

Alamo College Online

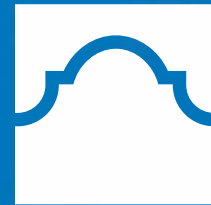
# Letting Innovation Breathe while Standardizing Micro-credentials for Scale

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Success  
**Dr. George Railey**

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Online Learning Coordinator

Alamo College District – Skills Lab



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Malcolm Baldrige  
National Quality Award

2018 Award Recipient



# Mission | Alamo Colleges Online

Empowering our diverse communities for success by **building and strengthening each College's capacity to deliver premier, quality digital learning experiences** for students.

Northeast Lakeview College

Northwest Vista College

Palo Alto College

San Antonio College

St. Philip's College



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# Who We Are



**100,000+**

Students across  
8 counties



**8**

Neighborhood &  
Regional Centers



**350+**

Degree & Certificate  
Programs



**#1**

Largest Provider of  
Workforce Training  
in the area

## DIVERSITY



**HSI**  
HISPANIC  
SERVING  
INSTITUTION



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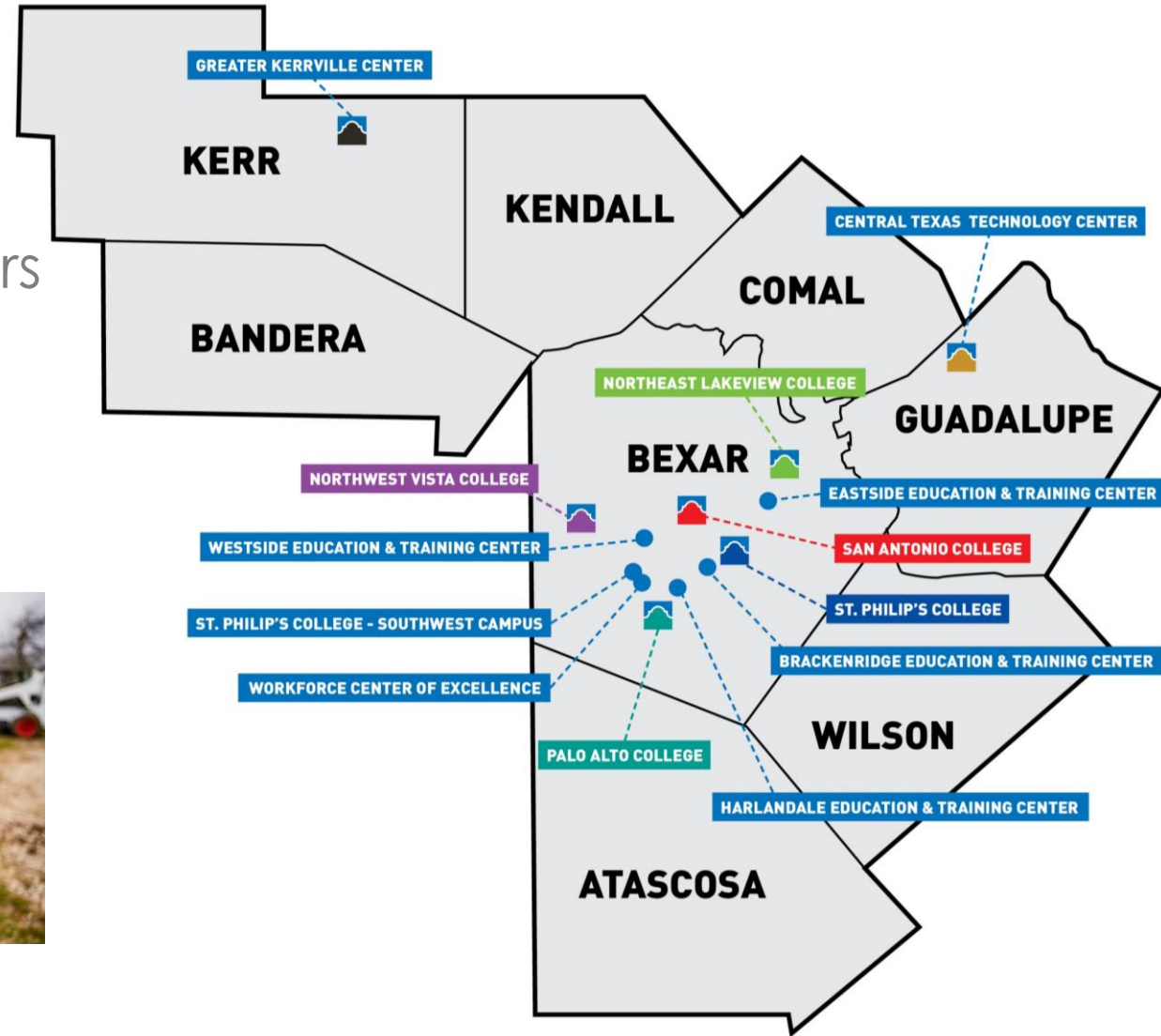
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# Alamo Colleges District

- 5 Colleges
- 8 Regional & Neighborhood Centers
- 16 Early College High Schools



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# Micro-credential Strategy Framework



**Employability  
Skills**



**Micro-  
pathways**



**Micro-  
credentials**



**Regional  
Workforce  
Engagement**

**Technology Stack**

# Goals and Guiding Principles

## Goals

- To empower learners for success by **awarding verified micro-credentials that articulate in-demand skills** to employers.
- Micro-credentials **increase social mobility** and position learners for **greater competitiveness** in the job market.

