



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## Digital Literacy and Micro-Credentialing to Improve College Graduate Marketability

Digital literacy is the ability to use technology to locate, evaluate, retrieve, organize, integrate, synthesize, analyze, produce, and communicate information through digital platforms. Digital literacy can play a powerful role in helping students connect, learn, engage with their community, and create more promising futures.[i]

Current digital literacy frameworks share several characteristics across institutions and nations. Importantly, no framework focuses on a single skill or approach. All institutions view digital literacy as plural, encompassing multiple elements or requirements, and usually combining technical, psychological, and interpersonal dimensions. These frameworks also tend to view the user or learner as someone becoming empowered through digital literacy study and practice.[ii]

As college educators, we assume most of our students arrive in class with digital literacy skills. Yet this may not be the case. Many students do not know how to write a professional email or use an email signature block. Most have never heard of a mail-merge process, and few have used Excel charts, functions, or pivot tables. Some have created PowerPoint slides, but not with embedded multimedia or embedded Excel elements. International students may have even less experience using basic Microsoft skills.

### Microsoft Digital Literacy Course

Microsoft provides a free, online digital literacy course that helps students gain the digital skills necessary to engage in a digital economy and improve their livelihoods. This course is used worldwide by individuals, nonprofits, schools, and government. It is perfect for first-semester business students, and can be used within the first three weeks of the semester to ensure all students are at the same starting point with their skills and understanding of technologies as business tools.

This free Microsoft Digital Literacy course contains the following modules:

- Work with Computers
- Access Information Online
- Communicate Online
- Participate Safely and Responsibly Online

- Create Digital Content
- Collaborate and Manage Content Digitally

### Embedding MOS Micro-Credentialing Into Courses

Micro-credentialing reflects the shift to a “learner-centric” approach in education and the need for retraining and upskilling in today’s digital world of work. Micro-credentials demonstrate competency in a specific set of objectives or standards of performance. Micro-credentials are signified by a digital badge or certificate that can be shared on an online platform.

I decided to explore the idea of embedding Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification exams into Office Applications courses. Industry certification and micro-credentialing help students gain a competitive advantage in the job market and, when the opportunity to obtain these credentials is built into the curriculum, it offers an added benefit for students. I hypothesized that embedding MOS certification into the curriculum would also increase student satisfaction, student retention, KPI results, and student grades, as students would become more efficient and effective at completing assignments.

### MOS Certification Details

The benefits of MOS Certification are provided below:

- Is a globally recognized industry certification.
- Heightens earning potential.
- Adds resume credibility and qualifications.
- Helps applicants stand out in the job market.
- Builds self-confidence.
- Enhances applicants’ professional image.
- Opens doors to potential job opportunities. [iii]
- Boosts academic performance and prepares students for college and career.
- Provides educators with targeted training and support every step of the way.

Certiport conducted a study in 2012 that highlighted the value of MOS certification. The study shows that certified students and employees become more productive as proficiency in Microsoft Office increases. Eighty-eight percent of certified employees said MOS certification made them more effective in their work.[iv] Centennial College has been a Certiport Authorized Test Center (CATC) for more than five years. We conduct approximately 1,200 student MOS exams per year, with 75 percent of students achieving certification on their first attempt.

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## Implementation

This was not an easy project to implement. Collaboration was needed with the IT department, the CALCS office, Certiport, CCI Learning, marketing department staff, colleagues, the continuing education department staff, the Registrar's Office, the accounting department, and the student bookstore. A clear plan and communication strategy were necessary for success. I trained my colleagues to administer MOS exams, and we worked closely with the CALCS office to ensure that the exams were accessible to all students.

We devised methods to keep costs low for students, including taking advantage of institutional pricing for student program fees. Before we embedded the MOS certification into our business courses, the textbook and course materials for the Office Applications course sequence cost approximately \$200 per student with no micro-credentialing opportunity. By embedding the MOS exams and accompanying learning materials package, we were able to bring that price down to just \$50. Students receive one attempt at a MOS exam in each course. With 1,200 students taking these courses each year in the Business School, students' financial savings are huge, and they gain the added benefit of possibly obtaining an industry certification.

## Conclusion

As the world moves to a global economy with increased movement and competition between employees, there is a technology skills gap that can be felt in almost every country. Certification, particularly entry-level certification, helps to build a skilled workforce that meets the needs of local employers and government technology initiatives. By offering the right balance of academic excellence and real-world skills training, instructors can provide students with the confidence and motivation they need to succeed academically and professionally. [v]

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For more information, contact the author at Centennial College, [kshields@centennialcollege.ca](mailto:kshields@centennialcollege.ca). Centennial College proctors MOS exams for the public, alumni, staff, and students. For more information, please visit the CATC web page.

Endnotes:

[i] "Microsoft Digital Literacy Course." Microsoft, 2020, <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/DigitalLiteracy/home>. Accessed 21 Mar. 2020

[ii] "Digital Literacy in Higher Education, Part II." NMC Horizon Project, vol. 3.4, August 2017, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593904.pdf>. Accessed 21 Mar. 2020.

[iii] "Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) Certification."

Centennial College, 2020, <https://www.centennialcollege.ca/programs-courses/schools/the-business-school/microsoft-office-specialist-certificate/> Accessed 21 Mar. 2020

[iv] "Microsoft Office Specialist Program." Certiport, 2020, <https://certiport.pearsonvue.com/Certifications/Microsoft/MOS/Overview> Accessed 21 Mar. 2020

[v] "The Value of Certification." Certiport, 2020, <https://certiport.pearsonvue.com/About/The-value-of-certification> Accessed 21 Mar. 2020