



## **MICRO-CREDENTIALS GUIDE**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

Over the past decade, non-degree education has transformed dramatically. In 2010, the development of the “Open Badges” technical standard established a new way to recognize learning achievements digitally. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) soon followed, bringing new competition to traditional higher education and establishing short-format digital credentials as a valid pathway to employment recognized by employers. According to 1EdTech (2022), over 74 million digital badges were issued globally in 2022, a 73% increase since 2020 and three times the total issued in 2018. Short-form educational offerings have quickly become a preferred option among working professionals and adult learners looking to advance their careers, a trend supported by recent surveys from the Strada Education Network and the Society for Human Resource Management.

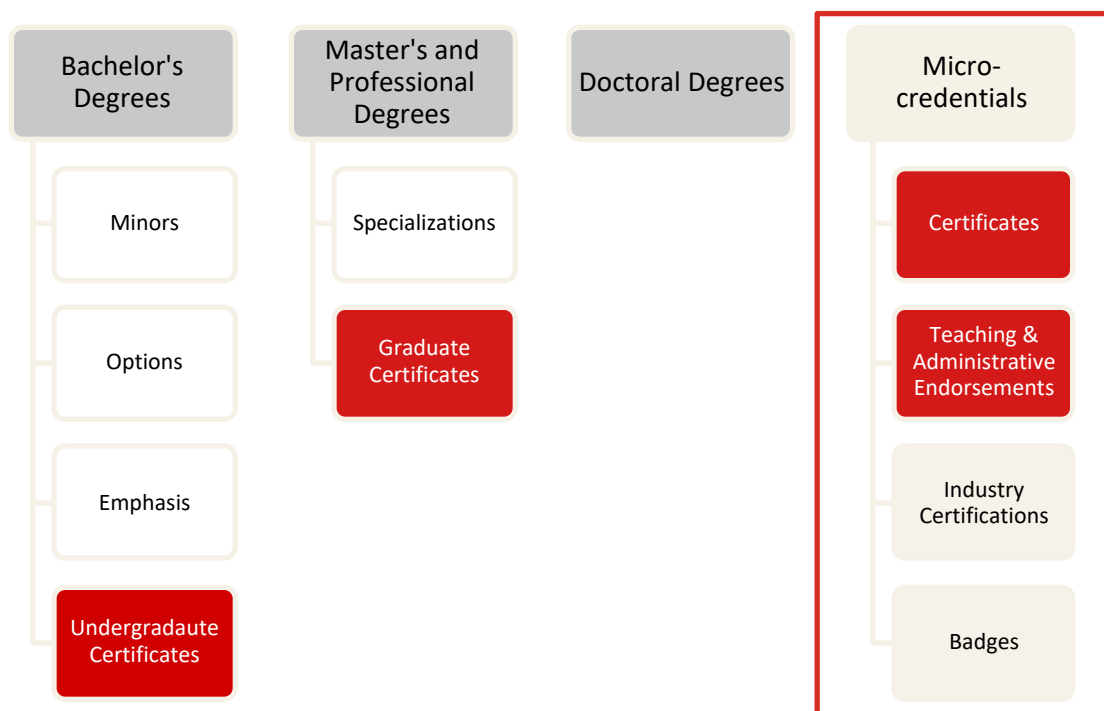
In response to this evolving landscape, and in alignment with UNL's commitment to current, past, and future learners, the EVC Office has prioritized developing and issuing micro-credentials as a strategic goal. This document sets forth guidelines for UNL's micro-credentials, designed to offer flexible and affordable courses that align student learning to employer recognized skills achievement. These micro-credentials aim to document skills gained and enhance communication of those skills to potential employers, ensuring that learners are well-positioned for career advancement.

### Purpose

The Micro-Credential Guide aims to establish a comprehensive foundation for understanding and developing micro-credentials and badges at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Building on the foundational processes for creating and awarding digital badges, which were developed in 2021 as part of the NU Connect Pilot Program, this guide serves as a living document that will continue to evolve as micro-credentials and badges become more widespread on campus. It is intended as a valuable resource for faculty and staff involved in the micro-credential process.

