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The

BIG REWARDS

OF MICROCREDENTIALS

How New Education Options Help Employees Quickly Advance Their Careers—And What Employers Think About It



“Every aspect of our lives is becoming customizable on demand. Why shouldn’t education follow suit? Microcredentials—or microdegrees—are proliferating as a cost-effective way for job seekers and employees to develop their skills and prove their talents on their own schedules.”

– Bill Stoller, Chairman and CEO, Express Employment International

The BIG REWARDS of MICROCREDENTIALS

An Express Employment Professionals White Paper
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Highlights

- Microcredentials, or microdegrees, come in many forms and provide people opportunities to develop or demonstrate skills in a way that is recognizable to employers.
- Microcredentials help job seekers and existing employees secure in-demand jobs and upskill without committing to a much longer traditional degree program.
- These credentials can be earned from a variety of institutions—from major universities to community colleges and even private companies.
- Prospective microcredential students should ask key questions before enrolling in a program. Not all programs are created equally.
- As the education system evolves, microcredentials are expected to increase in popularity.
- Surveys show that employers value microcredentials even more than employees might expect.


Microcredentials Defined

For job seekers looking to realign their skill sets with in-demand jobs, there's some truth to the old proverb: *good things come in small packages*.

Microcredentials—or microdegrees—might just be the answer.

While these credentials have been around for many years, offerings have ballooned more recently as interest from employers and prospective employees has increased.

And microcredentials aren't specific to job seekers alone. Employees interested in upskilling and meeting their own professional goals benefit from these types of credentials. By demonstrating their learning outcomes in a formal manner, employees can share their competencies to reach their professional goals, and employers can easily verify them, leading to a win-win for both parties.



According to the State University of New York, **“Microcredentials are short, focused credentials designed to provide in-demand skills, know-how, and experience. Stackable microcredentials can also provide a pathway to a certificate or full degree, now or when you are ready.”**¹

“Microcredentials are the fastest growing segment in academia and will continue to outpace all degree offerings as higher-ed, professional development and training continues to reinvent itself over the next decade.”

— Dr. Dean H. Stewart, Former Executive Director—Center for Exceptional Leadership, The Donald J. Schneider School of Business and Economics, St. Norbert College, De Pere, Wisconsin²

“Microcredentials are a powerful and effective tool in producing graduates who are both broadly educated and specifically skilled, giving them a competitive edge in the labor market while also enhancing their overall undergraduate experience.”

— James B. Milliken, University of Texas System Chancellor³



Types of Microcredentials

Subjects


Microcredential subjects vary widely, but compared to a traditional degree, they are generally more focused on specific skill sets. Examples include:

- Accounting
- Anatomy and Physiology Essentials
- Business Management
- Data Management with Python and SQL
- Drilling Basics
- Economics
- Film Set Construction
- Secondary Classroom Management

