

Case Study

As part of our landscape research on *Micro-credentials for Social Mobility in Rural Postsecondary Communities*, Digital Promise conducted case studies in partnership with four innovative postsecondary institutions that are using micro-credentials. Learn more about how these institutions are leveraging educator-industry partnerships to create real-time pathways for rural learners in their region.



Technical College System of Georgia (Savannah Technical College)



Introduction

Located in the historic southeastern region of Georgia, Savannah Technical College (STC) serves thousands of residents. As a part of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), the system reaches residents statewide, including those enrolled in Adult Education programs, which are enveloped into the college system.

The population continues to grow, both as a function of local residents and influxes from around the country, and there is a growing demand for skilled workers that can take up positions across multiple industries throughout the state. Still, in some rural communities, residents are unfamiliar with the opportunities that may exist outside of their immediate areas.

The lack of perceived proximity to opportunity has sustained a gap in skill development. However, there is a need to develop a workforce that has the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the growth of industries – such as IT, healthcare, and manufacturing – throughout the state that can provide solid career pathways.

In 2020, Savannah Technical College, a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia, was awarded a 4-year U.S. Department of Labor Strengthening Community College Grant of \$4.85 million to address labor market demands for a technically skilled workforce. In collaboration with workforce development and employer partners, the goal is to support adult learners statewide, across TCSG, in gaining micro-credentials to demonstrate their skills and transition quickly from unemployment to employment, and to progress in their careers.

"I had a student, a conscientious gentleman. He was a dishwasher at one of the hotels about four years ago. Never got a raise. Made minimum wage. He took the course, and we were able to get him a job with an organization in Georgia. He came back one day, gave me a big hug. He goes, "Professor Bill, it was like I won the lottery. I'm making \$15 an hour! I cannot believe this!" So, it made me feel so good."

– Bill Stankiewicz (Issuer)
Forklift Instructor, Savannah Technical College, Chief Executive Officer, Savannah Supply Chain

Micro-credentialing Initiative

“Right now, companies and communities can’t afford for any part of their talent pipeline into the workforce system to be ineffective or inefficient. Unfortunately, right now, many of them are. Returning citizens aren’t coming out with the skills they need to obtain great employment and to reintegrate fully. English as a second language learners aren’t being educated at the level in which to move into that pipeline. There are kids who aren’t college-bound in the traditional sense. There’s a lot of underemployed and under-skilled adults. The list could go on. We need to be more efficient at moving everyone into the better career opportunities that exist. I think micro-credentials are a part of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of that system.”

– *Dr. Brent Stubbs (Recognizer), Vice President for Economic Development, Savannah Technical College*

The initial cohort of the summer 2021 pilot program were six Black/African-American and one White recent high school graduates, who were uncertain of what they wanted to do; reflective of a significant portion of the population the program believes may most benefit. This cohort matriculated through the fast-track manufacturing program. It included virtual reality (VR) training in manufacturing skills and utilized a virtual reality forklift simulator to alleviate the potential burden of possibly causing physical damage while teaching forklift driving skills. Upon completion of the program, learners obtained their forklift safety micro-credential and Six Sigma White belt micro-credential, OSHA 10 and first aid/CPR certification. The program also featured soft skills and direct experiences with manufacturing through plant tours and direct employer engagement.

“They had the certification and skills they needed, and the micro-certs proved that they could actually hit the ground running and be an asset from day one to employers.”

– *Keith Fletcher (Issuer)
Executive Director, Strengthening Community Colleges Grant, Savannah Technical College*

Participants had mock interviews with employers to prepare for actual interviews. In the last week of the course, a large number of manufacturing companies came in and interviewed all of them. Two participants were offered jobs in manufacturing companies. Although those companies had the practice of not hiring anyone under the age of 21, according to Executive Director, Keith Fletcher, they made an exception to this practice due to the observed skills and certifications. Four of the participants signed up for additional STC courses in manufacturing or additional postsecondary courses.

