MINDEDGE LEARNING

Enabling Non-Credit to Credit Degree Pathways

at Louisiana State University Shreveport

Continuing Education Case Study

For Leigh Anne Chambers, Executive Director of Events and Community Initiatives at the Louisiana State University Shreveport (LSUS) Division of Continuing Education and Public Service, giving non-credit students the confidence and opportunity to move into the credit space at LSUS was a high priority for the Division.

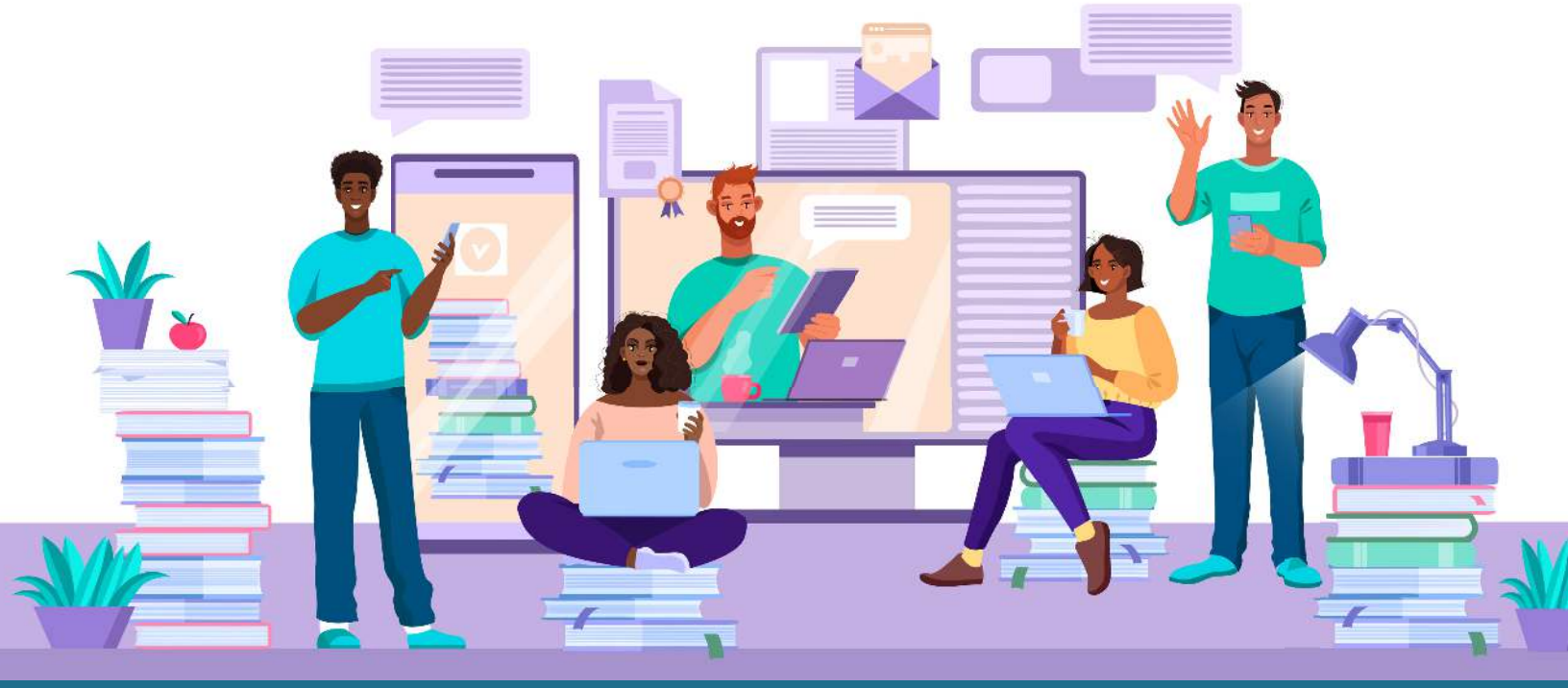


"[LSUS Division of Continuing Education and Public Service] is meant to serve students at a variety of educational entry points," Chambers said. ***"That's really where LSUS' Continuing Education Department's mission and vision comes from…we're here to be responsive to the needs in our community."***

One of those needs that the Division easily identified and responded to was the need for skilled nonprofit professionals. As there are many nonprofit organizations in the Shreveport area to respond to high unemployment and poverty rates, there are many nonprofit professionals looking for ways to develop new skills and advance their careers.

"The Institute for Nonprofit Administration & Research (INAR) for the state is housed [within LSUS]. And it's also closely aligned with our Master of Nonprofit Administration academic program, which is available 100% online," Chambers said.

The LSUS Division of Continuing Education and Public Service met with the executive director at INAR to learn about what the INAR research identified as areas of weakness or areas of interest in the nonprofit community.



