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SPEAKER:
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KRISTIN MORGAN:
Welcome to today's PaperClip Communications online training. On behalf of PaperClip Communications, would like to thank each of you for joining us today for our online training experience, titled Micro-Credentials and Badges 101: The Essential Foundational Blocks to Initiate & Build a Successful Program.

My name is Kristin Morgan, and I am a webinar coordinator with PaperClip Communications was today I had the distinct honor of being your moderator. I also have the pleasure of introducing our expert presenter, who has so graciously agreed to share her insight, wisdom and passion for today's topic. Please join me in welcoming Anne Reed.

Anne, I appreciate you being with us today. I know you have a great deal of information that you want to share with our audience so I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to you to get started.

ANNE REED:
Thank you Kristin and good morning everyone and thank you all for joining us today. As Kristin indicated, I'm here to talk about micro credentials will stop I am the director of micro-credentials at the University of Buffalo. UB is a large university -- research university, part of the stake -- state university system, (unknown term) as you may call it. Some history back in 2017. I was brought on to establish the office of micro-credentials, and we didn't start offering our micro-credentials in till the fall of 2018. It took about a year to get all of our ducks in a row and of love the processes and procedures that are necessary for a University wide initiative, which is... This

is how we started out. By offering micro-credentials all across the institution. We rolled out a pilot of 10 that first semester. Now we offer, excuse me, over 70 micro-credentials.

I thought I would discuss some key strategies for building a micro credential program. I think getting a micro credential program off of the ground request, you know, a lot of collaboration, a lot of processes and procedures, and I'm hoping to, you know, share some of my experience and it will be helpful for all of you.

The key strategies that I will be talking about today, clarity, communication, alignment, and developing efficient processes. These are kind of broad categories, but we are going to delve deep into them. Then at the end, we will have time to discuss any additional topics that I may not have covered that may be helpful for you. Hopefully lots of time for questions and discussion. So...

Okay, so we are all here today to discuss micro-credentials, which are sort of short format credentials especially developed to offer knowledge and skills that are relevant in the workforce. Because they are short, we will talk about and what that means in terms of small, because they are short, they are not traditionally tied to the academic calendar and often not connected to academic credits. They sometimes can be. But in general, they are meant to be more flexible options for learners in general. Degree seeking learners, or learners who may be already have a degree or need a credential instead of a degree. Learners in general who need to gain skills that are necessary to meet their professional goals. Lots of different potential audiences.

And... There's lots of different approaches to micro-credentials, since they are still relatively new, there is not really a single widely accepted approach. So, it's important I think to get clarity on what your institutions approach will be, or if you already have some micro credentials up and running, but that approach is and really try to define it and communicated out to your stakeholders. Because many people, even internal to an institution, are not yet really familiar with micro credentials.

And so, I wanted to start off with basic terminology. Let's see. This is part of getting killer -- clarity. Apologies if these next slides are too introductory for some of you, but I think in general it is always a good idea to start off with definitions, so we are all on the same page. And let's see here... Okay.

So, what are micro-credentials? What is the definition of a micro credential? Well, there currently is not a single widely accepted definition. Researchers and scholars who have experience with writing about higher education micro-credentials, or you know, practitioners, I have seen over and over again that multiple different definitions... And Beverly Oliver, she's at (indiscernible) University, is a highly regarded scholar in this area. She recognized that there is no global consensus of this term just yet.

Still, it is important to have a definition for your audience and stakeholders, right? This is our definition at the University of Buffalo. And I encourage you all to adopt a definition from the literature, or develop your own, so you that you have consistent messaging across your institution. At UB, University of Buffalo, we defined macro credentials as small programs that are focused on the work relevant skills, and that result in a digital credential. So we are really defining the micro credential in terms of a program. And then was earned upon the completion upon that program is a digital credential. There's really not a lot of standard or lengths of time to

completion for micro credentials will however, in the state of University New York system, we have some parameters around micro-credentials. There was a policy put up in 2017, and at the end of this webinar have a link to that policy.

In the (unknown term) system, micro-credentials can be credit bearing or noncredit bearing. If they are credit bearing, they cannot be more than 11 credits. Up to 11 credits, because they are all locally approved. They don't go on to (unknown term) and state added for approval. We don't want to get into the space of a certificate program like academic certificate programs, they are defined by their length and tend to be 12 to 15 credits. 15 to 18 credits Max.

Are micro-credentials that are credit bearing only go up to 11 credits. They can be anywhere from 0 to 11 credits. The language we have here is basically some language that was developed by our communications team. They developed some taglines for students. So we say micro-credentials, skills you need, proof you have them. What they do is allow you to, from the perspective of the letter, personalize your experience, augment your degree and differentiate yourself.

And so, that is kind of our language here at UB, but everyone I think has little nuanced definitions.

But, so, what differentiates them from other credentials? Basically here, we like to say that what differentiates them from other credentials such as degrees, certificates, minors, you know, all types of things, certifications, is that they are my girl, meaning small, and they are digital No, not all different institutions will offer micro-credentials as digital, but I think it made a lot of sense to have micro-credentials be digital credentials. I will talk about why that is in a future slide.

What we mean by micro is that they are small in terms of the time to completion, right? They take less time to earn than a traditional credential. More specifically, they are small in terms of the granularity of the subject matter. So, whereas the degree covers a broad range of knowledge and skills and is earned over multiple, you know, years, a micro credential focuses on a very specific set of knowledge or skill set, sometimes institutions refer to micro-credentials as competency-based. So they focus on competencies. They are short in terms of time to completion. So, small in two different ways.

And when we say that they are digital, this basically means that they are issued through a digital platform. And so, in comparison traditional credentials, which tend to be paper-based, although many situations are moving away from paper-based... They are shared. When someone earns it, they share their credential out via digital means. And they are embedded with metadata, which is the most critical aspect I would say.

So, this is the slide that shows what the metadata is. Metadata is essentially data about data. The digital credential image is typically a digital credential is an .json file. A file with the visual format. Within it lives metadata. There are standards for metadata that are overseen by an organization called (unknown term) Tech. They used to be called IMS global, but they changed their name. They oversee the specifications were the standards. Because some pieces of metadata are required for a digital credential to be functional, so that it can function in different digital spaces, right?