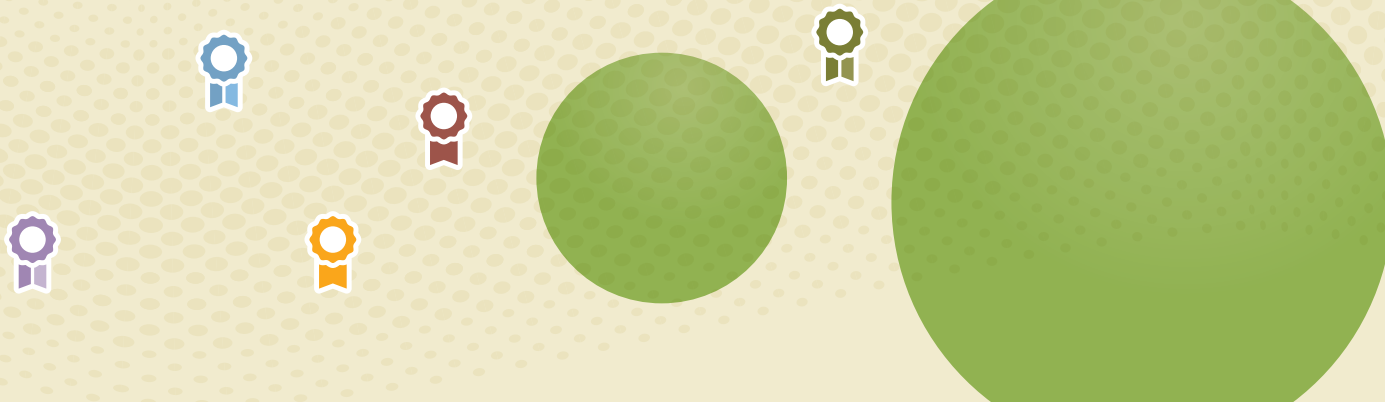


“Microcredentials are a means of addressing shortages in the workforce. Eventually, we could see this as the norm in advanced education—highly focused education that is directed at the areas of greatest employment need.”

– Greg Sulentic, Express franchise owner, Lincoln, Nebraska

Badge	Program	Launch Date	Campus	Time to Completion	Delivery	Details
	Intro to Steno Machine Shorthand	08/29/2023	Oklahoma State University - Oklahoma City	Weeks	Online	View All
	BOLT (Basics of Language Training) - Reading	08/22/2023	Southeastern Oklahoma State University	Hours	Online	View All
	STORM (Supplemental Teaching of Remedial Math)	08/22/2023	Southeastern Oklahoma State University	Hours	Online	View All
	Intro to Steno Machine Shorthand	08/16/2023	Tulsa Community College	Months	Online	View All
	Google Business Intelligence Career Certificate	08/16/2023	Tulsa Community College	Months	Online	View All

An example of subjects, institutions, and badges listed on UpskillOK.org⁴



Institutions and Stackability

Students can find credentials and degrees from expected and unexpected places. Major universities offer microcredentials, lending their credibility and reputation to the programs. Community colleges also offer these programs, which may be more responsive to the demands of employers in the local area.

Oklahoma City Community College, for example, has designed programs for local employers, including BancFirst, with courses that lead to credits, microcredentials, and—with enough coursework—an associate degree if desired.⁵

Companies also design certificates and microcredentials for the general public. Google, for example, offers certificates in cybersecurity, IT support, data analytics, and more—topic areas generally associated with the tech giant—through the Coursera platform.⁶

Programs from a company like Google may not be immediately “stackable” together with other microcredentials to meet the requirements of an initial advanced degree, but some universities may recognize them for college credit. Google says that “[s]chools like Northwestern, Purdue University Global, and the University of North Texas provide college credit for the Google Career Certificates.”⁷

The platform EdX brings together a range of institutions—including Harvard, Western Governors University, and Arizona State University—to offer a “micro-bachelors.” EdX bills this program as “the only path to a bachelor’s degree that makes you job-ready today and credentialed along the way.”⁸ In other words, students do not have to wait for a graduation ceremony to receive only one degree; they earn specialized credentials in the meantime.

Badges and Validation

One concern for both employees and employers is validating the microcredentials they earn. Before embarking on any coursework, students should understand exactly how they will be able to demonstrate proof of completion. The State University of New York explains that these credentials will appear “on your transcript and/or highlighted in a digital badge so your accomplishments travel with you.”⁹

Other platforms send students a competency-based transcript or unique digital badge from third parties, such as Credly, that employers can use to authenticate their credentials. “Badges are digital assets to show a learning achievement like a micro-credential or certificate. They contain metadata that provides context and verification,” according to Oklahoma City Community College.¹⁰ Badges can be added to an individual’s LinkedIn page or résumé.



