

Executive Summary

Micro-credentials and Strategic Credential Innovation at the University of Southern Mississippi

Provost Faculty Fellows Program
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Purpose

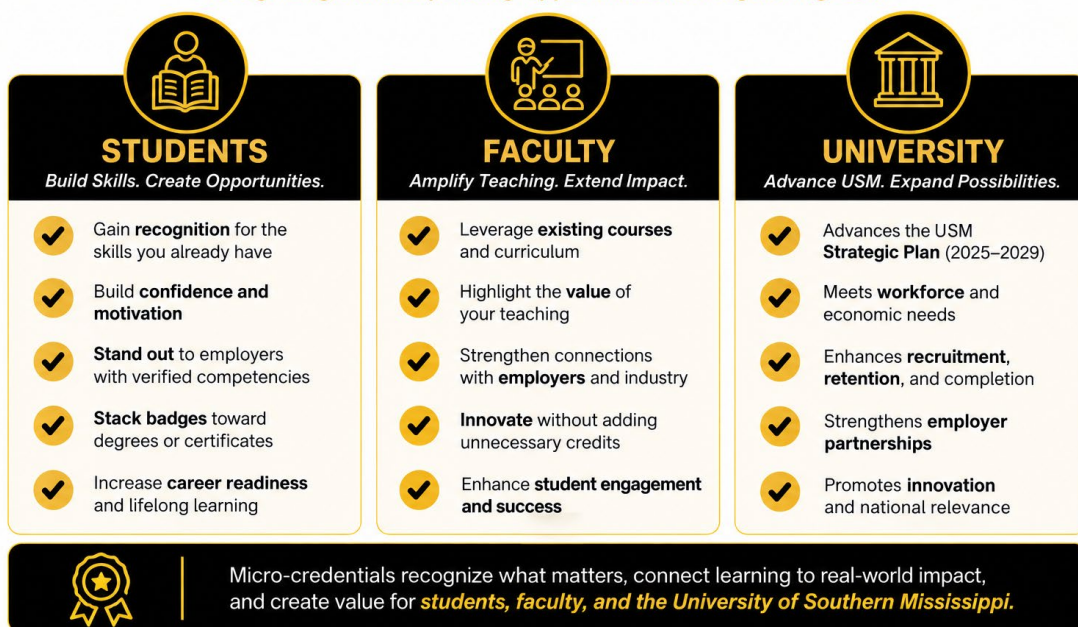
This executive summary provides a faculty-facing overview of the Provost Faculty Fellow project examining how the University of Southern Mississippi can strategically implement credit-bearing micro-credentials and digital badges. It summarizes the rationale, institutional framework, pilot badge models, and recommendations developed to support student success, workforce readiness, and academic innovation.

Why Micro-credentials?

Higher education is increasingly being asked to document not only what students know, but what they can do. Micro-credentials provide an opportunity to recognize meaningful competencies embedded within existing curricula while maintaining the value of traditional degree programs. Rather than replacing degrees, badges highlight workforce-relevant knowledge and skills that students acquire through credit-bearing coursework.

WHY MICRO-CREDENTIALS?

Recognizing Skills. Expanding Opportunities. Strengthening USM.



Project Approach

The project used a structured, evidence-informed approach to examine the development and implementation of micro-credentials at USM. The work began by aligning the initiative with priorities in the University's 2025–2029 Strategic Plan and benchmarking micro-credential practices across 20 peer institutions. An institutional analysis then considered USM's existing academic offerings, infrastructure, and opportunities for implementation. These findings informed the development of a proposed framework addressing governance, approval processes, academic quality, assessment, digital badging, and credential recognition. Proof-of-concept badge models were subsequently developed in General Education and Health Professions to demonstrate potential applications of the framework. The project concluded with recommendations for phased implementation, evaluation, and potential institutional scaling.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS AT USM

PROVOST FACULTY FELLOW PROJECT OVERVIEW

A strategic approach to building, piloting, and scaling high-quality micro-credentials that recognize student learning and career readiness.



RECOGNIZING LEARNING.
CONNECTING TO CAREERS.
ADVANCING USM.