It exists in a platform, and we will talk about what that is. If someone wants to share it out to

LinkedIn, or they want to use the URL and put it on their resume or however they want to share it, there needs to be some digital or technical functionality to make that happen. And so, some of the... Most of the pieces of metadata within a digital credential are required and then others are optional.

Here are the digital credential pieces of metadata. They call them properties. We call them a name. We do digital badges here at the University of Buffalo. Some use digital certificates, digital diplomas. What that visual graphic is, it doesn't necessarily matter. That's really up to your institution. But here, we use what are called digital badges. Basically the credential looks like a badge. Within it lives information about what the credential is, what the learner needed to do to earn it. So the criteria, often times the learning objectives, and information about the institution that awarded it. I'm sorry, I moved too quickly there. And the date that it was earned.

Sometimes, digital credentials can have an expiration date, which makes sense for certain skills that need to be kind of renewed, or you know, up-to-date.

And then standards, and we will talk about what that means in terms of standards. Basically, framework that the credentials can be aligned to. It tags for searchability. And then evidence is in optional piece. What evidence is is basically an artifact of learning that can be embedded in a digital credential that, you know, can allow a learner to show exactly what they can do because they are the credentials I think evidence is kind of the most unique aspect of digital credentials. Because, you know, if somebody earns a degree, they basically list it on their resume, but there is no real evidence behind what the learner knows or can do because they earn that degree. Necessarily full degree are more like signals. Whereas digital credentials really provides information about what the learner knows and can do because they earned it.

Digital credentials need to live somewhere, right? They need to be developed, stored and awarded via digital means. And so, most institutions invest in a digital credential platform. And most of them are cloud-based. Some are on the block chain. Most of them are cloud-based. And so, you have to pay is good prescription to use them. Usually once of them... Once a year. We use Credly here at the University of Buffalo. There's many platforms. I've listed them here for those who are looking into developing micro-credentials for the first time. Some institutions develop their own platform. I think there is open source platforms. If you have really great IT people that want to do that for you, then I would encourage that.

So, yeah. Lots to think about, right? In terms of what platform you will use, what the digital credential will look like, who your audience will be how you will even define these things, right? And so, in terms of audience, your degree seeking students might be your audience. We at UB really started with our initiatives as looking to add value... Value for our degree seeking students. So, to help augment their degrees, enhance their employability, that kind of thing. And since we started... So, when we started, our micro-credentials were primarily for our degree seeking students. But now we have grown and we offer quite a number that are specifically for nonstudents. So essentially, a continuing education, professional development type programs for nondegree seekers we need to upskill or rescale.

So, those decisions need to be made early on. Obviously, you can change course and evolve, but by knowing upfront what types of micro-credentials you are going to offer, who you are going to offer them to, you can be really clear when you are communicating this externally and even internally to get buy-in from, you know, some faculty or leadership who might be skeptical

of them. That kind of thing.

It also, another thing that is really cool with micro-credentials is obviously, any kind of degree or credential can be developed in partnership, or industry can inform the development of it. But I think there is an expectation for more close collaboration with external stakeholders when it comes to micro-credentials, because they are... You know, there is an expectation where they are really aligned with the needs of the workforce. Micro-credentials can be cobranded within an industry partner, or developed to some extent with local employers or something like that. Or even to institutions working together. So yeah, we will talk about that too later on, I think when we talk about alignment.

And then, like I said, you will need to decide what types of micro-credentials you will offer. There is really lots of different types offered by institutions. These are the ones we offer at UB.... Maybe later we can talk about what types of micro-credentials are out there.

So here, we have three types essentially. One, we call an academically when we call enhancement, and when we call post-traditional. So, academic is meaning that they are credit bearing, there is some academic credit associated with them. Some academic coursework. Maybe one course... Maybe three courses is the most that we have micro-credential courses bundled together, kind of the medically, that the learner can gain very specific skill or call out specialized skill. So, degree seekers and can earn them and nondegree seekers. For example, a non-matriculated person might want to earn a credit bearing a micro credential. Maybe they want to, for micro credential if they are thinking about a degree, or they can take a couple of micro-credentials to sort of break up their degree and build towards a degree.

In a unit, for example, let's say for example the English department, a graduate-level micro credential is offered through the English department's top learners who are pursuing an English degree can earn that micro-credential to call out a certain specialization, let's say poetry or something else to we don't offer that. Actually, we do offer something called the dual composition. So, a student who is working towards an English degree can get the digital composition credential as they work towards the degree. Was a man from a different unit who wants to gain skills in digital composition, basically writing for online audiences, can earn that micro-credential and sort of enhance the degree that they are already earning. Maybe let's say marketing or something like that.

So, that's one component. And then another is enhancement. Those are essentially coca regular programs. Noncredit learning opportunities. So, we know that there is all kinds of learning that is happening outside of the classroom. Now, with micro-credentials we have an opportunity to credential about learning, and also, because they are really official UB credentials, there is curriculum and assessment wrapped around it. And so, this can really enhance that type of noncredit learning.

Also, this is where many times we try to teach professional skills. So like leadership, you know, professionalism, collaboration. That kind of thing. Many times, those professional skills will be non-accredited micro-credentials.

And then post traditional is what we call, basically, like I was saying at the noncredit credentials for nondegree seekers. These will often be topics, or you know, subjects that are really relevant in the workforce. Maybe we are partnering with an employer who needs their employees to have

very specific skills. And so, we can build programs that way. Or also, you know, like, meeting the needs of wider audiences. This a lot of opportunities to do that with micro-credentials. You know, the demographics in higher education are shifting. There is less traditional college age students than there has been in decades. And so, many institutions are looking to whiter their applicant pool and to provide more opportunities for different demographics.

So, these are the three types that we offer at UB. And I know that there are other institutions that offer other types. So, sometimes institutions combine these. Right? Like noncredit to credit pathways, for example. Or, you know, programs that are specific to alumni the kind of build off of degree programs. So, lots of different approaches.

This is what I was hoping to maybe hear some of your other approaches. And maybe I will look back at the chat later and chat about that.