What Employers and Employees Think

Employers value microcredentials. That's the finding of a nationwide survey The Harris Poll conducted on behalf of Express Employment Professionals.¹¹

What employers say:

- **77%** of U.S. hiring managers say microcredentials are just as valuable as (**39%**) or more valuable than (**38%**) traditional degrees.
- **81%** of hiring decision-makers agree microcredentials provide the workforce with skilled workers in a timely manner.
- **83%** agree microcredentials are a valuable way for established employees to grow their skill sets and knowledge.
- **81%** say microcredentials will help close the workforce shortage.
- **48%** of hiring decision-makers report they would be just as likely to hire a candidate with a microcredential, and **31%** would be more likely.

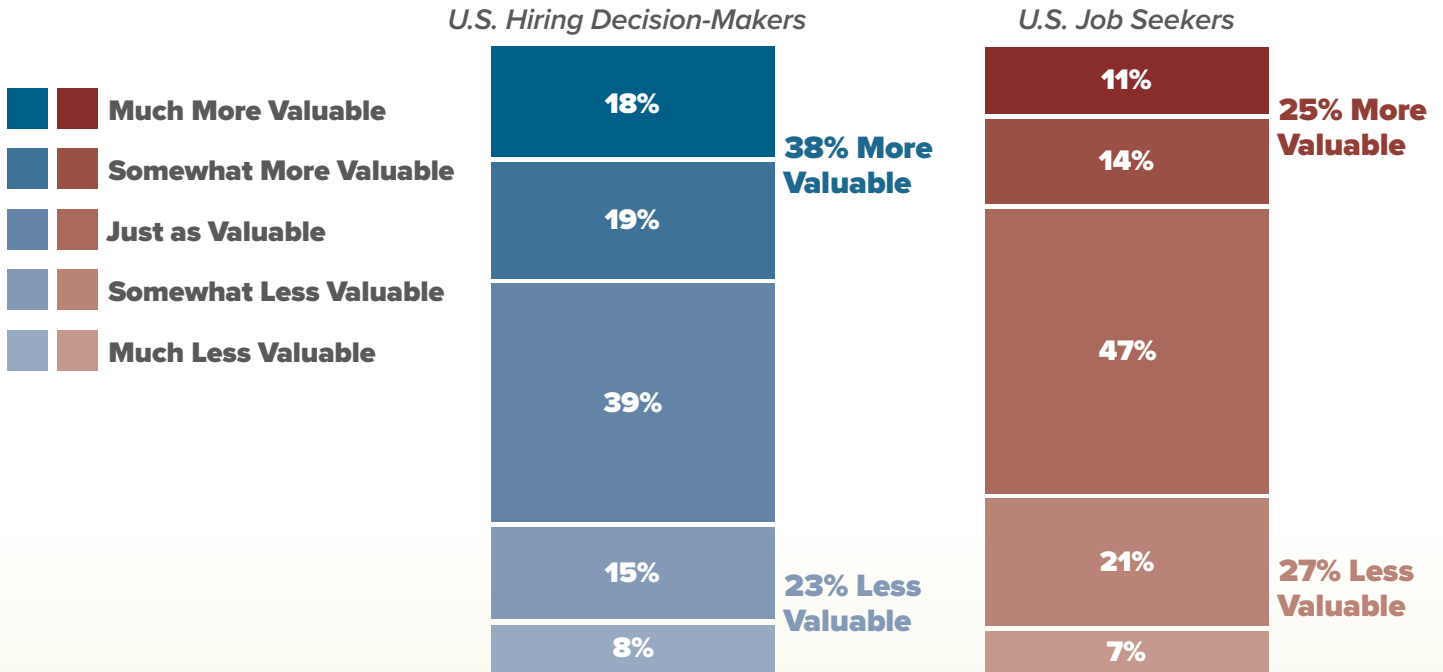
What job seekers say:

- **73%** of job seekers report microcredentials are just as valuable as (**47%**) or more valuable than (**26%**) traditional degrees.
- **83%** of job seekers agree that microcredentials provide the workforce with skilled workers in a timely manner.
- **86%** agree that microcredentials are a valuable way for established employees to grow their skill sets and knowledge.
- **79%** say microcredentials will help close the workforce shortage.
- **67%** would rather spend their time getting a microcredential than getting a degree through traditional means.



