



MICRO-CREDENTIAL INSIGHTS

MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND DIGITAL BADGES

CONCEPT

Micro-credentials: Short, focused credentials that provide in-demand skills and experience ([SUNY](#)).

Digital badges: Validated indicator of skills gained through micro-credentials ([Educause](#)).

INSIGHT

Micro-credentials orient learning around skills. Digital badges make skills visible.

THE ALAMO COLLEGES STORY

OPPORTUNITY DEMAND FOR SKILLS | UNDER-EMPLOYED LEARNERS

Alamo Colleges is the largest college district in south Texas, serving 90,000 learners annually. We are comprised of five separately accredited community colleges, all Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and one Historically Black College or University (HBCU). In 2021, Alamo Colleges sought to better reach unemployed and under-employed learners in Bexar County through a skills-oriented approach.

“Skills are an equity issue for unemployed and working learners,” notes Dr. Luke Dowden, Chief Online Learning Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor at Alamo Colleges, “if you, as a learner, can’t talk about your skills and don’t have proof of your skills, you might be left out of the emerging skills-based hiring economy.”

We decided to start with online, on-demand non-degree credentials. [Strada/Gallup 2020 survey](#) findings show that 62% of Americans preferred non-degree credentials. We began developing micro-credentials, which are accelerated and skills-based.

PIVOT MICRO-CREDENTIAL PILOT

In 2021, Alamo Colleges launched [Upskill](#), a micro-credential pilot initiative and platform, tailored to adult learners. We started by offering non-credit and credit-based micro-credentials in high-demand fields. We aligned them to [Alamo Institutes](#)’ courses and programs, which are organized to help learners match career goals to an Institute. We quickly iterated to learn how to best reach, support, and serve our target population.

Upskill offers micro-credentials in the following areas:



Nursing and Allied Health



Data Science and Analysis



IT, Cloud Computing, and Cybersecurity



Marketing, Sales, and Project Management



Software Development and Product Design

BLENDING APPROACH TECHNICAL + MARKETABLE SKILLS

Each Alamo Colleges' micro-credential consists of both technical skills and marketable skills. Technical skills are industry specific, while marketable skills are uniquely human skills and are relevant across industries.

Technical Skills	Marketable Skills
	
Abilities and knowledge required to get the job done by performing practical tasks in a specific career field	Durable, uniquely human skills directly impacting team functionality and organizational output

We selected marketable skills that our employers most often need. These include:

- **Career management**
- **Collaboration**
- **Resilience**
- **Oral communication**
- **Professionalism/Work ethic**
- **Written communication**

DIGITAL BADGES ACCESSIBLE | PORTABLE | VISIBLE

Alamo Colleges created micro-courses for working learners to gain marketable skills and have evidence of those skills through a digital badge. As [Educause](#) notes, “badges represent micro-credentials in the way that a diploma represents a degree.” Digital badges are an important part of the offering for working learners based on the value they provide. [Education Design Lab](#) highlights three core features that demonstrate this value:

- **Accessible:** Digital badges are not owned by the institution, employer, or authorizing organization, which allows easy access to the learner without going through a transcript request process.
- **Portable:** The learner can display their digital badges by uploading them to LinkedIn, adding them to their resume or social media site, collecting them through a learner wallet or e-portfolio, and/ or sharing them through an employer platform.
- **Visible:** Digital badges make learning visible, as employers can easily see the skills and competencies that learners have gained through each badge that is awarded.

Alamo Colleges offers employer partners the opportunity to create their own Skills Bundles to upskill and reskill their worker-learners.

LEADING THE WAY A VOICE ON MICRO-CREDENTIAL INNOVATION

In addition to Upskill, Alamo Colleges is a part of several national efforts on micro-credential innovation. These include:



- **Open Skills Network:** Alamo Colleges District is a member of the **Open Skills Network**, a coalition of employers, institutions, policy makers, non-profits, and others working to advance skills-based education and training; and participated in the **2021 pilot OSN project**, which contributed to the development of micro-credentials for our Upskill initiative.



- **UPCEA:** Alamo Colleges District is a member of the **University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA)** and is a part of UPCEA's leadership team for the new **Council for Credential Innovation**, which "will focus on leveraging the strategic potential of non-degree credentials and non-credit education and training to transform institutions of higher education as well as the talent marketplace."



- **1EdTech Consortium:** Alamo Colleges Online staff represent the Colleges on the **Global Digital Credentials** workgroup, which is working on the development of a question bank around marketable skills training and academic program integration.



- **Education Design Lab:** Alamo Colleges District worked with **Education Design Lab** to develop new micro-credential pathways in healthcare in Summer 2022.



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LEARN MORE. CONTACT US TODAY.

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