The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 11-24
(Voting Units: All)

Defining Digital Badges

Primary Contacts

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Background

Digital badges are a type of digital credential that are housed in an online system. This allows for portability and display of specific achievements or competencies to interested parties including potential and current employers, educational institutions and their faculty and staff, or other learners. The power of these digital credentials is that they include the learning objectives assessed by the issuing agency.

This proposal is informed by lessons learned from the ongoing pilot projects outlined in the committee report that was submitted to the Provost's office in March of 2020.

Rationale

Digital badging offers opportunities to bridge the gap between a higher education degree and employment. It provides a simple method for a learner to demonstrate specific competencies[1]. Badges provide students an opportunity to highlight and further articulate skills that may not be directly evident on an official transcript which could increase their ability to distinguish themselves from other job applicants and enhance employability.

Badges also offer opportunities for people already in the workforce, including our own faculty and staff, to engage in professional development and demonstrate in-demand skills. Badges can enable career enhancement through small educational sequences that result in a portable, digital, credential.

As described in the committee report, there is no consistent definition of a badge at the national level. Due to this, it is critical that badges be operationally defined so what a "badge" means at Michigan Tech, and to both our students and their employers, is clear and consistent.

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[1] Credly, (2018). *Digital Credentials are the Future of the Workforce*.

Proposal

Michigan Tech will offer digital badges as a ~~learner~~ micro-credential for learners demonstrating specific competencies.

Official badges awarded by Michigan Tech will be:

- competency-based.
- assessed for ~~student~~ learning.
- defined by learning objectives that are directly aligned with the badge name/title.
- representative of about 20 hours of learner engagement with course material.
- non-credit offerings ~~(but may be earned as part of a for-credit course)~~.
- fee-supported.
- awarded through the badging platform adopted by Michigan Tech.
- represented using a standardized visual identity.
- Initiated, approved, and closed by the unit's ~~faculty-led~~ process, the unit's chair and/or dean (or supervisor/director) before being sent to the provost's office where badge proposals are reviewed for completeness and accuracy, ~~approved,~~ and implemented ~~managed~~ jointly by the Provost's office and Registrar, and their designees.
  - interdisciplinary badges will be approved by all involved units

It~~At this time it~~ is not the intention that badges will stack towards transcriptable credits or credentials (e.g., courses, certificates, degrees).

While badges are defined as being smaller than a credit and outside the normal tuition structure, they are an official MTU credential. Instructional materials created by faculty to develop and deliver badges is considered to be unambiguously "scholarly work" as defined by Board of Trustees policy 14.3.

Reporting

The provost's and registrar's ~~responsible~~ offices will provide an annual status update to the University Senate's Curricular Policy Committee (CPC) regarding the use of badging across campus. Report elements will include:
- Badge names with descriptions
- Competencies / Learning Objectives
- Modality offered
- Details on associated fees
- Usage statistics available through the badging platform
The CPC may, at its discretion, request additional information.

Fees

The end goal of collecting fees is for badges to be self-sustaining.

As badges would exist outside of the normal tuition structure, a nominal per-badge fee to support the adopted platform would be implemented.

Additional fees to support the delivery of the badged content would be at the discretion of the offering unit/faculty. As part of a badge proposal, units can propose the distribution of fee revenue above the per-badge rate collected to support the badging platform and its administration.

When determining fees, the unit should carefully take into consideration the population earning the badges (e.g., currently enrolled students, K-12 teachers, current MTU faculty and staff, external professionals) and may propose discounted fees for specific audiences.

If badges are used as a value-add opportunity to recognize competencies gained through a course taken for-credit, not more than a nominal fee for the cost of platform support will be associated with the badge as students are already paying tuition.

Start-up Costs

First year costs for the selected badging platform would be approximately $12,000between $10,000-11,000 due to the included cost of software setup and integration. Years two and three would be $3,0002,600 each, which would allow awarding badges to 7501,000 learners badges per year. The three-year average cost to issue a badge would be approximately $85 per learnerbadge.

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