## Guiding Principles

- Represent **in-demand skills**
- Include **skill assessments**
- Require **credentialed** faculty members and trainers



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# Story of Navigating the Diffusion of Innovation

Skills Lab



Innovation



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# Embracing the Opportunities and Challenges

- Serving five independently accredited Colleges
- Building buy-in from leadership and faculty
- Respecting all of our College cultures
- Creating and maintaining value
- Honoring creativity and autonomy
- Addressing apathy and fear of change
- Managing the urge to change everything (Badge the world!)
- Increasing understanding of micro-credentials
- Pushing the limitations of technology
- Finding funding
- Staying focused on the strategy
- Preparing for significant change in state requirements / outcomes



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# 2021 Planning & Testing



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# Strategic Design and Testing

- Micro-credentials and Digital Badging
- Micro-pathways:  
Pathways to High Demand Jobs
- Digital Marketing:  
Finding our target population
- Learner-Centered Design and Personas
- Community of Practice:  
Embracing Faculty Thought Leadership
- Credit for Prior Learning:  
Aggregating all types of learning



## MICRO-CREDENTIAL INSIGHTS

### MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND DIGITAL BADGES

#### CONCEPT

**Micro-credentials:** Short, focused credentials that provide in-demand skills and experience ([SUNY](#)).

**Digital badges:** Validated indicator of skills gained through micro-credentials ([Educause](#)).

#### INSIGHT

Micro-credentials orient learning around skills. Digital badges make skills visible.

## THE ALAMO COLLEGES STORY

### OPPORTUNITY DEMAND FOR SKILLS | UNDER-EMPLOYED LEARNERS

Alamo Colleges is the largest college district in south Texas, serving 90,000 learners annually. We are comprised of five separately accredited community colleges, all Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and one Historically Black College or University (HBCU). In 2021, Alamo Colleges sought to better reach unemployed and under-employed learners in Bexar County through a skills-oriented approach.

"Skills are an equity issue for unemployed and working learners," notes Dr. Luke Dowden, Chief Online Learning Officer and Associate Vice Chancellor at Alamo Colleges, "if you, as a learner, can't talk about your skills and don't have proof of your skills, you might be left out of the emerging skills-based hiring economy."

We decided to start with online, on-demand non-degree credentials. [Strada/Gallup 2020 survey](#) findings show that 62% of Americans preferred non-degree credentials. We began developing micro-credentials, which are accelerated and skills-based.

### PIVOT MICRO-CREDENTIAL PILOT

In 2021, Alamo Colleges launched [Upskill](#), a micro-credential pilot initiative and platform, tailored to adult learners. We started by offering non-credit and credit-based micro-credentials in high-demand fields. We aligned them to [Alamo Institutes'](#) courses and programs, which are organized to help learners match career goals to an Institute. We quickly iterated to learn how to best reach, support, and serve our target population.

Upskill offers micro-credentials in the following areas:

*Alamo Colleges District's Micro-credentials Insights\_*<https://www.alamo.edu/microcredentials-briefs/>



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# Community of Practice

## Purpose

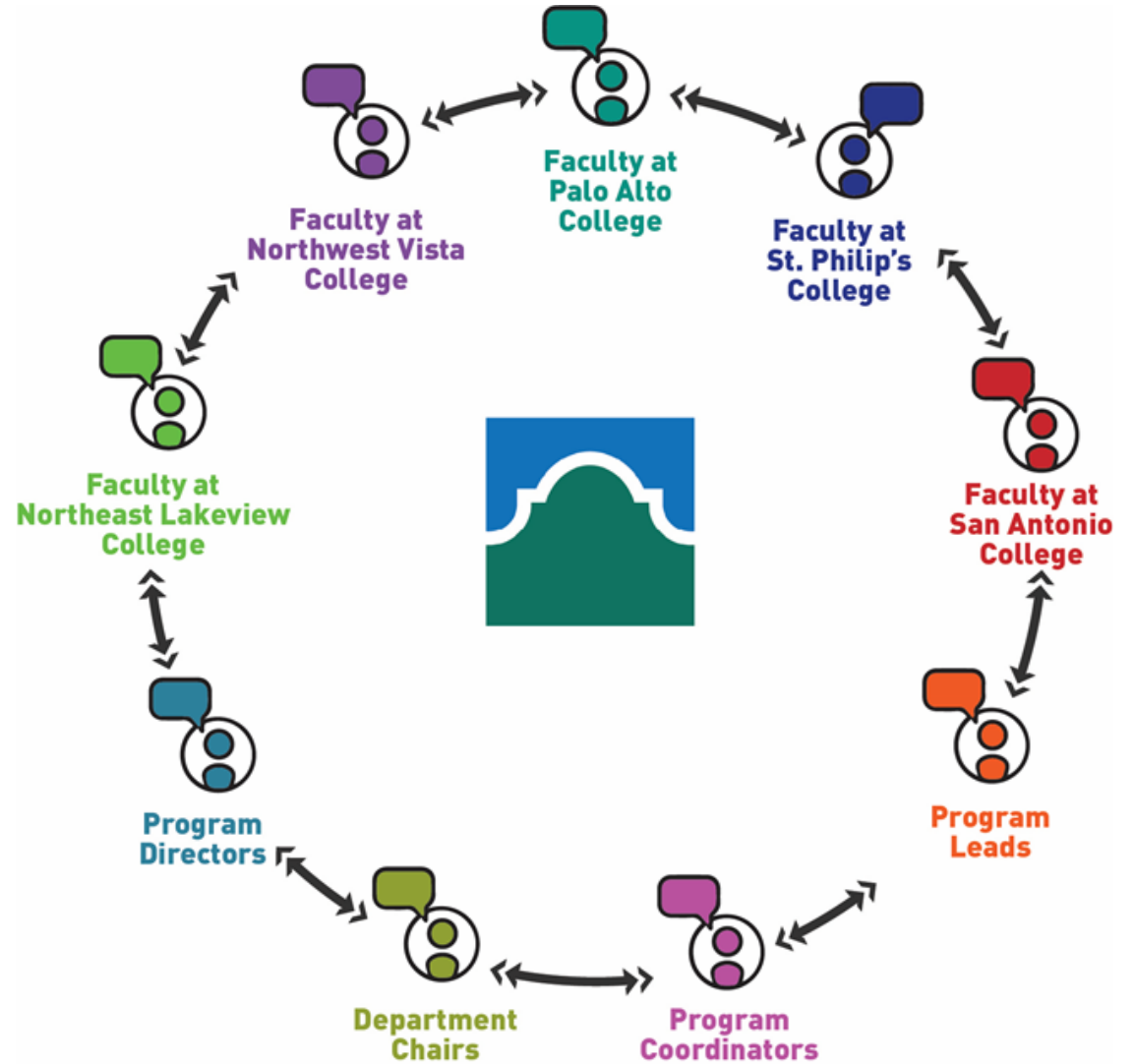
To **BE** a thought leadership and a practitioner support group for those professionals who are **awarding verified digital badges** that **articulate in-demand marketable skills** to employers.