So, just for clarity, because I know there's a lot of different terms. Some institutions don't use the term micro credential at all. They use alternative credential. I think for the most part, may be those are the same thing. Sometimes I think alternative credential also encompasses certificates and certifications. We avoid the term alternative credential here at UB, because when we started our initiative especially, we weren't looking to offer an alternative to a degree. We are very academic focused research university. We really believe in the significance of a degree program. So, we didn't want to confuse that messaging. We didn't want to say, "Oh, you don't need a good degree. You just need a micro credential." Some institutions do want to provide alternatives to degree, so that's why we don't use that term here.

MOOC massive online (indiscernible) courses stop some institutions consider them micro-credentials. They could be, right? I see them as more a delivery method. They are delivered online to massive amounts of learners all at once. They are completely asynchronous, that kind of thing. So we do actually offer one or two of our micro-credentials on course Sarah, which is a MOOC delivery platform. But we see them as MOOCs and the learner earns a micro credential upon completion.

We talked a little bit about digital badges. Basically we'll talk a little bit more, but that is another... That's just sort of the digital format. It's what you earn here at UB upon completion of a micro for data.

Stock ability, I want to talk and details often times, as we see the definitions of micro-credentials, they are defined as stackable. I want to be clear on what that means. And so, this is the definition from the US Department of Labor. They have a very specific definition of what stackable credential is for basically, it's a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time, and they are really meant to help someone move along their career pathway or up the career ladder. It's actually kind of very specific and vague at the same time. But, that is just one definition, right?

And so, there's different ways of defining stackable. There can be stackable towards a degree. Basically what that means is earning small credentials as you progress towards degree. I really like this example from the Brookings institute. They say, "For example, this could be a stackable toward the degree credential. Someone can earn a certificate or micro credential or something in a subject such as cybersecurity." And then later on, they can, you know, maybe they can return to the institution and wanted to use those credits towards their certificate towards their

Associates degree.

And so, they can gain experience while there may be working on a degree or gain experience to explore a discipline before they commit to a degree. But, those credits count towards the degree.

All of our credit bearing micro-credentials at UB are stackable toward the degree. They really need to be, because if there's academic courses, those courses can't be officially on the books unless they are part of a degree program. Students wouldn't be able to get financial aid for them if they are not part of a degree program. So they are all technically stackable towards a degree. Some are more stackable than others. Some degree programs might have no micro-credentials for stops some might have just one. Some might have multiple. So you can earn small credentials as you move towards earning your degree.

Sometimes there may also be a certificate that could be earned along the way to a degree. This is the example of that digital, composition program that I mentioned. Someone can come for a digital composition maker credential and realize they only have, you know, two or three more courses to take before they can earn a certificate in professional writing full think that's what it's called. And then they might have their micro credential and their certificate. And they see that they only need to take a certain number of courses before they can earn a Masters degree.

So, it's an exciting way to get people into the door of an institution, and also an exciting way to motivate learners who are pursuing a degree to completion.

... These examples that I have here, because I think they are really kind of different than the Department of Labor's examples. There's different ways to do stocking, right? I think it's really, you know, having multiple small credentials that are related to each other that build towards something larger.

So, this is an example of an undergraduate noncredit micro credential program. It is offered by our experiential learning office. So a non-(indiscernible) unit is offering this credential. Students can identify projects. They have what is like a project portal. Students go online and find projects that are aligned with things that they want to learn or interests that they have. Let's say that there is a nonprofit organization that needs a website developed. They can put it on the project portal in their students can develop a website. And as they are moving towards completion of the project, they earn these badges that help them, you know, develop aspects of the project incrementally and they are recognized for those efforts. Once they have completed the project, they actually get to choose what they want their final micro credential to say. For example, it could say, "Innovation, creative work." Whatever fits with their professional goals.

So, that is stocking. That is noncredit, right? But it is stocking. Stocking towards smaller badges. Towards a larger badge. Some institutions call them Uber badges or meta-badge men's. We call them achievement badges. Multiple badges that can be earned towards the larger badge. And this is just another example from UB. And so, this is a micro credential from our medical school. Any student who is in a professional program relating to healthcare practice can earn this micro credential to gain skills in interprofessional skills.

For example, a nursing student can earn this micro credential and show how they have experienced working with, you know, medical students and social workers. Because this is what

they are going to have to do in their career. So we want to help train them in those particular types of skills. And so, the students earned this smaller badge and once they completed, they get the interprofessional collaborative practice badge.

So, those are couple of different ways of stacking. And then also, besides just the inclusion of metadata, which provides additional information about the credential, is also important to note that when we define digital credentials, to focus on how they are useful for the earner. So, the earner has the information embedded in the credential about what they needed to do to earn it. And often times, an artifact of learning. So this allows them to really connect, kind of connect the dots between what they set out to learn, what they learned, and how they can show what they learned. How they can talk about what they learned. And then also, digital credentials can be shared easily in digital spaces.

And so, on this slide, you will see someone has their digital credential in their email signature. One student from UB posted it unlink it in as a linked in... I guess it's called a post. You can either put it on their profile like on the upper right, or put it as a post. So, you know, I think digital credentials or credentials in general are not always only for the purpose of, you know, professional advancement. But sometimes, for the purpose of building a professional identity. And feeling part of a professional discipline or practice.

And so, when the majority... When micro-credentials are earned, digital credential is issued. The majority of sort of uses is pushed out to their LinkedIn profile. I think the percentage is like 96% or something of digital credentials that are accepted. Because when you issue them, the learner needs to sort of accepted. They mostly push it out to their LinkedIn profile, because this is where people are getting jobs nowadays and promoting themselves professionally. So that really makes sense.

Another cool thing about using a digital credential platform is that you get to really see all that data about who is accepting their badges, who is sharing their badges, where they are sharing it too, how often it's been clicked on, that kind of thing. That's interesting.

Okay, so once you have clarity on what terminology you will use, I think it's a great idea. Anytime anyone asks me what I recommend, if I could recommend one best practice for starting out with micro-credentialing, I always tended to say to develop a communication plan. You might want to bring in your institution's communications team for this, or might want to start out on your own by getting clarity and then bringing them in for promotion later or something like that. But you know, I think it's definitely important to have clarity on what types of micro-credentials you will offer, how they will be offered, such as what digital credential platform you will be using. Are you calling them digital certificates or digital badges? What kind of language you will be using. And who your primary audience is and what value they offer for that audience.