### Defining Micro-credentials

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers defines alternative credentials as “non-traditional (non-degree) credentials offered by institutions of higher education, which may include a myriad of credit alternatives such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), micro-credentials (badges), credit- or non-credit bearing certificate programs, and various other opportunities. Typically issued in a digital format” (2022). The Higher Learning Commission defines micro-credentials as “proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has achieved following a short learning experience” (2024). Due to the absence of a formal industry or higher education definition, the Micro-Credential Taskforce at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has defined micro-credentials as a recognition of specific skills or knowledge acquired through short, focused learning experiences. While encompassing a range of learning opportunities, **micro-credentials can be awarded as certificates, endorsements, industry certifications or badges, and may be for-credit or non-credit.**



## Certificates

Certificates are offered at undergraduate and graduate levels to non-degree and/or degree-seeking students. Certificates earned by students are reported on the academic transcript. Undergraduate certificates require 12-20 credit hours, and graduate certificates must be post-baccalaureate and consist of 12-20 credit hours. The academic governance process for developing certificates is overseen by the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor.

## Teaching and Administrative Endorsements

Teaching and administrative endorsements are credit-based courses that may lead to licensure, renewal of licensure, or recertification. These requirements may be defined by a licensure or regulatory agency.

## Industry Certifications

Industry certifications can be either credit-based or non-credit based. These typically are professional industry-recognized credentials and the requirements may be defined by an industry-recognized technical, licensure, board, or other eligibility entity.

## Badges

Badges are a flexible, evolving framework for recognizing verified credentials in both credit-based (less than 11.5 credit hours) and non-credit learning achievements. Designed as adaptable credentials, badges evolve with curricular and co-curricular innovations and highlight demonstrated competencies or mastery in specific areas, evidenced by modules, courses, self-directed learning, or relevant work experience.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF UNL BADGES

Each badge at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln should be structured around a set of activities that include the three guiding principles:

- **Knowledge:** Provides a common foundation for the badge topic.
- **Experiences:** Allows students to co-create their learning pathways.
- **Reflection:** Encourages students to review their knowledge and experiences and consider how they can be applied in the future.

Badges offer both credibility and flexibility. Our offerings are authored by UNL faculty, staff, industry leaders, or a combination of the three. Each badge should be at least a minimum of 15 hours to complete and is often stackable, allowing learners to pursue mastery or special recognition at various stages of learning. Mastery criteria are determined by the proposer at the time a badge is proposed.

### Badge Images

Each level of the taxonomy is associated with a unique image developed by the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor. The image is included in Canvas Credentials and the Badge Inventory and serves as engaging representations of the badge that can be shared electronically. The shape of an image depends on the level of the badge, but each image includes the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the issuer with the title of the badge. Badges and digital certificates also feature an icon selected from a list provided by the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor. Examples of these images can be found in [Appendix A: Badge Images](#).

### Audience for Badges

Badges can be structured toward four distinct audiences or groups, examples are reflected below, and are aligned to the Taxonomy of Badges reflected in the next section:

- **Continuing Education/External Audiences:** These badges are awarded to learners outside of the university.
- **Faculty/Staff:** Faculty and staff badges are designed to recognize the professional development, achievements, and contributions of university employees.
- **Student Co-curricular:** Student co-curricular badges are awarded to students for their participation and achievements in extracurricular activities, clubs, student organizations, and community service.
- **Student Curricular:** Student curricular (for-credit) badges are tied to specific academic courses within the university's curriculum. At this time, UNL is not creating student curricular badges.

## Taxonomy of Badges

UNL supports six types of badges, which are aligned with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Each type is distinguished by the level of activity required by the learner to obtain the badge.