## How

Sharing ideas, mining best practices, informing decisions

## Who

Faculty or staff who are Badge Coaches or Badge Specialists



# 2022 Building



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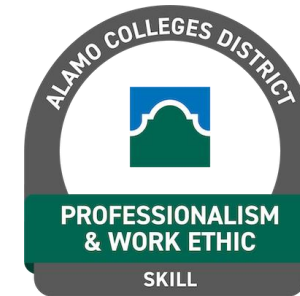
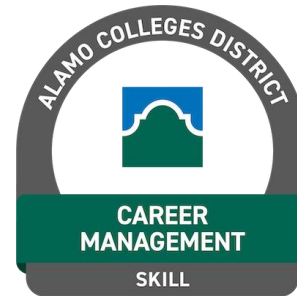
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# The Employability Skills Bundle

A Skills Pathway facilitated by a **certified Badge Coach**, wherein worker-learners earn one or more of the following badges based on your company's needs:

- **Professionalism and Work Ethic**
- **Career Management**
- **Written Communication**
- **Oral Communication**
- **Collaboration**
- **Resilience**



# Industry Aligned: Micro-credentials & Micro-pathways

## 2022 - A Focus on Healthcare

Late Fall 2022, the Alamo Colleges received 2 state grants to **create micro-credentials and micro-pathways** leading to in-demand healthcare careers.

- **15 New Micro-courses** leading to employer-validated digital badges
  - \*Included technical and marketable skills
- **4 New CE Micro-credential Programs** leading to certifications
- **6 New Micro-pathways** to make career progressions accessible and visible



