Complementing a Humanities Course with a Project Management Certificate

A Case Study

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Formed in 2014, Workcred is an affiliate of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Its mission is to strengthen workforce quality by improving the credentialing system, ensuring its ongoing relevance, and preparing employers, workers, educators, and governments to use it effectively. Workcred's vision is a labor market that relies on the relevance, quality, and value of workforce credentials for opportunities, growth, and development.

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With 14 institutions that enroll over 256,000 students overall, The University of Texas System is the largest university system in Texas and one of the largest public university systems in the United States. UT institutions produced over 66,000 graduates last year and awarded more than one-third of the undergraduate degrees in Texas. They also educate more than one-half of the state's health care professionals and award 63 percent of the state's medical degrees annually. The combined efforts of UT-owned and affiliated hospitals and clinics resulted in nearly 10.8 million outpatient visits and more than 2.1 million hospital days in 2023. UT's $4.3 billion research enterprise is one of the nation's most innovative, ranking number one in Texas and number two in the U.S. for both total and federal research expenditures. With an operating budget of $32 billion for fiscal year 2025, UT institutions collectively employ more than 160,000 faculty, health care professionals, support staff, and students.

Suggested citation:

Workcred and The University of Texas System, *Complementing a Humanities Course with a Project Management Certificate: A Case Study* (Workcred, May 2025). **https://share.ansi.org/wc/Shared%20 Documents/Workcred-Reports/UT-System-Case-Studies/Complementing-a-Humanities-Course-with-a-Project-Management-Certificate.pdf.**

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Microcredentials in the University of Texas System

The state of Texas continues to experience strong job growth, which increases the need for employers to be able to hire workers with the necessary skills upon graduation.[1] To address this challenge, The University of Texas System (UT System) launched the **Texas Credentials for the Future Initiative** in 2021 to create more opportunities for students, alumni, and incumbent workers to earn short-term credentials (i.e., professional certificates and microcredentials). Through partnerships with Coursera and Google, as well as initial grant funding from Strada Education Foundation, the UT System scaled microcredentials across their institutions to expand career opportunities, help students understand how skills learned in an academic course or program are connected to skills required by employers, and to improve post-graduate wages.[2]

Faculty members were given flexibility to implement strategies that were best suited for their academic disciplines, courses, and students. They could adopt existing professional certificates or develop their own microcredential. Faculty could also determine if a microcredential should be embedded in a course, offered as a co-curricular activity, or as a combination of the two.

This case study focuses on how the Google Project Management Professional Certificate is paired with a humanities course at The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), and is part of a series of four case studies that highlight how faculty in different academic disciplines at three UT System institutions utilized microcredentials in their undergraduate courses.

> **"I am honored to collaborate with faculty and staff within our System to support collective efforts to improve the career readiness of our learners by providing access to industry credentials that supplement degrees to help our learners be competitive in the evolving world of work."**
>
> **– Kelvin Bentley, Ph.D., program manager, Texas Credentials for the Future, The University of Texas System**

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1   "Over 26,000 Jobs Added as Texas Labor Market Continues Growth Streak," Texas Workforce Commission, April 18, 2025, **https://www.twc.texas.gov/news/over-26000-jobs-added-texas-labor-market-continues-growth-streak**.

2   "Texas Credentials for the Future," The University of Texas System, accessed February 12, 2025, **https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/texas-microcredentials**.

Integrating a Project Management Certificate with a Humanities Course at UTSA

Determining the Purposes and Goals for Microcredentials

Learners develop many workforce-relevant skills in humanities courses, including analytical thinking, communication, teamwork, and problem solving.[3] To help learners more clearly make the connection between the skills they are learning in the classroom and how those skills can advance their career, Jude Chudi Okpala, Ph.D., professor of instruction, philosophy and classics at UTSA, provides students taking his courses with the opportunity to earn two different types of microcredentials: 1) the Google Project Management Professional Certificate, developed by industry and offered through the Coursera Career Academy, or 2) the academic skill badge on

