

Badge Proposal – Executive Summary

The members of the Digital Badges Working Group are hereby submitting a proposal to create and define the University of Kentucky badge, which can be either a credit-bearing credential, or a non-credit-bearing credential. This proposal was developed with input from faculty, the Provost's Office, QEP leadership, the Senate Council office, and a member of the SREC Committee.

Badges represent coordinated educational activities that lead to either a credit-bearing or noncredit-bearing educational credential, which enable faculty to pull back the veil on their curriculum and elucidate the skills students are learning, from soft skills underlying coursework to specializations that can be highlighted within a larger credential. Badges provide students with an opportunity to integrate educational and professional training and earn a credential that demonstrates knowledge and skill sets that are in demand by employers.

The issue of a badge credential has been reviewed by the Senate Council and University Senate multiple times. First announced to SC in February 2021, the Digital Badges Working Group has been soliciting feedback and responding to input. The Senate first approved an extension of the badge pilot in April 2021, to extend the pilot through the end of the 2021 calendar year. Most recently, Senate Council (on behalf of Senate) extended the pilot through the end of the Spring 2023 semester. A number of badges have been proposed by program faculty and are currently offered to students during the pilot. At this time, the Digital Badges Working Group is ready to request final approval for a badge credential.

The Digital Badges Working Group is appreciative of the work and support offered by the many units involved in this initiative. The establishment of a badge credential will support UK's students, as well as carry forward expectations established in UK's current strategic plan. By providing students with a credential that demonstrates accomplishments prior to completion of an entire certificate or degree, a badge will support Principle 1 ("Putting Students First") in the strategic plan. The badge program will also reflect commitment to Principle 3 ("Inspiring Ingenuity") by providing faculty with a mechanism to advance a culture of innovation in teaching and creative work.

A badge program (either credit bearing or non-credit bearing) consists of two or more courses, but no more than four courses, which collectively provide one or more defined skill sets or competencies that can be useful to students/learner and employers. This proposal outlines the requirements of a badge as well as the process for approving, changing, terminating, and awarding badges. Badges require the approval of the unit faculty ("program faculty") and that unit's respective college-level faculty body, as well as review and approval by the Senate as per the guidance laid out in SR 3.1.3.3.2.3.

A number of aspects of the badge program have been revised to reflect feedback received from the Senate Council and Senate. For example, it is critical to have local and college faculty oversight and approval, as well as final approval from the Senate, but review by an academic council or the Senate Academic Programs Committee (SAPC) is not necessary. There were also concerns expressed about linking UK's badge credential with a third-party company that creates a digital version of a badge. As a result, this final version of the proposal does not compel the University to engage with any particular company. Finally, concerns were raised about governance and possible disciplinary overlap, which will be alleviated by a final review by the Senate via a 10-day posting.

Why Badges?

Faculty can creatively showcase the educational benefits of their courses and academic disciplines to a wide variety of students and other stakeholders.

Badges, as coordinated educational activities leading to either a credit-bearing or noncredit-bearing educational credential, enable faculty to pull back the veil on their curriculum and elucidate the skills students are learning, from soft skills underlying coursework to specializations that can be highlighted within a larger credential. Badges function to recognize, assess, and motivate learning. Because badges build on existing courses or may inspire new courses, faculty can design badges to respond quickly to emerging fields and expectations from professional organizations and employers. For the purposes of this Senate policy, “course” refers to *a unit of educational content with paced delivery to enrolled learners, that includes required interactions with the supervising credentialed instructor during a fixed period of time, which culminates in the instructor’s assessment of the learner’s attainment of specific learning outcomes*. Overall, badges offer a way for faculty to think creatively and proactively about how their courses and disciplines prepare students to engage in a wide range of challenges and opportunities throughout their careers.

Employers seek soft skills. According to the Wall Street Journal, in a study of 900 executives, 92 percent reported that “soft skills” are as important, or more important than technical skills, while 89 percent struggle to find employees with appropriate soft skills. Similarly, the Quality Assurance Commons for Higher and Postsecondary Education, funded by the Lumina Foundation in 2016, has conducted extensive research to determine the Essential Employability Qualities (EEQ) that all learners will need to prepare for the changing dynamics of the workforce. Graduates need to demonstrate that they are: communicators, thinkers and problem solvers, inquirers, collaborators, adaptable, principled and ethical, responsible and professional, and lifelong learners.