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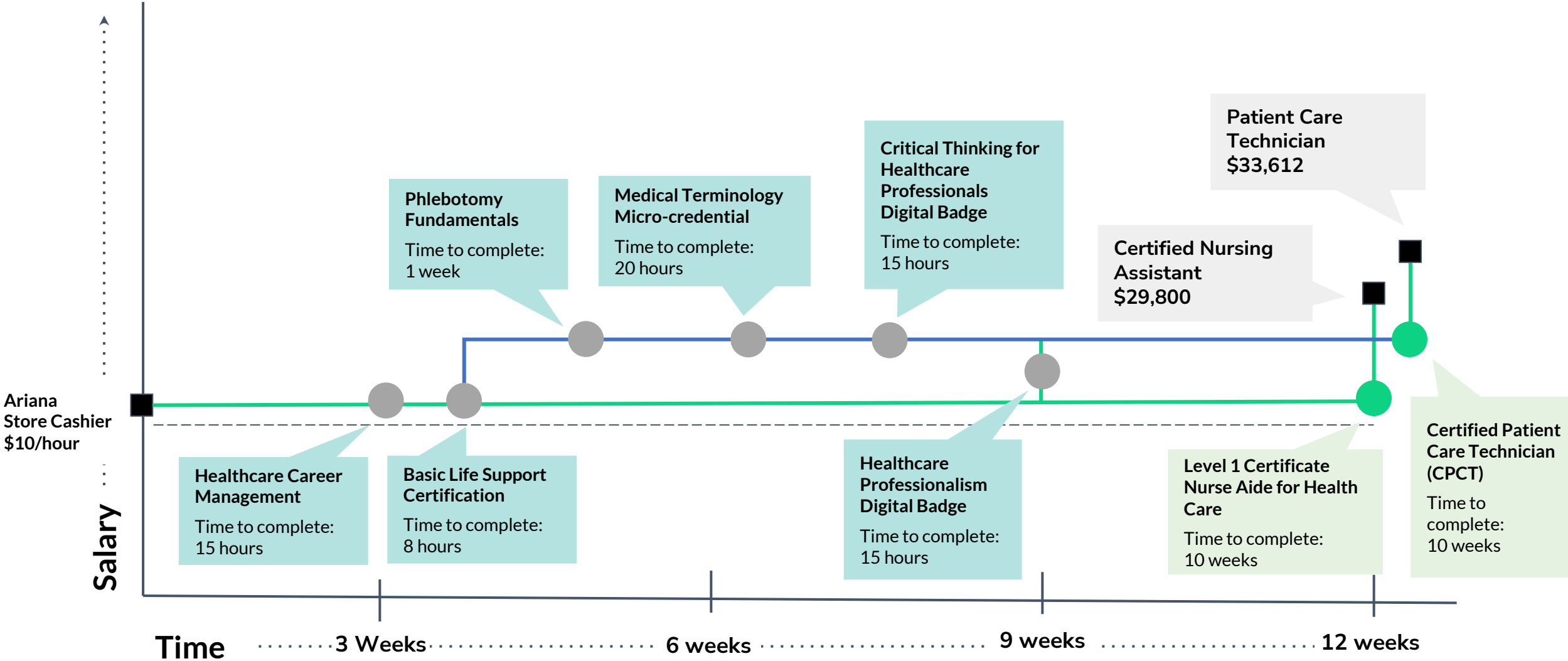
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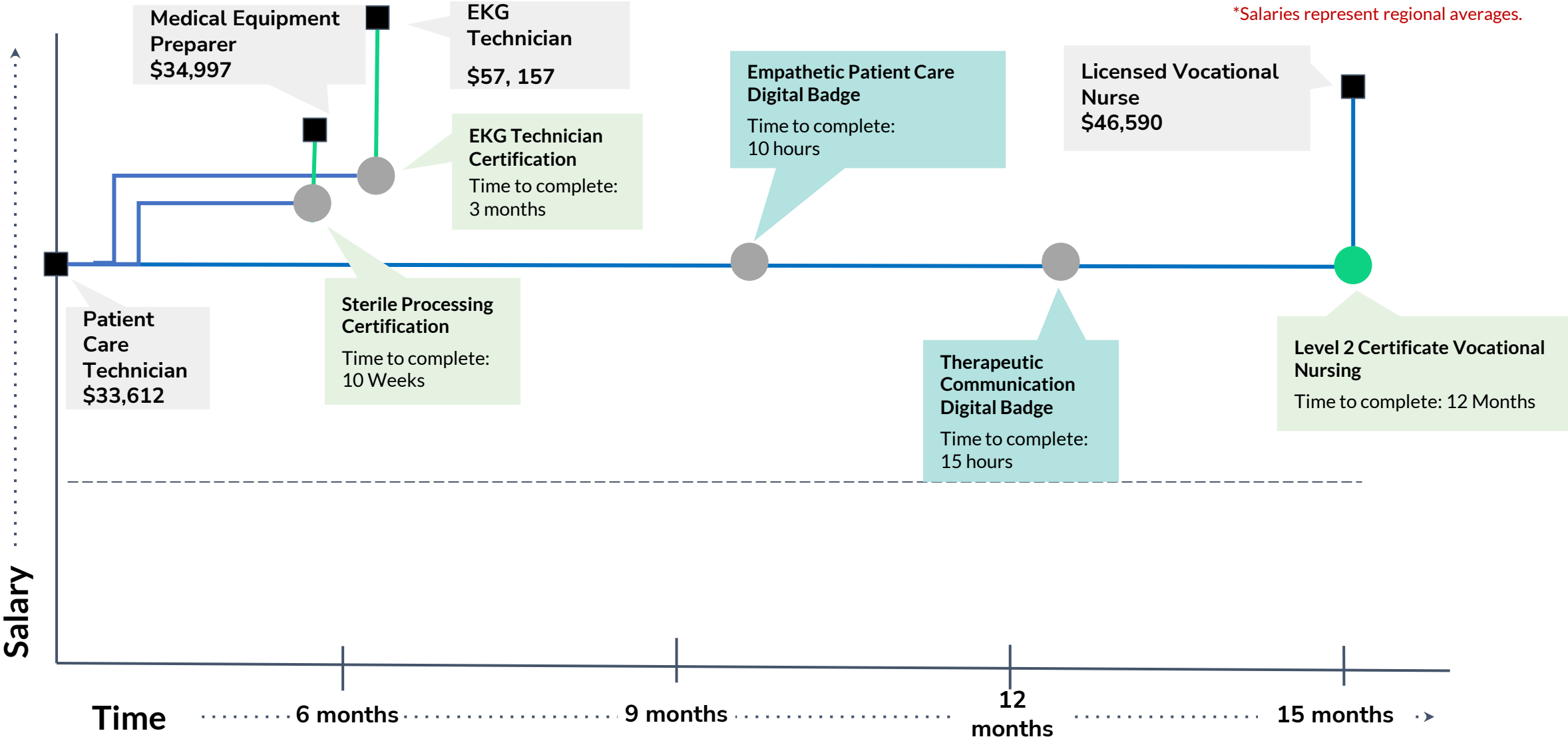


# Micro-pathways: Nursing Example [0 - 3 months]

\*Salaries represent regional averages.



