MINDEDGE LEARNING

Edging Out the Competition: Preparing Students for the Real World

at Saint Michael's College

Continuing Education Case Study

At Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont, there are an abundance of opportunities to participate in co-curricular activities. But when it comes time to graduate and put those co-curricular activities on a resumé, how do students prove that they gained real world skills from their experiences?



"I think Saint Michael's, like many small liberal arts colleges, [has this] very robust co-curricular environment. And within [this environment], students develop professional skills, and they get a massive amount of professional experience," Todd Johnstone-Wright, the director of the Undergraduate Professional Endorsement Program, said. ***"The downside of it is it's often very hard to qualify and quantify that learning as a recent graduate. That's because on a resumé, it looks very much like an activity or club, versus professional experience."***

How does Saint Michael's College rectify this? Through the **Undergraduate Professional Endorsement Program**, run by Johnstone-Wright.



"[Saint Michael's is] really teaching 21st century skills or professional competencies, but the challenge we face is we're not explicit about it," Johnstone-Wright said. ***"I think [Saint Michael's] recognized the tension that exists there and decided to begin this initiative."***

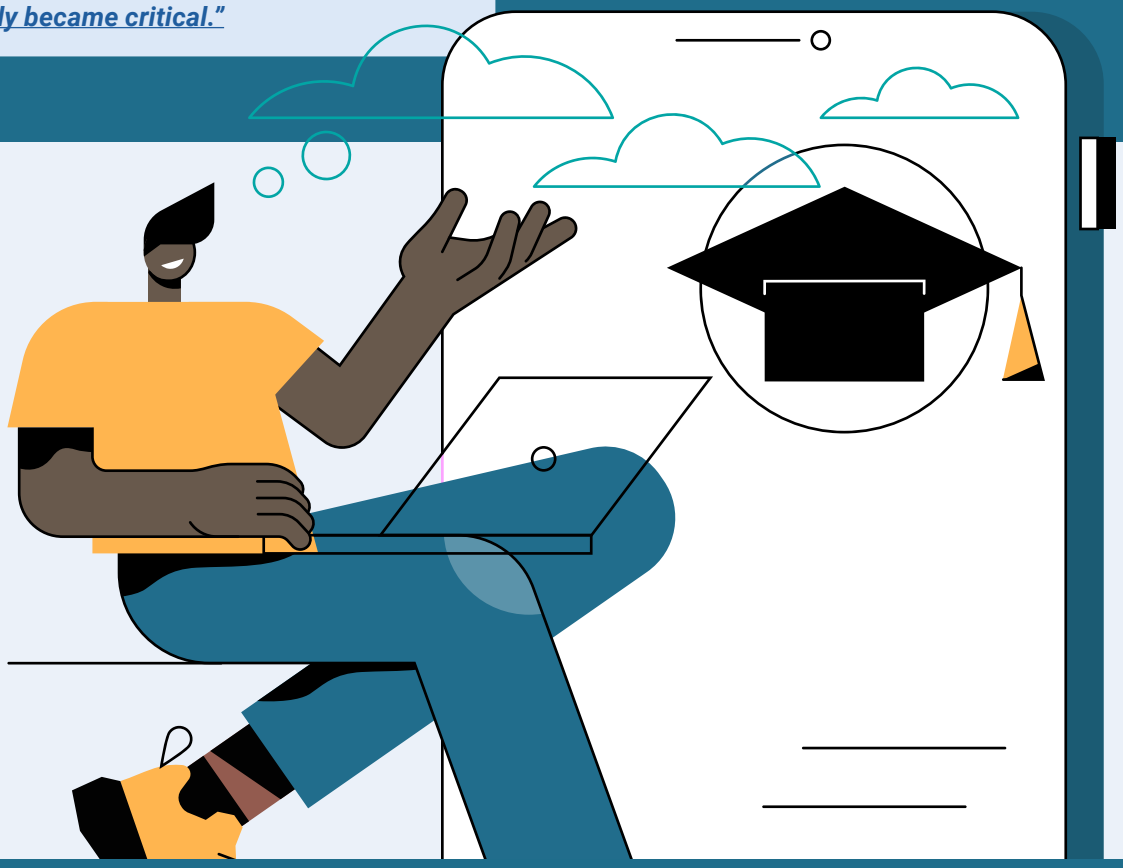
In the program, students are given the chance to gain and apply professional skills to their co-curricular activities, and become leaders in their fields of interest before they leave their college experiences. They have the opportunity to earn MindEdge certifications in topics like leadership and management to enhance their resumés and give them an edge over other candidates applying for the same post-grad positions. Through the program, students take courses, put together a work portfolio, and gain professional skills that will help them in their real-world work opportunities.