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3   Ashley P. Finley, *The Career Ready Graduate: What Employers Say about the Difference College Makes* (AAC&U, 2023), **https://dgmg81phhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACU-2023-Employer-Report.pdf**; *Future of Jobs Report 2025* (World Economic Forum, January 2025), **https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf**; and Dan Brodnitz, "The Most In-Demand Skills for 2024," *LinkedIn* (blog), February 8, 2024, **https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/linkedin-most-in-demand-hard-and-soft-skills**.

intercultural communications, which was created by Dr. Okpala through a teaching and learning reimagined grant sponsored by the Division of Academic Innovation. Because project management is such an in-demand occupation that continues to grow in Texas, the U.S., and globally, Dr. Okpala selected the Google Project Management Professional Certificate to integrate with one of his humanities courses, and is the focus of this case study.[4]

According to a report by the Project Management Institute, 25 million new project managers will be needed globally by 2030.[5] In the U.S., the projected percentage change in employment for project management specialists between 2023–2033 is seven percent, which is faster than the four percent average growth for all occupations. And, Texas expects eight percent job growth for project management specialists, which is higher than the U.S. average.[6] In addition, humanities courses help students develop collaborative thinking, problem-solving, and analytical thinking skills that are also critical to success in project management roles. The combination of increased labor market demand for project management skills and humanities courses that cultivate skills relevant to project management provides an opportunity for students to simultaneously gain academic course credit and a third-party, validated credential.

Figure 1: UTSA Demographics

UTSA
The University of Texas at San Antonio™

1 UTSA Circle
San Antonio, Texas 78249

University Demographics[7]

35,770 Total student enrollment

30,889 Undergraduate student enrollment

Undergraduate student demographic profile:

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- White
- Other Races
- International
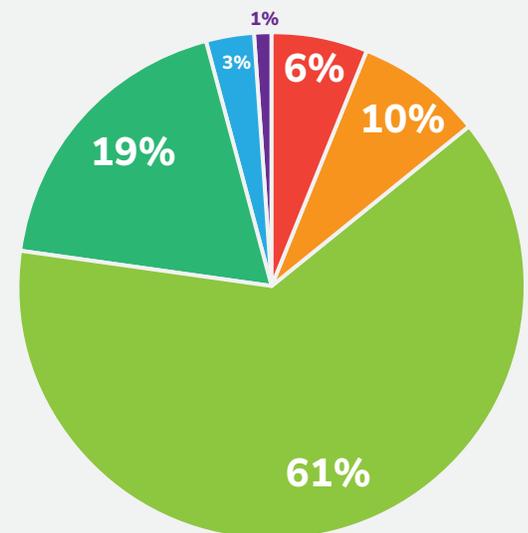
45% Percentage of students receiving Pell grants[8]

2,994 Total number of students enrolled in any microcredential at UTSA (July 2024)[9]

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4   Jude Chudi Okpala, as discussed with case study author Karen Elzey, Workcred, October 7, 2024.

5   *Talent Gap: Ten-Year Employment Trends, Costs, and Global Implications* (Project Management Institute, June 2021), **https://www.pmi.org/learning/careers/talent-gap-2021**.

6   *Report on Texas Growth Occupations – 2024 (Texas Workforce Commission, December 14, 2024),* **https://www.twc.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ogc/mtg24/commission-meeting-material-121724-item13-rep-tx-growth-occupations-2024-twc.pdf**.

7   "SmartBook," The University of Texas System Office of Institutional Research, May 2024, **https://www.utsystem.edu/documents/docs/publication/2024/ut-system-smartbook**.

8   "New Carnegie Classification Casts Light on UTSA's Excellence in Advancing Social Mobility," *UTSA Today,* April 24, 2025, **https://www.utsa.edu/today/2025/04/story/carnegie-classification-advancing-social-mobility.html**.

