university. Most of our students identify as Hispanic and multilingual. Accordingly, the faculty micro-credential includes content on equitable grading, teaching, and feedback strategies with our multilingual writing students in mind. For example, in our discussions of rubrics, we emphasize the need for clear, plain language rather than advanced, discipline-specific jargon, as well as the impact of weighting content, ideas, and organization over sentence-level grammar and mechanics. We also discuss the value of providing multilingual student writers with models of successful student work and we offer resources focused on productively responding to errors in multilingual student writing (i.e., this flowchart from the Purdue OWL's faculty guide, p. 34). While these are good pedagogical practices for all students, our discussions with micro-credential faculty focus especially on the importance of these efforts for multilingual student writers.

EVALUATING, REFLECTING AND REFINING: MICRO-CREDENTIAL COURSE ASSESSMENT

Having delineated the structure and rationale of both faculty and student micro-credentials, this section discusses the preliminary data results of both micro-credentials. While we plan to engage in more robust assessment frameworks that would incorporate additional measures such as analysis of student writing artifacts, faculty course redesign outcomes, and longitudinal tracking of pedagogical changes. Currently our assessment data offers encouraging insights particularly through high levels of self-reported satisfaction and perceived learning gain. Specifically, we focus on the outcomes of the micro-credentials, exploring the perceptions of the program by faculty and students and its impact on faculty teaching and student learning experiences. Additionally, we examine whether the integration of writing micro-credential content into the disciplinary curriculum has fostered enhanced writing skills in students, as anticipated, and how faculty have reacted and adapted their instructional approaches. Through this analysis of program feedback, participant testimonials, and empirical data, this section aims to evaluate our micro-credential program in achieving its objectives.

FACULTY-FACING MICRO-CREDENTIALING COURSE

In assessing the micro-credentials, we hope the initial results will highlight achievements and areas for further refinement. The data sources for faculty assessment are

faculty surveys, course statistics, and course artifacts. The faculty micro-credential program, aimed at integrating writing pedagogies within various disciplines, has been met with robust participation and approval. The program yielded high completion rates, with 16 of 18 faculty completing the first cohort, and 21 out of 23 completing the second cohort. Faculty who dropped out due to overwhelming responsibilities all expressed regrets. Since faculty have limited time and many demands on their schedules, including teaching, research, and service, attending professional development sessions can be difficult to fit in among these other priorities. Competing demands remains a common reason for faculty dropout in professional development programs (Wadhwa et al., 2014).

Survey data from the first cohort of faculty participants revealed overwhelming satisfaction, with 100 percent of respondents expressing satisfaction with their experience in the program. Additionally, 77.78 percent of participants acknowledged gaining more from the experience than expected, and 88.89 percent reported feeling more knowledgeable about teaching with writing than their peers who did not participate in the program.

Qualitative feedback from faculty underscored the practical applications of the course content. Participants implemented new teaching strategies immediately, such as revising assignments to clarify audience expectations and align with disciplinary writing genres, and integrating self-editing prompts into their courses. One faculty commented:

There are several elements of what I've learned in this class that I have already begun to implement in my current summer course and I've flagged for inclusion in my future classes and my approach to writing in these courses: 1) I've revised a few assignments to give prompts about audience, or make the audience more explicit; 2) I've revised two assignments to tweak the writing portion to align with disciplinary writing genres, and made that connection explicit; and I've added self-editing prompts to a couple of assignments. . . . I'm really pleased at how this course has given me new ideas for teaching and assignment design.

As we see in this quote, such writing assignment revisions have the potential to not only enrich the faculty's course content but also further WAC best practices in the disciplinary course. Additionally, although the faculty micro-credential is tied to only one course the faculty members teach, faculty can apply the acquired knowledge of teaching with writing to all the courses they teach.

The overall reactions of the faculty to the course, an important measurement level of the effectiveness of professional development programs (Guskey, 2002),

indicate positive outcomes and areas for enhancement. For example, one participant noted the tangible benefits of the training, stating: “With the training, I believe my course is more engaging for the students.” This comment shows the course’s impact on improving classroom engagement. Another faculty member expressed appreciation for the program’s practical applications as he personalized the learning to his course: “Thanks for organizing and offering this course. It helped me achieve the goal of developing a writing assignment for my computer science course.” However, feedback also highlighted challenges related to the course’s demands, as one participant remarked: “It was a great deal of work, and one must be able to find the time to complete the process.” These insights not only affirm the program’s immediate benefits but also provide information for refining future iterations, ensuring that the course remains effective and accessible for interested faculty members.

STUDENT-FACING MICRO-CREDENTIAL COURSE

The student-facing micro-credential, implemented by the trained faculty, also reported positive outcomes. Over two consecutive semesters, a considerable number of students earned the writing micro-credential—141 from 11 courses in Fall 2022 and 174 from 10 courses in Spring 2023. Satisfaction rates were high among these cohorts, with over 90 percent of participants each semester reporting “Very satisfied” or “Satisfied” with their micro-credential experience. Over 93 percent of the student learners in each semester expressed that they feel more or much more knowledgeable about learning with writing than peers who did not complete the micro-credential. Over 90 percent of the student learners expressed that they would include the micro-credential experience in their job applications, which reveals that the micro-credentials were seen not only as a testament to their writing ability but also as a valuable addition to their professional profiles, potentially enhancing their employability.