Badges provide a flexible educational credential that can be layered into UK’s existing educational ecosystem.

For students, badges provide an opportunity to integrate academic and professional training, to earn a credential they can show “along the way,” and to display and narrate their own educational journey. Amplified and made transparent by social media, badges allow students to convey aspects of their learning in persuasive ways to educators and employers. Badges and other “microcredentials” occupy a wide middle ground between two extremes: one that insists that college is exclusively an intellectual experience and one that assumes that college should be focused on job training.

Proposed Senate Rule language follows. Per Senate Rules 3.1.3.2, proposals involving badges are submitted using Senate Council-approved forms.

3.1.1.3.1.3 Badges

A badge program (either credit bearing or non-credit bearing) consists of two or more courses, but no more than four courses which collectively provide one or more defined skill sets or competencies that can be useful to students/learner and employers. The credit-bearing badge credentials will appear through the Registrar on a student’s University transcript; non-credit-bearing badges will not appear on the transcript. The non-credit bearing badge credentials and their non-credit bearing courses, delegated by the Senate Rules to the local jurisdiction of a college faculty body (or its Senate-approved equivalent), will be officially attested by the signature of dean of the college (or dean equivalent) (See SR 3.2.3.3.2-.3.2.3.3.3).

A credit-bearing badge must be a minimum of five credit hours and must not exceed eight credit hours. A student must earn a C or better, or a Pass in a pass/fail course, in each of the required courses to earn a badge. Courses required for a badge can be in any hundred series (see SR 3.2.1.1).

At a minimum, a proposal for a badge will include the following information: badge name; description; audience served; learning objectives; and assessment plan. Badges require the approval of the unit faculty (“program faculty”) and that unit’s respective college-level faculty body. The college faculty body renders final approval of the non-credit bearing badges. For credit bearing badges, upon approval at the college level, the approval process will follow the guidance laid out in SR 3.1.3.3.2.3 (“Other Changes”).

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#### **Section 4.**     *Standard numbering system*

*The number system reflects the level of course material and associated rigor. With the exception of upper graduate level and professional courses, any prerequisite restrictions limiting the level of a student accepted into a course shall be specified in a course’s prerequisites. [US: 11/14/2016] Courses shall be numbered as follows:*

- 001-099           No credit, non-degree and/or developmental courses; [US: 9/10/2001]*
- 100-199           Freshmen-level course; undergraduate credit only; [US: 11/14/2016]*
- 200-299           Sophomore-level course; undergraduate credit only; [US: 11/14/2016]*
- 300-399           Junior-level course; undergraduate credit only; [US: 11/14/2016]*

- 400-499      *Advanced junior- and senior-level course; undergraduate credit only;*
  
- 400G-499G    *Senior and first-year graduate-level course; graduate credit for non-majors only; [US: 11/14/2016]*
  
- 500-599      *First-year graduate-level course; undergraduate and graduate credit; [US: 11/14/2016]*
  
- 600-799      *Upper graduate-level course; open only to graduate students; [US: 11/14/2016]*
  
- 800-999      *Professional programs course; open only to students enrolled in professional degree programs (see SR **Error! Reference source not found.**). [US: 2/13/2012; 11/14/2016; 3/19/2018]*

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(Reprinted below is from the August 2022 Senate Rule wording for SR Section 3. There is a separate action underway by the Senate Council for certain changes to SR 3, in relation to impending changes in SR 1. Hence, the framework wording offered below into which the new badges process will be incorporated may be adjusted to reflect the other changes to this rule being considered concurrently.)