9   Jude Chudi Okpala, as submitted to case study author Karen Elzey, Workcred, October 4, 2024.
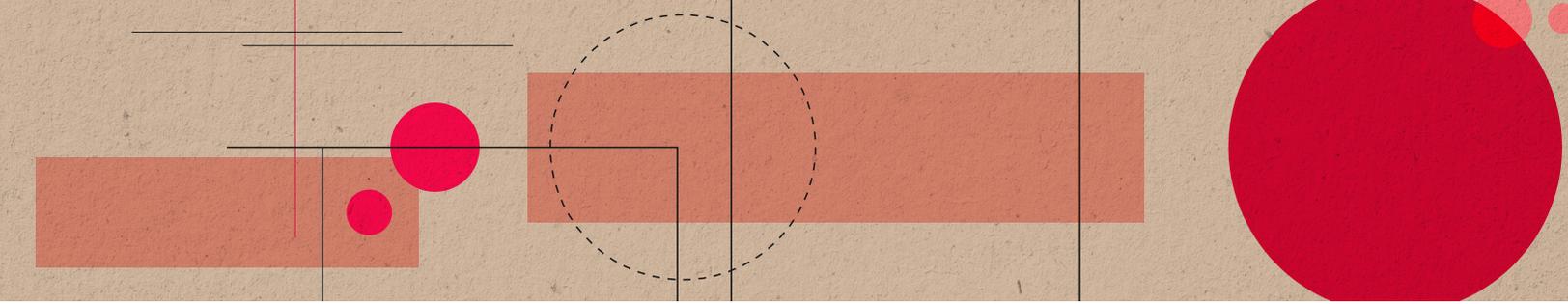
Building the Case for Microcredentials

Creating Internal Support for Microcredentials

A microcredential community of practice was formed at the UT System to discuss the purpose of microcredentials, explore academic disciplines where they could be adopted, identify best practices in other institutions, and determine which departments, faculty, and staff needed to be involved in the development and continued support of microcredentials at the campus and system levels. The UT System also received a grant from Strada Education Foundation to support the development of microcredentials at individual institutions. Some of that grant money was used to offer faculty $1,000 stipends to support the research and course redesign needed to build a new or adopt an existing microcredential and evaluate its impact. Currently, UTSA has established the Roadrunner Credentialing Task Force to use microcredentials to create skill-centered learning opportunities for the Roadrunner community.[10]

> "Microcredentials are an important part of UTSA's holistic approach to preparing our students to be lifelong learners and filling critical needs in the workforce."
>
> – Melissa Vito, vice provost for academic innovation, UTSA

One of the first steps in the planning process was to gather evidence about which academic majors might benefit the most from microcredentials. Faculty relied on data from seekUT, a free tool that synthesizes data from different sources including the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, U.S. Census Bureau, Texas Workforce Commission, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the National Student Clearinghouse®, to provide post-graduate outcomes by campus and academic major.[11] According to seekUT, UTSA classics and humanities students who receive a Bachelor of Arts degree have first-, fifth-, and tenth-year median earnings of $31,000, $64,000, and $58,000 respectively.[12] This

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10 "Task force provides updates on improvements towards the Roadrunner experience," The University of Texas at San Antonio, accessed April 4, 2025, **https://www.utsa.edu/today/2024/06/story/2024-campus-experience-task-force.html**.

11 "About seekUT," The University of Texas System, accessed February 12, 2025, **https://seekut.utsystem.edu/about_ seekUT**; and "seekUT Collaborations," The University of Texas System, accessed February 12, 2025, **https://seekut. utsystem.edu/collaborations**.

12 "seekUT San Antonio," The University of Texas System, accessed February 12, 2025, **https://seekut.utsystem.edu/ seekUTSanAntonio**.

data made classics and humanities courses good candidates for incorporating microcredentials, but it is also important to gather additional information from external partners about the skills they value in job candidates before making a final decision.

The classics and humanities faulty met with staff at the UTSA University Career Center and the Professional and Continuing Education (PaCE) team who used their relationships with regional employers to gather information about current and future skill requirements, the recognition of microcredentials, and whether badges are recognized in the hiring process. To gather this information, the PaCE team hosted on-site seminars, conducted training events, and issued a survey. The information gathered from the seekUT data and the PaCE team work was analyzed and led to the decision to develop microcredentials that could be aligned with and offered as part of existing classics and humanities courses.