And then, once you have kind of all of that, I think it's definitely time to bring in communications to think about how you will promote them. Who will promote them. So the communication plan should have the clarity about the language and the definitions. The who, what, how. And then also, a plan for promotion.

And so, at my institution, we have a fairly decentralized process for marketing our programs. We have our office of micro-credentials which is an essential office. Then, once a micro credential is developed, the department or unit that oversees it, let's say it's, like I said, let's keep going with

this English department. They kind of own it. We really want these to be considered credentials like other credentials. So that unit will be responsible for promoting their maker credentials. Each of our decaying all units has their own marketing team.

It really depends on how your institution is structured. The size of your institutions. If you are overseeing micro-credentials, maybe you will be charged with actually marketing the programs. I oversee micro-credentials at UB, but I'm not charged with marketing them. However, I am charged with promoting them in general. Our University communications developed high-level materials about micro-credentials in general. You know, graphics and language. And we have an essential website. But then each of the individual departments market their own programs.

And I also want to say... Actually, this last bullet point here about connecting with stakeholders, I think this should be earlier. Because I realized that when we started this initiative, I spent a lot of time going around to department meetings. You know, Dean's meetings. Talking with them. Local employment organizations, labor organizations. Industry partners who were already formed with our different departments. And listening to students and listening to these stakeholders. Telling them what micro-credentials are, what we plan to do. The kind of hearing them and getting their feedback. Really developing the strategy with all that feedback is really the best approach.

Okay, and it works it for educating people about what micro-credentials are, and then it also works for educating yourself about what the needs are and what the interest is.

Okay, so I think we're going to take a little break.

(Music plays)

(Break)

SPEAKER:
The break will be ending momentarily.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Welcome back everyone. I hope you were able to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss with your colleagues will and has been sharing with us so far. I love all the questions that have been coming in. When and finishes the second half of her presentation, we will jump right into them. Anne, I'm going to turn it back over to you.

ANNE REED:
Great, thank you. Welcome back everyone. We are about halfway through today's webinar. I'm really hoping to have time at the end for conversation. Things are looking good with our time. We are ready to discuss our last two topics. Alignment and developing processes.

Let's see. Alignment can mean many things. It can be alignment with institutional goals, the needs of stakeholders. And so, that's kind of programmatically. Your whole initiative needs some sort of alignment or framework to work within. But then developing individual micro credential programs also. There's different ways to align those. Specifically, working to be talking about aligning them with competency frameworks. Excuse me.

And then efficient processes. I will talk about and mention a number of processes that are necessary for offering micro-credentials and specifically try to focus on (indiscernible) governance and registering and tracking learners.

Okay, so if you have... If your institution has in office for maker credentials or a specific unit that oversees maker credentials, it's a good idea to have a mission statement and to align that mission statement with your institution's mission. And so, by doing so, you can build internal credibility right from the start to show why micro-credentials are important to your institution.

And I think that's especially critical, because micro-credentials are so new. And I know that sometimes getting that sort of credibility can be difficult if there is a lack of knowledge about what they are. And so, trying as much as you can to really work within the framework of your institution. We want to be innovative, we want to innovate, and some even want to disrupt higher education. But, I think you really can't do that unless you are working within, you know, the parameters of your institution.

So, we are offering micro-credentials. They are different than what we traditionally offered. But also here at UB, really aligned with our leadership wants to offer higher education.

And so, strategic goals is another thing to think about. You might have your institution strategic goals online somewhere. And so, checking in with those and seeing how the work that you are doing with micro-credentials aligns with strategic goals can be very helpful for creating value within your institution. And also, for collecting data and documenting your impact, right?

For example, we have this year some strategic goals are set out by our leadership that are kind of on the newer side. And so, we revisited our goals in my office. One of the strategic goals is promoting a university wide culture of equity and inclusion. Another one is deepening engagement in the regional community. And so, we really try to work with faculty how to see how we can effect those goals within our maker credentials. And now we have, I think maybe six or seven micro-credentials that really focus on inclusion and cultural awareness and those kinds of things. And also aspects of our maker credentials that have, you know, curriculum or assessment of projects that allow their learners to connect with the community in different ways.

So, yeah. When we write up our end-of-the-year reports, we can show how we contributed to the strategic goals of our institution.

In that alignment with the needs of the workforce, alignment with student needs and preferences, this seems like a lot of expectation here. But, it doesn't have to be that complicated. Right? I mean, you might be able to do some market research to connect with employer partners and industry partners about what skills they really feel like the labor market or their candidate pool is lacking and see how you can maybe fill some of those needs.

And then also, in terms of students, I think it's really important to bring students into the conversation as much as you can. Because students or potential students, alumni, whoever your audiences, really listen to them. If they are all saying that they want micro-credentials but only want them online because they don't have time to come on campus, whatever they might be saying to show that you are hearing them interactive build programs that address those needs as much as possible.

We did focus groups. Some of the departments do focus groups, or do some kind of outreach or surveys before they develop a new micro credential. And we've seen that to be a really effective practice.

And alignment also in terms of the needs of the workforce... I think engaging these partners, like I said, reaching out, inviting yourself to advisory Council meetings. Things like that. Even just calling up someone that you had a contact with from a faculty member or something. Having a conversation can be super beneficial. So, we show... You be, we have all of our micro credentials in some way are kind of a collaboration with external entities.

For example, a very low level kind of collaboration would be just seeking input from external stakeholders to inform the curriculum and the assessment for the micro credentials. Or, even simply incorporating industry standards, competency frameworks, in the curriculum planning. I'm going to talk specifically about competency frameworks in a future slide. Maybe even the next slide.