# Micro-pathways: Nursing Example [3 - 15 months]





# Industry Aligned: Marketable Skills

ST. PHILIP'S COLLEGE



**HEALTHCARE  
CAREER MANAGEMENT**

SKILL

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**HEALTHCARE  
PROFESSIONALISM**

SKILL

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**EMPATHETIC  
PATIENT CARE**

SKILL

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**HEALTHCARE  
CRITICAL THINKING**

SKILL

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**THERAPEUTIC  
COMMUNICATION**

SKILL

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**HEALTHCARE CULTURAL  
COMPETENCE**

SKILL

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**HEALTHCARE  
INDUSTRY ETHICS**

SKILL

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**HEALTHCARE LAWS  
AND REGULATIONS**

SKILL

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**NURSING LEADERSHIP**

SKILL



# Innovation: Digital Badge Taxonomy

## DIGITAL BADGES OVERVIEW

### GOAL

The Alamo Colleges District (ACD) mission is to empower our diverse communities for success by taking “intentional action to support students’ career goals from pre-matriculation through post-graduation” (Aspen Institute, 2019). This taxonomy aims to create a consistent experience for the communities we serve across the Colleges and maximize the visibility of in-demand skills. By aligning digital badges, micro-credentials, and micro-pathways across the district to local careers, job opportunities, and employers, we work to end poverty in San Antonio.<sup>1</sup>

### DEFINITION

Digital badges are digital credentials that people earn by demonstrating a skill. They consist of an image and metadata, are aligned with the Open Badge standard, belong to the earner, and are shareable on social media platforms, resumes, and e-portfolios.

### VALUE PROPOSITION

Digital badges articulate in-demand skills to employers and increase social mobility by positioning students for greater competitiveness in the job market.

The benefits of digital badges include:

- Increasing student engagement by motivating, rewarding, and validating learning
- Increasing students’ awareness of skills gained by connecting content to the workforce
- Making courses more attractive by articulating skills to employers
- Aligning with Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) Marketable Skills Goals
- Creating a digital method for reporting students’ acquisition of skills
- Providing data for identifying and addressing workforce skills gaps

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Hiring practices are changing rapidly. There is a shift to skills-based hiring and using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to scan application materials for keywords. To best prepare our learners for the new hiring landscape, the following three principles inform the creation of all badges in the ACD:

1. Represent in-demand skills.
2. Require skills assessments.
3. Are assessed by credentialed faculty or staff.

### CREDENTIALLED ASSESSORS

Faculty members and trainers will receive specialized training to award digital badges. Assessor Tiers are defined in this section by the training required, the responsible entity for the training, and correspond to the type of evaluation for a particular skill or competency.

- **Tier 1:** Digital badge training that credentials a faculty member or trainer to award badges that represent the THECB Marketable Skills. This tier is specific to each College and facilitated by the Colleges.
- **Tier 2:** Digital badge training that credentials a faculty member or trainer to facilitate a micro-course that awards a digital badge. This tier is not College-specific and is facilitated by Alamo Colleges Online (i.e., Badge Coach).
- **Tier 3:** Digital badge training that credentials an adjunct or full-time faculty member to integrate a digital badge into a credit-bearing course. This tier is not College-specific and is facilitated by Alamo Colleges Online (i.e., Badge Specialist).

DIGITAL BADGE TAXONOMY | Version 2 | 2/27/2023 2



## DIGITAL BADGE TAXONOMY



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# Innovation: Changing the Digital Badge Taxonomy

**Competency Badges**

- Written Communication
- Oral Communication
- Visual Communication

**COMMUNICATION MARKETABLE SKILL**

Test - SAC Communication Pathway  
by [Test Issuer 1](#)