Forming a Governance Structure for Microcredentials

For UTSA, the development, support, and maintenance of microcredentials is a collaborative effort that involves multiple departments and groups across the campus, but is primarily led by the Divisions of Student Success and Academic Innovation. UTSA's workforce credential project also created committees that developed partnerships with academic, student success, and technology divisions across campus to promote and advance the use of microcredentials and focused on different aspects of the microcredential lifespan. The committees are listed below:[13]

» **Standards and Alignment:** Develops and maintains standards for microcredential implementation and provides a framework to help faculty integrate microcredentials in their courses.

» **Infrastructure:** Develops and maintains the digital systems necessary to support microcredentials.

» **Learner Experience:** Gathers feedback from learners to improve microcredentials.

» **Pathways:** Focuses on strengthening relationships and improving alignment between UTSA and employers.

» **Communications:** Creates and implements communication plans to promote microcredentials by highlighting success stories and impact.

» **Data and Assessment Group:** Evaluates microcredentials and identifies areas for improvement.

By having a campus-wide approach to governance, faculty receive the resources they need to build microcredentials that support student learning, provide bridges between academia and the workforce, and align with employers' skill needs.

Determining Effectiveness of Microcredentials

One of the issues that inspired the Texas Credentials for the Future Initiative was the importance of good labor market outcomes for all graduates, regardless of their academic discipline. As a result, UTSA uses the Data and

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13   Jude Chudi Okpala, as submitted to case study author Karen Elzey, Workcred, October 4, 2024.

Assessment Group to evaluate how best to collect and measure data related to the impacts microcredentials have on student academic performance and long-term career success. Currently, the data that is being collected includes microcredential participation and completion rates.

Another aspect of determining effectiveness and success of microcredentials involves ensuring that the microcredentials maintain alignment to labor market needs, how to determine if a microcredential should be retired, and whether the microcredentials effectively signal the right skills to employers. Although UTSA is still developing the formal processes and policies that would address these issues, they have instituted a pilot program that enrolls students in a comprehensive learner record to help address the employer signaling issue. This technology platform facilitates connections between students and prospective employers, and helps students create a more comprehensive skills development profile that supplements academic transcripts.

Strategies for Offering Microcredentials

Faculty at UTSA pursued different strategies for offering microcredentials:

» **Extra credit:** provides students extra credit if they complete a microcredential on their own time

» **Supplemental assignment:** allows students to complete course assignments while simultaneously earning a microcredential

» **Course content:** includes a microcredential as a capstone course with a final project

An initial analysis indicated that the supplemental assignment approach had the highest number of enrollments and completions. The extra credit approach had a moderate number of enrollments, but a lower completion rate to the supplemental assignment approach. And the course content approach had the lowest number of enrollments, but higher completion rates than the extra credit or supplemental assignment approaches. This analysis shows that the supplemental assignment approach, where the microcredential is completed along with a course or series of courses, is the most effective method for engaging students and ensuring they complete the microcredential.[14]

Students were also asked to complete a survey asking about their motivation for participating in a microcredential program. The top four responses were: instructor offered extra credit, improve career prospects, explore project management career, and it was an instructor requirement as part of the course. This survey data also provides some insights about effective strategies for offering microcredentials with humanities courses.

Figure 2: Comparison of Enrollments and Completions by Approach

Approach	Enrollments	Completions
Extra Credit Approach	153	57
Assignment Approach	489	399
Course Content	56	50