- **Engagement Badge:** Documents participation and is best suited for engagement in extra-curricular activities, attendance at one or more events or workshops, or active membership in a UNL organization. Participation should be meaningful and provide value for the participant but reflection or a tangible submission from participants is not necessary. While not associated to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, it is encouraged that Engagement Badges reflect "Remember" and "Understand".
- **Foundational Badge:** Documents the introduction to skills and competencies gained from opportunities for personal, career, and professional development. Foundational Badges are associated with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy through "Remember" and "Understand." These should demonstrate learning, but not mastery, and may involve practicing skills and competencies in the learning environment.
- **Intermediate Badge:** Documents skills and competencies that have professional and career value. Learner activities should demonstrate mastery of skills and competencies and take place in professional environments. Intermediate Badges are associated with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy through "Apply" and "Analyze" and require some artifact(s) to be submitted and assessed by grantors before being awarded.
- **Advanced Badge:** Documents a learner's qualification and capability to employ a collection of competencies or industry standards in professional environments. Advanced Badges are associated with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy through "Evaluate" and "Create."
- **Mastery Badge:** Similar to Advanced Badges but specifically show that a learner is qualified and capable of employing a collection of competencies or industry standards in professional environments. It is also possible for a combination of Foundational, Intermediate, and Advanced Badges to stack into a Mastery Badge.
- **Industry Badge:** Shows a learner is versed in practicing multiple skills necessary to achieve industry or professional certification or licensure. Like Advanced Badges, these demonstrate mastery but for a specific industry or profession, rather than general skills and competencies.

## University of Nebraska-Lincoln Taxonomy of Badges

	Engagement Badge	Foundational Badge	Intermediate Badge	Advanced Badge	Mastery Badge	Industry Badge
<b>Outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware</li> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember</li> <li>• Understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply</li> <li>• Analyze</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate</li> <li>• Create</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualified</li> <li>• Demonstration of Mastery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualified</li> <li>• Demonstration of Mastery</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Awareness, Attendance, Physical or Virtual Presence	Recall facts, terms, concepts, and basic procedures related to the badge topic. Demonstrate comprehension by explaining ideas or concepts in one's own words, interpreting information, or summarizing key points.	Apply knowledge and concepts to solve problems, analyze scenarios, or perform tasks related to real-world situations. Break down complex information into smaller parts, identify patterns or relationships, and draw conclusions based on evidence.	Assess the validity, reliability, or effectiveness of information, arguments, solutions, or methods within the context of the badge. Generate new ideas, products, or solutions by synthesizing information, applying critical thinking skills, and exercising creativity.	Meets learning objectives from Foundational, Intermediate, and Advanced Badges.	Demonstration of a collection of competencies or industry standards
<b>Assessment</b>	Attendance or participation record.	Multiple-choice questions or quizzes.	Case studies, simulations, or projects.	Essays, debates, or presentations.	Assessments from Foundational, Intermediate, and Advanced Badges	Appropriate assessments for the industry standards.
<b>Intended Audience</b>	Faculty/Staff and Student Co-Curricular	External Audiences, Faculty/Staff, Student Curricular, and Student Co-Curricular	External Audiences, Faculty/Staff, Student Curricular, and Student Co-Curricular	External Audiences, Faculty/Staff, Student Curricular, and Student Co-Curricular	External Audiences, Faculty/Staff, Student Curricular, and Student Co-Curricular	External Audiences, Faculty/Staff, and Student Curricular

## OVERSIGHT OF BADGES

Badges at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are sponsored and issued by the institution, which retains oversight to protect their integrity and value. The success and oversight of badges involve a collaborative effort among various campus units and individuals. The Micro-Credential and Badging Coordinator plays a central role in coordinating badge development across UNL, overseeing the Micro-Credential Inventory, and managing the Canvas Catalog and Canvas Credentials site. This coordinator works closely with proposers to identify and articulate the skills and competencies valued by employers and industries, assists with badge image development, manages the badge development process, and provides data reports on awarded badges.

The Micro-Credential Committee is responsible for evaluating proposed badges for alignment with the taxonomy, inclusion in the Micro-Credential Inventory, and appropriate rigor concerning assessment and student learning outcomes. They also enforce an institutional strategy for tagging and data collection. Similarly, the Department Chair or Unit Director and the College Dean or Unit Administrator evaluate proposed badges for alignment and rigor within their respective areas, ensuring that the badges meet institutional standards and support college or unit goals.

