

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 5-25 Defining and Implementing Digital Badges: Revision to Proposal 11-24

(Voting Units: All)

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 competencies¹. 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 Michigan Tech 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.

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

As described in [the committee report](#), there is no consistent definition of a badge at the national level. The scope of this proposal is to define operationally what a “badge” means at Michigan Tech, so the definition of this credential is clear and consistent to both our students and their employers.

Proposal

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

Official badges awarded by Michigan Tech will be:

- a learning opportunity that will result in mastery of the topics or skills that would be expected from approximately a half-credit of collegiate-level instruction and student effort.
- relevant to advancing the goals and image of both badge earners and the University.
- competency-based.
- defined by learning objectives established by the unit that are directly aligned with the badge name/title.
- assessed by the instructor for learning on a pass/fail basis as defined by the learning objectives of the badge.
- non-credit offerings (but may be offered as value-added course content).
- fee-supported.
- awarded through the badging platform adopted by Michigan Tech.
- represented using a standardized visual identity.
- reviewed for completeness and accuracy and approved by the Provost's office.
- implemented jointly by the Provost's office and Registrar's office, or their designees.
- approved as a University credential.
 - badge proposals will start in the unit, and be approved through the chain of authority. Badges aimed at external audiences will also be reviewed and approved by Global Campus. Final approval will be the responsibility of the Provost.
 - interdisciplinary badges will be approved by all involved units.

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 or employees to develop and deliver badges are considered to be unambiguously "scholarly work" as defined by Board of Trustees policy 14.3.

Reporting

The provost's and registrar's offices will provide an annual status update to the University Senate's Curricular Policy Committee (CPC), which will then report to the full Senate, regarding the use of badging across campus. Report elements will include:

- Badge names with descriptions
- Competencies / Learning Objectives
- Modality offered
- Usage statistics available through the badging platform
- An indication of the fees generated through badging programs, and the range of funding models that have been used (e.g., industry-sponsored, fees from participants, University-sponsored, etc.) to cover the costs of the development and delivery of these programs.

The CPC may, at its discretion, request additional information.

Fees

The end goal of collecting fees is for badges to be self-sustaining. In some cases, they may be revenue-generating, especially if they are meeting the ongoing educational needs of external entities.

It is recognized that badges will be offered in different ways to multiple distinct populations. For example:

- Populations internal to Michigan Tech such as enrolled students and employees in association with existing courses or as stand-alone entities (including trainings)
- Populations external to Michigan Tech such as companies, professionals, and extended learners as stand-alone entities (including trainings).

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

Fees for each badge will be proposed through collaboration between the unit and Global Campus and approved by the provost (or their designee). This will help ensure they are sufficient to support the developmental and operational costs and in line with the current market (as applicable based on audience). Guidance on setting fees for different populations will be developed and maintained by Global Campus.

It is expected that any badge fees collected above the nominal platform support amount will be used to support instruction as well as costs associated with developing, advertising, and administration of the program. Any revenue above those costs will be shared, including with the units and offices engaged in the operation and delivery of the badge, as determined by the Provost Office and Global Campus.

If badges are used as a value-added opportunity to recognize competencies gained through a course taken for credit, the nominal fee for the cost of platform support will not be exceeded unless there are additional costs to delivering the badge.

Start-up Costs

First-year costs, including software setup and integration, for the selected badging platform have already been covered by a grant. Years two and three would be \$3,000 each, which would allow the awarding of badges to 600 learners per year. The three-year average cost to issue a badge would be approximately \$10 per learner.