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14 Jude Chudi Okpala, "Navigating Microcredentials for Teaching and Learning: The Case of the Humanities," shared with case study author Karen Elzey, Workcred, December 9, 2024, PowerPoint Presentation.
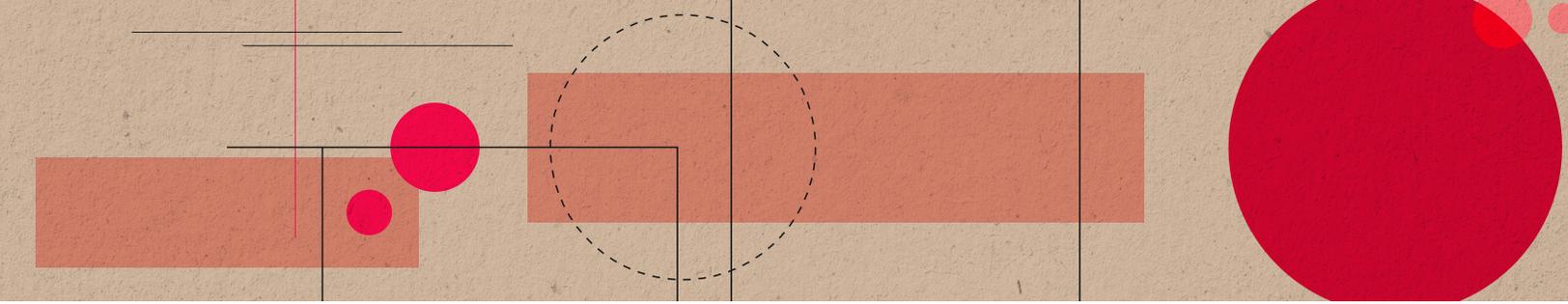
Understanding Microcredential Content and How it Aligns to Humanities Curriculum

There are several important steps to incorporating microcredentials into undergraduate curriculum. Perhaps one of the most critical is for the faculty member to gain an understanding of the content and the assessments that are part of the credential before selecting a third-party, validated credential.

In this case, the Google Project Management Professional Certificate is comprised of six courses. Each course includes learning outcomes, a list of skills that learners will gain (such as project management, effective communications, risk management, strategic thinking, agile management, and business writing), the number and types of assessments, the number of modules within the course, and the estimated time to complete each module. Each module incorporates readings, videos, quizzes, and discussion prompts. The final module is a capstone project that allows the student to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in the other five courses.[15]

After reviewing the course content, Dr. Okpala determined that the Google Project Management Professional Certificate could be used in five of his courses:

- » HUM 3013: History of Ideas
- » HUM 3023: History of Cultures
- » HUM 2023: Introduction to Humanities I

> **"The Google Project Management Certificate adds value to the study of the humanities; it leads students to understand the value of collaborative thinking necessary in the humanities as it cultivates among them the skills for engaging a project from the beginning to the end."**
>
> **– Jude Chudi Okpala, Ph.D., professor of instruction, philosophy and classics, UTSA**

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15   "Google Project Management Professional Certificate," Coursera, accessed February 10, 2025, **https://www.coursera.org/professional-certificates/google-project-management**.

»   HUM 2033: Introduction to Humanities II

»   HUM 3163: Global Humanities

This case study focuses on how the Google Project Management Professional Certificate was integrated with HUM 2023, which is part of the UTSA core curriculum and fulfills the requirement for the creative arts category.[16] For the HUM 2023 course objectives, Dr. Okpala determined that there was a strong overlap with collaborative thinking, problem solving, and analytical skills. For example, to conduct research in the humanities, students must apply collaboration skills, demonstrate the ability to work in interdisciplinary teams, and be able to define, plan, and execute research projects. As a result, he made minimal changes to HUM 2023 to align it with the certificate. One change that he did make was to emphasize the importance of teamwork in the course and he created a new discussion assignment to focus on project management skills. He also developed an additional module for HUM 2023 that provides students with information about the certificate, how the certificate relates to the course objectives, and opportunities for students to get additional support to complete the certificate.

Implementing the Microcredential

When students enroll in HUM 2023, they have the option to decide whether they also want to sign up to earn the Google Project Management Professional Certificate. Since the certificate does not have any education or experience prerequisites, it is accessible to any student. And, the cost to earn the certificate was eliminated because of a partnership among the UT System, Coursera, and Google that allows students, faculty, and staff to have free access to professional certificates offered through the Coursera Career Academy.[17]

Students who opt to pursue the Google Project Management Professional Certificate work at their own pace and on their own time. Students who complete the certificate within the same semester that they are enrolled in HUM 2023 have their final course grade increased by one letter scale (e.g., a final course grade of a C+ would become a B-). Students also receive a certificate from Google that they can use on their LinkedIn profile and other sites. Students who do not complete the certificate program within the semester can continue to work toward completion, but they will not receive the incentive to raise their final course grade.