USM
THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Major Deliverables

Deliverable	Summary
Institutional Framework	Governance, approval processes, quality assurance, assessment, and implementation recommendations.
General Education Badge Concepts	Four proof-of-concept badge models demonstrate how existing coursework can be packaged into meaningful credentials.
Discipline-Level Pilot Models	Examples from Health Professions aligned with professional competency standards (PT, OT, Athletic Training).
Implementation Roadmap	Phased strategy for institutional growth, assessment, and continuous improvement.

Pilot Badge Portfolio

The project developed four General Education badge concepts as proof-of-concept models, along with discipline-specific examples illustrating how the framework could be adapted to professional and workforce competencies. The General Education concepts are not finalized credentials; final ownership, naming, course requirements, assessment expectations, and implementation would be determined through appropriate faculty and academic governance processes.

GENERAL EDUCATION PILOT BADGES

Recognizing Foundational Skills. Strengthening Student Success.

These four credit-bearing micro-credentials package existing coursework to recognize competencies that employers value and that support student success across all academic programs.



PROFESSIONAL WRITING & PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Demonstrates the ability to communicate clearly and effectively in writing and in diverse public contexts.

COURSES (9 CREDIT HOURS)

- **CMS 111** Interpersonal Communication
- **ENG 101** English Composition I
- **ENG 102** English Composition II



Builds strong written, oral, and interpersonal communication skills.



HUMAN BEHAVIOR & ANALYTICAL REASONING

Demonstrates understanding of human behavior and the ability to use evidence-based reasoning to solve problems.

COURSES (9 CREDIT HOURS)

- **PSY 110** General Psychology
- **SOC 101** Introduction to Sociology



Strengthens critical thinking, analysis, and understanding of people and society.



PRE-CLINICAL ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY

Demonstrates foundational knowledge of human structure and function essential for health sciences and related fields.

COURSES (9 CREDIT HOURS)

- **BSC 250** Anatomy & Physiology I Lecture (4)
- **BSC 250L** Anatomy & Physiology I Lab (1)
- **BSC 251** Anatomy & Physiology II Lecture (4)
- **BSC 251L** Anatomy & Physiology II Lab (1)



Builds essential knowledge for health-related academic and career pathways.



GOVERNANCE, ETHICS & INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

Demonstrates understanding of governance structures, ethical decision-making, and institutional systems.

COURSES (9 CREDIT HOURS)

- **ENG 203** Technical & Professional Writing
- **HIS 101** United States History I or **HIS 102** United States History II



Develops informed, ethical perspectives on institutions, policy, and civic responsibility.



Each badge requires 9 credit hours and a grade of B or higher in all courses.
Badges stack toward degrees and provide verifiable proof of essential competencies.

The discipline-specific models demonstrate how existing coursework can document advanced competencies relevant to graduate and professional education, clinical preparation, and workforce readiness.

HEALTH PROFESSIONS PILOT BADGES

Discipline-Aligned. Competency-Focused. Career-Driven.

These pilot badges demonstrate how existing coursework can be aligned with professional standards to strengthen preparation for graduate study and the health professions workforce.

 THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION DESIGN & PARTICIPATION <i>Occupational Therapy Pathway</i>	 THERAPEUTIC EXERCISE PRESCRIPTION & PROGRESSION <i>Physical Therapy Pathway</i>	 INTEGRATED CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT <i>Athletic Training Pathway</i>
Recognizes competencies in participation-focused therapeutic intervention planning and adaptive rehabilitation practice.  COURSES (6 CREDITS) • HPR 322 Recreational Therapy Program Planning • HPR 351 Diversity and Inclusive Practices in Recreational Therapy  ALIGNMENT TO ACOTE STANDARDS • B.4.3 Analyze contextual and environmental influences on participation and performance. • B.5.1 Apply client-centered and culturally responsive approaches to intervention. • B.5.2 Develop intervention plans based on client needs and participation goals. • B.5.3 Adapt activities and interventions to support functional engagement. • B.5.10 Utilize therapeutic activities to promote participation and quality of life.	Recognizes competencies in therapeutic exercise design, progression planning, and movement-based rehabilitation practice.  COURSES (6 CREDITS) • THY 414 Exercise Prescription for Chronic Disease • THY 415 Exercise Prescription for Musculoskeletal Disorders  ALIGNMENT TO CAPTE STANDARDS 7B Develop individualized interventions supporting patient-centered rehabilitation and functional outcomes. 7C Apply clinical reasoning and plan-of-care development to therapeutic exercise progression. 7D Utilize movement systems, biomechanics, and therapeutic exercise principles within rehabilitation practice. 7E Demonstrate professional judgment and safe clinical decision-making during exercise progression and modification.	Recognizes competencies in the assessment, clinical evaluation, and management of sport-related concussion and neurologic conditions.  COURSES (9 CREDITS) • HPR 554L Athletic Training Clinical I • HPR 572 Clinical Exam and Diagnosis II • HPR 654L Advanced Athletic Training Clinical I  COMPETENCY DOMAINS • Acute Neurologic and Emergency Assessment (HPR 554L) • Clinical Concussion Evaluation and Diagnosis (HPR 572) • Applied Clinical Concussion Management (HPR 654L) <i>Aligned with contemporary employer expectations for concussion management across athletic and clinical settings.</i>
 WHY IT MATTERS These badges document specialized competencies that employers value and graduate programs expect in future healthcare professionals.	 BUILT FOR SCALING These pilots provide models that can be adapted across additional health professions and disciplines as microcredentialing expands.	 USM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Benefits to Faculty and Academic Programs

- Recognizes competencies already taught within existing curricula.
- Supports recruitment and student retention through visible skill pathways.
- Strengthens employer engagement and workforce alignment.
- Creates stackable credentials without requiring wholesale curriculum redesign.
- Provides opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Positions USM for continued innovation in credentialing.

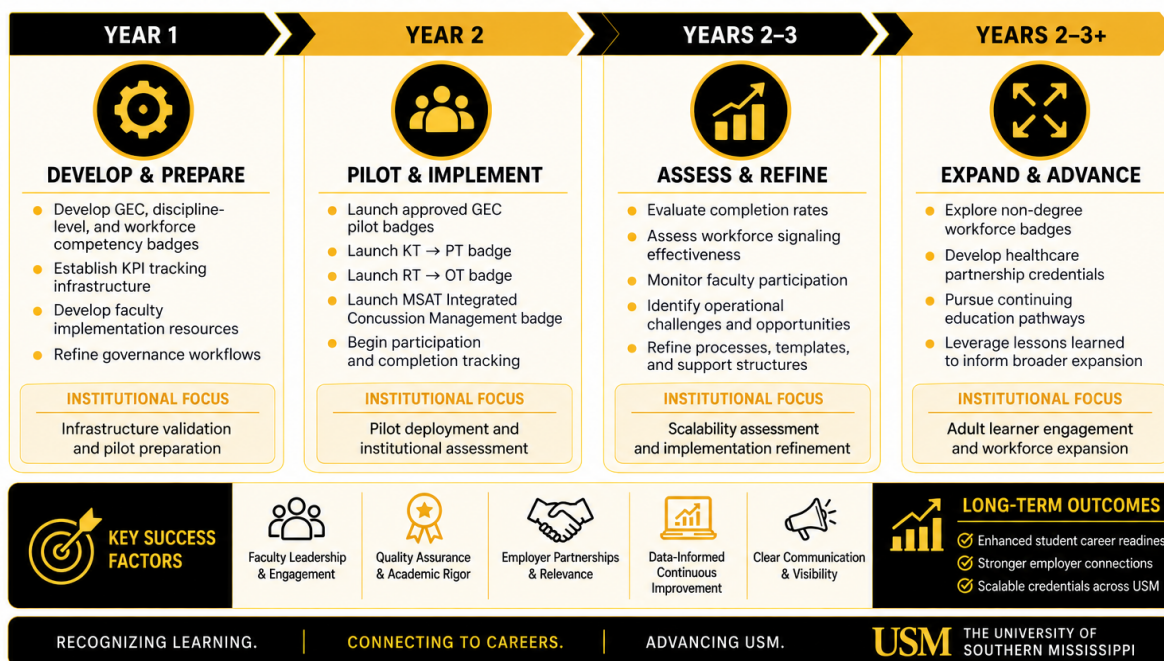
Key Recommendations

- Advance selected General Education badge concepts through faculty review and established academic governance processes as an institutional proof of concept.
- Use the Health Professions badge models to demonstrate how discipline-specific credentials can align existing coursework with professional competencies and workforce needs.
- Establish sustainable governance and assessment processes.
- Monitor completion, student outcomes, and employer engagement.
- Expand strategically based on pilot results and faculty interest.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE & PHASED ROLLOUT

PILOT. LEARN. REFINE. SCALE.