Final approval of badges rests with the Assistant Vice Chancellor Digital and Online Learning, who ensures that the proposed badges reflect UNL's value and rigor while considering financial viability and return on investment. This comprehensive oversight structure ensures that badges issued by UNL maintain high standards of quality and relevance.

For questions related to badges, please contact the appropriate person below.

Name and Title	Assistance Area	Contact Information
<b>Badge Resource E-Mail Account</b>	First point of contact for general badge support	<a href="mailto:online@unl.edu">online@unl.edu</a>
<b>Angie Rushman</b> Coordinator, Micro-Credential and Badging	Provides proposal development support to proposers and coordinates with NU Advance on course creation.	402-472-6555 <a href="mailto:Arushman2@unl.edu">Arushman2@unl.edu</a>
<b>Diona Hartwig</b> Assistant Director, Learning Experience	Provides support for NU Advance and development of course shells.	402-472-5736 <a href="mailto:diona.hartwig@nebraska.edu">diona.hartwig@nebraska.edu</a>
<b>Kevin Shriner, Ed.D.</b> AVC Digital and Online Learning	Administrator overseeing all aspects of badge development.	402-472-3751 <a href="mailto:kevin.shriner@unl.edu">kevin.shriner@unl.edu</a>



## BADGE DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS

Applications for the creation of a badge are made to the Micro-Credential Committee. The application originates in the college or unit and is approved by the appropriate chair, dean, or vice chancellor prior to application submission.

UNL utilizes two review processes prior to the submission of a badge to the committee.

**Step 1:** The first step is for a proposer to seek approval from their Department/Unit Chair utilizing the *Micro-Credential Approval Form*. This form will require the proposer to identify the title, badge description, badge taxonomy and associated learning outcomes, intended audience, instructional method, assessments, and expected costs.

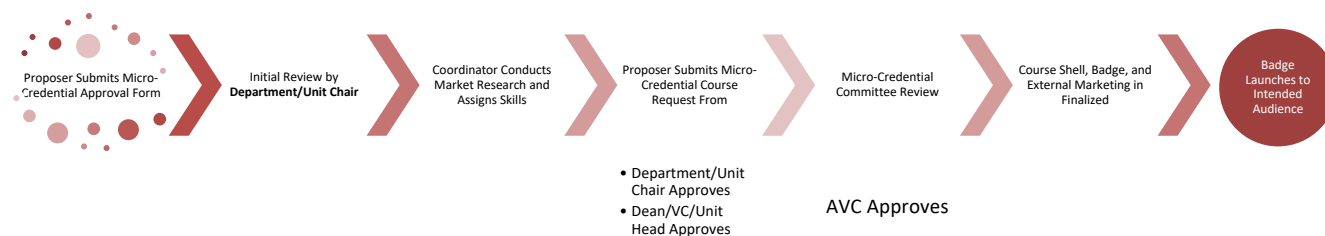
**Step 2:** With an approved form, the proposer schedules a meeting with the Micro-Credential and Badging Coordinator to discuss next steps. The coordinator will conduct a market analysis of the proposed badge, assign three industry skills, and ensure there is no duplication of other badges. Step 1 and step 2 complete the first review process.

**Step 3:** In coordination with the coordinator, the proposer initiates the *Micro-Credential Course Request Form* and submits the completed form to the Department/Unit Chair for approval. Following approval, the form is routed to the Dean/VC/Unit Head for approval. Once all approvals are documented, the form is routed to the coordinator for submission to the Micro-Credential Committee.

**Step 4:** The Micro-Credential Committee reviews all documentation and determines if the course is approved. Upon approval, the form is forwarded to the AVC for Digital and Online Learning for review and final approval prior to recording and processing into the appropriate learning management system.

**Step 5:** The coordinator notifies the proposer of the decision and coordinates with the Assistant Director of Learning Experience for the development of the course shell in the appropriate learning management system. The coordinator develops the image associated with the badge, updates the badge inventory, and public directory.

**Step 6:** The proposer finalizes course development. The course is reviewed by the coordinator and the proposer prior to student enrollment. The coordinator develops the mechanism by which the badge is awarded into the appropriate learning management system.



## APPENDIX

### Appendix A: Badge Images (Still in Development)