The approval to align the Google Project Management Professional Certificate with HUM 2023 occurred before UTSA had implemented a formal governance process for microcredentials. The approval process consisted of meeting with the UTSA director of teaching, learning, and digital transformation and notifying the dean and department chair that Dr. Okpala was participating in the UT System microcredential initiative as a way to improve post-graduate outcomes. The process from conceptualization of the idea to having students enrolled in the Google Project Management Professional Certificate as part of HUM 2023 took three months.

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16 "2024-2026 Undergraduate Catalog," The University of Texas at San Antonio, updated January 29, 2025, **https://catalog.utsa.edu/undergraduate.**

17 "Texas Credentials for the Future," The University of Texas System, accessed February 12, 2025, **https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/texas-microcredentials**.

Once the microcredential was approved, Dr. Okpala considered different strategies to encourage students to enroll in HUM 2023 and sign up to complete the certificate. For example, he created a video for students who might have interest in developing project management skills. The video stresses the value of earning the certificate, and how it enhances the value of their academic degree and expands career opportunities. The video also explains which project management skills can be developed through HUM 2023 and the certificate program.[18] Dr. Okpala also built incentives directly into his course as a way to motivate students. He provided reminders to students each week to encourage them to work towards completion of the certificate. In addition, students were given access to peer coaches to help them successfully navigate and complete the certificate. The ultimate incentive was to provide extra credit for their final grade.

By choosing to complete the HUM 2023 course and earn the Google Project Management Professional Certificate co-curricularly, learners are not only better able to recognize and apply the skills they learned in the course, but they are also better able to signal their skills to potential employers by combining it with the certificate.
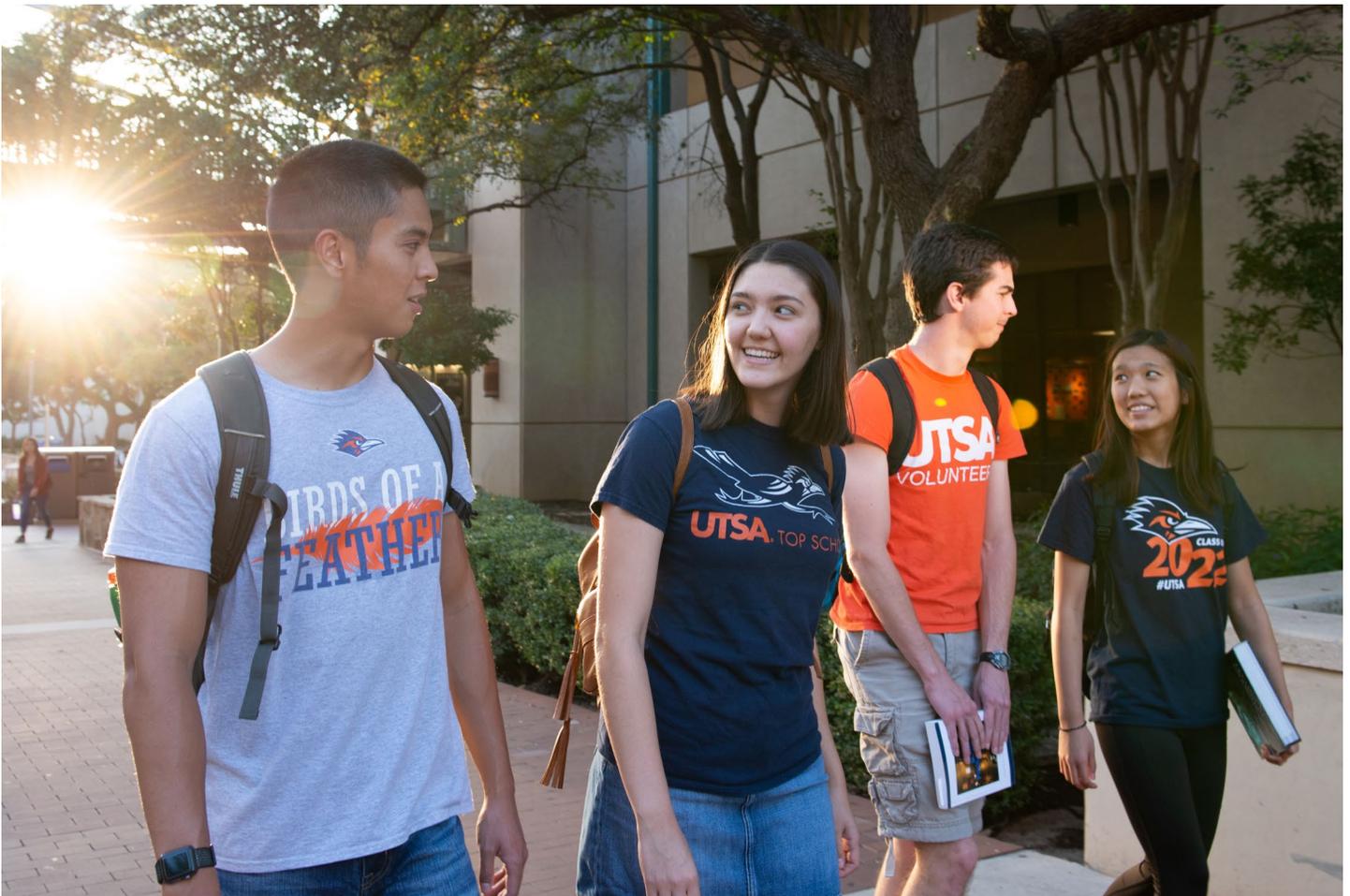
© 2018 The University of Texas at San Antonio