So yeah, that is how we can show that micro-credentials are relevant beyond the University. The learners gain skills that are needed in the workforce, and we know that, because those skills are built into the micro credentials. Mid-level collaboration is basically, and these are just our definitions. Obviously this is not something that everybody needs to do. But, we feel like it's important here, because at our institution, we don't really do much in terms of... Not that we don't do much, but we are not really known for being, you know, having employer partnerships. This is something we have really been trying to build. Other institutions might have been doing this. Might have been doing these partnerships and collaborations for, you know, many, many years. So this is how we are being explicit about it and being purposeful about it. Mid-level collaboration is basically, we expect... A micro credential can have some opportunity for the learners to interact with an external company organization. So like a regional community project supporting a nonprofit in some way, or, you know, having on-site visits. Conducting workshops. Or you know, employer or industry partner coming to the campus to conduct industry workshops or to inform the... Speak to the students directly about what they do. And site visits, I think I mentioned that to. Just some way for the students to interact with the external organization.

Also, another way to do this is to get endorsements. Digital credentials can have endorsement. You can put information in the metadata that this company endorses this micro credential. This company believes that these skills are needed for hiring in their industry. So, you know, you can link out to a letter from, you know, a president of an industry or company or something like that. There's different ways to build that sort of endorsement. I know some institutions that even have companies who have agreed to prioritize candidates who have a certain micro credential. So, there's different ways to have endorsement. That's something I think that I would encourage you to explore. I think it adds some external credibility and, you know, it's a way to build relationships and to show learners that, you know, this micro credential has value in the market. The workforce, the labor market.

And that high-level collaboration is sort of a formal partnership. I think the example that I gave, there is a (unknown term) community college who works with local employers and has them endorse the micro credential, and also says they will prioritize learners who has the micro credential. I think that the formal partnership. Some ways that both entities benefit. Maybe there is a revenue sharing or something like that. You know, if you have experts who are assessing or potentially working as adjuncts, or helping codesign curriculum. That's another way to have kind

of a formal partnership.

And so, yeah. Lots of different ways to go about this. I would just like to add that I'm not sure if all of you are familiar with (unknown term) professional continuing education program. They are an organization has existed for quite some time and they started out by supporting universities into developing their continuing education programs. They have extended their portfolio to include online learning. Another have recently extended their per for Leo to include alternative credentialing. I'm really excited about the work that they are doing. And actually cochair of the leadership committee for alternative credentialing. Anyway, this report is hallmarks of excellence than credentialing information. It provides so much information about how to develop programs. They call them alternative credentials. Specifically the section on University and stakeholder engagement, lots of great strategies for engaging with business stakeholders will buy highly recommended. It is free and online.

So, how do we do this? Engage with your workforce and development business (indiscernible) office or your regions workforce development offices. Engage in... With industry advisors. Seek out employer partnerships that already exist at your institution. I think we don't need to reinvent the wheel. We can start with what exists and build off of that. Using labor market analytics. Your institution might describe -- subscribed to light cast. It is basically market analysis. You can get really great reports about the jobs and skills that are high needs in your region in your state. You can set those sort of parameters for location and also for specific fields. Lots of really great labor market data that can inform the development of your micro-credentials.

I really recommend competency frameworks because I think it's a way to easily and freely gain information about what competencies are needed. So basically, a competency framework is a structure that sets out and defines each individual competencies, very specific skills the kind of build on each other, needed and an employment setting. There competency frameworks for specific fields and for specific industries. Specific jobs even. If you use a competency framework when you are developing a micro credential, you can easily show that your micro-credentials are aligned with the needs of employers. You can show that they are relevant. Also, you can increase discoverability. Because when you use a digital credential system, you can use tags and standards. You can put the information in the digital credential in different ways that allow them to be discoverable. If someone shares the digital credential on LinkedIn for example, recruiters can find them by, you know, scraping the data and finding who has these skills that they need. It's also just better in terms of transparency for learners and for employers. For employers to help them understand and articulate the skills that they've gained. And for employers to understand the skills that a candidate has if they look at their digital credential and it has the information about specific competencies. And if they need those competencies for the job that they are hiring for, they can see the match.

I know that there is a lot of talk these days about skills mismatch or something. That candidates, or, you know... I don't think it's candidates. Graduates are actually coming out with great skills. But not necessarily the skills that are needed by employers. So trying to close that gap I think is using competency frameworks can be a great solution. There's a lot of competency frameworks out there. O-Net which is the primary source of occupation for the United States. You can search skills, you can search skills by positions. The competency model clearinghouse has a very specific industry models. I will show you an example of the next life. They have the competencies that build upon each other. You can use those to develop your curriculum for micro-credentials.

At UB, we have a broad requirement for alignment with competencies. Then we consider each micro credential on a case-by-case basis. If there's carpeted supreme works that certain industries use more than others. So sometimes, we will build additional competencies in our micro credential. Besides what we build, which is those professional skills. They are called the (unknown term) competencies... Basically, this organization does a large-scale survey. Every five years, maybe, with employers to see the skills that they need full stop they are really professional skills. Soft skills I guess we will call them. It is important to have soft skills and technical skills built into the micro credentials stop that's how we prepare our learners for the workforce. They need the technical logic and skills, but also need to know how to apply those skills in a professional setting.

Okay, so those are some places to get competency frameworks. This is an extensive list. This is a free document online. I have the link. You can get it when you get the PowerPoint after this webinar. They used to be called IMS Global. Now they are called (unknown term) Tech. This is the organization that sees the standards or organization for digital credentials. They recommend aligning your digital credentials with competency frameworks. That's why they have this really great list available online that you can go to if you don't see something that you need from those few that I provided the examples from...

This is kind of what you will see when you see a visual of the competency framework but this is our financial services. I think I wrote something down. Financial competency services model. This one is from the competency model clearinghouse. This is how they sort of visualize their models. Professional competencies, workplace competencies... You can build these into your micro-credentials and use competencies on your website. Like put them on the website for micro-credentials. If learners are looking for specific skills, they can sort and seek out skills instead of seeking out maker credentials. They can find the skills they want again and see, "This micro-credential allows me to gain those skills." You can indicate them when you are promoting a program. Lots of different ways to use them. I think the number 1 Most Important Way to use them is to check to see that they are built into the micro credentials that you are developing.

So, I don't know. Maybe you will be the ones who are developing the curriculum. Maybe you will be working with faculty or instructional designers here at UB. We do a very collaborative approach were most often, whoever is proposing the micro credential is the one to develop it. And then, my office helps to make sure that it has aligned with the needs of industry and it has relevant workforce skills.