Verified

Published: Dec 1, 2022



DIGITAL BADGE TAXONOMY



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# 2023

# Preparing for Scale

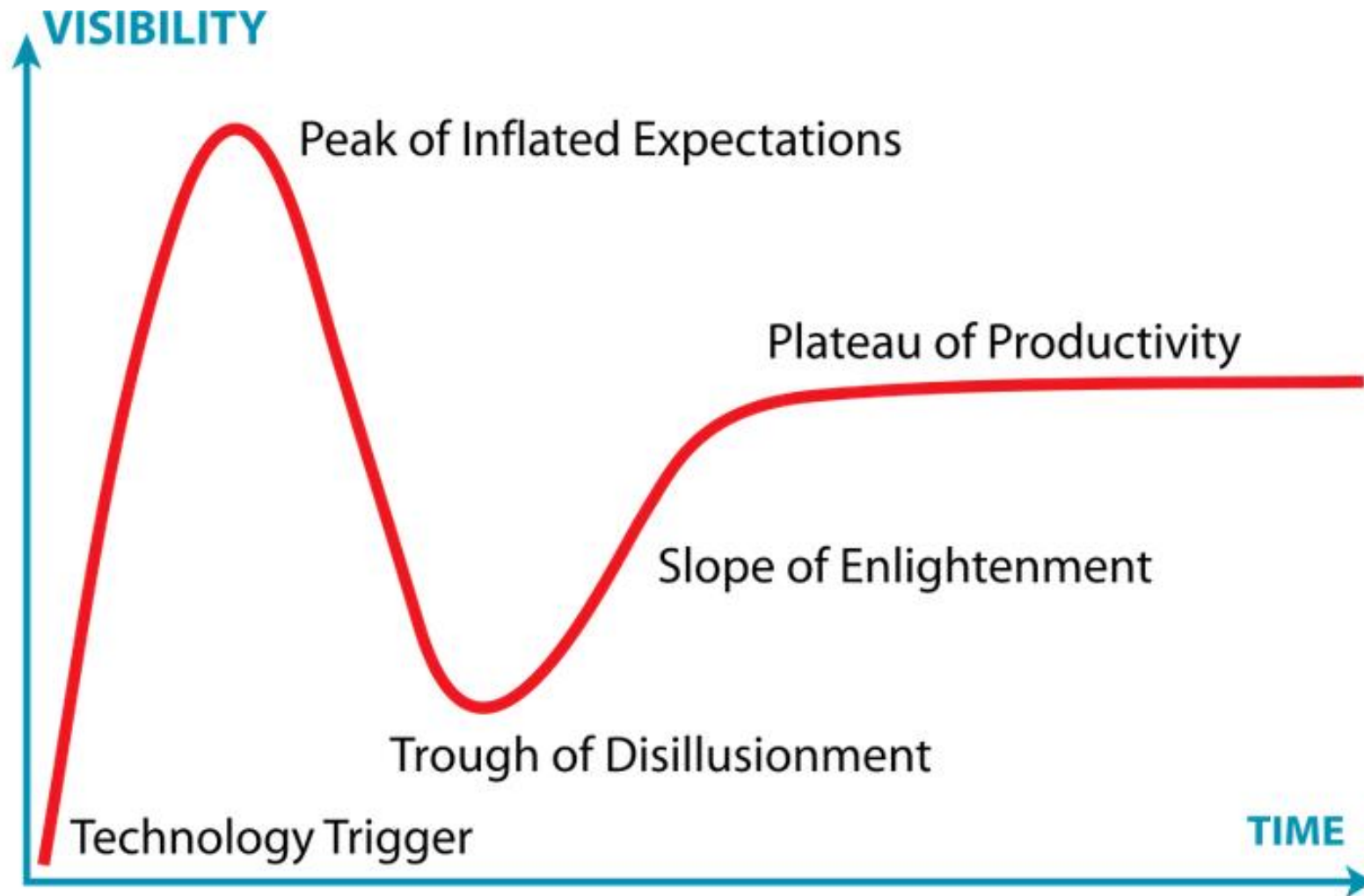


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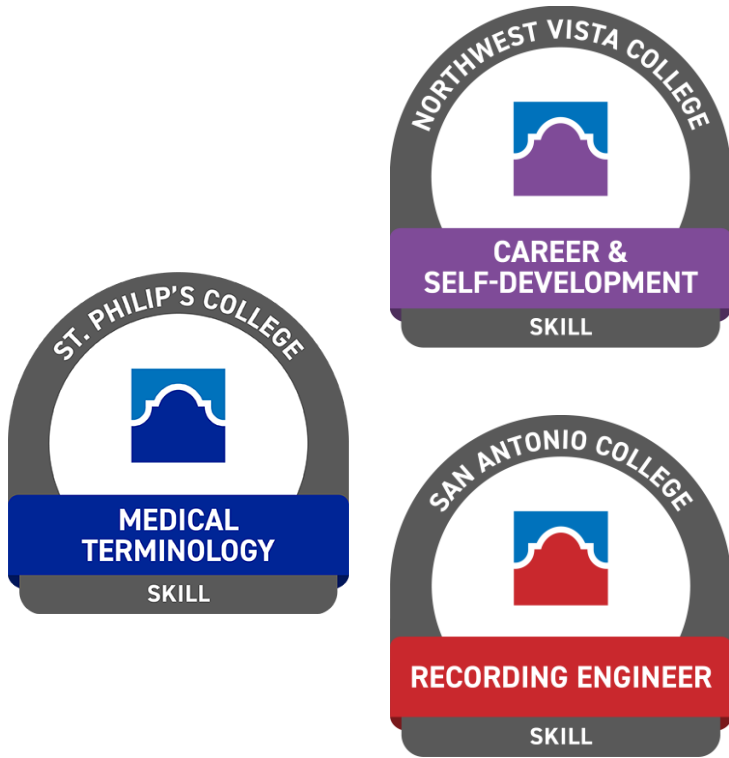
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# Experiencing Gartner Hype Cycle



# Innovation: New Micro-credential Proposal Form



## New Micro-credential Proposal

Please complete this form to propose the creation of a new micro-credential. There are specific requirements that a new micro-credential must meet, including:

- Approval of your College's leadership team (Department Lead, Dean, and Vice President)
- Alignment with the [Digital Badge Taxonomy](#)
- Clear benefits for the learner (evidence of demonstrated competencies, in-demand skills, etc.)

The Skills Lab is here to support you through this process.

Submitting this request does not guarantee that the micro-credential will be created. The Skills Lab will review the proposal, provide feedback to you, and collaborate with you and your College leadership. Please note that a formal approval process is currently in development.

**Please discuss your micro-credential proposal with your department chair and your dean before submitting the proposal.**

\* 1. Email

\* 2. Your First and Last Name

\* 3. Which College would issue the micro-credential to learners?