This research led to the development of five nonprofit micro-certificates created from courses within the MindEdge catalog. All five were designed to address the needs of the nonprofit community.

"These [MindEdge] micro-certificates were actually borne from academic research," Chambers said. ***"There were a lot of gaps that were brought forward in that time, and there was a need for solutions quite quickly."***

The Division engaged with LSU Shreveport faculty subject matter experts, or SMEs, to examine and customize existing MindEdge programming to fit the needs of the LSUS community.

"[Subject matter experts are] the driving force behind collaborative efforts," Chambers said. ***"They're the ones that articulate what the need is, because we may or may not be experts in the area that we know that there's need. So we rely on them to kind of guide the conversation and the cadence."***

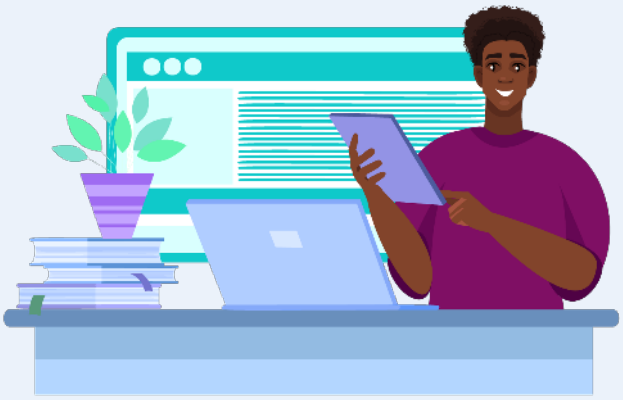
The SMEs worked closely with Leigh and her team to evaluate MindEdge programming to configure these non-credit certificates that fit the needs of the LSUS community. These micro-certificates were aligned to **Credly badges** that are awarded at the completion of each micro-certificate. Once all five badges are earned learners will receive PLA credits in the Nonprofit Administration graduate program.

"(Badging) solves many of the needs of the PLA," Chambers said. ***"It says, 'I've gone through these educational outcomes and I've gained competency.' And that's why the incorporation of the digital badges is so important is because it's a physical representation of that success that helps answer the question of why it should go from non-credit to credit." "We think of it as building a pathway to success, it helps pave that pathway."***

The badges proved to be a popular feature of these micro-certificates. Faculty who reviewed these course suites were eager to add them to their own online profiles – and that led to a heightened interest in the program among their colleagues, as well.

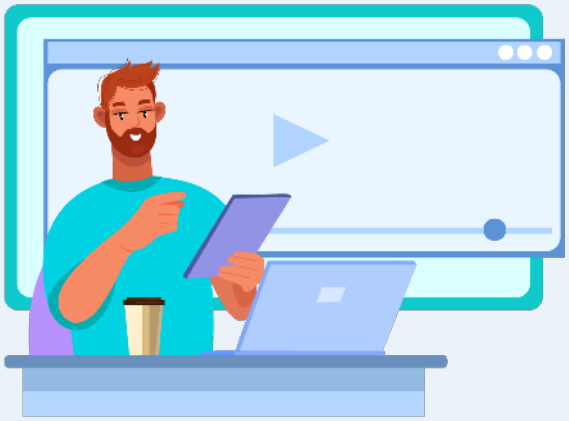
While the Division knew it would attract a variety of learners to these new MindEdge nonprofit bundles, it attracted more "skills-gap individuals" than expected.

"[If] I'm a social worker who is serving homeless populations, but then I move up to the executive director role," Chambers said, ***"I don't necessarily have a lot of knowledge of the backend administrative tasks that are the same [across many nonprofits]."***



Many of the learners who signed up for the nonprofit certificates were nonprofit board members, volunteers, and those in the later stages of their nonprofit careers.

"I think when COVID occurred, it felt like a massive reset for the entire population," Chambers said. ***"We felt foreign upon reentering our normal workforce, because we were pulled away in a different and foreign environment. Quite a few people said, 'You know, I felt like I was out of practice, and these certificates helped solve that.'"***



Another way the MindEdge certificates cater to the northern Louisiana population of nonprofit professionals is by offering a 100% online experience. The desire to make learning more accessible is a driving force behind the Division's choice to expand its certificate offerings.

"Not everybody in [nonprofit leadership roles] have traditional four-year degrees," Chambers said. ***"We are trying to produce something that doesn't exclude any learner…[having a completely online program] helps remove a barrier because maybe they're intimidated to step foot here on this campus. We like to think of continuing education as a sandbox,"*** Chambers said. ***"It is an opportunity to trial new initiatives, new ideas. We like to think of it that way because continuing education is an agile gateway to educational opportunities…. So we build everything in mind, in continuing education, about being responsive to the community's needs."***