A measured, data-informed approach to launching and expanding microcredentials across USM.



Looking Forward

The project demonstrates that USM has an opportunity to develop a deliberate, faculty-driven approach to micro-credentials that complement existing degrees and academic programs. The next stage should emphasize faculty governance, clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment, strategic use of existing curricula, and credentials with demonstrated value to students, employers, and graduate or professional programs. Beginning with carefully selected pilots would allow USM to evaluate feasibility and impact before broader institutional expansion. Pilot implementation remains contingent upon appropriate faculty review, academic governance, and institutional approval.

Appendix

Faculty Resources

Faculty Micro-Credential & Badge Development Guide

Purpose of Badges at USM

- Micro-credentials and proficiency badges provide students with workforce-aligned credentials embedded within academic experiences.
- Badges allow institutions to recognize specialized competencies without requiring development of full academic programs.

Badge Types

- Foundational Badges: Co-curricular or professional development experiences.
- Proficiency Badges: Transcribed, competency-based credentials built from coursework.
- Programmatic Badges: Discipline-specific workforce pathways.
- GEC-Aligned Badges: General education competency clusters.

Pre-Curriculum Planning

- Discuss the concept within the program or school before proposal development.
- Identify badge manager and faculty ownership.
- Determine whether existing coursework can support the badge.
- Establish workforce alignment and competency assessment strategy.

Curriculum Workflow

- Determine whether Permission to Plan is required.
- Complete the Proficiency Badge proposal form.
- Move proposal through school, college, and university governance.

Best Practices

- Use existing courses whenever possible.
- Keep competencies measurable and employer-readable.
- Design stackable pathways.
- Align badge language with workforce terminology.

Common Failure Points

- Undefined competencies.
- Lack of workforce rationale.
- No clear assessment strategy.
- Insufficient faculty/program buy-in.

Badge Alignment Matrix

Badge Category	Strategic Value	Primary Student Population	Institutional Benefit
GEC-Aligned Foundational Badges	Broad competency signaling and retention support	General undergraduate population	Institution-wide student differentiation and engagement
Discipline-Specific / Programmatic Badges	Advanced competency specialization	Program-enrolled students	Program differentiation and recruitment
Workforce-Aligned Professional Skill Badges	Employer-facing workforce readiness	Career-oriented and transition students	Regional workforce alignment and employability

Badge Planning Worksheet

Use this worksheet before entering Curriculog to determine whether a proposed badge is conceptually, operationally, and strategically viable.

Badge Category (GEC-Aligned / Programmatic / Workforce-Aligned):

Proposed Badge Title:

Target Student Population:

Primary Workforce or Competency Signal:

Courses Included in Badge:

Existing or New Courses?

Defined Competencies (3-5):

Competency Assessment Strategy:

Potential Badge Manager:

Resource Implications:

Strategic Alignment:

Program/Faculty Discussion Completed?

Leadership Alignment Completed?

Would Permission to Plan likely be required?

Curriculog Translation & Proposal Support Guide

This guide translates Curriculog proposal language into practical planning guidance for faculty developing GEC-aligned, programmatic, or workforce-aligned badges.

Curriculog Field	Purpose	Faculty Guidance	Example
Data-informed rationale	Explain why the badge should exist	Connect to workforce, student value, or institutional goals	Supports healthcare documentation and patient navigation skills
Skillsets developed	Define competencies	Use measurable action-oriented language	Clinical communication, data interpretation, patient intake
Workforce relevance	Demonstrate employer value	Use job-description style terminology	Prepares students for healthcare support and coordination roles
Assessment strategy	Verify competency attainment	Describe how mastery will be assessed	Students complete competency evaluation with 80% threshold
Badge manager	Operational oversight	Identify responsible faculty or coordinator	Program Coordinator

Faculty Readiness Checklist: Before Entering Curriculog

This checklist is intended to support faculty and academic units prior to launching a proficiency badge proposal in Curriculog.