Currently, the professional endorsements students can earn are Adventure Sports Coaching, Emergency Medical Services, Leadership, Non-Profit Management, Organizational Management, Sports Coaching, and Sustainable Management.

"The challenge was in that middle space between the first course and the book-end course was trying to find good quality content that was evidence-based that also came with associated credentialing and certifications," Johnstone-Wright said. ***"That's where MindEdge really became critical."***

While the college has both an organizational management course and a leadership course on campus, they are courses that can be hard to access outside of the business major. For students pursuing majors other than business, MindEdge certificates are a game changer for Saint Michael's. They give students with focuses in liberal arts subjects the opportunity to learn the foundations of these professional skills without competing for the same classes as the business majors.

To begin the Undergraduate Professional Endorsement Program, students must take a two-credit course, Professionalism: Theory and Skills for the Global Workplace, and are expected to identify the real-world skills they use in their co-curricular activities, and the real-world skills they will be expected to have in their professional fields. Students are encouraged to pursue areas that interest them and areas that have associated professional credentialing, like MindEdge certifications such as Nonprofit Management.





Student Asher Rich, education studies major, found this opportunity especially helpful for his career plan. An active member of the theater department, dance team, and Common Ground, an LGBTQIA+ alliance at Saint Michael's, Rich plans to boost his resumé with the skills he's learned through his MindEdge certificate and show how he applies them to his co-curricular experiences.

"I feel like a lot of the extracurriculars I'm doing are gearing me up to what I want to do in the future, which is art administration," Rich said. ***"[Saint Michael's] had the nonprofit credentials [I] could get for non-profit management. And I thought that was perfect for the path I want to go on."***

Completed during his second year at Saint Michael's, the Non-Profit Management certificate and the Undergraduate Professional Endorsement Program gave Rich the chance to hone in on what classes he needs to take in future semesters to stay on his career path.



"A lot of the things I would need were a lot of business classes, but I felt like a lot of the business classes that I would have to take wouldn't really prepare me in the way that I wanted in workplace skills," Rich said. ***"While I still have to take some, [taking MindEdge courses] was a way that I didn't have to really get off course. I can still take all my other classes without being overloaded."***

Another second year student, secondary education major Lauren Best, took advantage of the program to start earning her Undergraduate Professional Endorsements in Adventure Sports Coaching and Nonprofit Organizational Leadership. Best, a campus ambassador and an avid volunteer in her college community, was inspired to improve her leadership skills through the MindEdge certifications.

"There was a strong connection between my education major, the leadership certificate, and the Undergraduate Professional Endorsement," Best said. ***"Being really purposeful with what I take will allow me to get some special, extra licensure in there to look marketable."***

Best currently holds an internship with the Vermont Dance Alliance and was taking her Non-Profit Management certification simultaneously. **During her internship, the MindEdge grant writing content became increasingly relevant to her work.**

"Having that module in there just connected the dots of, 'Okay, this is how to grant write.' And this is me doing it in my life, reaching out to local Vermont businesses for grants and donations to make our dance festival a success," Best said.

In addition to co-curriculars and internships, each full-time Saint Michael's student takes 16 credits each semester, and that pathway is structured around them completing that in four years.

"So that's where MindEdge is really critical because it creates a new access point for students to get the information [and] engage in learning that they're interested in, [and] do it in a very self-paced and somewhat transactional way," Johnstone-Wright said. ***"Students can plug into it when they need it, or when they have time to do it, which, from a flexibility standpoint, is absolutely brilliant."***

