

Oulu UAS achieves 35% enrollment growth with industry-aligned micro-credentials through Coursera



Industry
Higher Education



Location
Finland



Size
10,000 students; 500 employees

Overview

Preparing students for a rapidly evolving job market requires more than incremental curriculum updates. As Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Oulu UAS) moved nearly half of its Information and Communication Technology (ICT) instruction online and consolidated its degree pathways, the institution turned to Coursera to reintroduce specialization at scale. By embedding industry-recognized micro-credentials into its programs, Oulu UAS aligned academic learning with workforce demands while expanding flexibility across its digital learning environment.

The Challenge

Oulu UAS needed to balance scale with specificity. Consolidating multiple ICT specializations into a single degree simplified program delivery, but it reduced opportunities for students to develop targeted, job-ready skills. Simultaneously, the rapid shift to online learning required high-quality digital content that could engage large cohorts without compromising outcomes.

The stakes extended beyond curriculum design. In a post-COVID, AI-influenced labor market, students needed clear, verifiable proof of their skills to remain competitive. Faculty also needed confidence that new approaches would maintain academic rigor while complementing—not replacing—their role in student development.

The Solution

Oulu UAS selected Coursera to embed industry-recognized Professional Certificates from partners like Google, Meta, and Microsoft directly into its curriculum. Rather than treating these credentials as add-ons, the university integrated them as core academic components. They now either substitute existing courses or supplement them with career-oriented learning.

This approach enabled flexibility without sacrificing structure:

- **Credit alignment:** Students earn ECTS credits upon completion, with certificates assessed on a pass/fail basis, aligning industry learning with academic standards.
- **Seamless access:** Single sign-on (SSO) integration and institutional licensing remove financial and technical barriers for students.

Snapshot

35%

increase in student enrollment achieved through Coursera

80%+

completion rates realized by targeting students in their final years

2,500

industry certifications earned by students in 2025

- **Faculty support:** BBy incorporating external content, instructors can focus more on hands-on guidance and applied learning.
- **Academic integrity:** Project-based validation requires students to demonstrate applied competence beyond course completion.
- **Strategic timing:** Micro-credentials are primarily introduced in later years of study, when students have clearer career direction—maximizing relevance, motivation, and completion rates.

The Results

Oulu UAS has translated its micro-credential strategy into measurable academic and institutional impact. Integrating scalable, high-quality content into its ICT programs expanded access and improved learning outcomes.

By offering flexible, certificate-based learning can support growth without overextending faculty resources, the institution achieved:

- ~35% increase in student intake between 2020 and 2025
- ~2,500 industry certifications earned by students in the last year alone
- 80%+ completion rates among later-year students (compared to a 50% rate for first-year students)

This active engagement with the new model is a clear signal of sustained participation in career-aligned learning. The data also revealed an important insight: timing drives success. This shift in completion rates reflects a much stronger alignment between learning content and students' evolving career goals as they get closer to graduation.

The impact has also extended beyond ICT. Other faculties—including engineering, business, and health care—are now exploring or adopting similar models, signaling institutional confidence in the approach. Faculty perception has evolved as well. Initial concerns gave way to recognition that integrated credentials enhance rather than replace their role by freeing time for deeper student engagement.

Looking ahead, Oulu UAS is positioned to continue scaling this model. The university is successfully using micro-credentials to balance academic rigor with workforce relevance while maintaining flexibility across programs.

Outcomes

Curriculum flexibility

enhanced by substituting traditional courses with professional credentials.

Financial barriers reduced

for students through university-funded licensing and SSO integration.

Widespread adoption

sparked across multiple departments following successful implementation in the ICT faculty.



Develop career-ready graduates at scale

Embed globally recognized industry credentials into your curriculum.

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