We like to use a document like this to sort of check off and see. This is also really great when you are stacking. These low-level skills can be gained in this micro-credentials, but it might be good idea to have multiple micro credentials because there too many skills. They can learn everything in the short amount of time. That kind of thing.

This document actually I have it linked to. It's linked on this PowerPoint. It actually comes from E campus Ontario, who created this competency toolkit. It's a really great downloadable toolkit with lots of different techniques and resources for building competencies into credentials. That is free online and downloadable. It has really great resources that are available like this.

Okay, so developing efficient processes. I tried to outline the processes that we needed to develop your IUB before we launched our program. Some of these can be modified and

tweaked or even developed while you are offering micro-credentials. But, if you can get these... Can you figure out how you are going to do these before you offer micro-credentials, that's a really great thing. I would say that registering track learners is something that we were figuring out as we go. We knew that we wanted to put our micro-credentials in the student information system and add the learners that way so that we can count of leverage existing technologies and practices.

However, it took longer than we expected because we had to work with different stakeholders, the registrar, and the professionals who we have a group... A team who oversees the student information system. The technical aspects of it. The institutional analysis team are the data experts. We are to work together to figure how we are going to do this, right? We know how to develop codes and coding schema for degrees and for courses, but we didn't know how to necessarily make it work for micro-credentials. That took longer than we anticipated, and we didn't have a developed until close to the end of the first semester of offering micro-credentials. So, take some time to figure that out. Work with your registrar. The ones that are highlighted here, I'm just gonna try to focus on.

You need to figure out somehow what micro-credentials you offer. Here we have a proposal process. The faculty and staff decide what micro-credentials we are going to offer, and we help support that effort. So we have to have a proposal process and the process for designing programs. Who is going to do that. Who should be in the room or in the zoom meeting. Or making decisions about the actual curriculum and the design of it. How would stocking and things like that.

Since we have a proposal process, someone had to review them. Someone had to reprove the proposals. These three side steps is like our governance process for our micro credentials. It is important to have governance, because they don't have additional approval outside this institution. We really want to show that they are quality and they make sense for institution.

With they are developed and approved, how will they be rolled out? Hello they be marketed and promoted? How will you register and track learners some institutions develop in the system specific for tracking learners. Those digitally credentialed performing learners, to have any tracking, they are for building and issuing credentials. They might have changed until I started looking into these platforms. I know that Credly doesn't have any tracking. It has to be done external.

Issuing credentials. When will you do it? Maybe certain times of the year. We have a schedule. Each semester we issue credentials. Because they are all on different timelines, they are not tied to the academic calendar. It's not like after the 15 week semester we issue all the credentials. We have to do that more on an ongoing basis. So we have a schedule for doing that.

And then continuous improvement. Reviewing some existing programs and making revisions. How often does that need to be done. How often do we need to check in with those faculty and staff who are overseeing micro-credentials and see if maybe some competencies have changed or the needs have changed or they are seeing certain patterns in enrollment or whatever it may be. Definitely have to keep reviewing and revising and making sure everything is working as effectively and efficiently as it can be.

For developing processes, I wanted to talk briefly. The governance process in my opinion is the most important, because there needs to be away for quality assurance, right? For you, it might entail something different, because you might sort of strategically develop programs rather than seeking proposals from your internal constituents. In either case, there needs to be some kind of checks to ensure quality and some kind of system for moving forward with approving and ensuring quality.

We have a rubric that we use. So we have developed proposal forms. If you go to University of Buffalo, just search University of Buffalo micro-credentials. I have it linked here. For faculty and staff, some of the pages are behind a wall where you have to login. I've specifically kept the proposal page open because I think it would be helpful for other institutions. We have want to have a sense of what that process looks like and (indiscernible) if that's something you need or are considering.

And so, we have the proposal forms and we have a rubric. I don't think it's online, but if it's something you would like to see, feel free to reach out to me. It's what our committee uses to review new proposals. We have certain things that we look forward to make sure that it meets the goals of our office and that these programs are really structured like micro-credentials.

Then you will need to determine who your final approving bottle would be. -- Body.... Maybe it's academic leadership, maybe it's leaders director of continuing education. Whomever that might be. And you might need to engage curriculum committees because her credit bearing medical credentials might need to go through curriculum committees before approval, just the courses do and degrees do. You might want to bring in external experts to. External experts might be a really great valuable addition to a review committee for example.

So, yeah. I think I talked a little bit about governments already. What's necessary. These are credentials. We want them firmly to be considered credentials and to have credibility in the market. And so, to also have students feel like they have value, because they do. There needs to be oversight, right? Issuing any credential reflects upon the reputation of your institution. These credentials can travel so widely in digital spaces. The hundreds, thousands. I don't know how many people could potentially see someone digital badge and click on the Inca sense of the learning. We want that learning to reflect learning that we believe in in our institution. That's why we need governance. But we also need governance to make sure the maker credentials pedagogically sound. We never want to forget that these are learning experiences that we are developing. They need to be coherent and effective and relevant. They should have a certain amount of rigor depending on the program.

We have examples here of governance processes for you to take a look at. There's lots of them. Many institutions have been posted online and you can check them out.

This is our process at the University of Buffalo. We start with the proposal. You can check out our proposal forms. The proposal comes to my office with the necessary approvals. So, if it's a credit bearing micro credential for example, the chair and the Dena need to sign off on it. The academic Dean, associate Dean, need to sign off on it. And then, I give the proposal to our review committee, and that is a committee of faculty and staff at the University who have good knowledge of our initiative and goals. And you know, more than just me giving feedback, it's really great to have others who have, especially if they are in the discipline. I try to assign it to members who are aligned with the discipline who have knowledge in that discipline.

They review, and give feedback. They don't approve or deny. They wanted to be a strong proposal. When they take it to the associate deans for final approval, final approving body. Hopefully by that point, it is a strong proposal and it will get approved. The associate deans for academic affairs have good knowledge of what is happening across campus in terms of programs. They are the same group that approves new courses and new degrees. So we leveraged this group. It's really great because they are really stretching what they do. Their practice. Now they are seeing proposals that are for noncredit. Better for kind of continuing education. Before, they were just approving academic programs. This has really been a great process, because it allows our academic leadership to have a sense of all of the learning that is happening. All the learning, but all that is being credentialed on campus and to kind of stretch what they consider learning. Learning is not just what happens in courses, right?

