



PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST OF ITS KIND REPORT SHOWS BROAD TRENDS OF MICROCREDENTIALS IN GRADUATE EDUCATION *Report includes case studies from universities and an action agenda for stakeholders*

Washington, DC – A new exploratory report from the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) aims to address a range of pressing questions about the impact of non-degree graduate credentials in the graduate education landscape.

With funding support from ETS, [*Microcredentials and Master's Degrees: Understanding the National Landscape to Support Learners and the Workforce*](#), sheds light on post-baccalaureate and non-degree credentials, known as microcredentials, and their evolving role in higher education over the past 20 years. Until now, little was known about how these credentials impact graduate education, particularly the master's degree.

The two-year research project pulls together quantitative and qualitative data to examine this diverse and fast-changing field: three surveys that targeted graduate deans, graduate program directors and employers; six focus groups with key stakeholders; and more than 20 interviews with graduate school administrators, employers, and researchers. Below are a few of the key takeaways from the report:

- Most microcredentials are not seen as an alternative to master's degrees but as an “add-on” or complement to a master's curriculum or experience. Many students enrolled in graduate certificates were current master's students or enrolled in other graduate degree programs.
- Many certificate programs have small enrollments. Out of the 196 responses to the program directors survey, the median program enrollment was only twelve students, and many programs were significantly smaller. In some cases, this is by design: some programs are limited to employees of a company that need upskilling in a changing field.
- Despite a flurry of interest in employer partnerships, 77 percent of respondents to the dean's survey said departments and programs were the main drivers for developing programs.
- The quality of microcredentials remains uneven due to inconsistent or unclear standards. At the same time, employers have more confidence in universities as credential providers than private providers or even other employers.
- The practice of “stacking” or combining microcredentials into master's degrees or certificates is still in the development phase at many institutions. Currently only 50 percent of the certificates described by our institutional survey takers were characterized as “stackable.”

Suzanne T. Ortega, President of CGS, said this report illuminates a topic that has been gaining steam since the early 2000's and that was accelerated during the pandemic.

“Many of our members have come to us for clarification around the use and implementation of microcredentials, and we wanted to provide them with data-backed report that shows what the non-degree program landscape is really like,” Ortega said. “Ultimately, we are seeing that microcredentials support innovation in graduate education, offering multiple pathways to learning and teaching for students, administrators and faculty.”

“Reports like this are a helpful benchmark to understand the usage and growth of microcredentials, particularly as graduate education evolves over time, which is why it's important for us to support CGS on this initiative,” said Rohit Sharma, SVP of Global Higher Education and Workskills, ETS.

About CGS

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. The organization's mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.

About ETS

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