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18 "Dr. Jude Okpala - Coursera Google Project Management Certificate for Humanities," UTSA Academic Innovation, Powered by Panopto, accessed February 19, 2025, video, 4:32, **https://utsa.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=5dd7b3f2-fd4e-4664-b2c3-aee70022f1b9**.
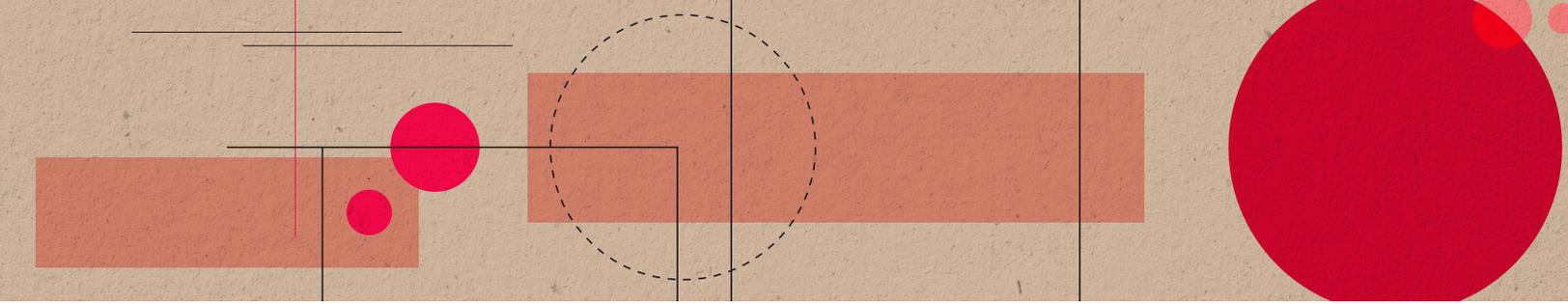
Challenges and Solutions

Several challenges emerged through the process of incorporating the Google Project Management Professional Certificate into HUM 2023, and can be used to inform the development of microcredentials campus wide.