Value of Microcredentials vs. Traditional Degrees

U.S. Hiring Decision-Makers and U.S. Job Seekers



These survey results indicate hiring managers are, in some cases, more bullish on microcredentials than job seekers, indicating prospective employees may even be undervaluing the benefit of these credentials.



“A candidate’s participation in microcredentials or microdegrees shows the prospective employer that they value professional development and have pursued additional education as a means to become a more valuable employee.”

– Matt Sullivan, Express Employment Professionals and Specialized Recruiting Group franchise owner, Green Bay, Wisconsin



“We see candidates who have sought out microcredentials or microdegrees as having a lot of initiative. They want to improve their expertise in a certain area and typically target certain jobs that require an added piece of knowledge they may not currently possess. These candidates want to ensure they are competitive and have the skills and knowledge needed to compete against other candidates and add value to a potential employer.”

– Janis Petrini, Express Employment Professionals and Specialized Recruiting Group franchise owner, Grand Rapids, Michigan



Benefits of Microcredentials

- *Students do not have to take on large sums of debt to pursue a credential.*

With Americans holding \$1.7 trillion dollars of student debt, and so many struggling to pay it off, people are understandably wary of signing up for pricy degrees. Microcredentials can often be earned just a few hundred dollars at a time.

- *Students can receive new credentials within a matter of weeks, rather than having to invest two, four, or more years.*

Embarking on a full degree program can be daunting. With microcredentials, students can undertake smaller chunks at a time, while still having something credible to put on their résumés.

- *Microcredentials help address the lost learning opportunities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.*

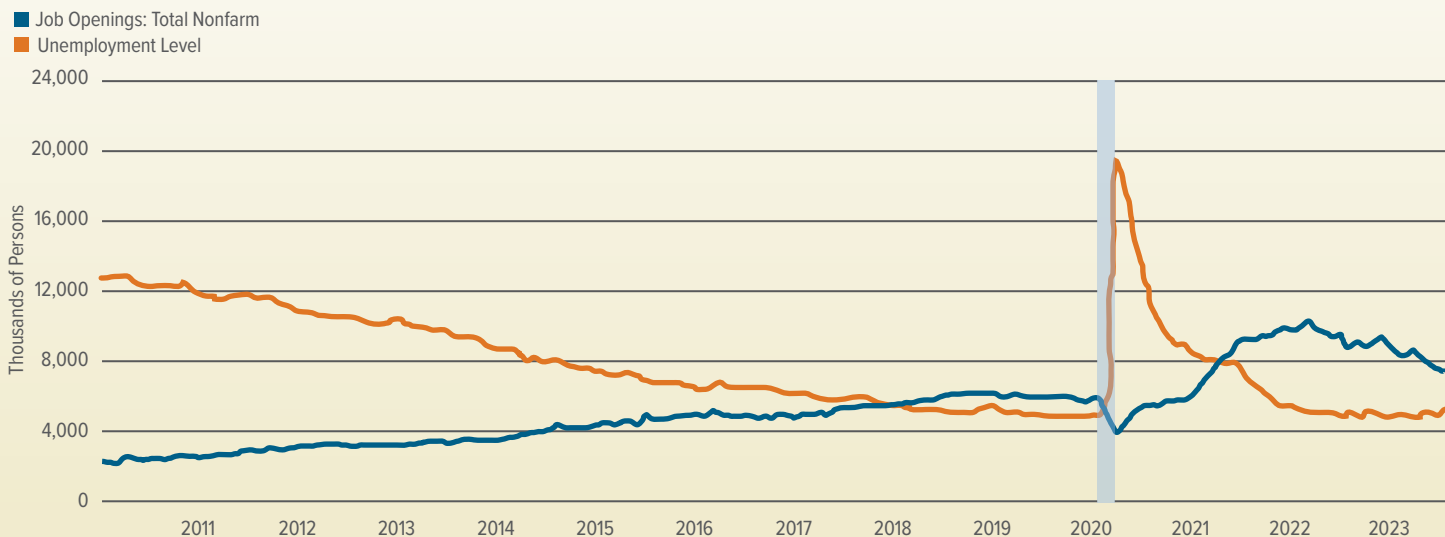
As Express reported previously, the COVID-19 pandemic caused many people to delay schooling or put off opportunities for professional development. Microcredentials are one way to make up for lost time.