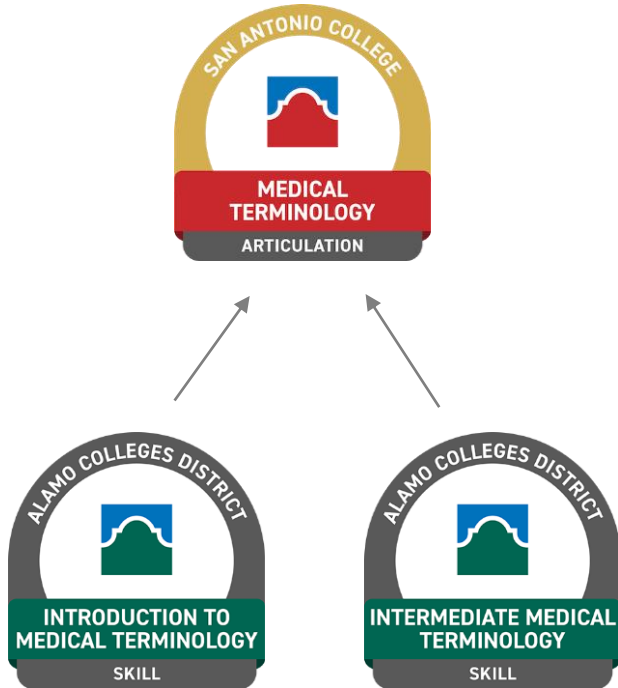
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# Innovation: Internal Alignment

## Credit for Prior Learning



## Technical Badge in Credit Courses

Badge Module SPC 2023

Read the information (below) about the requirements to earn a badge. Require submitting each assignment in this module.

Badge progress / Medical Terminology

Previous badge: [Oral Communication](#)

- What is the Oral Communication Badge
- Digital Badge For Oral Communication
- What are the Benefits of Attaining Digi...
- What is a Proving Ground?

Proving Ground 1: [Speak]  
Jun 24 | 100 pts | Score at least 80.0

Proving Ground 2: [Listen]  
Jul 8 | 100 pts | Score at least 80.0

Proving Ground 3: [Use A]  
Jul 8 | 100 pts | Score at least 80.0

Proving Ground 4: [Tell Stories to Express Ideas]  
Jul 15 | 100 pts | Score at least 80.0

Medical Terminology SKILL

Learner progress 6 of 8 earned (75%)

## Medical Terminology

Requirement  
Complete Midterm and Final

Offered by  
[St. Philip's College](#)

Edit requirements

Requirement description:

Complete the Canvas module [Midterm and Final](#).

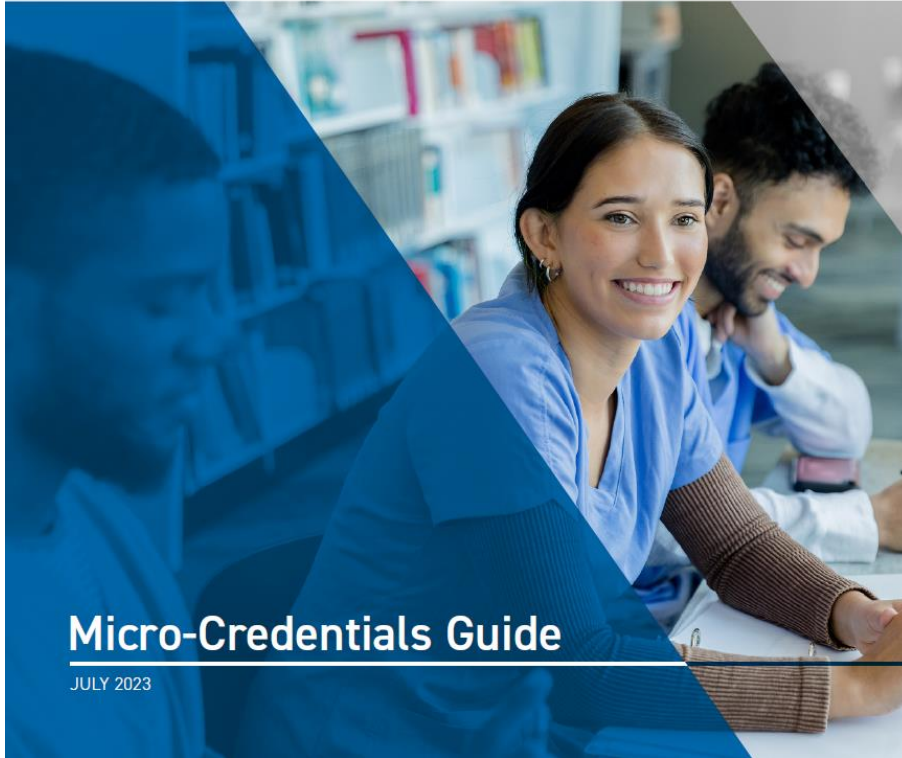


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# Innovation: Micro-credential Guide



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MICRO-CREDENTIALS GUIDE | July 2023

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

### PURPOSE

#### THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE IS TO:

1. Create clarity. Enable all faculty and staff to engage.
2. Accelerate innovation. Provide guidance and remove barriers for all colleges.
3. Increase credentials of value. Enable greater access to all learners to support economic mobility.
4. Sustain and scale. Help all colleges advance.
5. Achieve the vision. Meet the Chancellor's charges.

