

Media Release

Faculty In Favour of Quality Micro-credentials

For Immediate Release – October 27, 2022

(Edmonton) - CAFA is concerned that the Government of Alberta is continuing to gamble on our students' future by doubling down on micro-credentials. As professors and academic staff, we both develop and enthusiastically endorse pedagogical transformations that help more students learn and grow. Given that interest and expertise, we have some concerns with the GoA's implicitly endorsed models for micro-credentials.

CAFA would like to see all micro-credentials fulfill basic but important academic requirements. First would be that they all micro-credentials are academically approved like any other program or course offered at a university. Secondly would be that these micro-credentials are 'stackable', providing a genuine and accessible pathway to getting a full degree or diploma for students.

"CAFA is worried that micro-credentials are being pushed as a panacea to all post-secondary problems, but that this rush for development will cause many to be just as quickly forgotten or dismissed in the near future" says Dr. Jon Doan, CAFA's president and Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education at the University of Lethbridge. "We don't want our students enrolling in and paying for micro-credentials that will be worthless in a few years, when this fad is over."

One method of maintaining the staying power of micro-credentials is to have these programs approved by the institutions' General Faculty Councils (GFCs). This is the standard method through which all degrees and course offerings are approved at universities—it makes sure that academics currently researching and teaching in the field can ensure the appropriate academic rigour to maintain a high-level of quality throughout the program.

Another method of creating a strong micro-credential would be to have the current faculty teach these programs, either tenure-track professors and instructors or the large rosters of sessional instructors that the universities maintain. CAFA is concerned that universities will use third-party contractors to deliver job-specific workplace training under the prestigious banner of the university and pass on these third-party costs to our students.

Lastly, CAFA would like to see assurances that micro-credentials are stackable, providing another pathway into further higher education opportunities for students to choose. Many micro-credentials are stand-alone programs that do not allow students to earn credits towards a full degree or diploma. If these micro-credential programs sizzle out, our students will be left with meaningless badges and their efforts in our classrooms and labs will be in vain. Having truly

stackable micro-credential could allow our students the flexibility to pursue life-long higher education and ensure the transferability that our students need for success.

CAFA is encouraged by some specific developments at universities around micro-credentials—with some programs being academically approved, taught by scholars, and are transferable to standard programming. While many universities have some stackable courses, virtually all universities are offering these high-quality micro-credentials alongside basic work-place training that can be completed in a session of one or two days. This variation in academic rigor, classroom contact time, and instruction quality threatens to undermine the usefulness and longevity of micro-credentials. Micro-credentials need to communicate that the students are fully qualified and have received equitable training across different fields and subject matters. If not, our students are being sold introductory work-place training at the price point of a university offering. CAFA believes this is equivalent to selling the university's reputation and not delivering high quality education reflective of the university granting the micro-credential.

CAFA believes the model of academic approved, faculty taught, and stackable micro-credentials is the appropriate model for our students since they assure a high quality of education to both the students and the future employers, while providing pathways for the students to re-enter the regular academic streams if they wish.

“If the government is going to promote micro-credentials, CAFA must insist on quality programming that generates lifelong learning and real, positive opportunities,” says Dr. Doan. “As academic staff we care too much about our students to have our universities squander valuable resources creating dead-end programs.”

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