Section 8. **Other Changes**

A proposal that has not been identified as a significant change by one of the lower levels of review or Senate Council Office (SR [3.1.3.1.3](#)) shall proceed directly to 10-day post (SR [3.1.3.3.2.4](#)). The Senate Council shall review a proposal received from SAPC pursuant to SR [3.1.3.3.2.3](#) and take appropriate action. The Senate Council may direct that the proposal shall proceed directly to the Senate 10-day posting approval process (SR [3.1.3.3.2.4](#)). If the Senate Council approves the proposal for consideration by the Senate at a Senate meeting, the Senate Council shall place the proposal on the University Senate agenda for its action. The Senate shall either (1) approve the proposal, or (2) shall make the final University decision to disapprove and stop action on that proposal. The Senate Council office shall circulate reports of these decisions to the Provost, Registrar and other appropriate entities. [US: 4/23/2018]

Section 9. **Posting**

The Senate Council Office shall post proposals to change an existing certificate or degree on the corresponding Senate web site for ten business days. [US: 5/7/2012]

Section 10. **Objections**

Any University Faculty member can raise an objection to a posted proposal through a member of the University Senate. If a Senator raises an objection to the Senate Council and the objection is not resolved, then the Senator may have the issue placed on the agenda of the next regular Senate Council meeting by having five Senators submit an objection to the Senate Council Office. If the Senate Council deems the objection has merit, then it will place the item on the Senate agenda. The Senate shall be informed about the nature of the objection by information included with the proposal packet. Formal action by the University Senate on the proposal is final Senate action. The Senate Council shall circulate reports of these decisions to the Provost, Registrar and other appropriate entities. [US: 5/7/2012]

Section 11. Final approval

If no objection is raised to the Senate Council Office within ten business days of the posting, then the proposal is approved. The Senate Council Office will report approvals to the Provost, Registrar and other appropriate entities. [US: 5/7/2012]

Proposed Processes: Approving, Changing or Termination of Badges and Awarding Badges

1. A proposal concerning a badge (new, change, or suspend and close) is initiated by the educational unit faculty (i.e., departments) and will include
 - a. Badge name and description (no more than 500 words)
 - b. Audience or population served
 - c. Learning objectives
 - d. Course requirements
 - i. For credit-bearing badges, at least two courses offered for a combined 5-8 credit hours.
 - ii. For non-credit bearing badges, a detailed description of the course components and requirements
 - e. Evaluation Criteria for Attainment of Learning Outcomes
 - i. For credit-bearing badges, minimum course grade requirements (student must earn a C or better or a Pass in a pass/fail course, in each of the required courses)
 - ii. For non-credit bearing badges, a detailed evaluation plan must be provided.
Program assessment plan for the badge
2. Badge proposal review
 - A. Non-credit bearing badges

- a. Homed in a College
 - i. The college faculty body reviews the proposal and renders the final approval or final disapproval of new non-credit bearing badges, changes to the badges, termination of the badges, and all necessary related educational policies concerning exercise of the badge. SR 3.2.3.3.2
 - b. Homed outside of a College
 - i. For non-credit bearing badges and their non-credit bearing courses, the “Dean” of the badge and courses homed outside of a college is the officer appointed by the Provost, with concurrence of the Senate, to act in the prescribed manner. For these badges and courses, the faculty body responsible for the program/course content, learning objectives, etc. and for taking the educational policy actions in the role of a department faculty, is the faculty of record committee approved by the Senate to act as such for the respective program/course. (SR 3.2.3 and SR 3.2.3.1)
 - ii. For new non-credit bearing badge programs that are will not be homed a college, the proposal must list the recommended initial faculty to serve as the faculty of record for the badge program. The Senate approved form must be included in the proposal.
 - iii. The proposal is submitted to the Senate Council which will forward the proposal to the appropriate academic council. SR 3.2.3.3.2.4
 - c. Actions to create or terminate non-credit bearing badges are reported to the Senate Council by the college or equivalent Senate-approved faculty of record committee.
- B. Credit-bearing badges
- a. The college faculty body (or responsible faculty Senate-approved faculty body if initiated outside of a college) reviews the badge proposal and either recommends approval or makes the final decision to stop the proposal.
 - b. Approved proposals then progress to the Senate Council Office.
 - c. Senate Council office will review the proposal and then place badge proposals that are in compliance with the Senate Rules on a 10-day post.

The Senate directs the Senate Rules and Elections Committee shall make the appropriate modifications to other pertinent places in the Senate Rules to reflect that Senate Rules controlling credit-bearing and non-credit badges/courses/programs are subject to the same rules as are other transcribed credentials (e.g., rules for student academic discipline).