Once it's approved, it is final and ready to be launched. It takes about three... I would say three months is probably the average, depending from the time of the proposal coming to the office. You can see how can be much more nimble than developing a new minor, for example, which might even take years. In our institution it takes a long, long time to get a degree or even a minor approved.

I will just be through this. I really want to get to some time for discussions. I really wanted to bring this up, because it's something that I think you should think about early on. Engage your registrar. We did not know we would grow so exponentially, but because we use a system to track our learners, it has made things easier because we can pull data about the learners and all the information is in one place, so that is really, really helpful especially because now we have thousands of enrollments every semester. If we were to use some kind of homemade process, it would have gotten really unwieldy.

Yeah, it's important to determine what that process will look like, what system you will use, who will do what – like, for example, who will activate students? Who will deactivate them in the system? And, you know, maybe that will be the faculty who oversees the program, or maybe it will be someone in your centralized office, or maybe it will be someone in the registrar's office. Just defining those roles is really helpful and important.

I'm so glad we have time for discussion! These are some of the links. Other links are in the PowerPoint, so I'm hoping Kristin is going to send the PowerPoint out. If it will be sent out as a PDF, I will make sure that everybody get all the links to the resources that we talked about because I only included them because I know that they have been really helpful for me, and I hope they are helpful for you as well.

OK, so... The takeaways basically are my, you know, big key strategies: clarity, communications, alignment, and efficient processes. I think it is especially important to keep the learner in mind and to remember that some of the things that micro-credentials promise... If you Google "micro-credentials" and see things like "affordable, fast, get a job quickly" kind of thing... (Chuckling) We don't want to make any false promises. We want to be transparent with what are micro-credentials offer, what they are, and what they are not.

Really consider a pilot. That is another one of my big recommendations to get a sense of what works, what doesn't work, and where the interest is, and... I especially would say to develop a pilot before you go and develop a policy. I think the policies can kind of restrict us, whereas we

kind of want to be... I mean, I think that a lot of institutions come to micro-credentialing because they want to do something different. They want to be innovative, so we don't want to be constricted by something that doesn't work because it is harder to amend the policy sometimes than it is to develop it.

And then, high-level collaboration is important, right? My office is really a coordinating office, so coordinating with the registrar, diversity communications, the career services, the advisors, you know? That kind of thing. Making friends with all of the constituents on campus that you know can help promote your program and help, you know, with the quality of what you are offering. Some folks know better than others about the needs of students and things like that.

And lots of... I've gotten lots of -- has made lots of great connections with employer partners and district partners just by talking to faculty.

I would also just end this with thinking about long-term. The quality of the micro-credentials that you develop will reflect on the qualifications of your earners, right? And you really, really want to help them become qualified for whatever it is that their professional goal is going to be, and then that fields upon the reputation of your institution and will help increase demand.

Just basically some few thoughts on, um, developing micro-credentials, offering micro-credentials. I think we have lots of great questions in the chat. Let's see... (Pause)

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Anne, do you want to go through the once, or do you want me to just start at the top? There are so many, so...

ANNE REED:
And I just want to remind everybody that if we don't get through all of them, I'm going to address them in written format because I really am interested in your questions and want to share whatever knowledge I have. If you just want to start from the top, or... I don't have a preference.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
OK, and just so the audience knows, whoever registered on your campus, that email will get the responses that Anne creates to these questions, so just please ask those folks to distribute these to you.

The first question: for credit-bearing micros, what is the minimum you consider a micro-credential?

ANNE REED:
That is a great question! For credit-bearing micro-credentials, the minimum is 1 credit. However, you can't just earn -- you can't just take one credit and then get a micro-credential. We always have some additional learning or project or activity that's beyond the coursework.

So typically, courses are three credits, right? Some of our units to creative things and breakdown courses into smaller modules or components so that it -- they can be part of a micro-credential, and that is really great.

But let's just say, for example, a micro-credential is three credits. It has three credits, but then

let's say it is like a course, and then there is an additional component that is noncredit, and that is where we really try to explicitly tie it to workforce needs, and that is where the learner most likely will develop their evidence, the artifact of learning that is embedded in the micro-credential.

Basically, one credit is the smallest. 11 credits is the most. It is really like a combination of credit + noncredit. It could be a series workshop plus an external internship, something like that, a volunteer experience, creating a project, something like that.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Great. What elements do you use, and doesn't provide a portfolio section for students to build and use the badges?

ANNE REED:
That is a great question. Alright, so we use Blackboard. We are transitioning to BrightSpace. However, we don't integrate our digital badging platform with our LMS. Some institutions do. You can integrate it so you can automatically issue badges.

I know this is unrelated, but I will add it to your question. The reason we don't integrate the two is because if we do have integrated and you are automatically issuing badges, you can't upload evidence, and that is a piece that we require at my institution, so, um... The LMS, does it have a portfolio section? I'm not sure! I don't think it does.

The last time I was using Blackboard, it did not have a portfolio section, but we do have a portfolio in an e-portfolio system here at the University of Buffalo that students use for other... Not necessarily for our micro-credentials, but for courses and things like that.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Can they be combined like academic and post-traditional? I'm assuming they are talking about micro-credentials.

ANNE REED:
I mean, I think they can be combined. We don't have any examples of micro-credentials. I don't think that our academic and post-traditional combined... But I think that would be an example maybe of noncredit to credit. For example, if somebody takes a post-traditional kind of micro-credential and later matriculates to a degree program, they can take a credit-bearing micro-credential, and both would be stacked to a degree.

We haven't done that kind of thing. I would like to do more stacking in unusual ways on this, because I think you can do more with appealing to more audiences and offer more diverse opportunities and options, but my institution does not do that. But I know that others do.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
What are your thoughts on attendance and participation?

