

# MICROCREDENTIALS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This paper explores microcredentials as a formal recognition of a skill or competency. WxL conducted a study (using an employer survey, a student survey, and student interviews) to evaluate:

- The awareness of microcredentials among work-integrated learning<sup>1</sup> (WIL) students and employers
- How the participants felt about the *value* of microcredentials
- The impact of microcredentials on student motivation during their professional development courses

Results showed that awareness of microcredentials remains low, but students and employers assigned moderate-to-high value to microcredentials in showing an employee's capabilities. Microcredentials were shown to positively increase students' motivation to try harder in a professional development course if they were awarded a microcredential.

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

There is growing demand for students to graduate with skills they obtain from work experiences. This research is about awarding credentials for those skills. Some evidence shows that employers want to see proof of the skills students gained during their WIL experiences or professional development courses.

Microcredentials may allow students to gain and document skills quicker and at a lower cost than traditional education degrees and diplomas. Microcredentials may allow students to provide evidence of their technical or soft skills to make themselves stand out among other candidates for a job.

The researchers wanted to know if students and employers were aware of microcredentials, and if they were, did they think they were valuable? Do microcredentials motivate students during their professional development courses?

### <sup>1</sup> **Work-integrated learning (WIL):**

an education model that combines academic studies with a workplace or practice setting. Work-integrated learning includes a partnership of an academic institution, a host organization, and a student.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers created an employer survey, a student survey, and conducted interviews with students to examine the awareness and value associated with microcredentials.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found that awareness of microcredentials among WIL students and employers remains low. Researchers found a positive correlation between awareness of microcredentials and how valuable they thought they were. For example, students and employers with more awareness of microcredentials were more likely to agree with statements that described microcredentials as valuable in showing an employees' capabilities.

Stricter criteria for completion of a microcredential appeared to be positively associated with how valuable the survey participants felt the microcredential was. Study results also showed that students valued microcredentials that demonstrated "soft skills." Both students and employers associated higher value with microcredentials that are awarded from a university than an online provider.

The researchers also found that students were more likely to try harder to complete a professional development course if they were awarded a microcredential.

Limitations of this study includes the small student sample size at only one university, and the fact that if the awareness of microcredentials was low, this could have impacted the value associated with the microcredentials.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Educators and work-integrated learning practitioners can use this research to gain insight into the usefulness of microcredentials, and how they may provide value to document or certify student competencies and skills.

## KEYWORDS

Microcredentials, work-integrated learning, alternative credentials, student, employer

## CITATION

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## ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

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*The Work-Learn Institute at the University of Waterloo is the only institute in the world dedicated to research on co-operative education and other forms of work-integrated learning.*