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# Innovation: Community College Growth Engine Fund



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Northeast Lakeview College



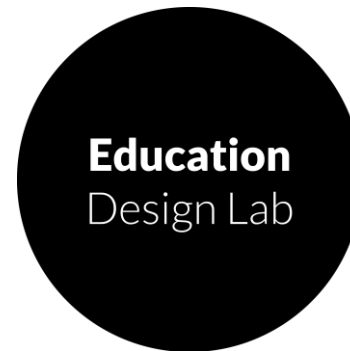
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Education  
Design Lab



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## Lead District



## Network Participants



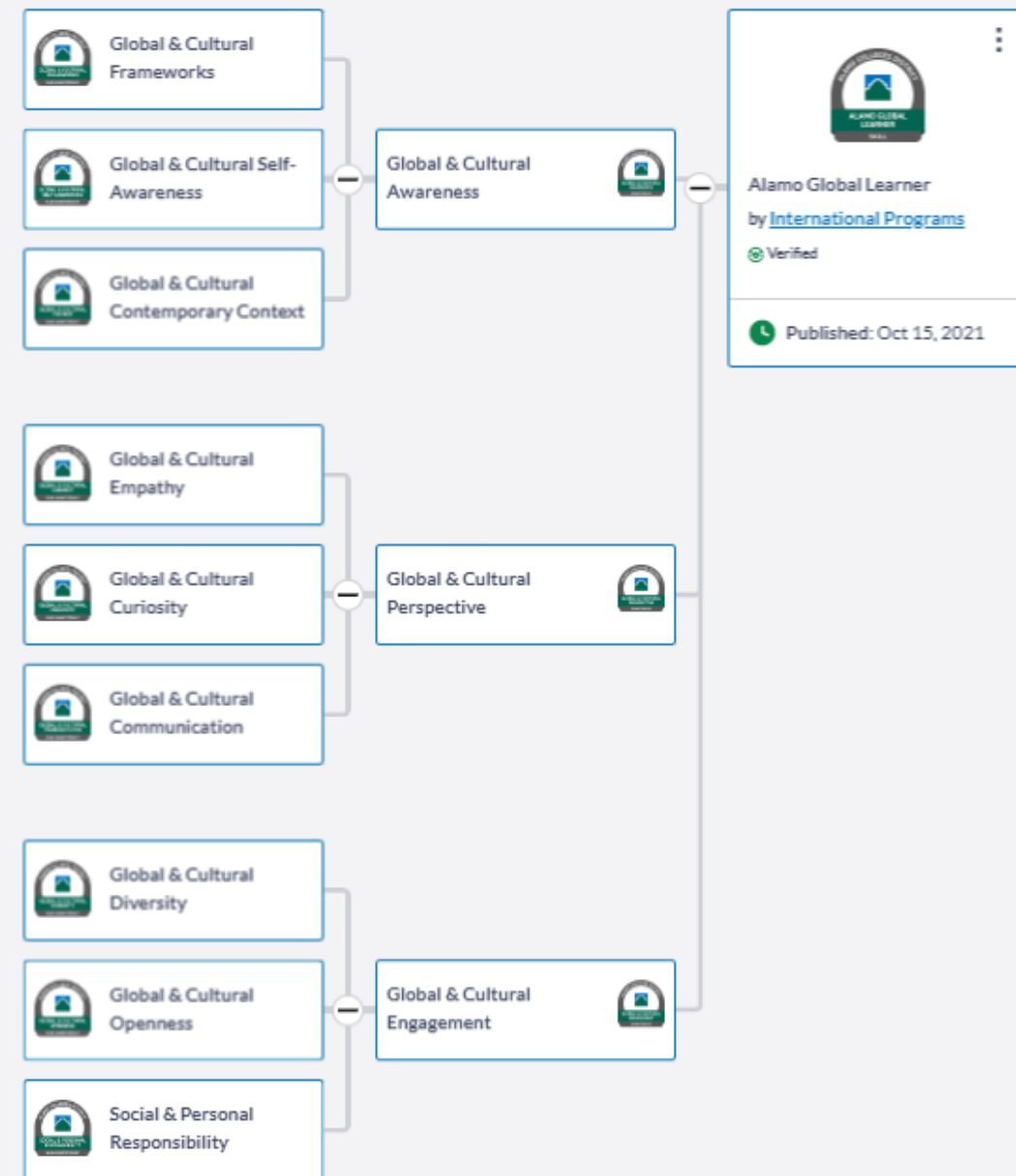
## Mentor Colleges



# Innovation: Pathways

## First Digital Badge Pathway

- Partnership with Office of International Programs
- 1 year to complete design process – from ideation to launch
- Students earn badges by completing skill assessments
- Began as a micro-course and expanded in credit courses across the Colleges in Fall 2023



# Innovation: Pathways

## First College-Wide Pathways

- Partnership with San Antonio College
- Goal to badge SAC's established marketable skill assessment framework
- Launched 8 college-wide marketable skill digital badge pathways
- Over 1 year to solve technical challenges
- Launched October 2023

**Manage pathway**

Required	Skill	In progress	Completed
Required	Synthesis	0	891
Required	Problem-Solving	0	1,096
Required	Creativity	0	1,315
Required	Evaluation	0	1,054
Required	Analysis	0	883

**Critical Thinking**  
by [San Antonio College - Marketable Skills](#)  
Verified  
1,934 In progress 306 Completed  
Published: Oct 5, 2023

**2240 MEMBERS**

Status	Count
Not Started	0
In Progress	1,934
Completed	306

A student will explore, identify, analyze, and evaluate issues, documents, and circumstances before reaching a conclusion.

**COMPLETION BADGE**  
The learner will be awarded the following badge when the requirements for this pathway are met.

**PREREQUISITE STEPS**



# Questions?



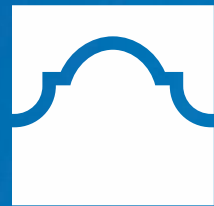
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# Connect with Us

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