ANNE REED:
Oh, like our attendance and participation badges? I'm assuming this is in response to...? Yeah, so I am not a fan of attendance and participation badges. I have gone to, like, a conference and all of a sudden earned a badge and that kind of thing. I think that there should be real distinction

between badges that are kind of recognizing attendance or participation. You know, those can maybe be good for some people and can shape their professional identity and showing that they are part of an organization or something like that, but at my institution, we are really trying to, like, have our micro-credentials be considered credentials, so learning experiences. There's assessment.

That is why we require evidence because the evidence shows you did not just get this badge because you showed up to a workshop or something. You actually did something and learn something. I would really like to figure out if communally, we can all kind of figure out how to really explicitly make that distinction between those and micro-credentials or digital badges that are really learning experiences, you know what I mean?

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Thanks. Does your registrar keep records of the micro-credentials?

ANNE REED:
Yeah! Yeah, of course. Every time a new micro-credential is developed to my work with folks in the Registrar's Office, and we develop a coding, a code. We have fancy coding schema for our micro-credentials, and because we have them in the student information system, and we have... Like, the undergraduate credit-bearing ones are in the academic catalog just like, you know, the degrees and the minors and things like that are.

So yes, the registrar has been a really important partner with my office.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Great. What is the advantage to a micro-credential versus a certificate?

ANNE REED:
That is a really great question. Yeah, I think... It depends on what kind of certificate you are talking about. There are ones that go on to state education for approval, and then there was that our attendance or professional development. Maybe you take a workshop or a training and they give you a paper certificate at the end.

I think it depends which one of those you are talking about, but micro-credentials are different from both of those. Micro-credentials are different from academics certificate in that they are smaller, first of all. They are less time to complete. If they are credit-bearing, they are less credit. As I said, here, we don't go over 11 credits versus certificates are typically over 11 credits, maybe 15. Different institutions or states may have different definitions.

But a credit-bearing micro-credential can be very much like a academic certificate, just smaller. And, you know, there are so many different approaches, it is so hard to say what other institutions do, but at my institution, we require that sort of explicitly workforce-relevant component, right? There is most likely some kind of experiential piece that may be necessarily wouldn't happen in a certificate. A certificate may be all academic coursework.

But here, you cannot take three courses and stumble upon learning a micro-credential. You have to do the additional piece that is required for earning the micro-credential.

And how is it different from other things? Say maybe I go to a training and get a certificate at the

end. Typically, that would not have an assessment, and I wouldn't necessarily have to produce anything at the end of it. Certificates are also typically not issued digitally, so you might just have a piece of paper and cannot share the same way as you can with a digital micro-credential.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Great. Have you ever heard of the term "career credentials," and do you use it?

ANNE REED:
I have never heard of that term! And I don't use it, but career credentials, I kind of like it, so maybe it means credentials that you gain as you work towards a certain career that you want to work in or while you are in that career. I'm not sure. I would imagine they are very, very much tied with the skills and knowledge that are needed in that career. I haven't heard that term, but I think it is kind of cool.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Cool! Do you feel that there is a need for universities to align the language to a common nomenclature past just internal so these credentials are eventually transferable between institutions? I guess that is getting to the "there is no one term that fits all in the US." I know some countries have standardized terminology.

ANNE REED:
Yeah, I mean, I do and I don't. It is hard to say. In some cases, it is hard to have lots of flexibility and not be confined by standardization. On the other hand, I know what you are saying about being able to, you know, another institution to accept your micro-credential for credit or towards a degree.

They will if they accept the academic courses, right? They will accept the courses, but may be the non-credit micro-credentials stack to a degree or something like that. I think there are reasons why there should be consistency across institutions, and I do honestly think that is the direction we are moving in. I know certain organizations are building, like Credential Engine, for example, building technical infrastructure for standards shared nomenclature and stuff like that.

I think micro-credentials are still new, so all of those structures have not yet been developed, and I think we should develop them for efficiency and things like that and for clarity of understanding, but as long as we can do that while also trying to stay true to the value of micro-credentials being different and being, you know, not like sort of locked down by all this bureaucracy and standardization...

I mean, standardization has a purpose, but too much of it can just turn micro-credentials into degrees, whereas we are trying to do something different from degrees.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Do you charge tuition for the stackable micro-credentials?

ANNE REED:
Yes, and that is something I unfortunately did not get a chance to talk about. I was hoping to get a chance to talk about models/fee models for micro-credentials and things like that. Credit-bearing micro-credentials are tuition-based at my institution, and that the noncredit for non-

degree-seeking learners our fee-based.

Someone who is earning a credit-based micro-credential will pay tuition. They do not have to pay any tuition above the tuition that are for the courses in the micro-credential. There is additional learning and additional, you know, things that they get. They get the digital credential and the sort of evidence piece, and they get this... It is very much framed in a workforce-relevant type of way.

And that is not... There is no additional fee for that, so you don't have to pay a fee to take a micro-credential. For students, there is no additional fee above and beyond what you would be paying for tuition.

KRISTIN MORGAN:
Great, thank you. Unfortunately, Anne, we are out of time for additional questions, but please know, to our audience, I have copied all of the questions. I will get them to Anne, and in the next week or two, hopefully she will have the time to respond to those we were not able to get to during this presentation, and then I will email them out to you.

On behalf of Paperclip Communications, Anne, I want to thank you so much for sharing your insight, wisdom, and energy with us today. To our audience, thank you for being part of this robust conversation and topic.

There is a brief video that will conclude today's webinar that will share how you can ask additional questions of Anne; complete a brief survey and give us some feedback; as well as some upcoming webinars. I hope you all have a great rest of your day. Again, thank you for joining us, and I hope to see you on an upcoming webinar soon.

(Video plays)

SPEAKER:
The instructions and link for claiming your certificate of completion for today's webinar can be found in the certificate panel on the platform and in your handouts. You will need to enter the password you used to download your webinar materials for today. He will also receive a recording of today's event as part of your participation.

For those listeners were unable to ask a question in our allotted time or if you think of a question later, please feel free to email info@paper-clip.com and reference today's webinar topic so our presenters will have the opportunity to respond.

Once again, thank you to our audience today. We hope that you join us again for one of our upcoming webinars.

(Music plays)

(End of Webinar -- 12:32 PM ET)