

21st Century Skills Microcredentials

After years of research and on-the-ground work with academia, students, employers, assessment providers, and technologists, the Lab designed a rigorous set of eight micro-credentials that represent the most in-demand skills employers are seeking. Each of the 21st Century Skills Badges represents a core 21st century skill. To earn a Badge, a learner must demonstrate proficiency via a performance-based assessment in four core sub-competencies. Once a learner successfully completes the four assessments, they are awarded the Badge.



INITIATIVE

Initiative in the 21st century includes self-efficacy and the capacity to identify needs and respond proactively. Individuals who exercise initiative show four core sub-competencies: self-awareness, learning from both “failure” and “success” as opportunities to learn and develop. They lead without an official “leader” role or title, motivate others and catalyze necessary action.

Originally developed in partnership with Georgetown University.

Lead Without a Title

Individuals motivate and guide others; raise the morale of their group; and take responsibility for what needs to be done.

Demonstrate Self-Awareness

Individuals evaluate their own performance; recognize their motivations; and manage their anxiety.

Act as a Catalyst

Individuals galvanize action; identify and seize opportunities for change; and overcome inertia.

Learn from Experience

Individuals welcome and apply feedback; resist defensiveness; and see “failure” as an opportunity for greater understanding; and cultivate optimism by consciously challenging negative self-talk.



COLLABORATION

Collaboration in the 21st century includes the capacity to work productively with different individuals and groups toward a common goal. Effective collaborators exhibit four core sub-competencies: strengthen relationships by incorporating diverse perspectives; use active listening skills; and focus on solutions rather than problems.

Originally developed in partnership with University of Arizona.

Strengthen Relationships

Individuals create networks through which they access and provide resources, information, and support.

Listen Actively

Individuals form productive working relationships; ensure that others feel heard and valued; and grasp and retain information.

Focus on Solutions

Individuals create the forward momentum that advances the work of the organization.

Incorporate Diverse Perspectives

Individuals enlarge the conversation; challenge their own thinking; and maximize group effectiveness.



CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

Creative problem-solving in the 21st century workplace includes the capacity to solve problems in new ways. Effective creative problem-solvers exercise four core sub-competencies: both divergent and convergent thinking; identify patterns that may not be obvious; manage ambiguity; and apply an iterative process for generating, testing and refining ideas.

Originally developed in partnership with University of Virginia.

Exercise Convergent + Divergent Thinking

Individuals generate fresh ideas and apply a process for evaluating them.

Identify Patterns

Individuals make sense of data; recognize commonalities among seemingly unrelated situations; and frame novel problems in familiar terms.

Manage Ambiguity

Individuals trust the process; manage their own anxiety; and gather information before settling on solutions prematurely.

Apply an Iterative Process

Individuals systematically test ideas; challenge their own preconceptions; and expand the range of potential solutions.



INTERCULTURAL FLUENCY

Intercultural fluency in the 21st century includes the capacity to operate and communicate in different cultural contexts. Individuals who are fluent interculturally exhibit these core four sub-competencies: recognize and challenge their own cultural biases; show curiosity; demonstrate self-awareness; and incorporate diverse perspectives.

Originally developed in partnership with Vassar College.

Show Curiosity

Individuals demonstrate cognitive and affective openness to and interest in change and difference.

Recognize + Challenge One's Cultural Biases

Individuals reject “othering”; work effectively in multicultural settings; and avoid ethno-centricism.

Demonstrate Self-Awareness

Individuals evaluate their own performance; recognize their motivations; and manage their anxiety.

Incorporate Diverse Perspectives

Individuals enlarge the conversation; challenging their own thinking; and maximizing group effectiveness.



Resilience in the 21st century includes the capacity to learn from experience; exhibit flexibility; demonstrate self awareness; and focus on solutions.

Originally developed in partnership with George Mason University.

Focus on Solutions

Individuals create the forward momentum that advances the work of the organization.

Demonstrate Self-Awareness

Individuals evaluate their own performance; recognize their motivations; and manage their anxiety.

Exhibit Flexibility

Individuals adapt and adjust to new and changing situations.

Learn from Experience

Individuals welcome and apply feedback; resist defensiveness; and see “failure” as an opportunity for greater understanding; and cultivate optimism by consciously challenging negative self-talk.



Empathy in the 21st century includes the capacity to understand others’ perspectives and feelings and to use this understanding to improve the quality of personal and professional relationships, behaviors, team cohesion, and performance. Empathetic individuals exhibit these core four sub-competencies: they listen actively, both to what is said explicitly and communicated nonverbally; recognize what others need and value; validate feelings and perceptions; and incorporate diverse perspectives.

Originally developed in partnership with Bay Path University.

Incorporate Diverse Perspectives

Individuals enlarge the conversation; challenge their own thinking; and maximize group effectiveness.

Provide Validation

Individuals create a safe and participatory environment in which each member of a team can contribute.

Identify Others’ Needs + Values

Individuals put themselves in others’ shoes.

Listen Actively

Individuals form productive working relationships; ensure that others feel heard and valued; and grasp and retain information.



Critical thinking in the 21st century includes the capacity to reason logically and rigorously. Effective critical thinkers exhibit four core sub-competencies: gather and assess relevant information; identify patterns; question assumptions; and draw well-reasoned conclusions.

Originally developed in partnership with Andrews University, Aquinas College, and Hope College

Gather + Assess Relevant Information

Individuals ground problem-solving in facts rather than assertions.

Identify Patterns

Individuals recognize commonalities among situations that may at first appear unrelated; frame problems more accurately; and access relevant solutions.

Question Assumptions

Individuals resist easy answers; probe more deeply; and improve the problem-solving process.

Draw Conclusions

Individuals use logic and reasoning to evaluate arguments, form judgments, and make recommendations.



Oral Communication in the 21st century includes the capacity to speak with clarity and precision; adjust tone and word choice for both formal and informal settings; listen actively; and recognize nonverbal cues.

Originally developed in partnership with Makerere University and Tunis Business School.

Speak with Clarity + Precision

Individuals communicate ideas and information effectively, minimizing unintended confusion, misinformation, and offence.

Listen Actively

Individuals form productive working relationships; ensure that others feel heard and valued; and grasp and retain information.

Tell Stories to Express Ideas

Individuals capture their audience; use the components of storytelling to draw attention.

Use Appropriate Tone + Word Choice

Individuals adjust their style and approach for different settings; build rapport; and communicate up and down the organization.

“At Enterprise, we like to see a candidate balance academics with such soft skills as work ethic, communication and teamwork. These mobility microcredentials provide students an opportunity to build on and articulate these skills.”

Casey Porter
Talent Acquisition Manager, Enterprise

The **Education Design Lab** is a national nonprofit helping post-secondary educators respond to the changing needs of both learners and employers with equity-based solutions.

Interested in Using Our Microcredentials?

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