Collaborating Organization

The initiative is a partnership of multiple colleges across the state, including:

- [Savannah Technical College](#)
- [Technical College System of Georgia](#) (11 additional consortium colleges)
- U.S. Department of Labor
- Savannah City Government
- WorkSource Coastal: Georgia

Understanding the Value of Micro-Credentials in Georgia

Administrators envision employers will begin to recognize that earners have experienced rigorous training and application in a real-world setting by looking at a manufacturing micro-credential. New entrants, re-entrants, and career changers are believed to benefit greatly due to micro-credentials decreasing time commitment.

It is the hope of both administrators and participants that organizations will be more likely to hire and promote individuals based on micro-credentials.

The populations anticipated to benefit most significantly are those belonging to historically underserved communities. The program is reaching out to every demographic across the state of Georgia. While urban areas are the most culturally diverse, rural Georgia is increasing in diversity, having growing numbers of Latina/Latino and Asian residents. There is also consideration to specifically reach individuals who have decided to begin their families at younger ages. Fletcher expects that micro-credentials will lend themselves to younger parents being able to enter career tracks easier, leading to an ability to better support their families faster and at significantly lower costs.

Briana Herrington, a recent high school graduate and participant of the pilot program, expressed her appreciation and support of the program. Now earning significantly more than typical entry-level positions in her area, she stated that motivation for entering the program was to embark upon better opportunities than otherwise available. Having earned micro-credentials in forklift operating, manufacturing safety, and CPR, she believes that micro-credentials could help any learner because they provide different perspectives, access to new industries, and potential advantages if there is competition for positions. Presently a forklift operator, a role she never would have thought to pursue, she believes that micro-credentialing allows people to explore various industries with minimal loss of time or finances in the event that they determine an industry is ill-suited.

"I didn't know too much about it, but I saw that it was manufacturing. They said it could help us reach better possibilities and I wanted to be a part of it. It was a two-month program."

*– Briana Herrington (Learner)
Forklift Operator, Material Handler*

"You can be a jack-of-all-trades. Let's say you want to do something but you're not sure if you actually want to do it. Then you can just put your foot in the water and see if you like it or not. But, if you actually jump into something and you spend a lot of time on it and then decide you don't want to do it any more, then you'll know a lot about a subject that you might not be interested in anymore after [a significant amount of] time."

– Briana Herrington (Learner)
Forklift Operator, Material Handler

Economic costs and the time commitment of traditional educational pursuits is a point echoed by the administrators of the program in Georgia. Brent Stubbs, Vice President for Economic Development at Savannah Technical College, recognizes that there will be a need for a paradigm shift for many. He believes that younger people will readily understand the value of being able to explore a career in three weeks as opposed to four years, high costs, and the potential "associated guilt" of walking away from education that took years to complete. Highlighting how changes in educational paths can impact resumes, Stubbs believes that micro-credentials allow learners to pivot, which does not always work out

with longer, traditional programs. He underscores the notion that one should not have to sink exorbitant amounts of money into education before realizing an industry is not a good fit.

What's Next?

"The SCC grant is a systems-change grant. We are working to incorporate micro-credentialing across all aspects of TCSG which includes development of educational pathways that feature micro-credentials, traditional courses, and fast track programs. We are developing programs and courses that deliver micro-credentials in a more engaging, more accessible manner. We're using the latest technology to do that, VR, AR, interactive IT systems. Everything from Lectora to new pieces from Adobe and Articulate 360. We have brought quite a few of the latest educational tools as well as two exceptional instructional designers into the process to deliver courses that will accommodate everyone, including Adult Ed, our GED and ESL entry students."

– Keith Fletcher (Issuer)
Executive Director, Strengthening Community Colleges Grant, Savannah Technical College

TCSG & STC will scale their micro-credentialing across the state. The goal is to develop credentials that are more engaging and accessible via innovations such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive IT systems.

Having successfully matriculated a cohort in manufacturing; IT, and healthcare credentialing programs are being established. In addition, a digital badging system is being implemented statewide, according to Stubbs. Over the next four years, grant funding will be used to develop a digital badging and pathway system that will be able to interface with the K-12 digital badging and pathways system.

The initiative has also received a significant grant in order to provide skills to citizens returning from incarceration over the next two years. Notably, the Georgia Department of Corrections has also approved the development of a micro-credential pilot program.