Student feedback on the micro-credential also highlights the program’s role in enhancing both academic and professional communication skills. For instance, one student remarked: “I thought it was helpful in learning how to be a better communicator in general,” emphasizing the practical benefits of the training. Further, participants found the experience not only insightful but also applicable to their future career paths. As one student noted: “This was a very insightful and interactive experience that prepared me for my professional career. I hope to expand my knowledge in this same way by taking other additional micro-credential certifications in the future.” Moreover, the program addressed specialized academic needs, as highlighted by a student who appreciated learning how to read primary scientific literature: “One of the main things I really valued was

learning how to read primary scientific literature, as I believe that is something that is really common within my discipline, and it is something that is important with my future career in order to keep up to date with the trends on various treatment methods.” These testimonials in the surveys show the micro-credential’s effectiveness in equipping students with critical skills for academic and professional success.

REFLECT AND REFINE

Based on feedback and assessment results, several revisions are slated for both the faculty and student micro-credentials. For the faculty micro-credential, we are planning several key revisions. Our focus includes reducing the workload to alleviate the pressure on participants, ensuring they can fully engage with and benefit from the course content without feeling overwhelmed. For instance, we streamlined the faculty workload by reducing the number of required readings in each module and simplifying the assignment prompts to focus on fewer, more targeted questions. Reducing faculty workload is not merely a logistical improvement, but a deliberate effort to make professional development more inclusive and sustainable, especially for faculty teaching high-enrollment or labor-intensive courses. We will also update the content to address teaching writing in the age of artificial intelligence. For example, with our most recent cohort, we discussed the potential to create AI-infused writing assignments and the ways in which students can productively and ethically use AI for feedback on their writing. Additionally, we aim to further encourage the use of multimodal assignments, which will enrich the learning experience and cater to diverse learning styles. Finally, we plan to enhance peer interactions among participants to foster a more collaborative and supportive learning environment. These revisions are designed to improve the program’s quality and address the specific needs and challenges identified by our faculty members. Meanwhile, these revisions will help ensure that our micro-credentials do more than deliver content; they cultivate reflective, equity-minded faculty equipped to support all students, especially in our minority-majority teaching context. For the upcoming iteration of our student-facing micro-credential, we are committed to implementing several revisions based on feedback and the evolving needs of our participants. Key among these revisions is the improvement of students’ metacognitive reflection prompts, which will be refined to better support critical and sustained reflection on what they are learning about effective communication in their discipline and writing as an iterative process that involves regular drafting and revising. We also plan to integrate more engaging and interactive content throughout the program,

aiming to boost student involvement and retention of the material presented. We will ask faculty to track the ratio of earners to learners, providing us with data to continually assess and improve the effectiveness of the micro-credential program. At the time of this writing, we have already implemented some changes. For instance, recognizing the importance of early buy-in, we have introduced motivational content in the first module, emphasizing the value of the micro-credential and its potential impact on students' academic and professional successes. Additionally, a pre-learning survey has been implemented to better understand and align with students' expectations right from the start of the course.

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

This chapter has detailed an important initiative within our WAC program, focusing on the implementation of both faculty-facing and student-facing micro-credentials. We have explored the outcomes and content of these micro-credential courses and presented an analysis of the assessment results that showcase the tangible benefits and the challenges encountered. The feedback and data collected reflect a strong validation of the program's impact, yet also underscore several areas that were initially underestimated, including faculty interest, especially among graduate faculty, the program's potential reach, the overall course workload for faculty participants, the budget required for effective WAC support, and the level of autonomy of our WAC program.

These insights have led to the identification of challenges related to the micro-credentialing program's process and administrative aspects. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for future phases. We will also focus on collecting and reporting detailed assessment data to further refine the program's effectiveness. Based on the outcomes, there will be considerations to request renewal of funding and plan for the sustainability of the WAC initiative. Looking forward, there is potential for expanding the WAC team and leveraging faculty within specific disciplines to provide more targeted support, thereby enhancing the overall structure and reach of the WAC programming.

We argue that micro-credentialing can serve as an effective method for faculty development within the context of a WAC program, leading to pedagogical changes conducive to students' deep learning. Our vision of using micro-credential programs to enrich the academic writing culture across campuses will empower faculty and students with tailored, accessible micro-credential content, fostering a deeper engagement with writing and communication skills across disciplines that are essential for academic success and professional readiness. Our ongoing efforts to refinement and adaptations in the micro-credential program

underscore a dynamic and responsive approach to faculty development, positioning WAC to significantly influence both the practice and perception of a strong writing culture on campus.

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APPENDIX: GENRE ANALYSIS CHART

	Analysis of the genre	Specific evidence from the genre
What do you notice about the purpose of the text? Is the purpose explicitly stated or is it implied? Is the writer trying to inform, educate, persuade, prove a point, describe, narrate, or something else? Does the text want the audience to do, think, or understand something specific?		
What do you notice about the content/ message ? Is the main message directly stated or implied? Is there an introduction and/or conclusion? Is support/data provided for the claims that are made?		
What do you notice about word choice/ language ? Are there context-specific words used? Is the language advanced or is it able to be understood by a general audience? What sorts of transitions or other signpost phrases are used? Are there abbreviations used, and if so, are they defined/explained? Is first-person used (I or we)?		
What do you notice about how the audience is addressed? How does the text engage with its target audience? Is the audience directly named? Is the audience directly addressed with “you?” Is it clear what the audience can be expected to already know or believe? What does the writer want the audience to do, think, or feel as a result of reading/viewing the text?		
What do you notice about the visual appearance and/or organization ? Are there images/photos? If so, where are they in relation to the alphabetic text? Are there columns, bullet points, or headings? Does the text use sections and/or sub-sections? Columns? Bullet points? Varying font sizes? How does the text use color?		