Employer Input

In particular, the need to gather input from employers about current and future skills requirements and to better understand the perception and use of microcredentials in the hiring process was a challenge that was uncovered during this process. One solution to this issue is to identify existing or create new mechanisms to gather and incorporate feedback from alumni and employers that can be used to bolster the value proposition for aligning microcredentials with academic courses. This could include issuing a survey to employers and alumni to gather feedback about the effectiveness of the microcredential in the labor market. There are also opportunities to develop formal partnerships with industry sectors or individual employers to ensure that the skills acquired by completing the microcredential are aligned to the employer's current skill needs. A continuous feedback process can be established to reissue the survey periodically and use the insights gleaned from the survey to update the academic course and verify whether the microcredential is still appropriate.

Flexibility

Another challenge is the need to increase student engagement, especially when students have multiple demands on their time. More than 75 percent of UTSA students work at least part-time and this limits the time that is available to earn a microcredential, especially if it is offered as a co-curricular opportunity.[19] One solution to this challenge is to explore ways to integrate microcredentials into activities in which students are already participating, such as student organizations and extracurricular activities. For example, the Offices of Student Success and Career-Engaged Learning could identify whether it is possible to incorporate microcredentials into existing on-campus student work experiences, which would allow student employees to earn microcredentials that would enable them to highlight the skills they learned through their work experiences. Flexible learning options and non-credit experiential learning courses could also be created to develop microcredentials that are modular or stackable. This would allow the information to be broken down into smaller components, which could make earning a microcredential more manageable for busy students.

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19   Jude Chudi Okpala, as submitted to case study author Karen Elzey, Workcred, October 4, 2024.

Faculty Engagement

Similar to students, faculty also have a limited amount of time to engage in professional development activities that would allow them to adopt existing credentials or develop new microcredentials. To help address this shortage of time, strategies and promising practices to develop microcredentials could be integrated into existing activities. This might include adding microcredentials to faculty professional development plans and building microcredential adoption and integration strategies to update and enhance existing courses. And, key stakeholders could form a committee to explore how current faculty activities could incorporate strategies and technical assistance to help faculty effectively integrate microcredentials into their courses.

> "This collaborative approach not only fosters innovation but also ensures that microcredentials are developed with student engagement and success in mind."
>
> – Claudia Arcolin, executive director, teaching and learning experiences, UTSA

As part of its faculty engagement strategy, the Division of Academic Innovation is launching a peer learning network and establishing a microcredential institute. These initiatives are designed to cultivate a community of practice where faculty can explore, experience, and exchange best practices around creating microcredentials. This sort of collaboration empowers faculty to share what works, navigate implementation challenges together, and experience microcredentials firsthand—so they are better equipped to design meaningful learning experiences that resonate with students.

Measuring the Impact of Microcredentials

The Division of Academic Innovation collaborates with the Office of Institutional Research to evaluate the impact of microcredentials on student outcomes, focusing on persistence and retention by analyzing grade distribution and the effectiveness of these credentials in promoting student success. Additionally, Academic Innovation is conducting a longitudinal study to assess how microcredentials influence students' academic and career trajectories—examining whether they guide the selection of elective courses, encourage additional coursework, reinforce existing areas of study, or inspire interest in new fields.

Lessons Learned and Conclusion

Several lessons were learned through incorporating the Google Project Management Professional Certificate into HUM 2023. First, there is a need to provide students with more opportunities to apply what they are learning in an academic course to situations they might encounter in their career. Second, students who are focused on employment opportunities view earning a microcredential as a reason to enroll in an academic course. And finally, there is a need for faculty to be more intentional about creating stronger connections between course content and experiences outside of academia, which can enhance what is taught in the classroom by providing direct connections to how specific skills are needed and used in the labor market.

Microcredentials are used to meet a variety of needs that range from rounding out and enriching a degree program, fostering persistence and retention, demonstrating competency in technical skills, to enhancing employability outcomes. This case study provides an example of how integrating a certificate with a humanities course can expand career options, boost student interest in the course content, and provide clarity about how the course builds skills that have value after graduation. By combining various types of credentials, students gain the deeper concepts from an academic degree and specific skills from a microcredential, which benefits students, faculty, and employers.