- Program-level discussion has occurred.
- School leadership has been consulted.
- Badge category has been identified (GEC-aligned, programmatic, or workforce-aligned).
- Existing and/or new courses have been identified.
- Competencies and workforce relevance have been defined.
- Resource implications have been reviewed.
- Badge manager or coordinator has been identified.
- Assessment strategy has been discussed.
- Sequenced approval category has been identified.
- Potential undergraduate or graduate course approvals have been considered.
- Permission to Plan requirements have been reviewed.

Proficiency Badge Permission to Plan (PTP) Template

This streamlined Permission to Plan template is intended specifically for institutional proficiency badges that do not create new academic inventory lines, do not require IHL approval, and do not require SACSCOC substantive change review. The purpose of this form is to provide institutional visibility, strategic alignment, and resource planning prior to submission of the proficiency badge proposal in Curriculog.

General Badge Information

School/Academic Unit:

Proposed Badge Title:

Badge Category (GEC-Aligned / Programmatic / Workforce-Aligned):

Badge Manager / Coordinator:

Qualifications for coordinating this program?

Academic Level (Undergraduate / Graduate):

Does the badge utilize existing coursework only? (Yes/No):

Will new courses be developed? (Yes/No):

Will new faculty lines or recurring institutional resources be required? (Yes/No):

Section 1: Badge Overview

1. Provide a brief description of the proposed badge and its intended purpose.
2. Describe how this badge aligns with the mission and strategic priorities of the institution.
3. Identify the primary student population expected to pursue this badge.

Section 2: Workforce and Student Value

4. Describe the competencies or skillsets students will develop through this badge.
5. Explain the workforce, professional, or academic relevance of the badge.
6. Describe how the badge supports student differentiation, workforce readiness, or career advancement.

Section 3: Curricular Structure

7. List the existing courses that will support the badge.
8. List any new courses proposed for development.

9. Describe how competency attainment will be assessed.

Section 4: Resource Impact

10. Describe any anticipated resource implications associated with the badge.
11. If no new resources are required, explain how the badge will be supported using existing infrastructure.
12. If applicable, explain how the School/College plans to support minor resource needs internally.

Section 5: Sequenced Approval Considerations

Based on institutional impact, identify the anticipated approval sequencing category:

Tier 1 — Existing Courses / No New Resources

- The Permission to Plan document and Proficiency Badge proposal form may proceed during the same Curriculog governance cycle.
- Schools should ensure appropriate faculty discussion and leadership alignment prior to submission.

Tier 2 — Moderate Academic Impact

(New Courses / Limited Resource Impact)

- The Permission to Plan document should be submitted and reviewed prior to launching the Proficiency Badge proposal.
- Any required undergraduate or graduate new course proposal forms should be initiated through the appropriate Curriculog process.

- The badge proposal would normally proceed during the subsequent governance cycle following initial review of the Permission to Plan and initiation of new course approvals.
- Schools should ensure that proposed coursework, scheduling implications, and faculty workload considerations have been reviewed prior to submission.

Tier 3 — New Faculty Lines / Significant Resource Impact

- Provost-level review and approval of the Permission to Plan should occur prior to submission of the Proficiency Badge proposal.
- Schools should work with College and Academic Affairs leadership regarding resource planning and implementation timelines before proceeding.

Sequenced approval guidance is intended to align institutional review with the operational and resource impact of the proposed badge while preserving appropriate academic oversight.

Section 6: Attestation

I attest that the information provided in this Permission to Plan template is accurate to the best of my knowledge and that the proposed badge has undergone appropriate programmatic discussion and preliminary leadership review.

Faculty Originator Signature/Approval: _____

Note: Approval of this Permission to Plan document authorizes development and submission of the proficiency badge proposal through Curriculog and does not constitute final approval of the badge.