- *Microcredentials are responsive to in-demand skills and can be targeted to specific needs.*

Employers can work directly with institutions to create tailor-made programs, meaning students can be certain that they are demonstrating skill sets hiring managers want to see.¹⁵

Since 2021, there have consistently been more open jobs in the United States than unemployed people looking for work, exacerbating the skills gap—the lack of workers with the right skills—that employers have witnessed for years.

Lack of Workers with the Right Skills



Shaded areas indicate U.S. recessions.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics¹⁶

What to Look For and Questions to Ask

Anyone looking to enroll in a microcredential program should understand whether the program will be valued by potential employers in their area. Ask a few key questions before enrolling:

- *Have the programs been designed with the job market in mind? Have employers or industry representatives provided input into the coursework?*
- *Does the coursework provide the timing and location flexibility that your specific situation demands?*
- *Are credentials stackable—meaning, can they eventually be combined to meet requirements of a traditional degree in the future, if desired? Do they transfer to other institutions?*
- *Is the institution credible? Do employers in your area or field of study understand that the institution is trustworthy? If necessary, is it accredited?*
- *How are credentials verified and validated? Does the institution provide a digital badge or a competency-based transcript? Do employers recognize and accept these?*



The Future of Microcredentials

“The need for lifelong education and training will continue to grow as technology advances. Microcredentials will play a significant role in this sector in the coming decades as the workforce needs to keep pace with these changes. Speed to market plays a significant role in this.”

– Dr. Dean H. Stewart, Former Executive Director—Center for Exceptional Leadership,
The Donald J. Schneider School of Business and Economics, St. Norbert College, De Pere, Wisconsin¹⁷

The world of microcredentials is evolving rapidly, with universities and platforms announcing new developments and approaches on a regular basis. The landscape may look very different in just a few years, but the demand for microcredentials is unlikely to diminish as employees and employers continue prioritizing flexibility, portability, affordability, efficiency, and quality.



Learn More

To learn more about microcredentials and microdegrees, how to attain them, how to use them and whether they might be right for you or your employees, consider some of the following resources:

- **UpskillOK** — Career-focused credentials from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education: UpskillOK.org
- **SUNY Microcredentials** — The microcredential program of the State University of New York: Suny.edu/Microcredentials
- **UCLA CenterX** — Graduate credentials for educators from University of California, Los Angeles: CenterX.Gseis.UCLA.edu
- **Grow with Google** — Google career certificates: Grow.Google.com/Certificates
- **Coursera** — Company-designed microcredentials featured on the Coursera platform: Coursera.org/Certificates/Advance-Your-Career
- **MicroBachelors®** — EdX's microcredential program that also leads users to a bachelor's degree: EDX.org/MicroBachelors
- **Workplace Pro** — Express' Office Ready and Job Ready Certifications: ExpressPros.com/WorkplacePro
- **ExpressLearn** — Flexible Courses in High-Demand Fields Facilitated by Express: ExpressPros.com/ExpressLearn
- **Express Certifications** — Business Office Technology and the Career Preparedness Certifications: ExpressPros.com/Certifications
- **OCCC Microcredentials and Workforce Development** — Oklahoma City Community College's microcredential program: OCCC.edu/Micro-Credentials



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About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Our international network of franchises offers localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, employing 579,000 people globally in 2022 and 10 million since its inception. For more information, visit ExpressPros.com.

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