

Empowering Seminar
Micro-Credentials – Integration, Recognition/Accreditation, Digital Certificates
(FernUni Hagen, Germany, Online)

Partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increasing demand in recent years for short, flexible, and tailored learning opportunities. The EU supports such offerings, which are more and more often being labeled as “micro-credentials.” In Germany, however, there is a wide range of terms for short programs of that kind. They all have in common that they are usually offered in digital/blended format and target (lifelong) learners who are interested in studying, have already completed a degree, and/or are employed.

With study and continuing education programs that offer flexible learning paths to combine individual courses into certificates or entire degrees, the FernUniversität in Hagen has its finger on the pulse of the times. By offering a variety of compact, thematically focused educational programs, the FernUni has become one of the pioneers in the constantly growing field of higher education micro-credentials offerings.

In addition, as part of the EADTU project Modularisation of Continuing Education and Professionalisation by Micro-Credentials (MCE), our university is working with 10 EU partners on the research task of exploring institutional strategies with regard to shorter learning programs and implementation options for micro-credentials. The MCE project is particularly concerned with the learner’s perspective and advising universities on course development as well as political actors on the further implementation of the process that started with the EU Council recommendation on micro-credentials.

An important driver of development in the field of micro-credentials is a growing micro-credentials platform market, in which universities are represented internationally and nationally and in which the FernUni is also proactively positioning itself through a research project and in cooperation with the AI Campus. The latter is a learning platform for Artificial Intelligence with free online courses, videos, and podcasts to strengthen AI and data skills. Funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the research and development project with 10 partners uses criteria-based micro-credentials and micro-degrees in its course program. As a supra-regional partner university in the AI Campus 2.0 joint project, the FernUni is working towards the implementation of AI Campus micro-degrees as new qualification formats.

The two research pillars in the field of micro-credentials at the FernUni, the MCE project and the AI Campus 2.0 project, are focusing on synergy effects and are jointly organizing an Empowering Seminar on the topic in February 2024. The aim of the seminar is to create a discussion forum on the urgent and difficult issues of integration and recognition/accreditation of micro-credentials as well as digital certificates. The event, supported by the EADTU, offers the opportunity to discuss a) the opportunities and challenges of implementing external study offerings in university teaching with FernUni colleagues and international experts. In addition, the seminar will address b) issues of recognition/accreditation of short learning programs as well as the question of receiving credits for learning outside the university. Last but not least, the topic of c) digital certificates will be discussed.

- a. The FernUni aims to integrate the AI Campus study offerings into specific media-didactic formats in its curriculum. What does a curricular and structured integration of AI Campus learning opportunities into university teaching at degree program and continuing education level at the FernUni look like? How can the knowledge acquired in this way be certified? How can innovative qualification programs in university teaching be developed in an application- and demand-oriented manner?

- b. Whenever prospective or current students wish to have their prior experience acknowledged, in Germany a distinction is made between the procedures of “recognition” and “accreditation.” Recognition refers to coursework that has been completed at a university. Accreditation, on the other hand, deals with what has been learned outside of a university. How does the FernUni structure these procedures in the case of the smallest assessed and certified learning unit – the micro-credential – right up to micro-credentials that build on each other in terms of content and are combined to form a micro-degree? How can the quality of the micro-credentials used at the university be assured?

- c. During our educational biography as lifelong learners, we collect certificates of academic achievement, which to date have been issued almost exclusively in paper form. However, there is a trend towards “digital credentials” or digital certificates of academic achievement. These have the advantage that they can be issued more quickly, exchanged easily, stored long-term, and checked for authenticity. Thus, they can be used at national and international level. Certification in digital form is particularly useful when it comes to shorter and quicker online qualification formats. To what extent is the FernUni prepared for the challenges of certificate digitization? What steps are necessary for the technological implementation of digital certificates? Which current standards, frameworks, and technologies are relevant for the use of micro-credentials?

The seminar will take place on Friday, February 16th, 2024 from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m.

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